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Crowded spaces

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EDITORIAL

Contributors to this issue were invited to tackle the complex topic of crowded space. Perhaps, crowding is not simply a process of occupation of previously existing empty spaces, but one that also qualitatively changes those spaces. If so, the question shifts from 'What happens in crowded space?' to 'What happens to spaces when they get crowded?'. In other words, 'Which spatial problems do crowds pose?' And also, in parallel, 'How are spaces which are bound to become crowded conceived, designed, occupied and controlled?'

In discussing the spatial import of crowds both theoretically and in specific cases, two clear nuclei have emerged. The first cluster of authors addresses classical urban crowds and their enduringly controversial role in politics, history, and experience. Stefan Jonsson reviews the traditional image conveyed by crowd theory – the crowd as 'dangerous, chaotic and unpleasant' – stressing the continuing and even renewed importance of crowd action today. According to Jonsson, if crowds inevitably raise the issue of the foundations of power, it is because their act is, in the horizon of modernity, an essentially politically constituent one. From a legal-philosophical viewpoint, Lucy Finchett-Maddock examines how instituted power receives, through the law, crowd action. Indeed, how the law is (un)able to image crowds has tremendous importance, not only for how protest is met but also for how a society as a whole is (in)capable to image change. The piece by Federica Castelli moves, if possible, even closer to a phenomenology of protest crowds. By adopting a deeply embodied feminist perspective on street protest, one focused on the interplay of experience, emotion and the senses, Castelli argues for the directly political importance of the sexed body which, as she writes, 'reveals the fundamental dependency, exposure to others and the vulnerability of the human condition'. The images by the guest artists Emma Ciceri, introduced and philosophically excavated by Andrea Pavoni, match well with the facets of crowds presented by these first round of contributions.

In between the first and the second round we host a reflection by the urban planner Marco Cremaschi, who reports on how, during the course of the 20th century, planning science has entertained an ambivalent relation with crowding. In particular, Cremaschi highlights the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the view of crowds as dysfunctional, a view held by modernist theorists and, on the other, the celebratory view of crowds as vibrant and good for business, a position initially endorsed by urban developers rather than theorists.

The second cluster of authors addresses less easily visualizable yet still noteworthy current avatars of the crowds. These formations have also been defined as 'postmodern crowds'crowds', i.e. types of crowd configuration not necessarily confined to a predominantly political register (such as protests, revolutions, etc.), but which unfold in, or at least overlap with, non-political domains, and which need not assume the physical body-to-body nature of classical crowd imageries (see e.g. Borch and Knudsen, 2013). Certainly, our hard-drives, our mailboxes, our address books, our Facebook pages, even our bookmark bars can be imagined as crowded space. In this issue, Claudia Aradau & Tobias Blanke, Alberto Brodesco, and Andrea Mubi Brighenti propose a few points of entry into the analysis of such crowds and their spaces. Interestingly, it is precisely at this point that a number of phenomena are presented which also cast some doubts on any merely apologetic view on crowds (one, that is, which would merely reverse the old elitist contempt for crowds). In particular, Aradau and Blanke explore the ideology of crowdsourcing in contemporary digital markets, revealing how it may be explained by an old notion, namely workers exploitation. They also emphasize the hidden political import of such new crowds, a dimension which is especially and perhaps tactically overlooked by neoliberal theorists.

Subsequently, just as Castelli's piece was focused on the feelings of street crowds, Brodesco presents a case analysis of feelings in a YouTube crowd commenting the movie *Salò o le Centoventi giornate di Sodoma* by Pier Paolo Pasolini. By following in details the dynamics of the comments and replies, Brodesco points out how especially unclassifiable and uncomfortable cultural products such as Pasolini's *Salò* may elicit harsh commentary struggles that generate what he defines a feeling of 'asphyxiation'. Elaborating on Alberto's piece, Mubi coins

the phrase 'new media sociofugal spaces' to puzzle about how new popular media social platforms define, or at least host, certain crowding phenomena. The traditional notion of 'critical distance', Mubi argues, may find an application to the new online crowd formations. In turn, this may lead us towards a more radical understanding of the relations between the individual and the crowd.

Despite their diversity, different crowds and their manifold manifestations raise a number of common architectural questions concerning unfolding socio-spatial processes. A theoretical looming presence throughout these contributions – which we were surprised and pleased to discover – is Elias Canetti. Once defined a 'lost classic', Canetti seems to be endlessly inspiring to all new generations of scholars dealing with crowds. Because we think that the contributors to this issue have all made a very productive use of Canetti which goes well beyond ritual homage we invite readers to go through these diverse approaches to one of our preferred crowd theorists.

In conclusion, many other questions which we had raised, concerning for instance overcrowding (e.g., What feelings and emotions are associated to urban crowded spaces, ranging from mundane everyday spaces such as the metro to the 'exceptional' spaces of events, such as gigs, festivals, *nuits blanches* and political demonstrations? What sense of temporality and rhythm does the experience of crowded spaces correspond to? How are these spaces remembered and evoked at a distance? Etc.) could not be addressed here and remain thus fully open for future explorations.

C.B., A.M.B.

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Unmaking and remaking urban crowds

Marco Cremaschi

> *The city is the crowd…*
>
> L. Chevalier

For a long time, urban planners and their views on the city have been affected by the dominant negative imagery propounded by conservative thinkers such as Gustave Le Bon (1895): the crowd was stigmatised as politically dangerous, dirty, and disorganised. Oddly enough, real estate developers held more open views. For instance, they placed crowds as the basic reference for the design of shopping malls. So, at least the crowds of buyers had some positive resonance to them.

Along these capitalist-oriented lines, a recent trend towards a re-appreciation of at least some distinctive features of crowds seems to be under way. From this point of view, international competition strategies among cities in Europe seem to renew the 19th century craze for Great Exhibitions and Universal Fairs that attracted large crowds. So, crowd is back in town after more than a century of mutual hate and enforced decentralisation. However, in the meanwhile both the city and the crowd have changed. No longer do residents and their houses form the twin magnetic poles of the urban field. Rather, movement is now the essential attribute. This fact, I argue, creates problems both at the level of democratic representation and at the level of functional urban organisation.

The crowd and the public

In the early 20th century, American social psychology spread a view on collective behaviour where crowds were basically defined as gatherings usually qualified as large, lacking order and organization, still involved in a joint behaviour (Mucchi Faina 1983). To sociologists, crowds were characterised by large numbers, physical proximity and mutually reinforcing actions.

In urban planners' usage, the adjective 'crowded' transformed the subject of 'the crowd' into a kind of space whose distinctive feature was to be full. Admittedly, such an idea is generic, given that almost everything can be counted as crowded, regardless scale and salience. 'Crowded' thus embodied a malfunction, a negative attribute of a place which was better maintained when empty.

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Simultaneously, the idea of joint behaviour, with its more positive connotations, was increasingly associated with the figure of the public. The genesis of a modern public sphere was seen essential to modernisation. According to Tarde (1901), while crowd is a material gathering, the public is a sheer spiritual entity. To him, the common ground between the public and crowd lies in the fact that both are nourished by the simultaneity of emotions – the first through face-to-face communication, the latter through a symbolic communicative process.

A similar idea of 'sharing' was essential to 20th century urban planners. Indeed, the city is a place where people share feelings and beliefs. In a sense, living in a city is like being in a crowd. By educating to proximity, however, the city was also said to rehearse the creation of publics (Lofland 1989). Even better, 'urbanity' as a mode of life calls for the individual's training to communicate in public. This is the first step of a learning process that enables the development of a community of ideas within a dispersed audience. Without such a process of learning, no civil life can take place, and without the dense social life of urban gatherings no learning process is possible. In other words, only a sophisticated urban dweller is able to develop a common feeling, not only in the presence of other people, but even in a symbolic process such as public opinion.

Beyond social space

Because meetings in public space are primary qualities of urban life, it was possible to claim, with Chevalier (1958), that crowd and the city are synonymous. The concept of social space played a crucial role in French urban sociology. The correspondence – if not identification – between a certain group and a given space worked particularly well in the historical analysis of the first age of 19th century industrialisation, when dangerous (yet hard-working) classes lived concentrated in popular neighbourhoods surrounding the enclaves of the best-off. Urban planning dealt with social polarisation in a variety of ways. For instance, the first large urban avenues were aimed to cross-cut those divisions digging passages across class boundaries: for the first time people from different backgrounds could actually catch sight of each other in a common space (Berman 1982).

However, late modernity has jeopardized the equation 'city = the crowd'. Neither public gatherings nor the public sphere correspond to city space any longer. Social space now appears as a deterministic concept (Cremaschi 1994). In fact, social relations melt in the sponge-like aspect of urban space (Joseph 1984). In other words, the two poles have changed. The process of globalisation has deeply transformed the rationale of spatial ordering.

A few examples may illustrate this hypothesis.

The first one is the transformation of 'proximity' as a preoccupation in the localisation of advanced services in the global city. Western cities rest on the most astonishing amount of infrastructures, public goods, and central places ever produced, yet the process of decentralisation started in the first half of the 20th century has been increasingly spacing people apart. Industrial activities, middle class families, and company headquarters have increasingly flown central cities.

Second, large urban events have been increasingly employed as strategies for city development. Mega events appear to decision makers and businessmen alike as a natural complement to the ordinary management of the city, primarily from a financial point of view. Events are expected to generate a great movement of people and goods, which supposedly benefit the whole city. A global event often requires new buildings and infrastructures, and the state often contributes to support the financial side of the event, granting further resources

compared to slim ordinary city budgets.

Third, traditional urban inhabitants have become just a slice of the whole population, which now also includes commuters, visitors, businessmen and city-users. Space and its facilities are consumed by people from outside the city, who neither vote nor pay taxes there. Citizenship has therefore become a manifold concept, depending not only upon the abode, but also the place where one works, the place where one consumes etc.

Finally, residential compounds and shopping malls are developed according to marketing principles: instead of being a universal space, every single part of a city now addresses a selected public. Regeneration of inner-cities, for instance, is often triggered by planning devices intended to attract people and create a 'vibrant' urban space (Friedlen and Sagalyn 1989). This amounts to a reversal of the tenets of Modernist Movement in architecture. For instance, rather than as functional channels, streets are restored to their previous dignity of sociable meeting places with mixed traffic.

Because modernity accelerated the pace of everyday life, everything in the city is crowded: not only the streets, but also urbanites' agendas, minds … crowding has become a sentiment, where material details have vanished in a subtle feeling of dispossession

All these urban strategies seem to rest upon a simple idea: consumers desire a pleasant place to go to, but not a deserted one. The assumption that 'people go where people can be found' is far from trivial, for it incorporates the view that individual identity is a multidimensional network, which social events in the public space can either encourage or discourage. Hence the importance of a suitable, selected 'crowd'.

Designers' imagination

At least three generations of planning practitioners have been concerned with the idea of the crowd, with rather different attitudes. At the end of the 19th century the crowd was perceived as 'the beast living in the urban habitat'. Urbanisation was regarded as a natural process for mankind, and people moving to cities were expected to naturally turn into urban dwellers. Citizenship was conveyed by the city. Simultaneously, however, hygienist precaution and political fears laid a negative stigma on the crowd which threatened the education to urbanity.

Subsequently, modernist rational planning aimed at the standardisation of the masses (Mattelart 1994). The city conceived by the Modernist Movement is a beehive for tired individuals and a machine for turning masses over. The experience of crowd is removed, basically through the destruction of the street. In low-density suburban settlements, mobility is purposefully kept low to prevent the street from turning into a magnet for social life. In high-rise units movement is severed among specialised vector (high-way, pathway, elevators. . .). Also, different urban functions are segregated and areas are strictly zoned. The crowd disappears as a social phenomenon, and it is only mentioned as a malfunctioning of the urban machinery (the functional equivalent of the crowd is now 'congestion').

But actually, because modernity accelerated the pace of everyday life, everything in the city is crowded: not only the streets, but also urbanites' agendas, minds etc. Crowding has become a *sentiment*, where material details have vanished in a subtle feeling of dispossession. Escape attempts are increasingly difficult (Cohen and Taylor 1992). Somehow, the crowd has assumed more of a temporal than a spatial dimension. As a result, today the crowd stands

bewildered in front of an uncomfortable urban space, calling, if ever, for more controlled environments. Security problems are now addressed through the design of either fully artificial towns (Disney World) or artificial citizenship (corporate cities in the USA).

Conclusion

Despite planners' distrust, the experience of the crowd has not dissolved. Ortega y Gasset (1930) was surprised to find that cities were crowded with people, hotels with guests, cafés with consumers, theatres with audience, beaches with swimmers, and streets with walkers. However, we know that people only look for those places that best suit the type of fullness they desire. The crowd is not everywhere in the city. Different crowds meet in distinct and distinctive places.

Which is, then, the first interface between crowd and the city? Perhaps, it is still the street, that web of channels allowing for movement. Not by chance, movement and communication are the crucial topics in Park's foundations of Ameircan urban sociology (Joseph 1984). Strolling in the Main Street (the Corso, in southern European cities) on Saturday evening and Sunday morning requires 'a pleasant sense of bustle'. It would not make sense without the crowd. Even better, it requires people fit for strolling. Similarly, a mall and a market call for a crowd that is fit for buying, and the same holds for the crowds of theatres, stadia, exhibitions etc. Even summer holidays are often intended, not to escape the crazy crowd, but to find the right one.

At bottom, these diverse situations share two conditions: first, proximity is ruled by the social organisation of space (as revealed by Goffman); second, public space carries out educational as well as emancipating functions. However, movement is unequally distributed: *thick* areas, the great urban axes where circulation concentrates and people are conveyed, can be distinguished from *soft* areas, which are segregated and residential.

Early urban planners tried to command the wedding between movement and the city, not only introducing infrastructures such as the avenue, the boulevard and the *corso*, but also prefiguring the social etiquette appropriate to the distinctive public that would have inhabited them – a task designers of modern highways have neglected. From this point of view, the invention of new public space for crowds appears as a main challenge to contemporary urban planning.

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