

# We Still Do Not Know What a City Can Do: Modulation of Affect in Urbanism and Spatial Politics

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## INTRODUCTION

During the writing of this article a series of events have made me rethink what a city can do and how the concepts *event*, *interface* and *affect* relate to one another in current urbanism and design. Like many others, I have witnessed cities close down during the coronavirus pandemic. I have seen citizens mobilize with Women's March, Black Lives Matter and other social movements impacting urban life. In urban studies we know what urban planning and design can do (and not do) to enable participation and cultural diversity. We know what public art can do in negotiating identities and choreographing other mobilities of bodies. Quite often research has pointed to both the regenerative and destructive powers of urban planning and design. One of the recurring remarks among planners and urbanists is how planning sustains some bodies while excluding others.

It is commonly understood that the city is made up of a network of different yet interconnected bodies. Urban bodies are related and form social, economic, cultural, and legislative assemblages across their differences (see Amin & Thrift 2002; Anderson & Harrison 2010; Pløger 2016; Førde 2019). From this perspective this article seeks to understand what a city can do as an interface relating and distributing a diversity of bodies.

In particular this chapter bridges the notions of events, affects, and interfaces in relation to the city. In the following, I frame the interface as a mode of spatial production operating across points, lines and planes, and across multiple scales: the scale of the bodily encounter, in the insurgent commoning of a neighborhood; or as a diagrammatic mode of production in planning and spatial politics.<sup>1</sup>

In the first part of the article I will define modulation, affect, and faciality and describe how I use these notions in relation to what a city can do. Roughly speaking, I relate affect to the capacity of a body whether it is a singular or collective, and I relate interfaces to diagrammatic distributions of bodies. The diagram and the interface is further linked to the notion of faciality (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). This means that a face/interface is neither neutral nor transparent. On the contrary, it sticks to a certain image, identity or norm. Faces are like interfaces, they might be invisible or neutral in that they refer to a normative sense, but they can be demasked through embodiments and felt experience. Here, embodiment can be understood as encounters in which a body can augment or modulate its capacities to affect other bodies. I understand the term modulation as a specific diagrammatic mode of governance, that can be identified in, for instance, participatory planning and in many forms of embodied and sensory urban practices.

In the second part of the article, I will analyze how interfacial modulations of affect take place in contemporary urbanism and how it potentially changes predominant hierarchies. My interest is to understand how current regulations in the Danish welfare state are reproduced in participatory forms of planning, even though this is rarely directly addressed. I argue that planning as a diagrammatic power must be addressed, embodied, and analyzed to better understand the values and politics of affect operating in our seemingly transparent urban culture. I will analyze the capacities of a city on various scales and interfacial encounters welcoming all kinds of embodied knowledge and affective modes of engagement.<sup>2</sup> From being part of this interface culture it follows that we cannot know in advance what our explorations do, and where they lead us. I follow Anna Munster in claiming that interfaces “accentuate the intensity of a folded relation between sensing your own body (from the inside) while at the same time mapping it from the outside” (Munster 2006, 142; see also Thomsen this volume). In so far as interfaces cannot only be mapped by experiencing intensities from within, folded experiences are vital for the analysis of

interfacial modulations of affect. Hence, the examples below are based on lived experiences and sensed as bodily encounters. As such, interfacial experiences are often ambiguous and do not easily add up to neat conclusions. In the words of Deleuze (1994), “this something is not an object of recognition but of fundamental encounter. It may be grasped in a range of adjective tones. In whichever tone, its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed” (136, 139). Such tonality also marks the following analysis of what a city can do. Thus, the analysis does not answer the question what a city can do; rather it illustrates modulations and weavings in and out of various affective urban encounters emerging from my engagements with urban practices, atmospheres, sensations, and cultural embodiments throughout the *Eventual Urbanism* project.<sup>3</sup>

## AFFECT AS A FORCE-FIELD OF PASSIONS

The city is a place for social, bodily, and interfacial encounters. Georg Simmel (1976) remarks how the city of modernity is defined by exchanges of money and how the distancing strategies of facial and bodily encounters are closely related to the metropolitan’s rhythmic flows and stimuli. As noted by urbanists Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, “the city is a force-field of passions that pulse and associate bodies in particular ways” (Amin & Thrift 2002, 84). In their framework, the city does not have a certain identity. Rather we need to understand it in terms of an ontogenetic multiplicity or machinic assemblage constantly bringing bodies together in rhythmic events.<sup>4</sup> In recent years, the rhythms of events are increasingly distributed and monitored through media technologies. These can be seen as regulations and choreographies of the modulations of affect in citizens’ movements and modes of engaging and participating.

Interfacial modulation of affect can be associated with the notion of biopolitics, coined by Foucault and later Agamben. Recently Foucault’s term has been elaborated by Rosi Braidotti, as she points out how biopolitical powers of today are increasingly governed by digital technologies and post-human affective modes of controlling life (2013; 2019). The post-human turn in the study of biopolitical modes of affecting urban lives and bodies is, in this chapter, related to notions of affect, interfaces and events, insofar as interfaces are both directly connected to our digital and mediated lives and impact urban everyday life. Current interface culture reconfigures urban encounters on macro, meso and micro-scales

when, for instance, planning is implemented through media interfaces, or when our everyday behaviors and mobilities are tracked and monitored. Today, contemporary urbanism interface culture defines our ways of participating and encountering one another in the city. Urban design such as the Superkilen Park in Copenhagen, the High Line in New York, or the Minhocão in São Paulo are examples of how urban spaces are designed and used as interfaces for urban encounters, and how they are designed to be responsive to the citizens' embodiments and use.

The study of the post-human city and its interfacial modulations has to be engaged in the foldings and affective encounters of environment with its material agencies. These foldings are not just manifest in the physical urban environment but, increasingly, also in the processes of how the city operates as a meshwork or assemblage of materials, and mediated and communicative agencies. Shannon Mattern (2019) holds that, "systems of knowledge are inscribed in the built world. And these knowledge regimes are often shaped, contained, preserved, and distributed through the prevailing media technologies of their time ... technology mediates the ways that knowledge, power, and culture interact to create and transform the cities we live in" (n.p.). Drawing from a post-human and networked definition of the city, it is the aim of this chapter to show how affective encounters unfold, and how interface culture permeates and modulates the city.

## INTERFACIAL MODULATIONS OF AFFECT

In keeping with the description of affect as 'running through' bodily encounters and as an increase or decrease of power (a capacity for joy or sorrow), the discipline of urban studies regards urbanity as processes of individuation and differentiation in which urban bodies (social, architectural, cultural bodies, and institutional bodies) are in constant negotiation and dynamic change.

In urban politics and planning that increasingly operate through affective modes of regulation and stratification, the concepts of affect and event could more broadly be seen as governmentality. As noted by cultural geographers Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison, planning and urban politics can be seen as apparatuses that monitor affective processes (Anderson & Harrison 2010; McCormack 2018). While spatial politics and planning do not have universal capacities to control affective relations, they do,

however, influence how affective encounters take place. For instance, as I will elaborate later, modernist welfare planning of the 1960s and 1970s distributed everyday affects and relationality between bodies differently than the current neoliberal forms of urban participatory planning. In the latter, creativity and the right to participate and express oneself in public is often valued higher than spatial and economic equality. From this perspective, critical urbanists often tend to see the neoliberal city as a post-political city.<sup>5</sup> However, as I will argue, urban life is, on many scales, made as a response to affective politics. Affective politics encompass, for instance, what citizens as a collective body can do, what capacities a political body has in physical spaces, or what powers urban designers and architects have to make space for people's lives.

The question here is: what can a city do? This question should be understood on multiple levels. Analyzing what a city can do in terms of planning and spatial politics entails an analysis of how citizens' capacities are regulated, how citizens are affected by planning and legislation, but also whether their capacity to affect planning and legislation is possible or not. Spatial politics and planning do not, however, always entail direct spatial control. Rather, I consider planning as a constant, immanent process being negotiated and contested. Such negotiations can be understood as diagrammatic in the sense outlined by Deleuze (1992) in *Postscript on the Societies of Control*. Here, 'societies of control' delineates control through modulations of our everyday actions and relations, that are neither directly visible nor manifest. Modulation is a form of control that does not impose violence or power directly upon individuals as is the case in spaces belonging to disciplinary societies such as prisons, schools and the military. Power is rather distributed as a force immanent to the participating bodies. Thus, in societies of control, imprisonment happens without walls or physical boundaries. The prisoner is allowed to leave the prison, since their every move is registered and controlled by a bar code (Deleuze 1992). In today's algorithmic governance such immanent forms of control are increasingly becoming the norm permeating all levels of society.

Whereas urban planning in modernity, to a large extent, was exercised as representational forms of regulation (i.e. the architectural master plan, the municipal planning in European cities, the function of infrastructure), the current forms of urbanism modulate urban encounters differently. The master plan was a modernist form of spatial governance that worked through 'molds' consisting of universal architectural forms imposed upon

urban matter or built from *tabula rasa*. Conversely, I argue that contemporary strategic and participatory forms of planning increasingly rely on open, flexible systems that are responsive to the movements, acts, and flows that define them. Such modulations and processual forms are composed in and between affective relationalities between agents and the intelligent and responsive systems to which people are invited to participate in open-ended processes. Such participatory forms of urban planning are no longer disciplinary and material in the sense that they relate to the architectural form alone. Architecture no longer imposes a form or a disciplinary power upon urban matter. Rather, urbanism becomes *an act of urbanization*, a cultural process of regeneration, renewal, gentrification etc. In such processes of becoming, agency is not felt as external to the acting bodies, rather the city takes place and is formed through processes of participation, both imaginary and cultural production.<sup>6</sup> Here I understand urbanism as generic and diagrammatic, as a plane of organization constantly organizing, distributing, relating and separating bodies. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write, that the “plane of organization ... is structural or genetic, and both at once, structure and genesis, the structural plane of formed organizations with their developments, the genetic plane of evolutionary developments with their organization” (265). This is diagrammatic in so far as it is concerned with the development of forms and the formation of subjectivity, and how formations of subjectivity support stability of judgement and construction of identity. Like any form of diagrammatic distribution of power, the current form of urbanism, and its various forms of modulation (such as participatory planning), needs to be interrogated. In particular, as will become clear in the following, the promised transparency often relies on certain values, neither neutral nor open, but often as embodied norms pertaining to the co-creating bodies.

Hence, interfacial modulation in urban planning rarely operates through a discernible power, rather, it operates through affective modulations that can be felt in situations, but have no a priori rules of conduct. Following Deleuze’s critique in *Postscript on the Societies of Control* (1992), power is, in this chapter, therefore explored as immanent to the interface. Within the framework of planning, citizens can partake in participatory and emancipatory acts of self-individuation, while at the same time supporting politics of control. In other words, immanent power has a double agency: empowerment of citizens can be an immanent control

over a body and an immanent power *in* a body. Immanent control is further explained by Yuk Hui (2015) in regard to modulation: “modulation is a type of control that is characterized by creating a space for the individual, as if he or she has the freedom to tangle and to create, while their production as well their ends follow the logic of intangible forces” (75). Hence, the term ‘modulation’ refers to a diagrammatic agency, and explains a way of doing. So, in order to uphold a critical perspective, we must keep in mind what kind of interfacial modulations users of the city take part in. Often financial powers are at stake, when citizens partake in or become part of processes of gentrification, of real estate development, or of spatial segregation. As I will show, participatory planning relies on immanent cultural values including some people while excluding others.

The planning theorist, Jean Hillier (2011) has sharpened this diagrammatic thought in relation to planning as she suggests that the city is a plane or plan defined not by what it contains, but “rather by the forces that intersect it and the things it can do” (506). Hillier conceives of the city as a diagrammatic distribution of forces that affirmatively opens up towards what a city can do. While I support an affirmative approach to what a city can do, I also acknowledge a critical approach, since power is both potentially empowering and exercising power, diminishing what a city-as-a-community can do. In sum, we can see modulation as a diagrammatic power immanent to the city as exercised by individual bodies. The city can thus be conceived of as a diagrammatic modulation with an agency that relies on, and lives through, its participating bodies.

When defining contemporary urbanism and its spatial politics as modulations of affective encounters the city must, as a consequence, be seen as a field of relations open to the virtual. As explained above, affective modulations can both empower and diminish the power to act, and determine, what a city can do. Furthermore, it must be asked, what a city can do for what purpose or for whom? In *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* Deleuze (1990) writes: “we do not even know of what actions we are capable of, nor the extent of our power. How could we know this in advance” (226). The affective ethics in our actions could rarely be determined a priori, and neither could we determine beforehand the outcome of affective encounters. A body’s capacity to be affected can result in a passive power of pain and suffering from other people’s acts. But, as Deleuze notes, a given *passive affection* in suffering can also determine us to act. Affective powers

come from the outside, but can be acted upon through embodiments from the inside. In Deleuze's own depiction: "Every existing mode is thus inevitably affected by modes external to it, and undergoes changes that are not explained by its own nature alone" (219). As we will see in the following examples, acting upon exterior forces can transform suffering into actions.

In the following examples I will explore both the affective modulation in participatory planning, asking how citizens' bodies partake, and how the often invisible and immanent powers in interfaces might become manifest. Affective modulations will be explored on three interconnected scales: the citizen's body and embodiments (Gellerup Demolition Tour), the collective body of a neighborhood protest (the burka ban protest), and the city as an interfacial relation between bodies (the pandemic city). The guiding questions are: to what extent does affective modulation empower people, or do modulations decrease people's capacities to act, as suggested by Yuk Hui? What can a city do to its inhabitants, and what can citizens do to transform and empower neighborhoods and local communities?

## **THE GHETTO LAW AND THE CLAIMS OF A TRANSPARENT FACE**

The 'Ghetto Package' is a law realized in 2018 as part of the Danish government's restriction of designated ghetto areas. In the Danish context, the term 'ghetto' used to refer to neighborhoods comes, from a juridical and biopolitical instrument: the "ghetto list" published by the Ministry of Transport, Building and Housing to identify socially disadvantaged neighborhoods. But, as the ghetto list identifies a ghetto according to its crime rates, its percentage of ethnic groups with non-Danish backgrounds, and its unemployment rates, it has become a highly stigmatized term with sticky affects and highly stigmatized identity for the neighborhood and its residents. The Ghetto Package law can be seen as a spatial follow-up on the ghetto list's quantified valuation and spatial control of neighborhoods, in the sense that it allows local authorities to tear down buildings in designated ghetto areas and to differentiate citizen rights, for instance, by forcing children from ethnic minorities into Danish speaking day care institutions. The ghetto law imposes an interfacial modulation of certain relations between buildings, people, aesthetics, and every day culture.

One of the ghettos on the list is Gellerup. Gellerup is a former social housing neighborhood on the outskirts of Aarhus, Denmark. It was built in the late 1960s as part of Nordic modern welfare planning. Today, Gellerup faces major urban renewal. Since the regeneration plan from 2018 it is the ambition of the municipality of Aarhus to change Gellerup from being “socially disadvantaged” to becoming an “attractive residential district” for their target groups: the creative class and middle-class families (Brabrand Boligforening 2018, 9).<sup>7</sup> The aim, in other words, is to get Gellerup off the ghetto list by regenerating the area in the image of (white) middle class citizens. This intention of ‘doing good’ can in many ways be seen in relation to how the welfare state has transformed over time: from social ideals of equal rights into a neo-liberal mode of governmentality in which citizens are invited to take part in playful and affective encounters with the more or less hidden agenda of regenerating for an exclusive target group. This politics of affect in urban planning and design is practiced in the Gellerup masterplan and regeneration plan in focusing on bringing young entrepreneurs into the neighborhood, and by supporting young middle-class citizens to move into the area. A master plan is the architectural plan (drawings, renderings etc.), whereas the regeneration is the plan for social and cultural regeneration of a neighborhood. Hence, the plans differ from one another—one is material and the other explains the socio-cultural interventions proposed. This type of regeneration can thus be seen as part of national identity politics complying with local authorities’ interests in making Gellerup a site for economic growth and municipality-supported middleclass gentrification. In other words, the ‘attractive residential district’ can be understood as a regeneration and reconstruction into a specific national identity in which the master plan partakes in spatial politics. These politics are executed through various sorts of affective and spatial modulations aimed at the current and future potential residents respectively. This, among other things, implies rebuilding the much contested modernist social housing architecture into the aesthetics of middle class residential buildings.

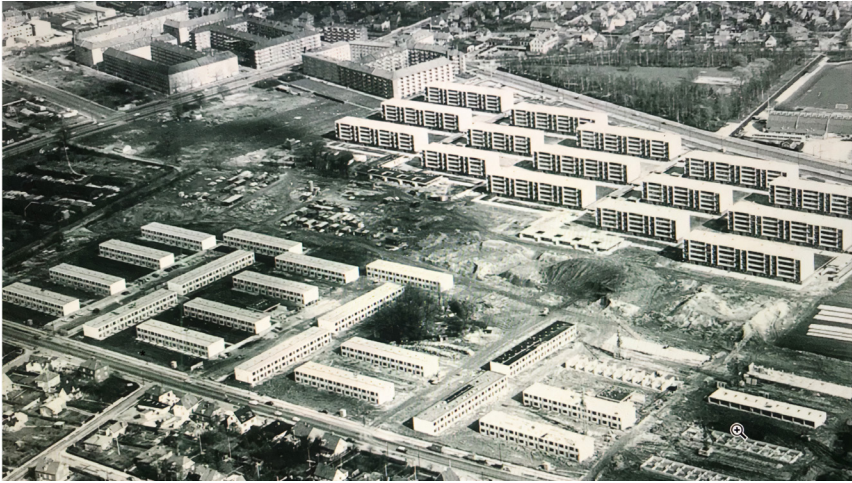
I will now offer a few examples of how architecture and aesthetics follow a cultural regeneration where specific affects are valued over others: The first step of the regeneration plan was to ‘open up’ Gellerup towards the city center of Aarhus. This plan proposes replacing the facade of one of the massive concrete blocks with a “golden gate” which provides the citizens of Gellerup with a view to Aarhus, and vice versa (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. What can urban planning do? The golden gate in Gellerup: opening up the modernist housing block towards the city of Aarhus (3D rendering by Transform Architects).**

The golden gate architecture can be seen as symbolic place-making and as an attempt to regenerate a sticky socio-cultural affect as an attempt to regenerate the sticky image constructed by politicians and media that modernist housing aesthetics equals people of color and immigrant communities (see Figure 2).

This spatial reconstruction of modernist buildings does not just tear down the much contested facade of social housing architecture, it also rebuilds it with the promise of a 'golden' gate—in the symbolic sense of economically lucrative—to the city of Aarhus. An aesthetics of a neutral, even transparent and open, face towards Aarhus promises openness, inclusion, and economic growth but is, at the same time, a construction that puts urban culture in the centre of Aarhus city as the normative ideal. Whereas this works as a place-making effort that sends a specific signal to citizens in Gellerup, and the Danish mainstream public, about openness, one might also question its actual spatial capacity to make citizens and publics (on both sides of the gate) meet.



**Figure 2. What can architecture do? Gellerup Housing project from 1973. Modernist social housing has in the last decades become an affective architecture sticking to designated “ghetto” areas, a ghetto discourse that again circulates in Danish media with sticky and stigmatizing images. Can architecture and design change such sticky affects by demolishing buildings, rebuilding an other face?**

This constructed face of openness and mutual accessibility and transparency can also be understood in terms of deliberately breaking with some site qualities and architectures. Whereas the original architecture of modernist social housing has several open glass facades, the current residents inhabit the buildings in multiple forms, covering, for instance, the windows with textures, cloths, plants, devices, and large antennas. The Nordic modernist architecture was, in line with social democratic politics, concerned with letting in the light to generate healthier housing facilities at the outskirts of the often crowded city centers. When the Gellerup Plan was created, the idea was to build a future of openness and democratic transparency, and when the first wave of immigrant workers came to Aarhus in the beginning of the 1970s, the city was proud to welcome its new citizens to this newly built area. Today the open facades of windows have been covered by curtains, and the buildings are everywhere supplied with individual antennas bringing in signals from around the world. In other words, the spatial expressivity nowadays tells the story of a multi-cultural ethnic community that does not assimilate or conform to the aesthetics of ‘openness’ and transparency that is often celebrated in Danish modernist

welfare societies. However, regenerations of facades, or the implementation of new facades, in, for instance, the creative student's house, is a recurrent feature in Gellerup's regeneration plan (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3. What can aesthetics do? The facades of transparency and openness in the new architecture of Gellerup, Aarhus Kollegiet. Ground-floor facades are kept in transparent glass promising to open up towards the street and other citizens.**

Transparency and the construction of a new face is further informed in the cultural programme “Instant City a temporary cultural event program initiated to support the masterplan through socio-cultural events and participatory art. By “instant” it rhetorically suggests that cultural encounters can happen instantly and overnight. Art and culture become tools in a bioplitical transformation process. Other initiatives worth mentioning are the “gazelle farm” and the praised design initiative, “Taste of Gellerup,” in which local citizens are being re-cast as cultural entrepreneurs producing and providing recipes and ethnic food to the general public of Aarhus (see Figures 4 and 5).

Whereas the initiatives in the instant city, to some extent, can be promising in staging different cultures of food in the neighborhood, the instant city also relies on an interfacial modulation of affect. Seen from this perspective, citizens are invited to participate in, embody and share, their cultural values only to the extent that it can be consumed as a tasty, exotic experience by outside visitors. National identity politics here become an affective biopolitics, distributed and transformed by and within the participating bodies of citizens (both ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ of Gellerup).



**Figure 4. What can participatory design and sharing food do? Taste of Gellerup is a food project in which local residents share recipes and food culture and potentially become creative entrepreneurs (photo by Taste of Gellerup, Alexander Muchenberger).**



**Figure 5. What can participatory design and sharing food do? Taste of Gellerup is a food project in which local residents share recipes and food culture and potentially become creative entrepreneurs (photo by Taste of Gellerup, Alexander Muchenberger).**

The phrase “[t]he face is a politics” was written by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, 179). Faciality relies on an underlying abstract machine, an operational hidden logic, which performatively produces politics. They explain that “it is precisely because the face depends on an abstract machine, that it does not assume a pre-existent subject or signifier, but is subjacent to them and provides the substance necessary to them” (180). Thus, in bringing the spatial aesthetics of an open and transparent face to Gellerup (then and now) it renders forth the spatial aesthetics and ethics of a vivid norm, in this case the norm of the Danish white middle class. This face is neither transparent per se, nor is it universal and neutral. It is, however, embodied in an aesthetics of modernity and democratic transparency that regenerates the face of the neighborhood in the image of white middle class citizens.

As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) state, “it is not the individuality of the face that counts but the efficacy of the ciphering it makes possible, and in what cases it makes it possible” (175). The ciphering and augmentation

of a particular kind of urban life that extracts value from certain urban encounters is also in charge of programming encounters in the forms of architectural and aesthetic processes of gentrification. The municipality's purpose with all this is to take Gellerup off the ghetto list. Whereas it augments a certain faciality it concurrently diminishes existing resident's forms of life. So, whereas the interfacial modulations of affect in the regeneration of Gellerup operates through spatial becoming, with the instant city as its temporary interface, it nonetheless has a certain white faciality masked as 'transparency' at its end-point. This encompasses a partnership between a flexible, participatory, open-ended planning and a biopolitics embodied by citizens. In inviting citizens to partake in a biopolitical and affective process of transformation, some parts of an urban culture are rendered visible, while other parts are demolished or silenced. In this case, the participatory planning relies on the participation of citizens sharing their 'tasty' culture in the instant city program (including its event-culture program). While affective and embodied participation might augment some cultural capacities amongst citizens in Gellerup, it also diminishes others. In this sense, a ciphery takes place that renders a certain representational image possible while neglecting already existing everyday cultures. This problem addresses the immanent powers at play in planning and urbanism. This is not new to urban studies. In the literature on place-making the instantaneity of temporary urban spaces often goes hand in hand with real estate investment and gentrification (see Madanipour 2018; Fabian & Samson 2017). Nonetheless, when we apply affect studies to participatory planning and place-making, all the subtle racialized modulations emerge, especially minor modulations that take place in the disguise of participatory and culturally inclusive forms of planning. Before leaving the case of Gellerup I will give another example of how affective spatial politics of this regeneration can be modulated through the affective politics of the body, drawing upon the gallery Andromeda's *Demolition Tour* in May 2018.

## **BEING AFFECTED—THE DEMOLITION TOUR**

In May 2018 local resident and curator Aysha Amin, in a Gellerup based community art gallery, Andromeda, conducted a ghetto tour, specified as a 'demolition tour.' The tour disclosed the local residents' affective relations to the (at the time) nine building blocks that were to be demolished

according to the regeneration plan. The tour gathered a small crowd of curious visitors from Aarhus—designers, planners and students. Guided by Amin, the tour visited the places and buildings in Gellerup. At each stop Amin told stories related to each place, bringing multiple narratives and perspectives on Gellerup together on the walk. In underlining its multiple and competing expressions, other stories of the neighborhood were brought to life (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6. What can citizen narratives do? Demolition Tour curated by community art gallery, Andromeda8220 and guided by Aysha Amin (photo by Andromeda8220).**

After encountering the neighbourhood, its architecture, its residents, and the childhood memories of Aysha Amin, a decision of this kind was obviously impossible for the tour participants. Arguably, the embodied experiences of *a life*, and the felt expressivity of how specific lives and citizens suffer from ghettoization discourses and concurrent media rhetorics, made the audience relate to the social and cultural qualities in Gellerup. I experienced the *Demolition Tour* as an embodied gesture of returning the

modulations of participatory planning, guided by a citizen whose body had experienced the affects of those modulations. The tour also managed, in an affirmative way, to point out the immanent qualities of Gellerup that were not instantly ‘tasty’ or ready to consume. This included the stories of people, their memories, and the expressivity added to the homogeneity of the modernist architecture. These impressions were felt by the visiting public, not necessarily as comfortable or joyful affects, rather as mixed feelings. The *Demolition Tour* was an event that folded the exterior forces of the ghetto discourse and its sticky affects into felt and embodied experiences among the participating visitors. When Amin was asked why she wore a bullet proof vest, she answered “to protect my feelings.” Deleuze (1988) notes that according to Spinoza, beings will be defined according to “their *capacity for being affected*, by the affections of which they are capable” (45). To me, Amin embodied such a capacity for being affected. When the various discourses imposed from the outside do not meet the expressivity of the inside, for instance the everyday feeling of belonging of citizens, an affective encounter might emerge. The affective expressions might be affirmative, but often they draw on mixed and ambiguous tonalities.

I understand the *Demolition Tour* as an affective encounter that both strategically navigated the external planning oppression of the neighborhood and directed this into felt yet ambiguous sensations that could be accessed by an outside public. The tour was an encounter between enduring a passive suffering from the outside and turning it into potential empowerment or acting against it. It is remarkable that the *Demolition Tour* was carried out in the evental aesthetics as many of the other events were in the Instant City program. But nonetheless the evental aesthetics enacted the melancholy of the past rather than celebrating the entrepreneurial future of the instant city.

The example of the Gellerup Plan, its regeneration plan and Andromeda’s *Demolition Tour*, illustrate how spatial politics and planning take place through participatory and affective engagements. Hence, this regeneration should not just be seen as an architectural and aesthetic renewal—it represents concurrently a cultural and social modulation of values. Regeneration becomes, in the well-meaning intentions of neoliberal municipal planning, a form of reinvention of the image and the face of a neighborhood. Its barely concealed agenda is a social cultural transforma-

tion of Gellerup in order to make it consistent with the normative Danish culture. This idea of regeneration relies in many ways on binary thinking as performed in the spatial aesthetics of the new city-plan and in the cultural aesthetics of food and dwelling. Spatial politics in the ghetto law and in the participatory planning discourse in the Gellerup regeneration plan thus welcomes specific forms of normative participation in excluding others. Media, culture and imagery play a specific role in constructing and mobilizing this face. Even though this face promises openness and transparency its back can be rendered visible through embodied acts like the *Demolition Tour*.

Returning to what a city can do, we might say that in the ghetto law as well as in the regeneration plan planning happens as a modulation of affects manifested in how imagery, figures from the ghetto list, and the spatial aesthetics of modernist social housing, are brought together to stigmatize neighborhoods and to replace them with a new face and culture. Regeneration is both a cultural and material modulation and they are rarely discernible. This is, for instance, expressed in the regeneration of architecture in the rebuilding of the façade where national welfare norms of openness and inclusiveness claims that transparency is an universal value. Therefore, as modulations of affect come from the outside (not immanently expressed by its citizens), the Gellerup regeneration plan deterritorializes former Modernist welfare values and its social ideals, as well as redefines the ideal citizen and what constitutes a community.

Hence, the former modernist understanding of the city as an interface for cultural encounters across cultures, signs and values is replaced with a faciality of a-signifying signs (the golden gate, the open façades) that nonetheless rely on codified binary biopolitics of the yes or no: *either* the covered facade *or* the unveiled open façade, *either* the curtained closed concrete building *or* the golden gate to Aarhus, *either* unemployed people of color, *or* creative middle class citizens and entrepreneurs living the lifeforms of an instant and eventbased city. This codification of citizens happens through processes of symbolic, spatial and cultural modulation. In this regard, the *Demolition Tour* was an event that demasked the binary biopolitics by facing the affective modulations of the regeneration plan with ambiguity and from a position inside the neighborhood.

## AFFECTIVE COMMONING IN THE BURKA BAN PROTEST

The same year as the ghetto law was initiated (2018), the publicly nicknamed “Burka Ban” came into effect, prohibiting people to cover their faces in public. With the intent of making facial urban encounters white and harassing Muslim people, the ban can be said to break with the urban modern ethics of the city as a space for encountering the other, or otherness. Rather, the ban points to what media scholar Møhring Reestorff (2017) has described as the national identity politics in Danish “tepid nationalism” in recent years. Also, the burka law can in many aspects be seen as a continuation of the white faciality described in relation to Gellerup and the ghetto law.

In August 2018, a counter movement to the ban was initiated in Nørrebro, Copenhagen. A protest, organized by the NGO *Women in Dialogue*, in which participants were prompted to perform civic disobedience by covering their faces.. Together with other local community groups, protesters and NGO’s voiced their concern by representing the veiled women facing the fines for wearing niqabs and burkas in public space. As one of the organizers stated about wearing a niqab, “now it is a sign of protest” (Hustad 2018). From being merely an everyday way of dressing, the burka had become criminalized by law, and with the counteraction of the NGO, and for a large group of participating residents in the Nørrebro neighborhood, a neighborhood known for its multicultural diversity and community engagement, a sign of protest. In the gathering in Superkilen Park, people were wearing a plurality of masks, veils and niqabs. Later the protest proceeded to North West neighborhood forming a chain around the local police station, enacting a citizen’s rights to wear whatever she prefers (See Figure 7).

In his book on *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, Deleuze divides affectivity into active and passive affection, which corresponds to the capacity of a body to affect and to be affected:

The capacity of being affected is called a power of suffering in so far as it is actually exercised by passive affection. The body’s power of suffering has as its equivalent in the mind the power of imagining and of experiencing passive feelings. Let us now assume that the mode it endures, comes to exercise ... its capacity of being affected by active affections. In this aspect the capacity appears as a force of power of acting. (1990, 222).

In Édouard Glissant's dialogue with Mantia Dawara (2011), he demands a citizen's right to opacity, pointing to the barbaric trait in Western societies of imposing one's own transparency on the other. We can say that the power of suffering in a Western—here specifically Danish claim of facial transparency—is exactly what the women endure with the Burka Ban. But through the protest and the commoning of wearing a mask the right to opacity is asserted.

We have already seen how the *Demolition Tour* was oscillating between the passive affections and the active power of acting. Returning to the question of what a body can do, the burka protest similarly illustrates how a collective body of citizens in Nørrebro, through affective modulations, unveils the spatial politics in the burka ban. Starting from the binary



**Figure 7.** What can a neighborhood do? Citizens in Nørrebro neighborhood put on multiple masks and veils in protest against the Burka Ban, and formed a chain around the local police station (Photo Michael Haldrup).

politics of the veiled and unveiled, the local community and the NGOs, made the covered face reemerge as a multitude beyond the identity politics of either the nation state or a specific ethnic community. As such the commoning across the neighborhood was against specific national identity politics (see Tampio 2009) and a reclaiming of the right to opacity.

In the burka ban protest, commoning becomes a modulation of making affective relations in a community felt. Where planning in the Gellerup case was analyzed as an interfacial modulation of affects between bodies, the burka ban protest points to how a city, or in this case a neighborhood, distributes and empowers citizens by bringing diverse bodies together in real-time situations. Here, the embodied experience of commoning in real time holds a capacity for acting otherwise. In this case it's not a question of what a singular body can do, rather, the burka ban protest shows what commoning across differences can do, as we do not know the extent of such a collective body in advance. Its capacities to affect and to be affected are realized in the situation, in its process of embodiment. In this case, the collective body forming as a multitude of masked expressions negotiated the sticky political and mediated affect of the veil or the burka to a Muslim group of citizens. Establishing for a moment a multitude of covered faces it showed another face to Danish national politics not conforming to an identical and identifiable unveiled face but rather constructing an opacity in disguise. Participating in the protest, there was a moment in which I, as a citizen, faced the urban implications of a single white faciality as it shakes the very foundations of the city as an interface for encounters. Did all participants feel the same? Unlikely, because each commoning body manifested—visually and bodily—that they did not want to conform to any single identity image governed within a public space. I understand modulation of affects in the burka ban protest as an augmentation and reinforcement of opacities of any art, a remasking of citizens rights not to conform to any singular image. The spatial politics prohibiting the burka was turned around and augmented so as to let the multiple covered faces speak. This was a cacophony of voices that could not be reduced to a single cultural identity. Embodying multiple faces from various religious and cultural contexts, the participating bodies did not conform to the either/or operative logics in the burka ban politics. Whereas the *Demolition Tour* in Gellerup enacted the expressivity of a single body, the burka ban protest can be seen as an example of what a city can do in the process



**Figure 8. What can a pandemic city do? During the pandemic, cities, streets and squares were radically closed down to prevent the virus to spread. It radically changed norms in the city and the distribution of affective social and cultural encounters. Superkilen Park in Copenhagen (photo Kristine Samson).**

of commoning. Here, the entire neighborhood embodied a multifacility and expressed an urban commoning emerging from cultural differences and an embodiment of a multiple co-existent facility.

## **THE NEW NORMAL OF FACE MASKS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING**

The coronavirus pandemic initiates a series of events that clearly show what the first cases have hesitantly indicated: that the city is an interface for social, cultural, and affective encounters in which bodies relate in both affirmative and disruptive ways. It is also an event that deeply redefines the city as an affective interface. In the former cases we could identify the emergence of immanent qualities, for instance the empowering capacities of the lived experiences of inhabitants or the commoning of a neighborhood against racialized spatial politics. Yet, what immediately qualifies the pandemic city as an event is that all pre-existing qualities disappear. As the virus spread, the common assumptions for most urban studies and planning practices were undermined. During the first lockdown in March 2020, pandemic was no longer a place for encounters, meaning that the underlying assumption permeating this article and the former cases mentioned above become redundant—redundant as seen from the perspective of active and affirmative affections. Instead, bodily and affective encounters in the city and the interconnectedness of bodies became dominated by fear, as encounters would spread the virus. Maiello (2020), analyses the coronavirus in terms of mediation, “this pandemic confronts us with our mediality; it shows us that we are in the middle, that we play an active role in a continuous process of transformation, which develops itself in the total hybridization of levels and scales, the human and the non-human, the biological and the medialogical.” This explains the eventual emergence of a radical other reevaluation of urban encounters, he pandemic crisis inserts a potential deadly threat in the embodied encounter. What a city can do in this situation is to lock down. Lock down in the sense of disconnecting all the everyday encounters that define the city and this prevents affective modulation. Formerly constituent factors in the city, for instance density, mobility and constant exchange, and social and bodily encounters become prohibited so as to diminish the capacity of the body to affect and to be affected, to contaminate and to be contaminated. Therefore the virus and the following spatial politics of social distanc-

ing disconnects us from our mobility and shuts down the majority of the affective modulations operating in the city. In this sense, the pandemic city becomes an urban event radically changing the ethics of relations in the city. However, urban encounters were also renegotiated and new counter regulations emerged, for instance, the law enforcements of wearing a face mask in public transport.

The prohibition of events and social gatherings of more than 10 people in Denmark is just one example of this. The city operates as an interface for affective encounters, even in the case where affective encounters are negatively defined. As such, the pandemic city reopened questions regarding biopolitics and environmental control, as it showcased new formations between disciplinary societies and control societies in the city. At the same time, it also opened questions regarding our planetary situation and to what extent (urban) life as we know it is sustainable. Several citizens encountered nature, the commons outside Copenhagen and the friendship with animals and companion species (see Figure 9). Here the question reemerges on another scale: what can a city do on a planetary scale? Can the lack of affections from, for instance, travel, tourism, commercial interactions, actually augment and sustain the more-than-human livability and decrease the anthropocentric and urbanised damage on earth? The corona virus illuminates the question of what a body and a city can do in so far as it shows how a city as an interface of encounters can also break down, rearrange and re-emerge with different behaviors and sociospatial norms.

## **AN AFFIRMATIVE ETHICS OF WHAT A CITY CAN DO**

What a body can do is not only to suffer passively from the affective modulation exterior to it, but to rework the suffering from its immanent relationality. This is what Braidotti (2013, 2019), among others, with reference to a Spinozist ethics, calls “affirmative ethics” (explained below). We can understand affirmative ethics as an imperative to keep experimenting with other ways of relating and experimenting with and through mediated and interfacial modulations. Braidotti (2013) explains: “Affirmative ethics is based on the praxis constructing positivity, thus propelling new social conditions and relations into being, out of pain. It actively constructs energy by transforming the negative charge of these experiences, even in intimate relationships where the dialectics of domination is at work” (227).



**Figure 9. What can companion species do? During the corona virus due to the affective threat in human encounters, people found comfort in nature and interspecies encounters. The nature reservoir, Syhavnstippen south of Copenhagen became a place for encountering llamas as companion species (photo Lasse Mouritzen).**

Such questions arise from the pandemic city: why would we reestablish urban relations and the painful and harmful interfacial modulations we were part of? As an interface, the pandemic city was malfunctioning, it was painful and frightening. It was not *new* according to pre-established codifications in spatial politics and planning but rather non-existent as the habitual foundation of our lives. It was no longer functioning as an interface. As such it felt like a systemic resetting of the predominant mode of production. If we can understand affirmative ethics as an experimentation or othering of the predominant order from within, the lessons from the pandemic city must be that radical change can also be imposed upon us from the outside. In the case of a pandemic crisis we are no longer discussing the point, lines and planes of the city. Instead, the pandemic might finally redirect us to a planetary scale pointing to our deep ontological relationality and interspecies interconnectedness. So why would we want to go back to normal? Events emerge where reality, as we know it, break open, and what we formerly considered transparent and neutral becomes demasked, fake or insufficient. What a pandemic city can do when it reconfigures as interface is to initiate *unprecedented* formations

of subjectivity. Events, as we have seen in this article, emerge from the felt experiences in affective encounters; as well as the affective encounter in which we are not able to relate to one another. Affirmative ethics emerge from such limitations, they can rarely be anticipated. Hence, we still do not know what a city can do.

## NOTES

1. Thanks to Greg Seigworth for pointing to how affects unfold as *point, lines and planes*. While the analysis on all three is difficult, I nonetheless find it fruitful to try and make the jumps in between the point, the lines and the planes. In this article, my main interest is the plane which I relate to the diagrammatic modulations of affect. But without the point and contact zones in the bodily encounters (points) or the processes of commoning (lines), planes easily become too abstract, especially in urbanism and spatial politics. The plane as a certain mode of urban production needs encounters and processes of commoning.
2. Whilst I normally write about these processual and participatory forms of urbanism and planning from an analytical, descriptive and distanced perspective (see, for instance, Samson, 2010, *The Becoming of UrbanSpace: From Design Object to Design Process*). I will allow myself to write from a more situated and embodied position. I believe that an embodied and affective approach to the field *matters*, and that cities currently undergo such radical transformations that we need to bring bodily felt sensations into the analysis to better understand the affective politics and dynamics of cities.
3. Evental Urbanism was a subproject in *Affects, Interfaces, Events* (2015–2021). The field of study was urban activism, art in public and cultural planning, but also the role of affective media and the body in contemporary urbanism and urban design.
4. For further readings into non-representational urban theory and affect, see for instance McCormack (2014) *Refrains for Moving Bodies*, Harrison & Anderson (2016). *Taking-Place Non-Representational Theories and Geography* or Amin & Thrift (2002). *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* 2004. For research in urban planning adopting a Deleuzian-Guattarian perspective, see Jean Hillier (2007), *Stretching beyond the Horizon*, or the following (2011) “Strategic Navigation Across Multiple Planes: Towards a Deleuzian-Inspired Methodology for Strategic Spatial Planning” In: *The Town Planning Review* 82(5), pp. 503–527.
5. For a further critical discussion and problematization of the post-political see for instance Erik Swyngedouw (2011) *Designing the Post-Political City and the Insurgent Polis*, London: Bedford Press; or Margit Mayer (2013). *First World Activism. City: Analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 17 (1), pp. 5–19.

6. For a further elaboration on how urban design and architecture partake in processes of becoming, see Samson 2010. For a further elaboration of the diagrammatic thought in planning, see Hillier 2007, 2011, for a further critique of participatory and cultural planning as power and control, see Fabian & Samson 2017, Madanipur 2018, Krivy (2008).
7. The general plan defines the target group and future residents like this “Families with children in the upper middle class: Migrants from the creative class with humanities and artistic higher education; Existing resourceful residents; Migrants with long or medium education; Migrants, eg. public servants or academics with children” translated from Danish: *Børnefamilier i den højere middelklasse: Tilflyttere fra den kreative klasse med humanistiske og kunstneriske videregående uddannelser; Eksisterende ressourcestærke beboere; Tilflyttere med lange eller mellemlange uddannelser; Tilflyttere, fx offentligt ansatte eller akademikere med børn.* Available at: <https://www.bbbo.dk/media/2230/bbbo-udviklingsplanen.pdf> [Accessed 01 May 2020].

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