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**CONTESTED BODIES, CONTESTED CITIES
(POST)MIGRANT YOUTH, CONTINGENT CITIZENSHIP AND
THE POLITICS OF CAPOEIRA AND PARKOUR IN TURIN, ITALY**

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CONTESTED BODIES, CONTESTED CITIES**(Post)migrant youth, contingent citizenship and the politics of capoeira and parkour in Turin, Italy**

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ndemartiniugolotti@bournemouth.ac.uk**ABSTRACT**

Urban spaces in contemporary Italy are currently contested sites where competing images of society, politics and citizenship are constructed and negotiated. While at a national level widespread xenophobic discourses classify migration as a security and public order problem, and define immigrants and their children as *alien bodies* in Italian cities, at a local level the leadership and cultural entrepreneurs of Turin based the city urban renewal on an image of multiculturalism and inclusiveness with the aim to attract visitors and capital investments. As the intersection of such discourses shape the manifold ways through which (post)migrant bodies become represented, perceived and addressed in contemporary Turin, this paper will address how such dynamics are negotiated by groups of children of migration between 16 and 21 years old practicing capoeira and parkour in Turin public spaces. The focus on capoeira and parkour, two lifestyle sports which emplace the body in public spaces, enabled this study to highlight how groups of (post)migrant youth used these practices to negotiate spaces and processes of inclusion, and exclusion, in Turin's cityscape. Capoeira and parkour represented meaningful sites of analysis, as practices wrought with contradictions indicative of current trends within Turin's urban politics. Both disciplines are abundantly endorsed by public-private events celebrating Turin's renewal, vibrancy and diversity. However, the participants' spontaneous, and often unrequested, engagement with these disciplines in public spaces often creates frictions and conflicts between them and other members of the public in relation to what constitutes the public, how it should be used, and by whom. The analysis of the participants' engagement with capoeira and parkour in Turin's regenerating cityscape, enabled to illuminate the shifting meaning of citizenship in the context of research, and articulate it to the reciprocal constitution of bodies, spaces, and power relations in a less-than-coherent assemblage of neoliberal urban regeneration.

KEYWORDS: Cosmopolitan Urbanism, Citizenship, Migrant Youth, Capoeira, Parkour

1. INTRODUCTION

The children of migration are controversial figures in contemporary Europe. Across several European countries, a constellation of anxieties indissolubly tying economic recession, uncontrolled migration, crime, and terrorism contribute to define them as national pollutants (Merrill, 2011), and as *alien bodies* in urban spaces. At the same time, several European cities based their neoliberal urban renewal on an image of multiculturalism and inclusiveness, in order to attract a cosmopolitan “creative class” supposedly enabling to bolster the cities' symbolic, cultural, and financial capital (Glick Schiller, 2015). In Turin, Italy, these competing discourses intersect each other within the city's process of post-industrial renaissance, and shape the manifold, contradictory ways through which (post)migrant youth's bodies become represented, perceived and addressed in the redeveloping cityscape.

This paper will address two main questions in relation to this ongoing process: how contemporary process of neoliberal urban regeneration shape the extent (post)migrant youth can exert belonging and civic membership in urban spaces, and how these youth live, navigate, and negotiate such process. Within this analysis, I address how citizenship is defined in Turin's public spaces beyond a legal and formal status. Therefore, I look at to what extent the exercise of citizenship, as “indisputable belonging” (Semi, 2015, p. 15) to urban public life and polity, is achieved, exerted and limited through and by bodily markers of race and class, and across diverse spatial and temporal contexts. Acknowledging the variety of normative articulations of citizenship, as by no means produced by the state alone (De Koning et al., 2015, p. 125), I address how civic membership is constructed in Turin's regenerating cityscape by an array of public and private actors, and how it is negotiated by the research participants.

I develop this analysis through an ethnographic perspective that privileges the point of view of young men of migrant origins practicing capoeira and parkour in Turin's public spaces, as a unique viewpoint to address the entanglement of body, space, power and belonging in contemporary contexts of uneven urban development. The focus on capoeira and parkour, two lifestyle sports that emplace the body in public spaces, enabled this study to highlight how groups of (post)migrant youth used these practices to negotiate embodied and emplaced and processes of inclusion, and exclusion, in Turin's cityscape. Capoeira and parkour also represented meaningful sites of analysis, as practices wrought with contradictions indicative of current trends within Turin's urban politics. Both disciplines are abundantly endorsed by public-private events celebrating Turin's renewal, vibrancy and diversity. However, the participants' spontaneous, and often unrequested, engagement with these disciplines in public spaces often creates frictions and conflicts between them and other members of the public (i.e. residents, security forces, business owners) in relation to what constitutes the public, how it should be used, and by whom. As such, the analysis of the participants' engagement with capoeira and parkour in Turin's regenerating cityscape, will enable illuminate the shifting meaning of citizenship in the context of research, and articulate it to the reciprocal constitution of bodies, spaces, and power relations in a less-than-coherent assemblage of neoliberal urban regeneration.

2. REBRANDING THE ITALIAN DETROIT: PARADOXES AND CONSEQUENCES OF TURIN'S COSMOPOLITAN URBANISM

In the last two decades, Turin's municipality, together with the city's main cultural-economic lobbies, responded to the decay of the “Italian Detroit” (Pizzolato, 2008) by

trying to rebrand the city image and transform it from a “city that looked like a factory” (Bagnasco 1986), to an European and international capital of “knowledge, culture, and innovation” (You Can Bet On Torino, 2014).

Almost a unique case in Italy, the “creative city” model that the city's leaderships and cultural entrepreneurs espoused (Vanolo, 2015), was also coupled with the development of pro-multicultural, and pro-diversity policies (Schmoll and Semi, 2013), aiming to facilitate the inclusion and participation of migrant communities and minorities in the city's regeneration process. Several authors addressed the association of “creative” regeneration patterns, characterised by investment in cultural rebranding strategies and radical spatial transformations, with multicultural, and pro-diversity policies, as a form of emerging *cosmopolitan urbanism* (Binnie et al., 2006; Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2011). These authors intended cosmopolitan urbanism as a process of neoliberal urban regeneration enacted by politicians, planners and boosters to attract “global talent”, financial capital, and tourism.

In this framework, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity started to represent the heart of what makes a 21st century city “vibrant” (Binnie et al. 2006, p. 1), and as a necessary urban feature to attract a cosmopolitan, ascending, “creative class” supposedly bringing to cities the needed competitive energy, and investments, to reposition themselves in a global scenario (Ponzini and Rossi, 2010). Cosmopolitan urbanism is usually surrounded by a progressive aura indissoluble economic vibrancy and inclusiveness, both envisaged and enacted by promoting residents' participation (including migrants and minorities) in the rebranding of their communities. However, it has been underlined that the hyper-celebration of culture, tourism and creativity, and the representation of vibrant, multicultural cities often enhanced an ethnicisation and essentialisation of migrants' trading and living practices (Schmoll and Semi, 2013), neglected fundamental issues of socio-spatial justice, and overlooked the implications of neoliberal restructuring (Ponzini and Rossi, 2010).

In Turin, the city's spatial and social transformations absorbed large local budgets by integrating private and public sectors to attract tourism and capital investment (Bondonio and Guala, 2011), and implied radical cuts to cultural programs (sic!), and welfare provision in a context of deep economic recession (Vanolo, 2015, pp. 3-4). In recent studies Turin's municipality figured as the most indebted council in Italy, and the poorest city in the industrial north of the country, with the unenviable record of the highest number of residential evictions in Italy. In 2014, Turin also had a 49% unemployment rate in the 15-29 age range (CGIA, 2014).

In this context of increasing social tensions and economic disarray, Turin witnessed widespread concerns regarding unemployment and economic crisis joining with moral panics regarding illegal migration, crime, and terrorism. Such constellation of anxieties contributed to depict migrants, and their children, as responsible for the spreading criminality, violence and ‘moral decay’ (De Martini Ugolotti and Moyer, 2016). The simultaneous fear and celebration of cultural diversity and (post)migrants' presence in the city spaces illuminated the paradox of Turin's cosmopolitan rebranding. To accomplish and legitimating the spatial and social development of a renewed city, (post)migrants' presence in the city became not only necessary for the success of Turin's ‘renaissance’, but also as a threatening source of anxiety to this form of city-making, especially when associated with images of incompatible (cultural) difference, poverty and ‘disruptive’ uses of space. The contradictory elements of this paradox had direct consequences on the participants' possibilities to claim civic membership in Turin's public spaces.

3. METHODOLOGY

Data for this study are derived from 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the city of Turin, and focused on the daily practice of capoeira and parkour enacted by approximately twenty young men of migrant origins between 16 and 21 years. Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian blend of martial arts, dance, music and acrobatics (see Downey 2005), while parkour is a bodily discipline that makes movement and the creation of personal and creative paths in urban space the foundation of its practice (see Saville, 2008). Both disciplines are knowing worldwide diffusion amongst young people across the world, together with an increasing “sportisation” (see Wesolowski, 2012, for capoeira; Ferrero Camoletto et al., 2015 for parkour). Both practices were chosen for this study as they meaningfully, and differently, emplaced the body in Turin's (public) spaces (see De Martini Ugolotti, 2015).

I engaged with young men with different geographic origins because I observed that an approach that restricted participant selection based on geographic origins or ethnicity would have limited insights about respondents enacted practices. The young men I followed were committed capoeiras and traceurs with various level of experience (their names in the text have been changed to protect their privacy). Interestingly, they also described their engagement with these disciplines in Turin's public spaces as the consequence of a lack of other leisure and socializing opportunities, rather than a conscious choice of an amusing past-time.

During the research, I adopted a flexible range of qualitative methods (ethnographic participation, documents analysis, in-depth interviews, participatory narrative and visual methods), and engaged with the participants in capoeira and parkour practice, which proved enormously helpful in gaining access to the fieldwork environment. The flexibility and creativity implied in the use of various methods was due to the informal, fluid characteristics of the contexts where the research took place, and to the intention to accommodate the participants' creativity and preferences in choosing the means and occasions they considered appropriate to engage with the research (Kincheloe, 2001). This qualitative, multi-method approach enabled me to develop a situated and crystallized (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005) analytical perspective and to address the multilayered and mutual constitution of self, place and belonging in participants' practices and daily lives.

4. THE RIGHT TO THE COSMOPOLITAN CITY: NEOLIBERAL URBANISM, AND (POST)MIGRANT YOUTH'S CITIZENSHIP IN TURIN

“Turin seems to me as it is made for those who like to spend their free time in the malls, gyms, clubs, or restaurants spread around the city... for those who for one reason or another don't like doing this there is neither much, or a place. If you ask me why we are sent away so many times from almost all the areas we train in I'd say it's not just because of racism or because we are considered 'not from here'. Of course there's that, and a lot, but in my opinion it's also because we go to ruin the image that people give to specific places we go training” (Karim, 21 years old)

As several authors have argued, the “hollowing out”—and subsequent “filling in”—of the state in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries can be identified with a weakening of the conventional association of citizenship with the nation-state, as a set of rights, and responsibilities acquired by birth or residency (Desforges et al., 2006; Van Schipstal and Nicholls, 2013). Karim's quote highlighted how to have a place, or recognition, in contemporary cities depends on demonstrating value as economic subjects, or else, as contributors to the economic vitality of the city, because of skills, money or culture (Van

Schiptal and Nicholls, 2013). Those who do not want, or can contribute are framed as drains and threats to the community, with further negative implications for those generally perceived *per se* as (undesired) guests in the social fabric, such as, in most cases, migrants and minorities.

However, in Turin's cosmopolitan urbanism, racial, ethnic, and religious “others” are an integral part of the effort to rebrand the city as a culturally vibrant, and inclusive (wannabe) global centre. The rationale for this process of multicultural inclusivity was provided by Turin municipality's aims to build “a local and collective [urban] identity including old and new migrants” (Comune di Torino, 2011) in the city's regenerating spaces. However, this rationale was mainly enacted by public-private institutions, that endorsed a palatable and festive image of cultural diversity through the promotion of multi-ethnic street markets, the organization of high-end international food fairs, and more ordinary ‘(multi)cultural festivals’, to appeal to cosmopolitan, sophisticated travellers, and less affluent,² (im)mobile residents (Schmoll and Semi, 2013).

Arguably, Turin's “multiculturalism from above” (Schmoll and Semi, 2013, p. 385) has not facilitated migrants' social inclusion or membership in the city's public life. Rather, it has mainly accentuated the distinction of regenerated, vibrant urban spaces from urban areas, and communities, lacking the desired characteristics of “otherness” (Semi, 2004, p. 88), and defined by their segregating difference, be it poverty, ethnicity, religion or a combination of these factors (Manley and Silk, 2014). Therefore, while Turin's urban planners and gentrifiers aimed to reflect an active celebration of inclusion of migrant communities as rightful members of Turin's public life, they actually produced exclusionary dynamics by drawing symbolic, but effective boundaries between acceptable and non- acceptable difference in the city's public spaces (Ley, 2004). These dynamics were evident by following the participants' engagement with capoeira and parkour across different urban social spaces:

“We have just finished training in a public area in South Turin. Karim mentions that on his way home he would like to go check a group of his friends who are performing parkour for a urban clothing promotional event. I ask him how would it feel to be called to perform in commercial and promotional events in public areas where he is sent away so many times by 'concerned' shopkeepers and public (as it happened today to us, by the way):

Karim: You know it's kind of... I guess it might be helpful to show a different image of us, so that people could understand a bit more what we do, maybe after a while we'd have less of the problems we had today... Although I'd feel like an obedient puppy that does what he's said to do, and then can be sent away for no reason” (Fieldnotes, May 28, 2014).

“Lucio, Erik and Hassan are performing with a capoeira group at the Latin Festival [...] As they rise on an improbable tropically themed stage, shirtless and with white, tribal signs over their muscular chests (and light brown skins), their daring and spectacular movements immediately get the attention of the crowd, including groups of women loudly showing their appreciation for the performance... After the performance, Erik and Hassan are all enthusiasm, and keep shouting “I am the man!”... Lucio on the other hand is more disillusioned: “I am not sure whether the people who were complimenting me tonight would recognise me if we met on the streets, or they'd rather accelerate their steps... but maybe I'm wrong...” (Fieldnotes excerpt, July 7, 2014)

These ethnographic excerpts illustrate the complex, normative re-positioning of the cultural politics of class, race, and place in contemporary Turin. They also illuminate the intersections between spectacular, cosmopolitan urban renewal and increasing concerns about acceptable and non-acceptable difference, shaped by anxieties regarding illegal migration, crime and security (see also Manley and Silk, 2014). The participants' (post)migrant bodies were differently constructed and addressed in various territories in Turin's public spaces according to variable dimensions of space and time. Turin's municipality (cl)aims to build a urban multicultural sensibility (Comune di Torino, 2016), concretely provided participants occasional opportunities to attend festive events and parades that mainly portrayed an exotic and aestheticized vision of multiculturalism as pleasant diversity (Mitchell 1995). In these settings, their bodies and performances were constructed and valorised as a “new exotica” (Hall, 1992, p. 31), and provided authenticity to Turin's cosmopolitan image in its entertainment and consumption oriented areas.

The same bodies and practices were nevertheless pathologised and related to widespread anxieties when they appeared outside these boundaries in both peripheral and gentrified areas of the city. In this less-than-coherent assemblage integrating celebration/fear of diversity and market oriented development, (post)migrants' bodies became crucial objects of social control, since their presence simultaneously evoked the worst fears and highest aspirations, and desires, of Turin's regeneration process.

5. BAN-OPITC SURVEILLANCE, CONTINGENT CITIZENSHIP, AND TACTICAL RE-APPROPRIATIONS IN TURIN'S PUBLIC SPACES

“Let me tell you one thing, everywhere we go to train in the city, at some point someone comes to bother us, it can be the man at the window telling us to get a job, patrols of “concerned citizens” making sure we “behave”, the elderly who call the police because he think we are thieves, or vandals... even guys of our age often come to us and ask us 'why did you guys come to do your stuff here?’” (Abdelrazak, 19 years old)

Conceived as spaces *for* the public, streets, squares, parks are actually the setting for the definition of *what constitutes* the public, how it should be used, and by whom, and therefore represent crucial sites for the analysis of unequal relationships of power and membership in urban spaces. Abdelrazak's quote synthesised how a permanent state of unease related to crime, insecurity, and undesirable difference contribute to justify and normalise a pervasive, surveilling gaze on a “small number of people” (Bigo, 2006, p. 35), such as the urban poor and (post)migrants, who are increasingly framed as “too many” in Turin (De Martini Ugolotti, 2015). In this sense, Bigo's idea of a ban-opticon (2006, 2011) recognizes the reconfiguration of a diffused social, and spatial *dispositif* of control that changed its field of operation from the panoptic “surveillance of everyone” (Foucault, 1976), to the surveillance of a small number of people, usually “unwelcome” minorities (Bigo, 2006, p. 35). The ban-opticon *dispositif* is not enacted exclusively by security or police forces, but is spread throughout social spaces, and encourages people to collaborate, drawing on widespread imaginaries of a majority population threatened by a seamless continuum of crime, terrorism and migrants' invasion, often embodied in the figure of the migrant (Bigo, 2006, p. 23). A skin colour, an accent, a behaviour, are sufficient to become the object of pro-active actions of surveillance targeting “suspicious”, or “illegitimate” groups, or practices, in public spaces. Such emerging geography of power have contributed to a division between bodies marked by class, gender and race in ways that allow them to belong ‘without question’ in Turin's regenerating spaces, and the bodies of those whose

membership depends on compliance with ‘acceptable’ forms of ethnicity—namely, as consumers or as objects of consumption—that fit with the emerging constitution of a multicultural, rebranded Turin (De Martini Ugolotti and Moyer, 2016, p. 204).

This conditional and unstable form of civic membership, a *contingent citizenship* in Turin's multicultural social spaces, represents a tenuous form of belonging that creates blurred political actors, who can be defined as either citizens-aliens/aliens-citizens. Contingent citizens are thus (marginal) urban residents on a permanent “on probation” status, who have to adjust their practices and behaviours to the differentiated prerogatives of “good” and deserving (neoliberal) citizens (see De Koning, et al., 2015; Van Schiptstal and Nicholls, 2013). The participants' *partial, conditional and relational* membership in Turin's social spaces thus illuminated shifting, and (in)visible geographies of power that constructed unfolding hierarchies of belonging (Back et al., 2012), and disciplined the meaning and uses of urban spaces, and of the bodies attending them (Secor, 2004).

Nevertheless, although implicated in unequal power relationship and having to negotiate a never guaranteed membership in Turin's public life, the participants still strove to create opportunities for self-improvement, and socialization within the cracks and fissures, caves and passages of Turin's spatial and social order. Their ambivalent and contested capoeira and parkour practice in Turin's urban spaces thus both revealed the axis of difference and exclusion produced by Turin's cosmopolitan urbanism, and the disputed and partial consensus about the city's urban renewal:

“Sometimes we wait for the “right time” to use some spaces, like when they are less crowded, when the shops are closed, or we simply find spaces where basically nobody else go...” (Samba, 21 years old)

“The opportunity that an empty, or multi-storey car park, or an abandoned building give you is that you are in a not in a place where people go, so it's less likely anyone will come to bother you, you can train as much you want” (Cosmin, 20 years old)

As highlighted by Cosmin and Samba, conscious of the power imbalances unfolding in urban spaces, the participants usually decided not to directly or thoroughly confront those contesting their membership in the city's public life. However, they did not renounce to assert their presence in the city, and engaged in creative re-appropriations of spaces at the geographic and temporal fringes of Turin's regenerating cityscape. Highlighting “the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong,” (1984, p. xx) these re-appropriations temporarily displaced unequal spatial relationships, and showed the participants' capacity to insinuate themselves into Turin's materialisation of order, always on the watch for opportunities in time (De Certeau, 1984, p. xix). In this way, participants' tactical negotiations enabled them to (en)counter and contest their *contingent* citizenship, as a set of shifting, contradictory, unequal political relationships that applied on their bodies particular definitions of belonging, identification, and rights within urban spaces (Secor, 2004). The participants' contested bodily and spatial appropriations did not imply an organized and explicit political agenda of political transformation, but were rather informed by the participants' *desire* of self-improvement, socialization and recognition. Nevertheless, their embodied reinvention of the temporal and spatial fringes of regenerating Turin's spaces highlighted a transformation of spatial, and social, margins by those bodies who are arbitrarily included/excluded in contemporary contexts of uneven spatial development (see Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996). I will discuss the implications of

these (in)visible negotiations of place and belonging in the following, concluding section.

6. CONCLUSIONS: EMBODIED AND EMPLACED POLITICS AT THE MARGINS

Cities are arguably a crucial site to illuminate how the socio-spatial dynamics of late-capitalism intersect with shifting meanings of citizenship and increasing inequalities in our historical present. This paper addressed this relationship from a situated perspective that privileged the experiences, challenges and negotiations lived and enacted by a groups of (post)migrant youth practicing parkour and capoeira within the regenerating, post-industrial cityscape of Turin, Italy. As such, I did not address the practices of (post)migrant youth in Turin, as merely a container of social practices and relations (Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2011; Schmoll and Semi, 2013), but focused on the relationship between the participants and the city, thus exploring how urban practices and subjects negotiated, and were made part of the process of repositioning and restructuring of their city of settlement. Approaching citizenship as a civic membership that is often contingent on spatial and temporal elements and bodily markers, this study contributed to an understanding of citizenship as an emplaced and embodied process that (re)produces identifications, delineates boundaries, and disciplines the meanings and uses of urban spaces and of the bodies attending them (see Secor, 2004).

Turin's own way of being global accentuated symbolic, but effective boundaries between multicultural festive events/parades in regenerated areas, and the neighbourhoods, and communities defined by their segregating difference, be it poverty, ethnicity, religion or a combination of these factors. As such, despite Turin municipality's (cl)aims of multicultural and social inclusivity, this process reiterated and made (in)visible both the 'desirable' and 'abject' bodies in Turin's redeveloped urban spaces, and constituted the rationale for the management, surveillance and selective inclusion of specific bodies/phenotypes in the renewed cityscape (De Martini Ugolotti and Moyer, 2016). The idea of an emerging *contingent citizenship* thus illuminated how the value and membership of human activity in Turin's rebranding spaces has been increasingly assessed using performative criteria that inevitably cast shadows over other spaces and activities that are not deemed suitable for public consumption (Coleman, 2005), or not representative of an emerging and supposedly homogeneous "normalised majority" (Manley and Silk, 2014). Although the empirical case of this article focused on (post)migrant youth, I contend that this emerging construction of civic membership has wider implications in urban politics, as it increasingly permeates normalising ways of defining public spaces, community, rights, labour, security, identity, ultimately "us" and "the others".

However, the focus on the participants' engagement with capoeira and parkour in Turin's public spaces did not only illuminate unequal dynamics of urban inclusion/exclusion. Appreciating the ambivalence and fragility of the participants' daily, tactical negotiations enabled me to avoid projecting far-fetched political meanings and significance on to their practices. Nevertheless, I contend that the participants' spontaneous and (in)visible bodily and spatial re-appropriations became inherently political within Turin's process of uneven regeneration. Drawing from Isin (2002), I understand as "becoming political" the embodied and emplaced acts through which "strangers" and "outsiders" overturn the "various strategies and technologies of citizenship in which they [are] implicated and thereby [constitute] themselves differently from the dominant images given to them" (p. 33). (Post)migrant youth marginal and temporary practices of embodied *self-constitution*, and *appropriation* of the spatial and temporal fringes of Turin's regenerating spaces, highlighted

the daily sites of contestation over the meanings and contours of belonging and citizenship, that are created in urban spaces without the assertive foregrounding of an explicit transformative social project (see Soja, 1996). The political implications and stakes of these spontaneous and ambivalent practices are not forcibly related to their inclusion in a organised, explicit agenda of spatial, and social transformation (see also Turner, 2016). Rather, the participants' became political subjects in Turin's cityscape in the very moment they, irreverent, and unrequested, pursued their desire to redefine the unequal dynamics that enabled and constrained their pursuit of socialization, self-fashioning and recognition in Turin's public spaces. The young men in this study have clearly been unable to bring about material and social change, nor to transform the unequal definitions of citizenship in Turin's regenerating public spaces. However, highlighting their daily, bodily and spatial negotiations can inspire further researchers, activists, and (contingent) citizens to consider the “yet to come” possibilities (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013, p. 2) provided by their irreverent, temporary redefinition and displacement of the frontiers of self, place and belonging in contemporary urban spaces.

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