MIRRORS AND LABYRINTHS
Learning from Times Square how to make an urban-STS ethnography
Santiago Orrego
Mirrors and Labyrinths,
Learning from Times Square how to make an urban-STS

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This research is a collection of experiments, essays and speculations on ethnography, urban studies, STS and Multimodality.

“[This dissertation] is about what happens when social science tries to describe things that are complex, diffuse and messy. The answer, I will argue, is that it tends to make a mess of it. This is because simple clear descriptions don’t work if what they are describing is not itself very coherent. The very attempt to be clear simply increases the mess. So the [dissertation] is an attempt to imagine what it might be to remake social science in ways better equipped to deal with mess, confusion and relative disorder.”

John Law (2004), After Method

It would be unfair to use these pages to thank those who, over all these years, were somehow involved in the construction of this piece of research. It would be unfair because they deserve more than just acknowledgment as their efforts and contributions went beyond incidental input. In other words, this monograph should be understood as the result of a collective action made by an undetermined set of temporal associations that, by accident, had me as the common element.

As an attempt to display the main group formations behind this piece of research and looking to highlight their ontological status and their relevance in this development, they will be disassembled—in a pretty rudimentary way—from the general to the specific. I want you to use the metaphor of space as a puff-pastry (Lefebvre 1991[1974]) to think about this work as a simultaneity of multiple multiplicities composed of different layers, various kinds of material and immaterial elements, trajectories, spaces and situations. For this exercise, we will focus on three of those layers.

The first layer, the first group formation, comprises the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation of Colombia, Minciencias, the entity that funded my doctoral studies. The Technical University of Munich and its Munich Center for Technology in Society, MCTS, are also included here. It was in that research center where my doctoral studies were framed and developed. It was in that university where my academic skills were continually challenged and improved. Without the assistance of Dr. Elisabeth Zellmer, this whole project would have been administratively wrecked, not once but several times.

The New School in New York City hosted me during my fieldwork in Times Square. That institution not only provided me a temporal and floating place to work but also provoked inspiring discussions, especially with professors Antina von Schnitzler and Miodrag Mitrašinović. The research group Stadtlabor for multimodal ethnography, part of the Humboldt University of Berlin led by Professors Tomás Sánchez-Criado and Ignacio Farras, became my academic home.

It was(is) a stimulating place for experimentation, exchanging ideas, sharing projects and imagining different ways to understand the world outside.

Professor Ignacio Farras, my doctoral supervisor, occupies a privileged position in this first group formation. It is because of him that this piece of research was possible. Since the beginning and despite his busy schedule, he has always been there for me, trusting in my abilities, sometimes more than I do. It was a privilege to have the possibility of working with him, immersed in this still unsettled field of urban-STS, allowing me to experiment as much as I wanted, but without letting me lose my focus and path.

My family in Colombia composes the second layer I want to highlight in this section. Their unconditional support throughout this process and before, despite the distance, gave me the strength to start and satisfactorily finish this adventure that went beyond the boundaries of academia. Also my family in Germany, my in-laws, that wonderful group of people that hosted me and shared their culture and traditions. Antonia, my partner, my accomplice and my love, closes this group formation. Her infinite patience, jokes and smiles made my existence smoother and the burdens of daily life easier to handle.

Finally, the third layer is composed of all the versions of Times Square I encountered during my fieldwork. All the anonymous bodies and materials involved in this work, either those which were part of the stories I compiled or those that silently collaborated with the development of the multiple structures composing this doctoral dissertation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT
M01. A GENERAL MAP OF PEDESTRIANIZED TIMES SQUARE

This map is the main version of Times Square displayed during this piece of research. Nevertheless, Times Square will be expanded and contracted depending on its particularities and processes of associativity.

It only takes two facing mirrors to construct a labyrinth.

V01. LIGHTS STILL ON

It was almost midnight and the air was freezing due to some sporadic showers during the night. I was seated on a black concrete bench in front of an empty spot undergoing remodeling between the pedestrianized Broadway Avenue and W. 47th Street. After midnight, when the area is less transited, a group of workers begins their shift. Their job consists of adapting and restyling this bare commercial place for a new branch of Swarovski. During the day, the construction site remains closed. However, at night, despite the fact that the work is mainly carried out inside, one can see the lights and sparks from the welding machine from the sidewalk as well as some men doing their handiwork. Despite the noise this activity produces and aside from the continuous transit of workers and materials, this labor seems not to be perceived by most of the tourists who are still walking around Times Square at that time.

This is not an atypical situation around this location. Other activities and spaces of maintenance and repair, even those that are carried out in the middle of the day — when the Square is full of people — such as cleaning the area, moving the street furniture, or just adjusting and setting up the screens, are frequently overshadowed by the prevailing spectacle and the constant illumination of the zone.

That area which is undergoing remodeling, for example, is a non-existent area for tourists. Although the crowds of tourists share the same location as this place, it gives the impression that both multiplicities, despite their closeness, are part of different realities. The group of tourism, composed — among other things — by tourists, open stores, digital devices, screens, shows and free time, does not share more than geographic coincidence with the group around the area under renovation.

Also, people usually go to Times Square to allow the screens to trap them, to be abducted by the lights, by the stores and by the street performances. Tourists visit Times Square to take pictures, to buy and consume as much as they can. New Yorkers, on the other hand, go there to work. Nobody is in the Square — well, almost nobody — to look at an empty store being redesigned or to follow a sanitation worker doing their duty.

Near where I was (a few centimeters from me, on the same concrete bench), a group of eight guys were talking in Spanish, with a strong Caribbean accent, about a kind of “celebrity hunting” they carried out during the night. They were collectively and loudly counting off the celebrities they said they had seen around Broadway. Despite the fact that everyone was talking simultaneously, they were all following the improvised enumeration without any problem.

The dynamic was simple: a recitation of names and locations. Nobody was writing it down and each one of them was throwing information into the air. Suddenly, after checking his phone, one of them told the rest that due to the conversation they were having right now, they had just lost the possibility of meeting another celebrity some blocks away — one whose last name was Rodriguez. Unfortunately, I could not hear its first name.

The conversation continued. They were discussing what to do right now, where to go. Suddenly, I was distracted from my observations by a man who arrived at the place I was. “Excuse me,” he said, “can I ask you something? Why are you here?” “Here where?, in Times Square?” I replied. “Yes, the thing is that I just arrived today in New York for an internship, and everyone told me I should come here.”

I did not answer him directly about my reasons for being in the Square. For me, it was more interesting to hear what he had to say. So, I just asked him whether he liked being Times Square or not. “Sure, it is like being in a movie.” “You should come back here early tomorrow and see the crowds”, I told him. “Of course, I will be here again tomorrow afternoon, I just hope to find again the lights still on.”
Although perhaps you will not read these words and maybe you do not even remember the short conversation we had in Times Square a few years ago, I want to correctly answer the question you asked me that night. Perhaps you may think my response is delayed and unnecessary but I have a reason for making it now and not before. To cut a long story short, it took me more than three years to construct a response I was satisfied with and that would encompass all the reasons why I was there that night there. This whole monograph, this labyrinth, is my answer.

The night we met, I was in Times Square looking for Times Square. The days and nights before and after our encounter, I was also there doing the same thing: collecting and storing Times Square versions to create my own ones. That is why I did not talk so much to you that day. That is why I was more interested in asking you things than in speaking my mind and that is also why, unlike you, I never had the sensation of being in a movie. Instead I saw myself as an accumulator of situations, of small pieces of reality that later turned into slides, into the vignettes that I am presenting to you here.

As you will realize, once you are deep in these words, this labyrinth is trying to emulate the way reality was presented to us, to everyone that was there in Times Square. It was a simultaneous but compartmentalized reality that, at the same time, was producing unique moments that were repeated again and again. I do not know if you had the chance to see that, I do not know if the lights and the shows that surrounded us allowed you to focus on anything else and I do not even know if the Times Squares I am proposing here today match the version of that place you also have.

But that is not relevant here. My intention with this work is not to try to homogenize an urban location through the imposition of a set of versions of that place, to the contrary. When you saw me there I was conspiring in Times Square to liberate Times Square from Times Square. Do not get me wrong, this is neither a lapalissade or a sad attempt to confuse you with an epanalepsis. Although I am using the same label (Times Square) three times, I am referring to three different elements. I will re-write that sentence again, this time I will make it longer to reveal what is inside each tag:

I was conspiring in a specific geographical space, in a perceived one, to liberate many multiple and heterogeneous lived spaces — experiential and objective ones that are reunited in this document — from the conceived representations of that space imposed by totalitarian and hegemonic solidified theoretical perspectives.

I know, I know, it still looks tautological and a bit confusing and it is my fault, I admit that. Also, let me tell you that I constructed it this way intentionally. Believe me, after you finish reading this answer, after you find an exit from this labyrinth, my words will be easily understood. The point here is that my answer is not this work per se but the path, the route you might take for reaching the end of it. In that way, my answer to you also depends on you. I will need your help in constructing that response.

As a final thought, despite the fact that I did not undertake this work either because of you or because I was looking for a way of answering you, I have not forgotten your genuine interest in Times Square. Perhaps it is the same kind of interest I have in that place. That is the main reason why I am writing this right now, hoping, expecting, that one day you will also have the possibility of watching the lights still on at the end of this labyrinth, of this version — my version — of the Times Square you saw.
A kamal is an ancient celestial navigation device useful for determining Polaris’ latitude only in equatorial latitudes. This instrument is a limited device composed of a small wooden table with a hole in its middle, a string with several knots, human eyes and teeth, the horizon, the Pole Star, a particular geographical space and a knowledge of fundamental astronomy, math and navigation. A kamal also usually includes either a boat or a ship.

As a kamal, this section can also be understood as a limited device. Its scope goes no further than presenting this monograph and discussing the consolidation—and solidification— of this work’s study object. As a kamal, it required human eyes, a mouth and hands but no teeth. As a kamal, this document aims to orient the reader through a particular, unstable and effervescent geography: a mediated set of spaces, practices and situations collected and mostly occurring occurring in Times Square.

The limitations of this device are derived not only from its particular vision but also from its possible application, a particularity its shares with the rest of this document. This kamal was designed only for working on a specific spatiality, following a well-defined set of actors in a delimited temporality. As a consequence all the results, generalizations and attempts to theorize and create either laws, postulates, recipes, or recommendations could fail—and there is a higher possibility of that happening—once they are applied in other contexts and latitudes.

This kamal’s main objective is to help the user of this dissertation move around the whole document and navigate this sort of imbricate structure which is composed of different infrastructures with their logics, formats and ways of presenting their content. The general organization of this piece of research was made according to a strict hierarchy: an inverted pyramid, in an abstract and general way, consisting of chapter > section > passage.

However, this structure will be continuously broken or disrupted by the emergence of new paths and associations proposing new routes, new adventures and new possible scenarios. You will find vignettes, inserts and hyperlinks that, if you follow them, will transport you to other locations, different moments, temporalities and situations inside Times Square, or this version of it.

The document you are reading today is not only about the deconstruction and the representation of an open public place, it is also inspired in its logic and structure by a way of being of that particular location. It means that this dissertation was conceived and constructed as an attempt to interpret and repeat the movements and flows of a bounded and limited part of the world outside. We face a sort of onomatopoeic experiment based on collecting, compiling, overlapping and confronting different versions, timeframes, spatialities and materials concerning what we understand as Times Square.

That is why an instrument of navigation like a kamal is more than necessary here and although this device does not aim to offer you any single route to take, it promises to keep you safe and oriented throughout your journey. This kamal is thus composed of a set of cartographic elements: a table of instructions (artifact 01-a), a collection of maps of infrastructures (artifact 01-b), and this short introduction to using this device itself.

Inspired by Cortazar’s Hopscotch (1998[1966]), this Table of instructions is more than a simple index or a table of contents. This artifact is the entryway to a multilayered labyrinth of forking paths. I am proposing an interactive media, a platform for simulating multiple realities through the linkage of a set of stories, reflections, vignettes and other kinds of ethnographic elements, which comprise my doctoral research on Times Square after its pedestrianization and about the learning process that resulted from that experience.

Below, you will find six possible routes you can take for approaching and navigating this document. This document is a labyrinthine palimpsest full of shortcuts, invitations to break the writing’s linearities and the reading process. It is also a provocation to explore new ways of presenting—and interacting with—ethnographic products, to reproduce and re-compose the multiple, imbricate and sometimes contradictory ways reality is presented to us. You can follow the path you want; you can mix and match, you can make your own way.

One of the reasons for navigating a labyrinth is to assume the challenge of finding its exit without using any other tool than one’s own intuition. The sensation of being lost in an unknown envi-
bunch of dissimilar elements labeled under the same name.

However, these multimodal and interactive epistemologies are not merely designed to look at and describe the past, they are also tools for constructing and speculating futures. The intention of conceiving, designing and using them is to produce — or at least to try to produce — an ontological difference in an element that is diverse, as well as to highlight the way that element is being transformed depending on the associations and group formations it is participating in.

This spatialized amalgam of Urban Studies and STS, instead of being a wholly solidified element, has a magmatic structure — to use Venturini’s metaphor (2009) — that is continually moving but that, at the same time, still has boundaries and can be physically tracked through a particular physical path. However, despite the fact that following one specific path also means discarding other possibilities and routes, this activity of centering and locating — inspired by Haraway’s work on situated knowledges (1988) — will allow us to focus on specific and objective situations resulting from the encounter between Times Square and the author of these words.

Thus, the key here is to multiply, to increase the number of encounters and interventions and to follow as many paths as possible. That is why, in terms of a located epistemology about a particular but mobile and multimodal place, I invite you not to read this dissertation in a traditional and linear way, from the first to the last page. Instead, I encourage you to take — or create — different paths and follow them, mix them and deal with their interferences, their complications and so on until the end. Do not be afraid of discarding, leaving information behind, taking a (limited) side and turning yourself into an active part of the elaboration of this artifact, of this work as a whole. Remember, objectivity is always partial, situated and embodied.

The linear version of this work

Avoid any insert, any table and any possibility of moving around. Follow the main text in which you will find the most academically structured discussions in this doctoral dissertation.

Encounters, tensions, and collaborations between STS, Urban Studies at the time of doing ethnography

This route is mostly an epistemological path regarding how to create a set of temporal ethnographical devices, from the perspective of STS, for exploring and displaying urban places.

The process of designing and producing multimodal artifacts

An experimental and speculative journey into the design and fabrication of ethnographic crafting materials.

Stories and personal experiences of an ethnographer doing fieldwork

Focus on an ethnographer’s empirical process facing his study object and the challenges and provocations that the world outside proposes.

The pedestrianization of Times Square

A route focused on the processes and controversies surrounding the removal of Broadway at Times Square from the City’s transportation grid.

A discussion about public spaces’ ontology

This route is an empirical-philosophical exploration of urban places from an STS perspective, particularly drawing upon Actor-network theory.

These routes are not the only ones you can find here however. You will realize how constantly, when you are reading any random paragraph, there are invitations, like little trapdoors, to permanently abandon or temporarily interrupt the path you are currently following. You can identify them due to their structure (Go to...). (See...).
Preface

Here you will find the main suggested routes you can take to explore this labyrinth. There are also an additional two paths that will take you to unexpected alleys composed of intricate areas and unsettled zones you will be constructing at the time you are interacting with this multimodal document.

A01-B. SUGGESTED ROUTES AND OTHER PATHS

The linear version of this work

• A01. Preface. How to fabricate a kamal
  General guidance on how to use this piece of research.
• A01-A. Table of instructions
  This here? Some suggested routes for moving around.

ROUTE I

A01-B. SUGGESTED ROUTES AND OTHER PATHS

The linear version of this work

• P02. Why Times Square
  A brief general introduction to this work.
• P03. Times Square is a magnetic place
  A virtual walk and a conversation on seduction.
• P05. Spectacle and repetition
  Repetition as a stylistic resource composed of a set of rhetorical devices.
• P06. The surprising lack of interest in this place (version)
  An assumption and four misconceptions about pedestrianized Times Square.
• P07. Reductions
  Reducing and expanding. Empirical philosophy, STS, and urban studies.
• P10. Concomitance and dissimilarity
  What are we referring to when we talk about STS?
• P11. Opening Society
  A society is a temporal association of different ontologies.
• P12. Situating, linking, locating
  Exploring the relations between urban studies and STS.
• P13. palimpsests
  Society is a kind of spatiality composed of two different timelines. Space is static and mobile at the same time.
• P14. Times Square as an (urban) ecology. Part one, flattening the concept
  An introduction to the idea of urban ecology, a mix of ANT and social fields theory.
• P15. Times Square as an (urban) ecology. Part two, ecology as a field
  Unpacking the idea of urban ecology, a discussion about methods.
• P16. Times Square as an (urban) ecology. Part three, the Times Square war
  The story of how pedestrianized Times Square was regulated after being threatened by the inclusion of new elements.
• P17. Taking an alternative route
  Can we do STS research without STS?
• P18. STS as a parasite
  An epistemological proposal for using STS as a movement.
• A02-A. Program and A02-B. Overture
  An introduction to an essay on urban studies and urban as a concept.
• A03. Act one. Looking for the subject of urban studies
  What is the study object of urban studies? a discussion.
• A04. Act two. Establishing the subject of urban studies
  Presenting, discussing, and relocating urban as the core of urban studies.
• A05. Act three. Finale
  A section closing the chapter as well as, tentatively, the whole piece of research.
• P20. What matter who's speaking
  Discussing the scope of self-ethnography as a method for exploring urban formations.
• P21. Steps for an ontological decomposition or the day I decided not to go to work
A self-ethnography telling the story of how this piece of research was imagined.

- P23. Times Square ontologies
  An experimental studio of Times Square from some of its ontological constructions.
- P24. A pretty local meta-narrative
  Situating the pedestrianization of Times Square in a local context.
- P26. What is an urban experiment? Presenting the "green light for Midtown" program
  The story behind the plan of turning Broadway Avenue along Times Square into a pedestrian way.
- P29. An alternative history of pedestrianized Times Square. Discussing urban laboratories
  Imagining the pedestrianization of Times Square as the product resulting from urban laboratory work.
- P30. Thursday, 7:27 am.
  An alternative version of pedestrianized Times Square.
- P31. The Artefaktenatelier.
  A future proposal for crafting multimodal artifacts resulted from doing urban ethnography.

ROUTE II

Stories, vignettes, and personal experiences of an ethnographer doing fieldwork

- F01. First impressions before to land
  Some doubts and thoughts before going to the field.
- V01. Lights still on
  Just a random encounter in Times Square.
- F02. First week is done
  Ethnographic work is a place without disciplinary boundaries.
- P02. Why Times Square
  A brief general introduction to this work.
- V04-a. Happy new year!... in September (part one)
  Repeating and hyperbolizing a sporadic someone.
- V04-b. Happy new year!... in September (part two)
  Repeating and hyperbolizing a sporadic someone.
- V02. A late answer
  That is why I spent so much time in Times Square.
- F03. Embroidering times in the Square
  Times Square is an imbrication made by a solidified process of repetition and an effervescent layer of novelties.
- V05. XXX Times Square with love
  A material-semiotic piece of furniture.
- V06. The Free-WiFi experiment
  A man watching porn in Times Square, a local thread.
- V07. Selling music for free, a story in four acts
  Alliances, tensions, tactics, and the creation of group formations for selling CDs.
- V08. The yoga group
  A vignette connecting Times Square to China. Times Square as a political agent.
- V09. Competing for a smile (and for some tips too)
  Cooperation and segregation along the costumed characters of Times Square.
- V10. A scourge of morality
  The role of the media in the controversy of Times Square's pedestrianized plazas and costumed characters.
- V11. From Times Square to heaven
  A couple of Korean missionaries taking me to heaven and singing to me.
- V04. A reverse parasite
  My experience as a journalist facing urban research.
- V12. Casting, backstage, and making off
  What is behind the structure and composition of chapter 3.2.
- V14. Tracing and representing an urban[something]
  A textual experiment with two levels of deconstruction.
- V16. Hey! Hey! Hey!
  A version of Times Square where a mechanism of capture is deployed and spatialized.
- F05. Walking through Times Square
  An exercise of observation.
- V19. Numbers and imaginaries
  Presenting an artifact about how tourists imagined Times Square.
- V19. Times Square as a co-working space
  A version of Times Square without tourists, an exercise aiming to expand Times Square out of its primary (touristic) version.
- V21. The Nordic device
  Deconstructing a bench in Times Square.
- V22. Times Square on fire
  The story of a random screen burning on a Saturday afternoon.
- V23. Mandatory contamination
  Speculating on lights.
- V24. When infrastructures fail
  Sidewalks, barricades, bollards, and a car accident.
- V25. Hunting tourists in Times Square
  A short description of different tactics and strategies costumed characters apply to catch tourists.
- V26. Past is the new future. Part one, an embodied reality
  Situating the pedestrianization of Times Square in a historical debate about two different visions of urban planning.
- V28. Past is the new future. Part two, three, and four, a tale of two visions of a city.
  Situating the pedestrianization of Times Square in a historical debate about two different visions of Running a city.
ROUTE III
Encounters, tensions, and collaborations between STS, Urban Studies

• P01. Locating, discarding, and taking a side.
  An invitation to multiply our places of observation.
• P06. The surprising lack of interest in this place (version)
  An assumption and four misconceptions about pedestrianized Times Square.
• P07. Reductions
  Reducing and expanding. Empirical philosophy, STS, and urban studies.
• P09. Reducing the principle of Irreduction
  What are 'good' reductions?
• P10. Concomitance and dissimilarity
  What are we referring to when we talk about STS?
• V06. Melting and mixing (I)
  A compilation of techno-scientific associations/situations framed in Times Square.
• V07. Melting and mixing (II)
  A compilation of techno-scientific associations/situations framed in Times Square.
• P10. Concomitance and dissimilarity
  What are we referring to when we talk about STS? First, exploration.
• P12. Situating, linking, locating
  Exploring the relations between urban studies and STS.
• P13. palimpsests
  Society is a kind of spatiality composed of two different timelines. Space is static and mobile at the same time.
• P14. Times Square as an (urban) ecology. Part one, flattening the concept.
  An introduction to the idea of urban ecology, a mix of ANT and social fields theory.
• P15. Times Square as an (urban) ecology. Part two, ecology as a field
  Unpacking the idea of urban ecology, a discussion about methods.
• P17. Taking an alternative route
  Can we do STS research without STS?
• A02-A. Program and A02-B. Overture
  An introduction to an essay on urban studies and urban as a concept.
• A03. Act one. Looking for the subject of urban studies
  What is the study object of urban studies? a discussion.
• P19. The City is everywhere and in everything
  A reflection of the ineffectiveness of the idea city as the study object of urban studies.
• V12. When it woke up, the City was still there
  The City is just another element that may participate, or not, in the construction of the urban.
• A04. Act two. Establishing the subject of urban studies
  Presenting, discussing, and relocating urban as the core of urban studies.
• A05. Act three. Finale
  A section closing the chapter as well as, tentatively, the whole piece of research.

ROUTE IV
The pedestrianization of Times Square

• V03. Old man yells at cloud in Times Square
  The highest anti-pedestrianized Times Square voice
• P03. Times Square is a magnetic place
  A virtual walk and a conversation on seduction.
• P05. Spectacle and repetition
  Repetition as a stylistic resource composed of a set of rhetorical devices.
• P06. The surprising lack of interest in this place (version)
  An assumption and four misconceptions about pedestrianized Times Square.
• P16. Times Square as an (urban) ecology. Part three, the Times Square war
  The story of how pedestrianized Times Square was regulated after being threatened by the inclusion of new elements.
• P18. STS as a parasite
  An epistemological proposal for using STS as a movement.
• P24. A pretty local meta-narrative
  Situating the pedestrianization of Times Square in a local context.
• P26. What is an urban experiment? Presenting the "green light for Midtown" program
  The story behind the plan of turning Broadway Avenue along Times Square into a pedestrian way.
• V26. Past is the new future. Part one, an embodied reality
  Situating the pedestrianization of Times Square in a historical debate about two different visions of urban planning.
• P27. Giuliani's plan for Times Square
  The project presented by Giuliani's administration for mitigating traffic congestion in Times Square.
• P28. Negotiating the experiment
  An urban experiment is a collective exercise that news to be continually renegotiated.
• P29. An alternative history of pedestrianized Times Square. Discussing urban laboratories
  Imagining the pedestrianization of Times Square as the product resulted from urban laboratory work.
• V28. Past is the new future. Part two, three, and four, a tale of two visions of a city.
  Situating the pedestrianization of Times Square in a historical debate about two different visions of Running a city.
• P30. Thursday, 7:27 am.
  An alternative version of pedestrianized Times Square.
ROUTE V
The process of designing and producing multimodal artifacts

- P15. Times Square as an (urban) ecology. Part two, ecology as a field
  Unpacking the idea of urban ecology, a discussion about methods.
- P18. STS as a parasite
  An epistemological proposal for using STS as a movement.
- P04. A reverse parasite
  My experience as a journalist facing urban research.
- A04. Act two. Establishing the subject of urban studies
  Presenting, discussing, and relocating urban as the core of urban studies.
- V14. Tracing and representing an urban[something]
  A textual experiment with two levels of deconstruction.
- A05. Act three. Finale
  A section closing the chapter as well as, tentatively, the whole piece of research.
- V15. How does STS take its data?
  A brief exploration of the ways how STS understands and reflects its methods.
- P20. What matter who's speaking
  Discussing the scope of self-ethnography as a method for exploring urban formations.
- P21. Steps for an ontological decomposition or the day I decided not to go to work
  A self-ethnography telling the story of how this piece of research was imagined.
ROUTE VII
An exploration of empirical philosophy

• P07. Reductions
  Reducing and expanding. Empirical philosophy, STS, and urban studies.
• P08. Ontological incompleteness
  An invitation to go to what is usually discarded, an exploration of the ephemeral and unfinished.
• P09. Reducing the principle of Irreduction
  What are 'good' reductions?
• P10. Concomitance and dissimilarity
  What are we referring to when we talk about STS? First, exploration.
• P11. Opening Society
  A society is a temporal association of different ontologies.
• V15. How does STS take its data?
  A brief exploration of the ways how STS understands and reflects its methods.
• P22. Materials, practices, and regions of usefulness
  How to create things with concepts and concepts with things.
• V18. Sewing a patchwork
  Creating epistemological devices through the repetition of reality.
• P25. What does "to take care" mean?
  A reflection on taking care of multi ontological Times Square
**INTRODUCTION**

Some vignettes and reflections before to start

Someone asked on Quora: "How is New York City the center of the universe?"

**Another user replied:** "Ever heard of Times Square? It is where time started and thus everything is centered around it. Times Square (i) is in the New York City. That is why NYC is the center of not just this universe, but all universes*

* confirmed by Loki, Dr. Stephen Strange, Newt Scamander, and Obi-Wan Kenobi.1

PO2. WHY TIMES SQUARE

Why Times Square? This concern is a prevalent question that people ask me every time I talk about this research, my master’s research. Mostly I chose Times Square because it represented a challenge derived from four misconceptions: (i) Times Square is an aseptic artificial tourist spot, (ii) that is a matter of something else, where (iii) there is nothing to do and (iv) there is nothing to see. These misunderstandings about the place were obvious once I started to discuss different scenarios for possible research topics for my doctoral studies.

However, as time passed my work transformed and I tried to make that challenge a bit more interesting by adding a new layer of complexity. Instead of just conducting a study focused on "what one can say about a place that seems so volatile, etheeral and insignificant, in terms of academic relevance," I undertook a speculative exploration, the main objective of which was to discover: "what one can learn from a place like Times Square now and to develop an experimental ethnographic practice mixing urban studies and STS."

When I talk about Times Square now, I am referring to the space after the pedestrianization of Broadway between W. 42nd and W. 47th streets (see M01). The process of restructuring this place began in February 2009 as part of a supposedly temporary plan that aimed to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality and decrease pedestrian/car accidents in Midtown Manhattan. The idea of pedestrianizing Broadway was initially proposed for one year but after some evaluations the Bloomberg administration made it permanent. The whole process of transforming Times Square formally ended in April 2017.

Initially the intention of removing cars from that portion of Broadway and making Times Square “a pedestrian plaza” was controversial because most of the local business owners and some people from the media were—temporarily—opposed to making Broadway a pedestrian thoroughfare. The first group were concerned about the fluency of buyers to their stores and the second were, more or less, complaining about “turning the Crossroads of the World from the vibrant, frenetic, center of the universe into a butt-littered suburban parking lot. [The pedestrianization of Times Square was considered] an idea so ferociously dumb”. (Peyser 2009, May 27).

This is the geography, the arbitrary location (Candea, 2009), I decided to focus on as the primary study object for writing this dissertation: The bunch of stabilization and effervescences happening from 2009 to 2019, the one after and during its pedestrianization, the one before and during my doctoral studies. However, alongside this dissertation other Times Squares will be deployed and maintained in the shape of versions. These versions represent historical situations—an acronym for situated temporal associations—in the sense that they exist, as Times Square itself does, more in terms of time than in terms of space.

Nevertheless, this work aims to be neither a historical analysis nor does it use History as its primary source. I consider it important to clarify

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2. I will come back to these four misconceptions later in a section called The surprising lack of interest in this place (P06). That section, comprised of four passages and four vignettes, is a detailed extension of this one. Locating these misconceptions in a sort of individual space is a didactic idea intended to elaborate a better structure for this work and to extend discussion regarding the personal aspects of the confrontation between theory and reality that happened once I decided to work on Times Square.

3. As we will see throughout this research, this demarcation of Times Square worked only as an initial attempt to locate and frame the set of stabilizations I am able to describe here. Nevertheless, a deeper exploration of Times Square will reveal that its limits are totally diffused outside and that the only way of bounding a place like this is through the elaboration of a virtual and outdated version of it.

4. Nevertheless, this is not a dialectic exercise in which two opposing points of view are juxtaposed in order to show which is correct or superior. Neither is it an effort to vindi cate a (fake) neutrality based on just adding voices. Instead, what I plan to do here is to open new perspectives about a common phenomenon in order to highlight its simultaneity and multiplicity—despite the impression that, at first sight, it may seem I am just offering one single angle more— not only as an accumulation of stuff but also as a mixture of variations and contradictions.
renewed urban space that was working pretty well:

"It took 25 years to save Times Square from its dark age, and it took City Hall just three months to turn it into a squatters’ camp [...] [DOT commissioner] Janette Sadik-Khan closed Broadway to vehicular traffic in the name of easing congestion. But in the process, she managed to turn the myth that Times Square is strictly for tourists into a fact. [...] Let her move there if she likes it so much. Or better, give us back the Times Square that worked so well just as it was." (ibid)

The column which preceeded it, "End the 'petting zoo’" (C2), directly criticised the now-former DOT commissioner and her "overreacted" power in Times Square. Published on December 21 of the same year, Cuozzo was also hoping that former mayor Bloomberg would not declare the pedestrian plazas permanent because otherwise, Cuozzo predicted, companies would flee from the location:

"This used to be Midtown’s most dynamic commercial nexus. But Times Square office leasing has fallen on hard times, with fewer deals being made and lots of space soon to be vacant. [...] Companies come and go for many reasons, but it’s clear Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan’s brainstorm isn’t helping. “You might as well be at a mall in Paramus,” an accomplished Midtown real-estate executive told me. [...] One commercial real-estate broker told Crain’s recently that his Times Square clients were fed up with "throng of tourists on the streets," and looking elsewhere as a result. [...] The word “streets” is key: The bowtie in its ‘90s-redeveloped, crime-cleansed incarnation was full of tourists on side-walks that they shared with office workers and theatergoers. [...] Tourists, that is, were an indispensable part of the Times Square scene. But now they’re the whole scene — not just on New Year’s Eve, but every day." (ibid)

A third column, published on April 26, 2010, "Asphalt bungle" (C3), was again against former DOT commissioner Sadik-Khan and her plans to close 34th street. Nevertheless, the columnist turned the discussion over to Times Square and its pedestrian plazas:

"Her Times Square “plazas” are even worse — block after block of prison-yard asphalt devoid of meaningful, ful landscaping, furniture, or other amenities, crowded mainly with Big Mac-chomping tourists. [...] Not only are they unworthy of their iconic setting, they will be conducive to mugging and "wilding" should there occur even the smallest uptick in street crime on top of the one we’ve already seen. It remains to be seen as well how the tourist takeover will play with the great companies that make their homes astride the Bow-tie." (ibid)

"The new Grub Street” (C4) complains against the plans of the Times Square Alliance, the entity in charge of administering Times Square, to offer food and drink in the area. This column was published on April 4, 2011:

"It wasn’t enough that the City gutted Times Square’s historic energy with ‘pedestrian plazas’ full of low-rent tourists — now it plans to cater to those tourists with al fresco food, alcohol and delivery service. Can things get any zanier in the Crossroads of the Backpackers? [...] Possibly: The Times Square Alliance, which is behind the proposal, says it’s really meant to keep New Yorkers, not tourists, from feasting the “Bowtie” for lunch. We shall see if Morgan Stanley bankers, ABC producers and Conde Nast editors want to eat Virgil’s ribs al fresco amid tour-bus hawkers and the Naked Cowboy[...]. Maybe Danish meatballs would be more appropriate — Mayor Bloomberg’s ruinous redesign of Times Square, like the metastasizing bike lanes around town, was inspired by sleepy Copenhagen, the capital city of Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan’s imagination."

The title of the last column in this overview, “Times Square will never be a real part of New York” (C13), is explicit enough to let the reader know the common thread of this document. This text was published on June 1, 2019:

"Since then the plazas became a clown circus ruled by tourists and cash-hunting Elmos. Roving cartoon characters and burger-chomping visitors from Oshkosh are great for the hotel industry, but they stink for everyone else [...] Times Square went from a tourist destination that was part of the City to a tourist destination apart from the City. A facsimile of what people think New York is — tall buildings, loud noises, lots of people — yet isn’t really what New York is [...] City Hall’s clumsy attempt to fix a Times Square that wasn’t broken cost the great landmark its soul — and perhaps its commercial viability as well. Only time will tell whether it’s too late to save.”

* In 2011 Gothamist, an independent New York online media outlet, mocked Cuozo’s attitude of doing “nothing more than going on a cantankerous rant about the pedestrian plazas” calling him “Steve ‘He Who Yells At Cloud’ Cuozzo” (del Signore, 2011, April 4). The nickname referred to a meme from the Simpsons where a grumpy old man is exactly doing that, yelling at a cloud.
** The naked cowboy is a popular recurrent character in Times Square. (See P32-B30).

This because one can be accused of falling into two misunderstandings. The first is the perpetuation of a historical and social determinism, primarily related to the transformation of places in contemporary agglomerations: what we can call from a critical or "pessimistic" outlook gentrification or, from an official or "positivist" one, renovation. The second misunderstanding is described below.

5. At the end it did not happen in that way. Cartography of controversies was used only for some specific situations but it did not work as a main methodological strategy.
How else can I describe a methodological framework based on following a theoretical approach derived from situation theory and applied to make that situation fit inside the theoretical model? Also, why do I need to defend or at least validate a specific theoretical framework? At least in this piece of research, the intention here is not to demonstrate the validity nor the relevance of any pre-made theory nor to take a side choosing a particular frame. My compromise as an ethnographer should be and is—only with the study object of the work.

That is why my primary goal during this coming fieldwork is just to watch and collect everything I can without thinking about theories or method. I guess I will have time later to do that. I just do not want to turn my work into what it has always been criticized for, a kind of theoretical academic discourse disconnected from the world outside and focused on applying theories over theories, instrumentalizing empirical work to either support or refute a specific opinion. I will use these days in Times Square to allow myself to be surprised and to make a sort of inventory as Gay Talese (2003) made of New York for his famous report on the City, watching and following any possible trajectory group formation happening outside. Another reference from journalism is perhaps Alma Guillermoprieto’s work (1995), mainly her methodology, the one she uses every time she arrives in a new city: to walk. To walk without any purpose than approaching the city step by step, block by block.

The second misunderstanding I described above is that this kind of writing is related to historiography. It could be understood as such because I am not sufficiently prioritizing the elements and situations I collected “in the field.” Instead, I am tracing a sort of symmetric scenario where any “external” source is admissible. One of those “external” or “second-hand” sources are the historical materials about Times Square that occupy a significant space in this work.

Despite many other topics, reflections and essays, the main discussion this piece of research aims to deal with is related to the question “what can STS learn from Times Square for doing urban ethnography?” This issue will organize all the other inquiries and explorations deployed in this dissertation. This inquiry will also act as a guide that is open enough for experimenting with different strategies of grasping and representing a bounded spatiality. Simultaneously, it is specific enough for collecting all these constructions into a coherent thesis.

There is also a double condition related to the selection of geographical Times Square as the field of this piece of research. On the one hand, we have a delimited artificial site, easy to locate on a map and a temporal frame: this is our own demarcation of the field. On the other hand, we have a place that is composed of many different sites happening simultaneously. In other words, going to Times Square is constructing a bounded provisional ethnographical location over a constantly fluid multiplicity.

This double condition and composition of Times Square acknowledges and projects the complexity of the particular, situating and limiting our sight through the proposal that “only partial perspective promises objective vision” (Harroway 1988, 583). That partial perspective on specific spaces creates a unique temporal location composed of semantically related elements despite their lack of geographic or temporal proximity.

F02. FIRST WEEK IS DONE

September 9, 2017

It is interesting to see how the further I stray from journalism, the closer I seem to get it. Doing ethnography of a public space like this one is the kind of activity I always imagined journalism was about: walking, watching, observing, relating, exhausting a place, formulating questions about everything, looking for possible answers and writing about all of that in a sort of self-made interactive media.

I am not saying that, empirically, journalism is not doing that. Of course there is a kind of journalism still working at the edge of the immediacy, taking its time to collect information and construct robust and detailed chronicles and reports. What I am trying to point here is that this ethnography of public space, from an ANT perspective, is like expanding and producing a kind of narrative journalism that is wider and more complex than its traditional counterpart which is made for immediacy.

After a week in Times Square and after some long working hours walking and watching everything around, I feel like a chronicler, like a reporter, who now has a lot of different epistemological tools (i) to access various sources and elements and (ii) to create other ways of representing and reproducing the elements it is collecting. However, this sensation is more related to how disciplinary barriers are dissipated in fieldwork than to the intention of vindicating one particular discipline over another.

The dissipation of disciplinary boundaries makes sense in a scenario like Times Square: a public open space full of materials, imaginaries, historical layers, laws, routes and who knows what else. Having a place like that as a study object requires one to approach it from many perspectives and locations and to use as many tools as one can. Of course this is more logical and perhaps, in my case, mandatory as I am between two diverse fields: urban studies and STS.

The challenge here is resist any attempt to turn this piece of research into a naturalist description. This work cannot be just a continuous sum of stories and situations linked together from an extradiegetic perspective, like someone looking through a mirror, something happening outside, or like a scientist using a microscope. With further reference to journalism, this research cannot be like the work of those classic reporters that still believe their position is both neutral and objective.

I want to create a realistic STS ethnography of Times Square. A particular piece of research on Times Square after and during its pedestrianization. A work made of layers consisting of I know not what. I also do not know how I should compose and stabilize all the things I see here but I will have enough time to do that later. Meanwhile, I will continue with the task that brought me here: to record all the information about Times Square I can find, actual, historical, experimental, graphic or anecdotal. What will I do with that? I do not yet know. I will figure it out later.

In other words, we are talking here about a multi-sited ethnography of a particular site. Nevertheless, the term multi-sited should not be confused with Marcus’ multi-sited ethnography (1995). A multi-sited ethnography is referring to a kind of ethnographic work carried out in a specific geographical location that is composed of other types of temporal places and spatialities—what we will call later urban formations (see A04-B)—, as well as by situations, ideas, imaginaries, temporalities, and materialities. It is unnecessary to abandon a bounded territory for being situated in different locations or, how we will call it later, in other versions of the same space.

To finish this section, I will display three reasons why I also chose Times Square as my study object. Those reasons are three particularities of this place I found during my first explorations there. The first two of those peculiarities are Times Square (i) magnetism and (ii) hyperbolizing capacity. Both characteristics—that will be deployed below— are producing, perhaps, the most notorious ethos of Times Square: it is spectacularization (see P05). The last particularly is a general lack of interest in this place for both urban studies and STS.
P03. TIMES SQUARE IS A MAGNETIC PLACE

P03-A. A VIRTUAL WALK

I want to invite you to participate in a short spatial transmutation exercise. Once you finish reading the next paragraph, please close your eyes and imagine you are in the middle of Times Square. Times Square is a place surrounded by skyscrapers full of intermittent lights and blinking advertisements. To your right or to your left, a location full of giant screens hanging on the buildings’ facades. In this location you can also find street performances, fast food spots, people holding signs and panhandlers and hustlers of many types. Take a look at all the restaurants and stores located around you, watch — and feel — the multitude of people and other kinds of obstacles, fi-

nally you reach the corner where you can cross the Avenue. The pedestrian light is red and you must wait until it turns green again. Around you dozens of people are also waiting. Trying to get out of the crowd you end up in another one. The difference is that nobody is moving here. Then, after a few minutes, you cross the street and finally arrive at Duffy Square, the heart of Times Square.

Here you see that some groups of people are taking selfies. Others are seated on the big red stairs over the TKTS Broadway discount booths. There is a group recording a street dancer with their phones. Others are making a video of a topless woman painted red, white and blue. Finally, there are few small groups taking pictures of some Elmos, one Captain America and two Minnie Mouses. Large LED-screens and huge advertise-

ment signals surround the scene. Where is the attractiveness of this place located? Not in one place specifically.

P03-B. SEDUCING AND TRAPPING

It does not matter what you may think about Times Square, you cannot deny the place has a strong ability to capture things: bodies, glances, capital, emotions, opinions. The plaza’s attractiveness is revealed in many scenarios: Its screens and media; its history; its many represen-
tations in popular culture; its location; its activ-

ity, tradition, tensions contradictions and multi-
ple characters. The daily crowds of tourists, the 24-7 advertising and its vibrant environment in any season of the year are the proofs of that.

Pedestrianized Times Square is a loca-
tion where (almost) nothing is happening but, at the same time, there is always something occurring. A first glance at this location — the same kind of look that has been projected and repeated many times in many different media — reveals Times Square as a tourist trap. A label which has been more than enough to build a whole reputation and a set of imaginaries for this place, mostly negatives, based on only one of the many characteristics, facets or versions this location has.

One of the main questions I had at the be-

ginnning of my research was related to the capac-
itv this space has for attracting and capturing anything. What is that “thing” that makes Times Square so popular? Is Times Square’s popularity based on a sum of elements, as if one is making a sort of mathematical operation: screens' location + fame + history + imaginaries? Is its popularity the result of a sensory encounter between its visi-
tors and its modes and affordances? Is its popu-

larity even real, or are we here talking about a fic-
tion? Is its popularity just a myth? What is the formula Times Square is applying for gathering and retaining such a massive number of bodies and semiotic materials?

Nevertheless, I am not pretending to deny Times Square can fluctuate like a tourist trap. In fact, there is a version of Times Square that is a tourist trap (see P03-B) but this location is much more than that. However, even if we ac-
tcept that Times Square is a tourist trap, there are so many things to explore and to discuss within that condition: its architecture, its inner logic, its components. The point here is that to describe a place should not be the final objective but the point of departure for the more serious, detailed and schematic work of decomposition (see V14).

Intending to solve these questions, and with the idea of looking for that charm, the magnetic spirit this location has, I borrowed two ideas from Franck Cochoy (2011), seduction and cu-

ristisy, to try to relate Times Square’s attractive-

ness and power of attraction to a sort of role-

playing of persuasion and desire. Seduction is a collective and multimedia activity where curious-

ity seems to be the gateway to the unknown, a sort of spatially temporarily assembled around the idea of capturing and being caught (see P32-B16). Curiosity, according to Cochoy, “is the ant-

tidote of habitus, it is a force that drives us to break from what we are.” (158).

To name and to conceive Times Square as a tourist trap is analogous to what Latour (1999: 304) called black-boxing: [this is] “the way scientific and technical work is made invis-

ible by its own success.” In this case, a black box refers to the success, or the hegemony, of a ver-

sion of an element over the other versions of the same item. It is easy from outside to think that Times Square is just a place for taking tourists’
money but once one is inside that location—and it does not have to be physically—it is impossible not to see other kinds of aspects, situations and characteristics of which challenges the dominant interpretation (version) of the place.

Despite the fact that Cochoy (2016[2011]) does not offer a clear definition of seduction, amongst his work one can find small references pointing to his understanding of it. Seduction could be understood as a (fatal) way of capturing [other elements] (ibid: 46), as a force (90), and as a "mesmerizing" (500). Pottinger (2017) also highlights the lack of information about how seduction is “specifically entangled” (321) in Cochoy’s work. Still, at the same time, he is interpreting this idea as a sort of implicit eroticism (ibid).

I spent between six and eight hours daily in Times Square for several months. During that time, I saw how its attractiveness—that set of attributes making the square attractive—was continually flowing, appearing and disappearing. Meanwhile Times Square’s meaning and usage were changing, depending on the situation and on who was using it. This was a mosaic, grotesque, the same one. Let us take, for instance, three different elements of Times Square, a bench, a screen and a bunch of tourists, to briefly explore their capacity for attracting and seducing and how their meanings change depending on the kind of relationships they are participating in.

However, it is also essential to keep in mind that despite its seduction and attractiveness, Times Square’s ability to capture could be perceived as a unidirectional activity in which a single element is deployed as a sort of strategy for ensuring others but those who are caught up in the square have qualities that make them particularly susceptible to this entanglement. Seduction is a double sided game. We face a particular kind of linkage based mostly on emotion, where non-human elements take advantage of human feelings and desires to make them do things. To seduce and attract—we can see in the text mixed with this one—are material-semiotic movements producing specific spaces of desire.

There is a concrete bench (go to V21) in zone E of Times Square. The bench functions as a bench most of the time. It attracts pedestrians due to its shape and location. The bench structure is perfect for hosting people and its design invites them to go there and rest. Effectively, pedestrians use the bench for taking a seat and chatting, eating, relaxing and as a meeting point. The location of the bench offers good views of the other zones of Times Square. The view the bench has often attracts tourists who use the bench as a staircase. They take pictures and use the bench as a stage. When the tourists are gone, the bench’s flat structure seduces the homeless who repurpose the element into a communal bed. It is not clear to me why they prefer to sleep on the bench, its mate- rial is harder than the ground and its shape is narrow. However, there is something about the bench that is inviting as a place to sleep.

The purpose of making a distinction between (i) attractiveness and (ii) what to attract is to highlight two distinct aspects of the square. The first is related to a condition, to a set of character-istics that Times Square has, which makes it attractive. The second is about its capacity to act. We are talking, respectively, (i) about a bunch of adjectives—or signs—and (ii) about an action, following MacCannell (1999: 109), this action is framed by a semiotic process, “a relationship between a sight, marker and tourist.”

Times Square’s attractiveness is a passive quality, a set of peculiarities around which other elements congregate. Its power to attract is an active status, the permanent ability to trap that which is in its orbit.

The screens of Times Square are devices that know how to seduce without much effort. They only need to be plugged in and to display advertisements. They function as an assemblage and owe an essential part of their capacity to seduce to their communal coexistence. The high-density-choreography of lights attracts (most) tourists who use the screens—now turned into landscape—as decorative elements for their pic-tures and videos. The screen’s high volume of inter-actions, especially with tourists and other ele-ments such as the recorded material they display and the software that drives them, as well as their privileged location, attract a wide variety of com-panies that are seduced by (i) the sheer statistical volume of visitors to Times Square and by (ii) Times Square’s promise to position and promote their products in one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world.

Thus, Times Square attracts all manner of materials and elements in an endless and multi-layered courtship based on promising them things, different things through different prom-is-es. Alexa Färber (2020: 53-54) identifies two kinds of promises an urban place can make. “In the most basic sense, [we have] the promise as a practice—to promise to do something—relates a promisor and a promise to each other. [...] The performativity of the promise, as an illocutionary or commission act [...] is not primarily thought of as leading to the fulfillment of the promise but as a social bond with a certain quality. [Then we have] the second conceptual quality of promises as designating and materializing an object of de-sire.”

Tourists are the fuel that keeps Times Square working. The screens need tourists and the stores also. The panhandlers, the hotels, the theaters, the restaurants and the Times Square Al-liance all need tourists. Tourists are not only visi-tors, they are also objects of desire for formal and informal workers and religious groups too. Tourists are numbers. They are statistics that at-tact capital and investment. Tourists mean sales, tourists mean jobs. To attract tourists is a com-plex multimodal and semiotic exercise carried out by Times Square itself and by each one of its components. Sometimes these components work in conjunction with each other: the screens seduce visitors who are drawn to them like moths to a flame. Once they are there, the pedestrian plazas, street performances and glittering lights invite them to linger. Food courts and the other food providers as well as the stores with their souvenirs, discounts, sales and popular brands are all part Times Square’s ability to seduce. It is a team effort although, of course, the seduction of tourists implies competition. Street performances are also part of this competition. Broadway shows accused street performances of scaring off tourists and they asked the City Government to ban these informal workers while Stores are contin-ually reducing prices and renewing their prod-ucts. There are fliers, illuminated signage, en-gagement campaigns, marketing strategies and price reductions.

This game of enticement and persuasion starts long before the visitor physically arrives in Times Square. Sometimes it is unnecessary to even be there to become trapped and seduced by this location. Sometimes a promise is more than enough, a promise of being seen, having fun, finding a specific kind of imaginary, a promise of making particular connections. The eroticism that emerges from Times Square, that movement and decentralized force, is a hyperbole of bodies, sensations and trajectories. A hyperbole based on a promise of quantity, of being linked to a lot of [fun, eyes, lights, people, attention...].

Seduction is a multilevel movement of im-provisation and repetition. Implicitly, we have al-ready seen how the elements attracted by Times Square are also always seducing others either to capture them or to get something from them. Those new seducers, already seduced by Times Square, use a set of persuasive techniques based on a sort of material-eroticism reflected in their affordances and semiotic gestures. The persua-sive methods used by these seducers are varied: a light, a movement, a naked body, a cd, a flyer, a costume, a dynamic urban landscape, a cheap ticket, a dance, a sale.

Not every technique works for every kind of element which is why the seducer, like a Kraken tentacles, deploys its multiple tools and strategies, taking advantage of the physical and semiotic materials it can find in Times Square to grab as many elements as it possibly can. Seduction in urban places is often a three-player game. It is a multilevel game, where the seducer is allied to the place itself to capture those curious elements that are willing to modify their trajectories—or habitats—to follow a sign, a promise, a particular object of desire.
The frontage of this fast-food restaurant was also reminiscent to either an old Broadway theatre or cinema, and is reminiscent of the design of the entrance. The signage on its facade is made of circular light bulbs and is reminiscent of the design of the entrance to either an old Broadway theatre or cinema. I was expectant, waiting for his next move.

So, I got closer to him. I was curious about his presence. Suddenly, he started to dance and blow a plastic whistle I did not realize he was carrying on. “Happy new year!” he began to yell. I did not have so much time to react. I just took my phone, and I started to record that situation. He continued with his performance, and then, after a few seconds, he realized I was there watching him through my phone and started to do his thing in front of me. Suddenly, he stopped what he was doing, he took his hat off and immediately left the corner.

It was around noon, and the first thing I thought was, “what a party this man had last night.” He was wearing short pants, regular sneakers, and a light green shirt. Some necklaces—Mardi gras style— were hanging from his neck; some glittered sunglasses covered his eyes with the shape of 2017. A colossal hat was over his head. A backpack was the last piece of his outfit. But what caught my attention was that despite the traffic light changed multiple times, and the rest of the people were going from one side to another, he remained static in that corner. A backpack was the last piece of his outfit. But what caught my attention was that despite the traffic light changed multiple times, and the rest of the people were going from one side to another, he remained static in that corner. I was expectant, waiting for his next move.

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other tourists. This sort of symbolic interactionism in tourism is a resource already essayed, for example, by Dean MacCannell in his classic study on tourism and leisure (1976) and by Craig Colton (1987) in his work on how to apply symbolic interactionism in the field of leisure, recreation and tourism (LTS).

During my fieldwork observations, mostly of nonparticipants, I paid particular attention to tourist behaviors in Times Square. Instead of just noticing subtle differences I was able to see a sort of routinization in how tourists approached Times Square and the way they behaved there. I found there was a particular kind of tourist ethos continuously repeated by the heterogeneous elements we designate as tourists. Other types of elements in Times Square established relationships with those tourists—with the exception of the Chinese—in similar ways.

However, the empirical results obtained here are no more than a temporal and located set of observations that have no validity beyond this work. As a consequence of this there is no possibility of extrapolating either a general ethos of tourist behavior in public places or even generalizations about tourist behaviors in Times Square. The repetition of behaviors and situations occurring during my fieldwork is framed by a specific environmental dimension, the regular version of Times Square after its pedestrianization. This version is happening without any external force, such as a bomb threat, a global pandemic, or a New Year’s celebration, interfering with it.

With this in mind, I will now present a short possible explanation of tourist practices, logics and behaviors in the square. Tourists are continually arriving at Times Square’s open public areas to see the place but, mostly, to take pictures of themselves. Every day the same general routine takes place. Every day of the year there are thousands of tourists floating around while an army of unseen workers cleans and maintains the area creating optimal conditions for their reception and in turn allowing an army of visible (informal) workers to both observe and monetize them.

This multitude is watched over by a system of surveillance cameras, recording, controlling and counting them, individualizing them to get their data for reasons of security, marketing and statistical analysis. Meanwhile, hundreds of megawatts of electricity are being used to keep the LED lights of the billboards shining and the advertisements running as sensory traps.

There is a man who stands on his head while solving a Rubik’s cube. A group of topless women offering their painted bodies as decorative elements for tourists taking pictures. There are hip-hop dancers and acrobats. There are, from time to time, Hare Krishna parades with accordions, drums and guitars. There are wedding proposals. There are people posing in every corner of the plaza for spontaneous photo opportunities. There are people and more people, whose sporadic activities include:

8. Most of the informal workers in Times Square use to treat Chinese tourists differently. Panhandlers and street performers use to take advantage of the Chinese deicide behavior. For a deeper exploration of this topic, please go to V07.

9. Pizam and Sussmann (1995) and Pizam and Reichel (2008) have carried out two similar studies about the effect of nationality on tourist behavior showing the answers provided by a group of, in the first case, English tourists grades and, in the second one, by Israeli ones regarding whether they believe or not nationality is affecting tourist behavior. In both cases, after analyzing a questionnaire, both groups of tourists concluded that nationality is a determinant of tourists’ behavior—an opposed conclusion to mine.

A martial artist brandishing a long sword.

A naked woman sporting giant old-fashioned headphones who is singing loudly, despite the fact they do not appear to be plugged in to anything.

A woman spending almost half an hour, photographing her Starbucks drink.

A couple dancing salsa while a third person holds a phone playing a song.

Two little girls performing a ballet while their parents are busy taking pictures of the screens.

A skateboarder fleeing from two security guards.

A bunch of Chinese people singing hymns to Jesus in different languages.
From my point of view, as an ethnographer doing fieldwork in Times Square, these sporadic events constituted a spectacular landscape of ebullitions, the variety and spontaneity of which eventually blurred into a strident but repetitive pageant that was only spectacular for short periods. Going to Times Square daily and being exposed to its hyperbolized reality of shows, lights and spectacle ultimately destroyed its magnetic allure and capacity to surprise.

Religious parade. 2019 Fieldwork. August 20

If you go daily to Times Square, you may realize that most of the time, Times Square is not where it was supposed to be. In other words, it is a common situation being in Times Square and not seeing Times Square around. Sometimes, you must take Times Square with you to Times Square and let it go, setting it free. Of course, that situation could happen to you the first time you go there. It is a possibility. But once being in Times Square is your daily routine, more than an option, it turns into a fact.

This morning I saw a bunch of people scamming a family. Is that Times Square? Well, I guess it depends, one may say. If later this day, or in a couple of weeks, you ask someone from that family either what is Times Square or how it is to be in Times Square, they may relate the scamming experience with Times Square, and then a version of Times Square, a place where people is being scammed, will be outside going around and growing. Of course, it will depend on the capacities and resources that version has for making connections and keeping actual itself.

And yes, despite this, here is pure speculation, I am sure that family is not the first group of people scammed in Times Square and that their version, or a similar one, is already online, resting virtually, waiting for being actualized. A quick search on Google proves that I am right. There are about 450,000 results, only talking about videos related to being scammed in Times Square. Here some titles: “New York worst’s tourist trap: Times Square, Scams, Frauds, and more”; “NYC Travel Guide, worst three scams of Times Square”; “Crazy!!! Scams in NYC Times Square | Fake Disney Characters 2016.”

Going daily to Times Square implies watching the same scenes happening again and again. The characters are different, and space may vary. Still, that constant repetition is creating an effect that compresses everything together. That particular after-math produces the sensation that one is seeing the same stable thing barely changing and that, despite everything flows, that movement seems to be circular. Unpacking Times Square, from this perspective and from this particular location where I currently am — these words have been written from the Starbucks that is located below the Bloomberg’s billboard in the corner of pedestrianized Broadway and the 47th Street — gives the impression that this location is the result of the imbrication of two different timelines:

(i) The first element is a stable one that is composed of the simultaneous repetitions of many situations. Those situations, despite sometimes they are assembled using different elements, keep a sort of structural homogeneity in terms of agency and performativity: People taking selfies; screens advertising; barricades shaping the pedestrian zones; pigeons gathered near the kiosk that is in front of American Eagle; crowds going up and down; the same man, silently, holding a sign about Jesus; costumed characters going behind tourists.

(ii) The second element is an effervescent one (Delgado, 1998) created by each situation’s particularities. Despite that, in general terms, it gives the sensation that Times Square is a stable collection of repeated cases, those encounters happening there are also shaped by sporadic associations and by particular intensities. A man offering ‘free hugs’ punched in the pace a tourist because she did not tip him; a company is launching a new brand of chips through an activation campaign in Times Square; a computer that needs to be restarted displaying a blue screen error in a billboard; thousands of bees flying around a corner in Times Square and lying over a hot-dog stop, a bomb threat.

The challenge with this work, and what is making it wonderful, at least from my perspective, is the ability one must-have for seeing and taking care of the most minimal details of each linkage, describing at the same time, all its possible — determined by the possibilities of the ethnographer — features and relations but without neglecting the other connections happening at the same time. In the end, I see myself like a tailor spinning fine, creating multi-layered patchwork quilts. That is another definition for doing an ethnography of a public place.

But that kind of perpetual repetition of group formations doing the same things every day — even despite the elements inside of those temporal associations tend to vary continuously — was also a multiple resource, this time a stylistic one, I took from Times Square to talk about and to show Times Square. The multiple features of that resource are nothing more than a set of rhetorical devices: metaphors, analepsis, anaphoras, and onomatopoeias resulted from a multimodal work of observation on from and on a situated space being continuously and collectively designed.

That is why, going across this dissertation, you may have the sensation there are topics, scenarios, and discussions that are being repeated, although in a different way and from other locations, again and again. That reiteration I am highlighting and proposing here is also a sort of consequence of loosening, in the shape of a written document, a complex and a temporal association of heterogeneous and effervescent elements happening multiple times, and most of the time, in the same geographical location.
Later that day, I saw that man again by chance. He was walking to the same corner I met him that morning, wearing the same clothes, having the same attitude he had when he left the place. I followed him for some time until he arrived at his intersection again. Same situation as before: he was there, waiting in the corner, looking at the traffic light. Meanwhile, the rest of the pedestrians were going from one side to the other. A couple of minutes later, he started to scream once again, “happy new year!” at the time, he was ridiculously moving and blowing his whistle.

This time I finally realized what he was doing there. It turns that he was working as a part of a performance about Times Square that a tourist company was offering for its public. There is a specific tour one can make around New York City inside of a bus. The buses I am talking about are not the traditional touristic two floors ones where one gets some cheap headphones, a map, and a multilingual and superficial story of the places one is watching outside. No, those buses I am talking about here are like stages with wheels. The whole interior of the bus seems like a set of theater chairs. Its ceiling and walls are made of glass. Also, inside the bus, there are two hosts in charge of guiding the whole interactive experience.

The man’s role in the corner of Times Square was to reproduce, through a hyperbolized interpretation, what is to be a random pedestrian during the New Year celebration there. That is it. That was his job. I saw the man going to the corner one more time that day. His behavior was always the same, shining in front of the bus but getting somber once the vehicle was gone. His presence represented a sort of paradox in there, a paradox linked to time: he was something new and exciting by the tourists watching him but, at the same time, that interpretation was just a repetition of itself carried out a few times per day. I don’t know how many days per week. Also, he was just a reproduction in September of a New Year’s Eve element in Times Square. Perhaps he was a reproduction of himself just a little bit late, or earlier, depends on how you look at it.

The academic works about Times Square seem to disappear at the end of the decade of the 1990s. And it is not that nobody wrote about Times Square anymore. The situation is that almost any kind of work written after that date is focused either on the Nineties or even before. The decade of the 1990s, the Giuliani era, is the version of Times Square that has attracted most of the academic glances. The reason for the concentration of academic efforts in that period is that, along that decade, Times Square was cleaned and revitalized. (See P27).

What is interesting about that ascetic “New Times Square” was the controversy behind the process of cleaning/gentrifying the area. The City government turned Times Square, and all the zone around it, from a vibrant and frenetic location full of sex, drugs, cheap pensions, porn theaters, sex shops, and some kinds of crime into a rezoned and revitalized commercial spot designed for attracting family tourism, private investors and multinational brands.

Meanwhile, the redesign of Times Square carried out by the Bloomberg Administration and finished during Bill de Blasio mayoralty — in a timeline from 2009 to 2017 — was less interested, and let’s say, apparently, less provocative. The “New New Times Square” seems to be just the continuation of Giuliani’s plan for keeping the zone clean. My theory concerning why this version of Times Square is perceived in this way is based on the identification of four possible misconceptions that could explain why that most recent version of Times Square has been marginalized as a valid study object across all the fields that use “urban” in their names.

During many conversations across different scenarios — before starting my doctoral studies and once I have begun them — I have extensively discussed why my decision to choose Times Square as the locus and the focus of this research. I chose Times Square because of two main reasons: (i) a personal interest I have for New York City, a place that was also the location of my master’s research, and (ii) due to working on Times Square represented an academic challenge derived from four misconceptions I compiled from the discussions about the reasons of choosing that location. Those misconceptions are:
P6-a. There is nothing to see

Times Square, paradoxically, has been conceived as an ethereal sum of flows. The things happening there are not possible to be translated to a substantial study object. Everything seems so liquid, so unstable, so tricky to grasp. “It’s just people walking across stores and watching some screens” (informal conversation with a colleague in a café in New York City, July 23, 2019). The temporal associations, the group formations, the social interaction are ethereal, and Times Square is cataloged as an almost non-place. “There is not like either Bryant Park or Union Square where you can see real groups interacting. There are social situations, class, gender, age. Times Square is just a tourist trap. It is a lot of tourists gathered walking together across tons and tons of advertising, that’s it.” (Ibid).

P6-b. It is a matter of something else

Times Square is perceived just as the result of other domains. “It is not determinism, but Times Square looks like the spatialization of some capitalist movements that converted an area of New York into the biggest thematic park for propaganda and advertising.” (Workshop feedback, Munich, October 12, 2017). In other words, for carrying out a piece of research about Times Square, one just need to follow one of the most significant domains on social sciences, such as economy or politics, for explaining what is happening there. In the end, and generalizing too, an urban landscape—it does not matter which one—is results being either just a location where something else is happening or a product of an external force. The particular turns into a context that is used for setting the writing process.

P6-c. It is an aseptic artificial touristic spot

Linked to the second misconception, this third one is about that Times Square is an artificial spot that does not belong to New York City anymore. “I’ve been in Times Square a few times, and this place is not linked to this City at all. However, it is for sure the playground and the showcase of many multinational corporations” (informal conversation with a colleague in a seminar. Munich, June 20, 2017). Perhaps this is the most extended idea of the four I am proposing here. It looks like with the “cleaning” of the Square—in the 1990s—this place lost its chaotic charm and its wild spirit that were tying the zone with the rest of the city. This situation turned the whole area into an ascetic touristic spot without anything to explore because what is happening there is not real. It is just a representation.

P6-d. There is nothing to do

We have been seen this place so often and in so many different ways that it looks like everything about Times Square is already said. The inflection point was the pedestrianization of the portion of Broadway Avenue that was crossing the area. “What else can you say about Times Square? Sadly, you are living in a bad time for talking about it. We are currently not living either in the 80s when the place had something to say or in the 90s when the area was in the process of being renewed. Now nothing happens in there. Yes, some accidents and any other minor issues, but nothing you can formally inquire about. Times Square is a boring place for doing a piece of research.” (Discussion about my doctoral proposal with a professor. Medellín, November 8, 2015).
Instead of just ignoring or delegitimizing those opinions and points of view, I took the four misconceptions in a very serious way. They were the starting point for constructing a speculative and an epistemological strategy that aimed to approach urban places from their own characteristics, imaginaries, affordances, and materialities. In that way, I decided to go to what is usually discarded, to what is often ignored, to what is considered irrelevant or just as landscape. I started to collect those elements, describing and displaying their particularities, finding in there small, sporadic, and effervescent sociotechnical machinery: the set of stories and vignettes composing this work.

Understanding a particular place as an actant implies considering its ontological and epistemological independence far from any kind of theoretical burdens even if those come from STS or, regarding this work, specifically from ANT. To contemplate a specific location as an actant also means extending and unfolding that location, stretching and shrinking its shapes and components until the last circumstances. That means until one is not able, for any reason, to do that for more time. In the particular case of this dissertation, and despite the main actor I followed was Times Square after its pedestrianization, and to achieve a more exhaustive comprehension of this specific location, it was also necessary to explore and to exhaust other versions and intensities of this element had.

Sometimes the path for going through those versions started with a story I read somewhere, with a random conversation inside Times Square or outside that geography. Sometimes, the road began either with empirical evidence, a personal experience, or a work of observation. Sometimes, it was a particular movement. Other times it was about the decomposition of a specific material. But there are moments, like the ones that triggered me to conduct this piece of research, that started only with a personal interest in a city, in a neighborhood, plus a bunch of gossips and misconceptions.
CHAPTER ONE
Interferences and Complications

PO7. REDUCTIONS

As an ontological provocation, the idea of writing this piece of research is to encourage the debate around the linkage between urban studies and STS from an empirical-philosophical viewpoint mostly inspired by Annemarie Mol perspective’s on post*-Actor-Network Theory, on Viveiros de Castro’s multi-naturalism (2004) and Heidegger’s ontological work on usability (2008[1962]). This research is also an object-oriented ethnography about embedded knowledge in a situated, multiple, and temporal location, pedestrianized Times Square, regarding how to make an urban ethnography from STS.

“Philosophy used to approach knowledge in an epistemological way. It was interested in the preconditions for acquiring true knowledge. However, in the philosophical mode I engage in here, knowledge is not understood as a matter of reference, but as one of manipulation. The driving question no longer is ‘how to find the truth?’ but ‘how are objects handled in practice?’ With this shift, the philosophy of knowledge acquires an ethnographic interest in knowledge practices. (Mol, 2002: 5)

Empirical philosophy is an invitation to go multiple, approach, and describe an element exhausting its modes and affordances concerning its different ways of being and behaving depending on the kind of temporal association this element participates. “In this respect, empirical philosophy follows the increasing STS and social anthropological interest in exploring the world as multiple; not in terms of perspectives as in multi-culturalism, but in terms of ontological multiplicity.” (Jensen & Gad, 2009: 292)

Empirical philosophy is also an invitation to be situated. It means to conceive knowledge production as more than a deliberate work on ideas floating somewhere and nowhere in particular. From that perspective, concepts need to be located, spatially bounded, and materially shaped in a sort of situated ontological material-semiotic construction. “From the point of view of STS and empirical philosophy, this means that they cannot be analyzed out of context. Instead, technologies as well as concepts of technology must be analyzed as part of practice.” (Ibid: 298)

So, following that line on philosophical empiricism, this dissertation aims to exhaust a spatiality through different cases of repetition. That last enterprise evolves a sort of paradoxes located in between Gilles Deleuze’s and Jorge Luis Borges’ conceptions of reality and on Deleuze’s idea of philosophy as the process of creating “concepts that are always new.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994:5). For both authors, Borges and Deleuze, the reality is an incomplete, multiple, temporal, and sometimes contradictory set of heterogeneous aggregates happening simultaneously in a particular space that is not necessarily a Cartesian one.

We have, for instance, on Borges’s work the idea of labyrinth and on Deleuze’s one—together with Guattari—the notion of rhizome. Here both elements will act, one from literature and another from philosophy, as epistemological devices for approaching the world that is there. Borges’ labyrinth proposal is materialized by the bifurcated structure and intention of this textual artifact, the work you are reading right now. At the same time, the roots of that labyrinthine proposal can be traced, simultaneously, from his story “The garden of forking paths (Borges, 1964)” until Kafka’s literature and Leibniz’s philosophy, and simultaneously too, to the idea of rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004[1987]) where it is finally merged and diluted.

Jorge Luis Borges (1964), The garden of forking paths

CHAPTER CONTENT

(i) An ontological discussion about the multiplicity and incompleteness of the world outside.
(ii) A presentation of the central issue of this piece of research.
(iii) An introduction of the main theoretical discussions and inspirations.
The conceptualization of difference in (1994[1968]) and on Borges’ (2001[1882]; 2006[1883]), is a tricky point of view. philosophy and literature, vindicating those entlinkages between B& Dbut also between of repetition. The authors explore the different between those two authors are going further than just this particular encounter.

In a short essay, mixing philosophy and literature, Pérez and Bacarlett (2019) go deep into the different interfaces between Borges and Deleuze (B&D) through the presentation of a series of paradoxes both authors developed along their production: the paradox of the incompleteness; the paradox of the finitude; and the paradox of repetition. The authors explore the different linkages between B&D but also between philosophy and literature, vindicating those two ways of creating knowledge as valid scenarios for seeing the world far from, and simultaneously to, the dominant scientific point of view.

“The underlying issue—drama in the original—in both philosophy and literature is to try to represent the unrepresentable. This is in that way due to the only certainty both fields have is that our depiction of our encounter and representing reality recognizes the limitations of our capacities and tools. That is why B&D philosophy and literature are said to be ‘paradoxes’.” Although in the spirit of paradoxes to represent what cannot be represented. B&D [according to Pérez and Bacarlett] use paradoxes as “their main device for energizing and provoking our way of thinking. [...] Both Borges and Deleuze are convinced that we only start to think when we set aside common sense, and we face the challenge of doing it paradoxically.” (Pérez and Bacarlett, 2019: 13-14).

The implementation of paradoxes along with this whole dissertation aims to represent, more than the unrepresentable, what is mostly discarded and put aside by traditional perspectives in both Urban Studies and STS: those minimal and temporal situations, happening in our everyday life, that give the impression they are outside of any big theory and that we use to take for granted, turning them either into landscape or anecdote. We have, for example, a person taking pictures, a group of street vendors selling CDs, a bench, tourists in New York, pedestrianized Times Square.

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Those kinds of spaces and situations, those minimal and transitory associations are what Manuel Delgado incites to follow, to collect, and to turn into the study object of a sort of naturalist-interactionist urban ethnographic program based on predominating descriptions: “It is like if there is still everything to do. There is huge continent that has not been explored by social sciences yet. It is a place composed of all that infinite profusion of the waste left by social life before being solidified and turned into it does not matter what. It is the work of incom‐gruity; it represents all that is fickle, all that oscillates refusing to be fixed, all the unforeseen and the unpredictable. There is neither history, nor geography of what is irrelevant.” (Delgado, 2003: 8)

More or less, and using one of his metaphors, this naturalistic perspective proposed by Delgado (ibid) aims to see the world, as a sort of poetic positivism, inspired among other things by Vertov’s cinematic explorations—gathered in his Kino-glaz theory—, by de Maupassant’s liter‐ature and by a kind of avant-garde writers such as Joyce, Prost, and Musil. This naturalistic proposal of urban ethnography is characterized by the fact that “it does not want to aspire to prove anything: it shows, but it does not demonstrate; it describes, but it does not prescribe...” (ibid: 32). Delgado’s intention is just to watch, watch without convincing anyone, without deter‐mining anything, just observe and describe what our perception was able to see.

This whole piece of research is attend‐ing to Delgado’s call of going to what is usu‐ally discarded and left behind by the mainstream and (so often) totalitarian academic glances. This work is an exploration of the ephemeral and momentary associations happening in the streets. Notwithstanding, neither its methodology nor its aspirations are walking in the same way proposed by Delgado. It means that more than a natural‐ist piece of research, what is presented here is a kind of realistic one, a constructivist examination based on the fabrication of experiments (Marrero, 2008).

The discussion of naturalism-realism in urban ethnography carried out by Delgado and Marrero pointed out two different ways of understanding the practice of doing an ethnography of the life outside. The aim of a naturalistic way of doing ethnography is “to say everything” (Ibid, 28) of something through the elaboration of descriptions that, as we already saw, do not want to demon‐strate anything. In other words, naturalism is a “pre-discursive science” (Delgado, 2003: 32), a transparent attempt to reflect reality without any intention to affect it.

Meanwhile, the purpose of a realist ethnog‐raphy is “to write realistically. It means being influenced by reality and, at the same time, having the possibility of affecting that reality” (Brecht, 1984: 263, initially quoted by Marrero, 2008: 112).

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Regarding this research’s aspirations, the disjunction between this dissertation and Delgado’s naturalistic proposal can be observed in how the scope of this work is limited and reduced to the resources and sit‐uatedness of who is writing those words. Also, its boundaries and extension are con‐ditioned by the impossibility of approaching, encompassing, describing and project‐ing reality—not even a defined, located, and particular one—in its whole. The natu‐ralist ambitions of a positivist general view, like the idea of going from the humanity above, crashed into a mobile, multiple, and always-changing world of many worlds.

However, that constructivist—kind of realist— examination I announced in two paragraphs above could not be understood,

11. The idea of circularity on Borges, of a cyclical movement of time being projected to the infinite, can be explored, with some nuances and disruptions in two of his stories: The circular ruin and The library of Babel (Borges, 1964).

12. The original content of this paragraph was written in Spanish by Pérez and Bacarlett (2019). Instead of just translating the content, I interpreted their intentions, and I reconstructed a similar one, repeating its meaning but expanding its intention. Below you can access to the original content: "...el drama que subyace tanto a la filosofía como a la literatura es tratar de representar lo irrepetible, tratable, pues la única cuestión de ambas es que solo podemos partir de la limitación de nuestras capacidades e instrumentos; pero, tanto en Borges como en Delgado, la filosofía y literatura están avocadas al uso de herramientas paradójicas [...] ambos hacen de las paradojas su principal instrumento en el intento de activar y provocar el pensamiento." (Ibid: 13-14).

13. Regarding the tension naturalism-realism, there is a discussion (only available in Spanish) between Manuel Delgado (2003) proposing—as it was already presented—a naturalist-interactionist ethnography of the streets, and Isaac Marrero (2008) inspired by ANT ideas, aiming for a flat, realistic and mediated urban ethnography.
in a simplistic way, contrary to Delgado’s naturalist project. I mean, in order to represent what has been discarded by traditional urban studies and STS, one should also abandon any conventional way of approaching reality. It is here where the usage of paradox as a tool for producing new knowledge takes relevance. As Pérez and Bacarlett (2019) suggest, it is necessary to stop misunderstanding paradox as just a simple contradiction if we want to deploy all its possibilities of action.

“It is not enough to say that the antithesis of A is non-A. That is a pretty easy strategy because we are just reducing [in a reductionistic way] reality to a simple confrontation of opposites. The paradox is going against common opinion (para-doxo) precisely because it does not offer any definitive option between two [or more] opposite perspectives. Both are exactly plausible. The paradox is going beyond contradiction because this last one can be easily solved pointing a mistake in our way of thinking and, in that way, we can realize which option we have is the best.” (Ibid: 13-15).

Ontological incompleteness is a paradox itself that summons Borges and Deleuze but also Leibniz and Kafka. One could even go further and summing Spinoza and Nietzsche too. However, for practical reasons, I will keep those last two authors melted into Deleuze’s work. The concept of ontological incompleteness proposed here is a construction designed for gathering both the epistemological equivocations of approaching an element in its whole, as well as the efforts of reducing that element expanding its ontologies—two sides of the same idea. The idea behind ontological incompleteness has also been developing although not using that term—by Farias (2011: 369) for talking about the city as a never ended multiplicity of assemblages: “the constructivism underlying the notion of urban assemblages does not reflect an epistemological problem but is an ontological proposition. It is based on the general assumption that the world is not all in, that it is in the making and that a finished or complete edition of it within which to dwell does not exist. As in Bender’s title The Unfinished City (2007), the basic notion is that there is no city as a whole but a multiplicity of processes assembling the city in different ways.”

The intention of approaching an element in its whole, reducing and exploiting it, could also be framed into what Calore (1989: 21) has named “Dewey’s event-centered metaphysics of temporality.” Dewey’s (1998). Study on Time and individuality proposes a similar—if not identical—paradox of reducing an element (an individuality) by expanding (pluralizing) its ontologies always in terms of time. "Only a philosophy of pluralism, of genuine indetermination, and of change which is real and intrinsic gives significance to individuality." (Ibid: 219).

For Dewey, any element is historical and, in a more precise way, it is a piece of history: ‘[A]ny particular event cut off from that history ceases to be a part of [its] life as an individual’ (Dewey 1998: 220). The continuous repetition of individuals in time, he calls that process as “development” (ibid), is actualizing a particular piece of history. It is, in other words, a well-defined element and its ontologies (individuals). However, the action of developing, of expanding ontologies is only possible in a collective way, being in relation, making associations, with other, the “success in actualization depended upon the cooperation of external things” (ibid).

The meaning of incompleteness in an element ontology is related, in similar proportions, (i) to our incapacity for describing the world outside and (ii) to the condition the world has of being continually changing. Latour (2012) deals with that incompleteness, expanding Paris and its reality by what he calls “the illusion of the zoom.” That illusion is generated by exploring a location using “optical devices”14 that are giving the sensation that “one can circulate freely through and in every scale, from the most local to the global (in space), as well as shuttle about back and forth from the briefest instant […] to the longest period” (Latour 2014: 121).

For instance, the illusion of the zoom occurs when we use an online map to ‘embrace the entire city” (Latour 2012), but in fact, it is not letting us “embrace anything.” It is just providing us an illusion, like a simulation, of something that already happened. “The illusion of the zoom is so deceptive because of the impression of continuity. Because computers can so easily adjust pixels to all scales and link up data [...] they enable us to believe that between all these points of view there is a passage with no solution of continuity” (ibid: 91).

Notwithstanding, ontological incompleteness cannot be defeated by leaving aside any kind of “optical device” and instead exploring a location, Latour’s Paris, or Times Square in our case, by walking through it using the stroller point of view. “Yet there is nothing more abstract than this point of view, nothing less realistic – apart from the illusory zoom sliding, without the slightest tremor, from the European continent to the Beaubourg square in Paris, continuously changing scale. Ultimately, a city [one can also add here any urban place] cannot be the framework within which individual moves; simply because this framework itself is made of nothing more than traces left by other individuals who have moved about or are still there, in place.” (Ibid: 92).

As the last part of this short exploration on reductions and on ontological incompleteness, I will quickly connect both concepts with a set of four group formations to propose at least four feasible epistemological structures for dealing with and representing the ideas immanence and incompleteness: (LB) Leibniz-Borges; (BK) Borges-Kafka; (KD) Kafka-Deleuze; and (DL) Deleuze-Leibniz to approach reality, as Benjamin (2003[1982]) projected Nietzsche’s idea of eternal return (2001[1882]; 2006[1883]), like a tricky movement of perpetual recurrence:

14. I will use this trope for talking about the reality that is external to the researcher. The world outside, also sometimes the world that is there, obeys to (i) a way of denoting what is in front of it—its field site, for instance—or (ii) a manner of encompassing a portion of reality that, depending on the context, acquires a particular meaning.

15. The idea of “optical devices” is a term used by Latour (2014) to talk about and inspired by the exhibition of the Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson “Contact.”
Borges and Kafka are both labyrinth architects. Their constructions are intricate traceries of multiple possible spaces projected to the infinite, to the incompleteness.

Despite that the shape and the terrain, as well as the materials used by both architects to build their labyrinths, were different, the intentions behind those structures were pretty similar: to explore what is incomplete, what will never be approached in its whole, what is tricky, what is multiple and infinite. Besides that sensation of going through an endless construction of simultaneous and forking routes, there is a perpetual repetition, a constant flow of elements, for example, in the Trial (Kafka, 1998[1925]) but mostly in The Castle (Kafka, 1998[1926]), of bureaucrats without a clear identity, appearing and disappearing, multiplied, in bureaucrats without a clear identity, it means, reduced but also less, and taking the law as an example, this Kafka or knowledge in Borges. Neverthe- 

nists are always dealing and making associations about those linkages, both authors’ protagonists are always dealing and making associations with ideal subjects such as the law in Kafka or knowledge in Borges. Nevertheless, and taking the law as an example, this one is embodied, it means, reduced but also multiplied, in bureaucrats without a clear identity, appearing and disappearing, acting, producing a difference, and the sensation of a continual repetition of moments of time.

One may say that it was Franz Kafka the mind behind the idea of Deleuze’s assemblies. In fact, if someone wants to understand and implement— that concept as an epistemological tool for interpreting and describing reality, the first thing that person should do is going to read Kafka’s novels. As Müller (2015) suggests, “in them, everything seems linked to everything else: there are new, unexpected realities at each turn, entities congeal just to fall apart in the next instance and desire to reach an elusive goal [...] recomposes them anew every time.” (29)

Also, Deleuze’s work with Guattari (D&G) (1986[1975]) on “Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature” is a recognition of Kafka’s rhizomatic way of thinking but also writing. Another thing D&G highlights from Kafka’s work, presented as minor literature, is its situatedness and, related to that, his political commitment at the moment of creating his work. The content of Kafka’s novels is full of relations and collective processes of production. In minor literature, everything “exists in a narrow space, every individual matter is immediately plugged into the political.” (Deleuze, Guattari & Brinkley, 1983: 16) This is connected to that and interfering on here and there. Content and shape get melted, everything is con- 

nected, and we have an assortment of references, being assembled and un assembled continuously, tied to particular locations.

Infinitude and a folding universe, plus a connection between the idea of folding/ unfolding and the elaborate production of elements, where concepts that inspired the linkages of science, philosophy, and literature Deleuze (1993) constructed, as episte- 

mological devices, for approaching reality. Although the figure of the monad was an essential source of inspiration for the French philosopher, the metaphor of the labyrinth that is folded in multiple pieces also resulted fundamental for constructing all his multiple, and based on repetition, academic program:

[A] “labyrinth is said to be multiple, etymologically, because it has many folds. The multiple is not merely that which has many parts, but that which is folded in many ways. [That divided multiplicity is not being separated] into parts of parts, but rather divide infinitely into smaller and smaller folds that always retain a certain cohesion.” (Ibid, 3:6) The repetition and perpetual recurrence of folded situations is a condition of multiplicity, a simile of an always-changing labyrinthine reality.

Following this path, the structure of the monograph has been divided into three parts. The first one is an ontological reflection on the binominal urban studies-STS and urban-city, based on an ethnographic work on Times Square, New York City, carried out in September 2017 and July to September 2019 (Routes iii and iv). The second part is an ethnography of Times Square that resulted from the fieldwork made during the temporal frames already described. (Routes ii and iv).

The last section of this work gathers a multimodal set of ethnographic artifacts and experiments resulting from the encounter and contamination between Times Square and the one who is behind those words (Route v).

As the crow flies, the intention of the whole dissertation, as it was announced in the introduc- 

tion, is to propose a temporal and unstable answer to the question: What can STS learn from Times Square for doing urban ethnography? But to answer that query is not an easy job. There are many interferences one should deal with first. Each of those interferences, or ontological com- 

plications (OC), is related to a particular part of the speech composing this work’s main topic. For instance, there are some OC in accordance with (1) “STS”; others with the (2) “learning from” process; some more concerning (3) doing ethnog- 

raphy — this OC is divided into other two OC regarding with (3.1) “urban ethnography” and (3.2) “STS ethnography”— and (4) finally some others as stated in “Times Square.”

Ontological complications appear (because they were always there just that, typically, we just tend to ignore them) when one is facing reality out of any theoretical presumption to organize it, classify it, and, finally, reduce it. It is, precisely, the act of reducing —a paradox itself—the one that is expanding and repeating reality until the last consequences producing, every time, a different semantic creature since. Following the princi- 

ple of Irreduction (Latour, 1993), we can, and we cannot, at the same time, reduce a specific thing to something else. That ambiguity is, more or less, an invitation to avoid reductionist but without falling into the fallacy that any form of reduc- 

tion is reductionism per se.

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<th>Mirrors and Labrytinths</th>
<th>Reproducing a man reproducing Times Square. 2019 Fieldwork. September 3</th>
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<td>(KD)</td>
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objects in action and describe what we see. Empirical studies are more important for him than for almost any other philosopher. (Ibid: 14).

Latour’s object-oriented philosophical proposal is going around what he calls the principle of irreducibility. This principle claims that: “[n]othing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else [...] but it is a prince that does not govern since that would be a self-contradiction.” [and he continues] “There are only trials of strength, of wellness. Or more simply, there are only trials. This is my point of departure: a verb “to try.” [...] It is because nothing is, by itself, reducible or irreducible to anything else that there are only trials (of strength, of weakness). What is neither reducible nor irreducible has to be tested, counted, and measured. There is no other way. [...] Everything may be made to be the measure of everything else.”

In 2013 Levi Bryant started a discussion on his blog (larvalsubjects) criticizing himself due to, two years before, he wrote an article defending Latour’s principle of Irreduction. “Having reflected on this principle in the intervening years, I can’t help but believe that it would be a catastrophe to any knowledge and any practices were it taken seriously. Why? Because [according to him] to explain is to reduce. The sciences explain the powers of H2O by reference to more elementary features of hydrogen and oxygen. Likewise, I explain the powers of hydrogen and oxygen by reference to more elementary particles.”

Bryant continued: “The problem with the principle of reduction, when taken at face value, is that it leads us to treat every entity as an ontological given. ‘God, is but a principle of [ir]reduction this is an illegitimate reduction! Therefore we must include God in our ontology!”’ ‘Your depression is a chemical imbalance, you say? Well by Latour’s principle of [ir]reduction this is an illegitimate reduction! That’s the criticism that’s usually leveled at this principle and it’s nonsensical. Ray Brassier’s “critique” of Irreductions in the cultural case is based almost entirely upon this elementary misunderstanding—a “quite simple principle”:

“Latour is never saying that we must stop “reducing” things altogether. That’s the criticism that’s usually leveled at this principle and it’s nonsensical. Ray Brassier’s “critique” of Irreductions in the cultural case is based almost entirely upon this elementary misunderstanding. [...] Reduction is more or less a *synonym* for relation —but you can only relate two things that are irreducible to each other (since otherwise there would not be two things at all). [...] The argument that science can only work by reduction fits with Latour’s axiom perfectly well. To reduce is to form a network. There’s no issue. But while science may reduce or explain ‘it doesn’t reduce away’ as in ‘explain away’ — there’s always a remainder."

Thus, good reductions are those descriptive—I guess always-ethno-graphic—exercises of expanding and relating elements (epistemological reductions) instead of just explaining them (theoretical reductionism). The trick has always been the same: following the actors and letting them talk when one is mapping their trajectories, encounters, and disagreements, in a situated way, but from many different places and using different lenses of observation. The point here is to conceive public spaces (regarding our interests in the linkage Urban Studies - STS) as actants, as temporal multiplicities composed by any kind of relations, avoiding the classical glance of considering them as solid and stable locations—where social situations happen.

In other words, public space is never a singularity or (only) a particular either element or scenario. Instead, Times Square, for instance, is a sort of collection, a kind of palimpsestic sum of situations and versions of that ideal and temporal stable element we have known as Times Square. That momentary situation is more a product of our efforts for approaching reality than a particular reality has. So, summing it up, when we talk about reducing an actant, we are tracing and disassembling a multiplicity—Deluze used rhizome as his epistemological tool for doing that, Borges used the concept of labyrinth—not with the idea of explaining it through the application of ready-made theories, but showing how that multiplicity is composed and recomposed constantly.

At least in this context, the difference between reduction and reductionism is that reductionism denies the emergence and existence of (almost all) mid-level entities. At the same time, it aims to seek the real substance behind what is understood as an element. This kind of reductionism, conceived as an ontological one, neglects the idiiosyncrasy of everything that is not alive. “There are not visible objects but men and women and cats and other living organisms, that are not tables or rocks or hands or legs.” (Irving, 1990: 18).

Let us take, for instance, the classic and oversaturated example of the rock that was thrown into a window16, and let us approach it lying on a conception of reductionism inspired by Inwagen’s materialism (ibid) and Merricks’ eliminativism (Merricks, 2001): A rock was thrown into a window, the window was broken. However, the rock was not the cause of the window being broke. In fact, nothing was broken because the window does not exist, neither the rock. What we have (because we as living organisms exist) is a lot of particles (materialism) or atoms (eliminativism) interacting outside among each other.

Reduction, on the other side, does not neglect the existence of mid-level entities but also recognizes their multiple, fragmentary, unstable, and collective being. We have, thus, the first case of reduction I aim to present, continuing with the example of the rock. A rock is a rock in the way it behaves like a rock. But it can also be, without any alteration of its components, a projectile, a craft tool, a decorative item. For instance, a rock is turned into a projectile being reduced into some of its properties: its hardness, its shape, its resistance, as well as into some of its possibilities of action: to hit, to break, to hurt.

Simultaneously, to reduce means to put an element in relation to a specific situation (situation, from now, must be understood as an acronym from situated and temporal association) in this case, a semantic one. A rock as a decorative item and reduced in terms of —but not necessarily in all of them— color, shape, texture, value, composition, and size is bonded to a sort of semantic structure. That structure gives the rock a distinct sense of being, based on the aesthetic interpretation and categorization of the properties above described what later we will understand as modes.

Of course, a rock and any other entity could be separated into its components. However, that movement is not reducing. Anything. It is just dis-joining an entity. Take a diamond and try to break it down into its physical structure. You will get a lot of carbon, but the diamond will be gone. Repeat the same process but this time into its physical properties: hardness transparency —let

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16. This metaphor has been used, repeatedly, but with different purposes and angles, for example, by Ekstrom (2018: 43) in order to discuss “free will,” by Campbell, et all. (2007: 129) for talking about “freedom and causal contribution,” by Skow (2018) referring to “causation.”
Those properties could be related to a piece of tive circumstance. For instance, the change of being of a rock, from a decorative into a projectile, obeys more to a relational circumstance with its outside than an inner issue related to its properties and composition. So, it means that an actant's ontol-ogy attends to its relationships with other ele-ments and its different actions, and the conforma-tion and later stabilization of those linkages where it is participating. The condition that an ele ment has is not a solid, immutable aspect that belongs to its pre-made and idealist essence. On the opposite, it is a mobile, multiple, and collec-tive circumstance.

“Nothing is, by itself, the same as or different from anything else. That is, there are no equivalents, only translations. In other words, everything happens only once, and at one place. If there are identities between actants, this is because they have been con-structed at great expense. If there are equiva-lences, this is because they have been built out of bits and pieces with much toil and sweat, and because they are maintained by force. If there are exchanges, these are always unequal and cost a fortune both to establish and to maintain.” (Latomu, 1988: 162).

words—over the pedestrian plaza B (see M01). And I wrote that sort of disclaimer over that set's location because, although it gives the impression of the contrary, that furniture is a mobile one. It means the personal of Times Square maintenance can move those loungers around the whole area, notwithstanding an average person in there will never be able to displace them. Anyways, let us try to reduce those elements through their official version first. Called “XXX Times Square with Love,” this usable installation composed of three pink loungers was created by German artist and architect Jürgen Mayer, and it was inaugurated on August 24th, 2016.

"XXX Times Square with Love" was commission ed by Times Square Arts, a division —a public program— of Times Square Alliance. According to its website (art-s.timesquarenyc.org), “the loungers were the first specially-commissioned ongoing street furniture for the new Times Square plazas.” Although Mayer is the main head behind this project, the fabrication and installation of those loungers were on UAP, a creative studio of artists, designers, and architects:

“UAP New York worked closely with J.MAYER.H. to explore fabrication methods and materiality suitable for all seasons. The final outcome incorporates a soft rubber turf within the seats, providing a comfortable experience for users during the summer heat. (uapsupply.com, n.d.).

Regarding this project, one can find on Mayer’s website a short description of its intention and inspiration for its installation: “Originally inspired by the X-like intersection of Broadway and 7th Avenue that forms Times Square, the loungers are the first specially-commissioned ongoing street furniture for the new Times Square plazas. Each ‘X’ of ‘XXX TIMES SQUARE WITH LOVE’ can accommodate up to four people, with each leg of the X serving as an almost-horizontal lounger that allows people to lie down and enjoy a totally different— and more leisurely— perspective than the bustling plazas of Times Square...” (jmayerh.de, n.d).

But, of course, the “XXX” design is a semiotic game with a double meaning. The X shape not only represents the traditional bowtie generated by the intersection between Broadway and 7th Avenue. The three pilled fuchsia “X” are a nod to the old times of Times Square, where the zone was full of porn theaters, prostitution, and sex shops. Nevertheless, that second meaning is not explicit in any official pieces of information produced by Times Square Alliance. One can find a reference on Mayer’s website related to an old photo of a porn theater in the Square and a short text on the UAP website referring to the “plaza’s X-rated past.” The loungers laying on the middle of Times Square over pedestrianized Broadway are, perhaps, the most accurate semiotic-material representation of Times Square one can find. They are three gigantic fuchsia X-shaped loungers made of shiny aluminum and rubber. They can be seen and recognized from far away. This furniture’s shape is a practical symbolism that turns the area's past into a pop-representation of itself. Using a spatial-material synecdoche, one can imagine Times Square’s geography being translated into an image, into a color-ful character, designed for laying down and rest.

The intention of laying down, of taking a pause, is going in the same direction that the idea of pedestrianizing Broadway in that zone. The loungers were designed to hyperbolize the pedestrian experience. People in those plazas not only have the possibility of walking and taking a seat, but they also can lay down, spending some time in there watching the sky and using their phones for recording the landscape around, for taking selfies, or for doing other activities. “They [the users of Times Square] can chill with a book from the new Strand book kiosk or, using the hashtag #TsqXXX, they can share their love on social media, tag friends, and send them ‘XXX TIMES SQUARE WITH LOVE!’” (jmayerh.de, n.d).

The hashtag’s implementation was an official attempt to promote the new space generated by the inclusion of the X-shaped furniture in Times Square in a global online way. The multi-spatiality and multimodal-ity study of that zone, the one that is going beyond its traditional geography, is also a way to approach a multiplied location in a

V05. XXX TIMES SQUARE WITH LOVE

Times Square has a collection of fasci-nating pieces of furniture (see, for example, V21). Most of those furnishings were designed by well-known either designers, architects, or artists, so the combination they projected on those objects, a mix of usability, symbolism, and aesthetic, blended with the multiple possible responses on usability by the actors outside, make those elements interesting devices to be observed and decomposed. One of those pieces of furniture is the set of three fuchsia giant X-shaped loungers one can find—at least at the moment of writing those
Those versions are not only projecting and doing over the loungers does not allow there are moments when what some people or there is a food stain on the rubber. Then, not seem hygienic enough for laying in, times when the empty spaces in the “X” does not matter what kind of element we are talking about. The ontological complication regarding this first idea of reduction is how to conceive a solid (but multiple) entity with multiple doings and beings.

Reduction does not have a straight direction but a bifurcated one. There is another possible route to take for understanding this movement: Reduction also means translating the world outside into structured explanations of the world itself. Those explanations are a broad category that “consists of those models of reduction that construct it as a relation of explanation in the sense that the reduced entity is explained by the reducing entity no matter whether these entities are the theories, laws, empirical generalizations even individual observation reports” (Sarkar, 1992: 170).

Some complications arise at this point. The first one is that reduction does not mean easiness at the opposite. If we agree that an element — it does not matter what kind of element we are talking about — is always a multiple set of relationships, the act of reducing it into its practices, its affordances, or into its modes implies a continuous work on observing, on translating, on re-signifying, on relating, and on reproducing each one of the possibilities of being and doing it may have. But how multiple a multiplicity is? How to deal with multiplicity from a limited and located perspective?

A quick answer to the first question would be: a multiplicity is as multiple as the number of relations where it is participating. The second question does not have a fast way to be solved. In fact, one could approach this issue from different places in order to expand and, at the same time, to reduce the discussion regarding facing what is multiple. There are two proposed ways — for sure it may be more — where a possible answer could be found: One could take that question as a methodological matter of multimodal ethnography (go to A05-C2) or as a matter of socio-technical translation (see A05-C1).

Understanding, right now, I would like to shortly essay another way that might take us to a possible answer to the question that remains unsolved, the one regarding the mechanisms and tactics for approaching (reducing) a multiple multiplicity. The route I plan to explore is based on Michel Serres’ work on Leibniz’s idea of “enriching our models of thinking.” I will put aside Serres’ noisy proposal of multiplicity, only focusing on his schematic and structuralist modeling method. Modeling modes for representing and locating ideas is one of the most exciting and challenging topics one can take from Serres’ work. So, I intend to find a model of reducing Serres’ methodological models that can show us a proposal to reduce and expand an element.

In a conversation with Michel Serres, Bruno Latour (Serres & Latour, 1990) proposed the metaphor of “time machine” to understand and represent how Serres used to construct his texts. Serres’ production, often accused — in both positive and negative ways — of poetry (Ibid: 44), is considered “difficult to read because [he] does not affiliate [himself] with any precise tradition. He has ‘neither masters nor disciples’” [Ibid: 43], as well as due to his way of considering literature and philosophy (humanistic cultures) as valid — and necessary — interlocutors for scientific culture to approach reality in its whole (See Serres, 1982). We have here a first, although kind of abstract, idea of reduction. We will come back to it later.

The supposed “time machine” Serres had for constructing his academic production grants a total “freedom of movement” that allows him to “find himself in Ancient Rome then proof! in Vedic India then among the animals and then proof! in politics and then, without warning, among theorems.” (Serres & Latour, 1990: 44). But that freedom Latour highlights goes beyond a heterogeneous and anachronistic selection of topoi, contexts, and places. It is, of course, a matter of time. However, it is not about moving oneself between different times. It is about the act of mobilizing specific times, organizing them together, into the same space of representation.

Christopher Watkin (2005) translated on his website two paragraphs from Le Système de Leibniz et ses modèles mathématiques (Serres, 1968) I consider that could help understand why and how Serres’ work — inspired by Leibniz — on (i) a sort of mathematical modeling as a method, and on (ii) time, could be considered as another way of understanding the furniture. Below you will find the proposed translation of those paragraphs made by Watkin:

“Bergson critiqued the reduction of time to space as a fundamental error; it is clear that we must say quite the opposite. The measure we have of time (by and by that token of evolutionary processes as well) stems from the fact that we make of use of it space (and it is space alone that allows us to give rigor to the idea of continuity), or from the fact that we always use its opposite, namely the line. We deny space and think we are talking about time; by this very denial we speak about the line.

So, in order to extend Leibnizian thought by generalizing it we must take seriously the idea of differentiation into multiple elementary times (in some complex transformation) to which we could refer the evolution in question. Then and again, we must consider the line as the model (in other words, the formal representation) of one of these times. Finally, we must project the multiplicity of these lines in a space of representation. Together they would then define a complex surface, a figure of evolution, which would contain “chimneys” of strong acceleration or infinite growth, “mountains passes,” we signal the end of an “ascent” and the beginning of a “descent,” and areas with motionless lines and so forth, even tears… The notion of progress would then become local, regional, like that, of decadence, accumulation, cessation, etc., and so it would become crude to talk about the progress of science, the decadence of a civilization, the maturity of a revolutionary situation, or the genesis of psychology, because this would be to reduce a global evolution to a linear sequence. The fact that as we write this we have before our eyes a mathematical model unknown to us, which is, generally speaking, lamentably poor. Whereas science noticeably employs incredibly fine-grained structures, we are still philosophizing with the help of unrefined models and schemas, with techniques of thought which have hardly progressed.”
The idea of multiple times, each of them represented by a line¹⁷, tied together in multiple ways, proposes us to explore and experiment with new models of organizing and representing the world outside. In other words, to conceive reality as a sort of space of representation of different lines of time — the line should be understood as a model to project-specific, local and trajectories — what Serres calls as contemporaneity (Serres & Latour, 1990: 45; 47), is an invitation to design our own ways of connecting those trajectories in a sort of an (urban) assemblage shaped by, and this is one of the proposals of this dissertation, the (situated) world we are trying to deconstruct.

This particular idea of a structural model composed of multiple times in Michel Serres can be represented in Borges' The garden of forking paths. We are talking here about a sort of mediated labyrinth containing a heterogeneous set of temporal aggregates that are assembled and unassembled continuously by the movements generated (in the case of this work) by the ethnographer at the moment of translating — it means of reducing — the world outside to a different media. However, and this is the "freedom of movement" Latour was pointing before, there is not a unique way of doing that.

What was clear to Serres is that approaching and projecting the world that is there required a collaborative and symmetrical work between what he has called man culture (the humanities) and the scientific culture. Nevertheless, either the model, the path, the strategy, the route, or any other similar term to call the way of approaching reality must be constructed to take care of each situation's particularities. "One might say that Serres’ models are 'readymades' rather than generalized concepts since they are invented afresh with each investigation. Furthermore, having identified a model, rather than simply generalize at will, Serres insists upon demonstrating the model through the gradual addition and substitution of new elements." (Brown, 2002: 3).

To talk about reduction following Serres is to point to a sort of horizontal cognitive syncretism were to reduce means to coordinate; to coordinate means to mediate; to mediate means to create linkages between different ways to think and to approach reality recognizing that there is not only either a correct or a consistent manner of facing the world. "The main importance of his philosophy for the study of science is that he is one of the few philosophers to be utterly uninterested in the notion of a critique, be it transcendental or social. As a consequence, he makes no distinction between language and metalanguage, using a poem, a myth, a theorem, or a machine as something that explains as well as something to be explained. (Latour, 1988: 258).

To reduce is to organize a multiple world constantly flowing and happening simultaneously into a multiple structure that can contain and project that movement of simultaneity. However, the interferences and complications related to each part of the speech are continually reminding us there is not a single path, a single way to build a structure to represent the world outside and, at the same time, that there is not a single kind of structure we can construct and use for doing that.

But, and as an exercise of reflection, and a challenge to what we think is solidified, are we really sure that those elements composing the central question of this dissertation — What can (i) “STS” (ii) “learn from” (iii) “Times Square” for (iv) “doing ethnography”? — are valid conceptual elements? If we expect to reduce them, to use them, to represent them, we need to know first what we are talking about when we are referring, for example, to STS or to Times Square. Also, it is necessary to see if they are valid or not. But what does valid mean here?

There are two ways of going to find the answer to the question above. As it usually happens in these kinds of situations, there is a short way and a long way one can take. The short one is going directly to Chapter tree.one. There you will find a passage for exploring the idea of validity and its consequences. The long one is following each element composing the inquiry we already know. Also, there is a third possibility, not a way, but a possibility of dealing with that question: continuing with this dissertation’s spirit, you can choose the order of the components. Also, you can go first to validity and going back. Anyways, the options are multiple, and they are up to you.

¹⁷. Line was also a metaphor essayed by Deleuze (see de Miranda, 2013) for talking about trajectories, associations and aggregates: "The rising ground is no longer below, it acquires autonomous existence; the form reflecting itself in this ground is no longer a form but an abstract line acting directly upon the soul" (Deleuze 1994[1968]: 37). “Further in his writings, and particularly in his dialogues with Claire Parnet, Deleuze asserts quite simply that: ‘Whether we are individuals or groups, we are made up of lines’” (Deleuze and Parnet 2007: 124, referenced by de Miranda, 2013:107). For a deeper distinction between lines: molar, molecular and rupture ones see de Miranda, 2013: 110).
CHAPTER TWO

Reducing Urban, expanding STS

"Indeed, Latour’s central thesis is that an actor is its relations. All features of an object belong to it; everything happens only once, at one time, in one place. But this means that Latour rejects another well-known feature of traditional substance: its durability. We generally speak of the same dog existing on different days over many years, but for Latour this would ultimately be no more than a figure of speech. It would entail that we abstract an enduring dog-substance or dog-essence from an entire network of relations or trials of strength in which the dog is involved at each moment of its life. ultimately the unified ‘dog’ is a sequence of closely related heirs, not an enduring unit encrusted with shifting accidents over time."

Graham Harmann (2009: 17),
Prince of Networks

CHAPTER CONTENT

(i) An ontological decomposition of STS.
(ii) An introductory state of the art of urban STS.
(iii) Two ways of approaching urban STS without urban and without the city

P10. CONCOMITANCE AND DISSIMILARITY

What can STS learn from Times Square for doing ethnography?

Let us begin this section by exploring an ontological complication¹⁸ (OC). This OC has stated in the sentence's noun turned into the main question to solve during all this research: STS. Is STS a valid subject? That question turns relevant when it is brought in line with a couple of related issues: Can we talk about a solid, well delimited, and stable element at the moment of referring to STS? What is STS anyways? Is it a framework, a background, an additive, a set of either theories or programs?

For this section's purposes, let us suppose that STS is a valid subject. But what kind of STS am I talking with and about? and what does STS do? Is also STS interested in doing ethnography? Let us hope so! Coming back to the common thread of questions and complications, perhaps the most essential situation to solve first should be: what is behind the acronym “STS”? Well, it depends. Some scholars use it for “Science, Technology and Society,” others for “Science and Technology Studies.” Even though it seems like a subtle one, that variation displays two different epistemological visions and matters of concern of a supposedly same ontological entity.

Steve Fuller (1997) takes care of the distinction between both terms using what he has called as “High Church” and “Lower Church” for naming both approaches respectively: “There is probably a broad political consensus between the High and Low Churches regarding a generally critical attitude toward the role of science and technology in society today. However, the High Church stresses the need for more research to understand the complexities of that role. In contrast, the Low Church wishes to reduce some of those complexities by reorienting science and engineering education.” (Ibid: 181).

We can say that, among other aspects, the distinction between “Science and Technology Studies” and “Science, Technology, and Society” proposed by Fuller could be considered as a matter of public. Drawing a simile between those two concepts and science journalism terminology, the High Church focuses on the production and the distribution of scientific knowledge among scientific—small and well-defined—communities. Its language, methods, and format are complex and highly specialized. Meanwhile, the Low Church is about the divulgation of scientific knowledge among bigger groups. Its language is less elaborated but more didactic and generalist.

We have, on the one hand, “Science and Technology Studies” (Sismodo, 2004; Lynch, 2012) as a sort of territory where the meanings, the issues, the relations, the applications, and challenges, as its name says, of science and technology are discussed and studied from different disciplines. This version of STS is “an intellectually dynamic interdisciplinary arena that [...] from its origins in philosophical and political debates about the creation and use of scientific knowledge [...] has become a wide and deep space for consideration of the place of science and technology in the world, past and present.” (Kleinman & Moore, 2014:1). On the other hand, and offering a different perspective than Fuller’s churches, the inclusion of the term “Society” (Kranzberg, 1991; May, 1992; Bauschpies et al., 2006) implies to stress a cause-effect relationship between science-and-technology, and some kind of entity called as society. The mutual shaping of technology and society (MSTS) (Lievrouw, 2006; Boczkowski, 2004) is an academic approach that takes care of the constant interferences and feedbacks between science-technology —mostly technology—and that society thing, as a bidirectional imbrication of affection that is linking technological innovations to societal issues/experiences.

¹⁸ For a definition of what an ontological complication is, please go to P07.
MSTS aims to go further than other approaches that have conceived, in a linear way, the relationships between science-technology and society. It means that MSTS overcomes any kind of determinism, either social or technological, recognizing a permanent imbrication, a mutual shaping process of affecting and transforming each other, not always in a positive way, though. This imbrication is what Sheila Jasanoff (2004: 3) understands as the “interconnectivity of nature and society.” Society is thus in STS—at first sight—an abstract and blurred construction, a sort of actant, that is in a constant exchange with science and technology. But what are we referring to when we talk about society? One can take two ways to understand society: (I) using a generalist perspective, (II) following a particularistic one. Each one of those possible paths is linked to a sociological tradition. It means it is supported by a previous set of theoretical and methodological discussions and by a corpus of empirical publications in the shape of books and papers. However, to present and relate both ways, I will rely on Latour’s (2005) discussion about the “social.” Below, there is a brief presentation of the proposed discussion:

“[W]hen social scientists add the adjective ‘social’ to some phenomenon, they designate a stabilized state of affairs, a bundle of ties that, later, may be mobilized to account for some other phenomenon. There is nothing wrong with this use of the word as long as it designates what is already assembled together, without making any superfluous assumption about the nature of what is assembled. Problems arise, however, when ‘social’ begins to mean a type of material, as if the adjective was roughly comparable to other terms like ‘wooden’, ‘steely’, ‘biological’, ‘economical’, ‘mental’, ‘organizational’, or ‘linguistic’. At that point, the meaning of the word breaks down since it now designates two entirely different things: first, a movement during a process of assembling; and second, a specific type of ingredient that is supposed to differ from other materials.” (1)

So, the first way of going through the meaning of society is assuming that concept as a sort of solidified but, at the same time, blurred material. A generalist perspective implies to conceive society as a supposed kind of amorphous conceptual thing used as a homogenizing element for invigorating any type of exchange between science-and-technology and other realms. In other words, society is:

“[A] specific domain of reality; [that] can be used as a specific type of causality to account for the residual aspects that other domains (psychology, law, economics, etc.) cannot completely deal with; it is studied by specialized scholars called sociologists or socio-(x)—‘x’ being the placeholder for the various disciplines. (Latour, 2005:4).

On the contrary, a particularist perspective—the perspective used for developing this work—“claims that there is nothing specific to social order; that there is no social dimension of any sort, no ‘social context’, no distinct domain of reality to which the label ‘social’ or ‘society’ could be attributed; that no ‘social force’ is available to ‘explain’ the residual features other domains cannot account for.” (Ibid). What is understood as society is any temporal stabilization of any kind of elements rather than a particular domain. In this order of ideas, the usage of Society inside the acronym “STS” results to be unreliable and ambiguous since there is not a domain we can call by that name.

Notwithstanding, it does not mean we should discard that term as well as all the derived ones. Not at all. What we should do instead is being more precise at the moment of using them. It means we need to be specific with both signified and significant. For instance, Latour proposes the idea of association for talking about those kinds of temporal groups “made of ties which are themselves non-social. [Sociologist of associations] should travel whenever new heterogeneous associations are made.” (Ibid: 8). So, to use the concept society implies to clarify what kind of temporal association we are talking about here.

The idea of “Science, Technology, and Society” is reduced to a limited, to a unique, to a specific, kind of group formation opened to any type of aggregates. Suppose we decompose that triad in a sort of unity of sense. In that case, we have an open set of specific and linked components, what is here understood as a society, where science and technology—two elements not yet defined—are participating too. The shape and scope of that temporal formation will depend on the resources and the researcher’s empirical constructions in the field.

In the case of this piece of research, and extrapolating “society” to my study object, to talk about Times Square results to be insufficient and completely ambiguous. One can be confused easily using that term as a wildcard without knowing what it is pointing or replacing. I mean, there is an infinity of virtual and actual elements and situations that can be labeled under the name of “Times Square.” As a sort of illustrative exercise, below you can find ten examples of different either associations or situations having Times Square as a name:

- The conjunction of Broadway Avenue and the 7th Avenue in New York City.
- A touristic area in the middle of Manhattan composed of twenty blocks.
- A point on a map.
- An imaginary, in fact, tons of them.
- A working place.
- A zone to regulate.
- A place to dispute.
- The background of a photograph.
- A tourist trap.
- A piece of history of New York City.

Times Square from the red stairs. 2019
Fieldwork. August 12

That is why it is indispensable always to be clear about what is that association one is framing, decomposing, and describing. I know, to be continually announcing what piece of fluid reality one is stabilizing is a reiterative and exhausting job. Also, this activity will make everything going slowly, not only for the one who is writing but for the reader-user too. However, I am convinced that there is no other way one can take for encompassing, exhausting, and projecting an urban location, understanding that particular place as a temporal association of a kind of elements and where science and technology are participating.
P11. OPENING SOCIETY

A society is a temporal association of different ontologies. It is a possibility expanded until the limits of its affordances.

P11a. A model for organizing intensities

There is an open-source tool developed by the Knight Lab called Timeline Js. As its name is pointing, that device “enables anyone to build visually rich, interactive timelines.” (timeline js). The frontend of a random finished of those products is divided and composed of two different spaces. The bottom area is appropriately displaying the metaphor of the timeline. One can navigate through a particular set of years and select the available events the author of the timeline has carefully compiled one by one. Once an event is selected, this is displayed on the top area as a short description with either an image or a video.

The timeline has three buttons located at the bottom left corner of the screen: one is for zooming in, another one is for zooming out, and there is a final one for coming back to the previous event. Understanding Times Square as an abstraction, as a general way to name different sets of collective understandings products collaboratively made —what we call associations from an ANT perspective—one can metaphorize this location as an interactive but epistemologically limited, and ontologically incomplete timeline. I guess you may be thinking I just go trapped by “the illusion of the zoom” (Latour 2012) (also see P08. Ontological incompleteness). However, this is not an issue of scales but of organizing and representing information.

To think of Times Square as an abstraction is to recognize it as a temporal association, as a produced element by the continuous repetition —by the translation— of the world outside into new materiality. When we talk about Times Square, we generally refer to a bounded and located piece of reality isolated, either by us or by someone else. That portion of reality has its own ontological meaning and limits, this document, for example. To highlight this part is essential because “we don’t want to confuse the cause and the effect, the explanandum with the explanans” (Latour 2005:93), the world that is there with our interpretations of that world.

Notwithstanding, and how it was pointed at the end of P10 when we talk about Times Square, we refer to an ambiguous element because it is a signifier hosting multiple signifieds. Those signifieds are different ontological entities and particular temporal and spatial stabilizations with different scopes and magnitudes. The already pointed condition reality has, of being always changing, plus our inability of describing that perpetual movement is turning the ethnographic work into a matter of compiling and organizing descriptions.

We are dealing here with a similar situation faced, repeatedly, by Bergson (2001[1913]; 2004[1912]; 2007[1946]) regarding how to encompass time. One of the main subjects in Bergson’s work was related to our [as individuals] incapacity of approaching time and “how real time [...] eludes mathematical [and scientific] treatment. Its essence being to flow, not one of our measures is immobile, time is mobility.” (ibid: 2-3).

That line one is measuring, once measured, acquires a spatial magnitude that is, precisely, stabilizing it by giving those time intervals some boundaries and limits. However, the idea of an interactive timeline as a model of ethnographic representation is not proposing a sort of continuity among different spaces and times but to repeat and perform those dissimilarities, those different durations, highlighting their differences, intensities, and equivocations. The point here is not starting a mindless race against reality by aiming it but, at least, to try to chase it through a descriptive set of multimodal exercises based on the production of multiple units of meaning.

Despite its name, the digital timeline metaphor does not want to create the effect that there is a linear and scalar reality where small (temporal-spatial) events are contained into bigger ones, neither that reality is evolving, happening, in a positive way. What this device is doing is to organize and compile different situations, taking care of their particularities but also recognizing their possible linkages and contaminations. To conceive Times Square as a digital timeline is to face an epistemological challenge of constructing flat and interactive structures where the ethnographer can intuitively host its descriptions. Still, following the patterns and rhythms, that particular bounded reality—its study object—is proposing it.

There is a structural particularity regarding how users can face and use this version of Times Square. This singularity is related to their dynamic and—I hope so!— independent role as co-creators of this work. For example, and as a speculative exercise, a user can situate itself in front of the timeline, zooming out the device to display Times Square as a sum of linear events where the transformation (Disneyfication/ renovation) of that particular place can be appreciated. Although this mechanism was not planned as a linear device, an independent user—with any kind of previous experience—can easily mold the timeline structure in that way.

Nevertheless, what that user is doing, despite the frontend of the device is displaying a linear representation of Times Square, is stretching and contracting that element—experimenting with its plasticity—by assembling and disassembling different temporalities and spatialities, creating a particular and a continuous way of organizing and displaying information. That way can be modified and transformed by any user, employing all the possible resources the timeline is offering it and—it is also plausible—even going beyond those by adding its findings and structures.

The ontological incompleteness of an urban place, more than an epistemological inconvenience, is an opportunity for exploring and essaying different ways of expanding that element. The timeline metaphor proposes a flat structure that stores and displays the different versions of a bounded location isolated and translated into another materiality as a container. To navigate through Times Square, as a timeline, requires an embodied and a situated movement based on interacting with the different and horizontally organized versions of that element, recognizing their singularities and linkages but also taking advantage of them by moving, melting, relocating, and constructing new and temporal associations, (other) different versions of the same abstraction.

P11b. Abstractions and possibilities

A digital timeline is composed of different situations temporally and spatially located. Those situations also have their own structures and sizes. The extension of a timeline is always varying depending more on the ethnographer's abilities and resources than on the kind of element it is trying to describe. The result of building a flat structure for displaying different ontologies, spatialities, and temporalities, like the one proposed with the digital timeline metaphor, does not have to be linear.

20. “Northwestern University Knight Lab is a community of designers, developers, students, and educators working on experiments designed to push journalism into new spaces.” (Knight Lab, about us. Retrieved from: https://knightlab.northwestern.edu/about/)
The name “timeline” may be tricky, but if you stretch this labyrinthine device, you will realize how its structure is similar to the interactive timeline model. It means a flat, but rugged framework made of different magnitudes resulted from grasping and compiling different intensities that are happening, simultaneously, outside. Those intensities are, for instance, composed of thousands of effervescent encounters and sporadic linkages made of heterogeneous elements as well as massive infrastructures and complex systems. Times Square is thus an abstraction but also a potentiality with multiple possibilities of being. It is a multiplicity, not only because of its multiple and interchangeable elements but also due to its multiple beings and multiples temporalities. One can assemble Times Square by mixing and matching its diverse intensities, but what results even more interesting is to observe, and of course to describe, how this location results even more interesting is to observe, and of course to describe, how this location

however, and despite all the changes and differences inside a specific site (Times Square in our case), as well as despite its ontological diversity related to its capacity of making relations, there is something — in fact, that something is also a set of different components — a sort of bridge, that is connecting and melting multiple temporalities into a single one. That imbrication gives the sensation, the false sense, that what is happening outside is regulated by universal, or perhaps by scientific, chronology. The notion of multistability thus simultaneously highlights two points: (1) multiple relations to a technology are always possible, and (2) this potential is at the same time limited by the technology’s materiality, i.e., the particularities if its physical composition.” (376-377).

Let us bring the two temporal elements behind STS again: (i) Science, Technology and Society, the low church, and (ii) Science and Technology Studies, the high one. If the first church is about those particular, temporal, and well-delimited spaces — associations — composed by heterogeneous elements, science, and technology included, the approach and representation of those spaces is a matter of the second one. In other words, those two churches, those two signified, are complementary elements instead of being either two different points of view or just a matter of different public.

Meanwhile, Science, Technology and Society is referring to those effervescent associations we can find outside — what we bound and stabilize as our study objects — Science and Technology Studies is pointing to those epistemological tactics and tools we use and deploy for bounding, stabilizing, describing and projecting our study objects: those temporal entanglements, controversies, and situations where science and technology are intervening — in the case of this work and based on the interests of who is behind it — in urban public open places.

Having now a first approach to the different meanings behind the acronym “STS,” it is possible for us to move forward in this conceptualization of STS. Rather than being conceived as an academic discipline, the first contact point of STS in this piece of research will be understanding it as a particular but broad and heterogeneous field of knowledge, as a container gathering efforts, tools, publications, discussions, and, in general terms, any kind of elements around the systematic study and application of science and technology in particular, located, and well-defined situations.

To understand STS as a field means to stress our academic efforts over particular — in this case — urban amalgams of any kind of aggregates happening (affecting and being affected) simultaneously over a specific location. To understand STS as a field means using any type of available tools we have, from any discipline, to encompass, relate, and display those heterogeneous formations happening in a situated way. The purpose and primary characteristic of a field is its capacity of generating a sort of concomitance — not always in a pacific way — between dissimilar.

“The primary task of a field [...] is to focus a variety of such analytic disciplines on one set of concrete phenomena (thus medicine is concerned with the human body, education with the institution of education, international relations with the relations among national states — and each of these fields consists, essentially, of a variety of the basic disciplines working together).” (Popenoe, 1963:21).

Notwithstanding, another complication arises. If we agree that STS is a study field, how is that possible to add STS or to mix it with other study fields such as, for example, the urban one? What are we talking about when we are referring to Urban-STS? Is that new construction a more prominent field that is encompassing both (sub) fields? Or, on the contrary, are we still talking about STS just that it is a different kind of STS? Is it ontologically possible to have different types of STS?

Let us move now to the High Church, to the terrains of Science and Technology Studies. The idea of this section is to visit two different locations inside that place. The first location will offer us an overview of the encounter of STS and Urban Studies. The second one will situate the studies of sciences and technology in the domains and logics of this piece of research. It means we will construct a bunch of epistemological and multimodal sets of tools for exploring and displaying the multi-ontological world outside.
There is a branch on digital or cyberinfrastructure (Graham, 2010; Marvin and Medd, 2010; Larkin, 2013; Morita, 2016) and there is another one, just for naming a few, on urban infrastructures. This one will be expanded in P13c.

SCOT, the second main tradition already pointed, has been a branch of sociotechnical and technoscientific imaginaries as policymaking elements. (Jasanoff, 1990, 2003, 2004, 2006). Recently, a growing and unstructured group of scholars has been focused on the political role of imagination in the (social) process of co-production (Jasanoff, 2004b) of science and technology (Fortun and Fortun, 2006; Ezrahi, 2004; Fujimura, 2003; Kitcher, 2001; Mackenzie, 1996).

In a certain way, all the main three sub-fields have approached those urban matters using the strategy of applying their theoretical and methodological corpora to particular problems either related to, happening in, generated by, or resulted from different processes of urbanization and solidification of cities as strategic nodes of any kind of political, economic, cultural, and ecological—scenarios. Also, the STS explorations of the urban have taken for granted the existence and coherence of the urban field. Tacitly, they also have endorsed the city as the locus and the focus of the urban STS academic efforts.

21. The author of this work assumes that who is reading those words is familiar with STS approaches and its disciplinary divisions. However, next, there is a short definition of the aim of each sub-discipline: (1) LTS: Large Technical Systems (LTS) (Hughes 1986, Hughes & Mayntz 1988), (ii) Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) (Pinch & Bijker, 1984; Bijker, Hughes & Pinch 1989; Aibar and Bijker 1997), and (iii) Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Callon 1984, Law & Lodge 1984; Latour 1987). Each of those three perspectives, which peak of consolidation was the 90s, has been fed by many other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, history, geography, economy, philosophy, and politics.

Nevertheless, and during the last 20 years, those three traditions have continually moved and changed and produced new debates and academic sub-fields. We have, for instance, regarding the first tradition, the work of Susan Leigh Star (1999; Star and Ruhleder, 1996) on infrastructures and the posterior booming and dissemination of this object across different study fields. There is a branch on digital or cyberinfrastructures (Millerand and Baker, 2010; Ribes, 2014; Vertesi et al., 2016; Vertesi, 2019; Allhutter, 2019; Wintheriek, Maguire and Watts, 2019); another one is pointing to knowledge infrastructures (Bowker, 1994, 2005; Bowker et al. 2010; Hine, 2006; Pollock and Williams, 2010); there is a third branch of an anthropofor infrastructures (Graham, 2010; Marvin and Medd, 2010; Larkin, 2013; Morita, 2016) and there is another one, just for naming a few, on urban infrastructures. This one will be expanded in P13c.

Chapter two

VO6. THE FREE-WIFI EXPERIMENT

Times Square is a fragile place. In 2016 a solitary homeless man was caught watching porn using the tablet of a free WIFI kiosk located around the Square. Immediately the news made a big echo of this issue, tracing an imaginary relationship between this man and the recent past of the zone, the one before its renovation. “Porn booth is back. Times Square restores sleazy reputation with ‘free WiFi’ was the headline of an online news portal (rt.com). Try to search online “Horny Homeless Men Use Times Square Wi-Fi To Watch Porn” and count how many websites are using the same line. I counted twelve.

A random tourist interviewed by the New York Post was complaining about the situation. He said that, right now, Times Square was much worse than in the 70s because, at least at that time, the porn was indoors. “I used to come here in the ’70s, and I remember thinking Times Square was as sketchy as you could get, but I was wrong,” said former New Yorker Richard Herzberg, 61, who now lives in Dallas, Texas. “This is as skeezy as Times Square could get. I mean, in the old days there was plenty of porn, but you could only see it behind closed doors. So at least there was that level of modesty.” (Messing et al., 2016, June)

Suddenly, it was not just one single man. It turned out that watching porn using those WIFI kiosks was a repetitive behavior of some homeless men around the whole city (Chung, 2016, July 28). However, the case in Times Square, which was not even the first one of those incidents, was the one that got more relevant. And it could not be in a different way. The capacity of hyperbolizing (see PO4) that Times Square has is making everything bigger. Including this particular location in the header of a piece of news gives the information more relevance and visibility. Times Square is a magnetic place that can capture many people’s eyes inside and outside the city.

The free Wi-Fi kiosks, officially called links, are multifunctional structures spread out around the five boroughs. Using one of those hubs, announced as the new technological devices replacing the old, and every time, less used phone booths, it is possible to call any land phone in the United States, including 911. They also offer the option of charging smartphones, as well as of navigating through the city services. But their main feature is that one can go online, either using the browser of the tablet or via WIFI. All is for free. Well, kind of. The kiosks’ business model is based on showing ads and collecting users’ data. So, the users are paying for that service with their personal and behavioral information.

LinkNYC is a project of CityBridge, a consortium made up of three companies: Intersection, Qualcomm, and CIVIQ. Smartscapes. The idea of creating those devices came out of the intention of replac ing the city’s paid-phone system with a more modern technology that would provide a broader service to the whole New York citizens. Especially to the poorest. Those experimental spots were launched in December 2015 after more than three years of work that included a pilot program in 2012. This program consisted of adding a router to the existing paid-phones and a “call for proposals” in 2013 to substitute those old structures permanently.

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In theory, the installation of those kiosks represented a significant advance in implementing new communication technologies and information in urban places and the usage of the public structure as a strategy for improving the streetwalking experience. Nevertheless, when the kiosks were in the sidewalks, the whole plan had to be re-adjusted. Since the beginning, one of the aims of this idea was to provide better connectivity, offering a service more in concordance to our times. It means more digital, anticipated and protected. Those intelligent towers were on the streets proposing a new model of a smart city.

But the response of a portion of the New Yorkers was a little bit unexpected (was it?). They started to use those kiosks in particular ways: watching porn and (also some of them) masturbating, disturbing the neighborhood playing music with a high volume, monopolizing the spots for long periods, or even using the kiosks as spots for selling and consuming drugs. Those kinds of situations forced them to readjust the whole project, especially in terms of digital security. Surprisingly, the most critical concern of the ones recently mentioned was related to the NSFs (no safe for streets) content.

Despite some improvements in the algorithm regulating the kind of websites the device could display, people continued finding ways to watch porn and visiting sites with inappropriate content. So, after many attempts to keep it safe, the final answer of LinkNYC was disabling the web browsing function of the tablets. However, it is still possible to navigate through the city services using them. The WiFi service never disappeared. Another big concern about implementing those kiosks and their ways of operating was regarding the users’ privacy.

As I already pointed before, these towers were collecting users’ personal and behavioral data. The reason for doing that was summarized as “commercial purposes.” Notwithstanding, those purposes remained unclear. Simultaneously, some people and organizations (Electronic Frontier Foundation and New York Civil Liberties Union) started to suspect that those kiosks were more instruments for surveillance—especially for monitoring low-income communities—than just part of a free WiFi program. Also, the presence of Google as the owner of one of the companies, InsiteLinkNYC, further increased the halo of suspicions around the project.

Even a group of New Yorkers decided to create an online platform, “ReThink LinkNYC,” to restore the whole LinkNYC program. Their demands are: First, to remove all the elements and features they consider can be used as surveillance devices: Bluetooth beacons, cameras, and the whole collecting data strategy. Second, they want that the city provides a community-WiFi service based on people, not on corporations. Their agenda is based on developing online activism and implementing a campaign for sticking anti-LinksNYC stickers around the city.

Each of those kiosks can store the location, the type of device, browser, operating system, and much other sensitive data from the users’ phones (Kofman, 2018 September 8). But this algorithmic mode of control is not the only one. The towers are equipped with two cameras continually recording the area surrounding the device. Yes, the cameras can record their users too. Regarding all the doubts about those devices, the version of CityBridge (“CityBridge Policy”) is that they are collecting that information for administrative, research, security, statistical, and testing reasons. Moreover, they can share it with a third party in many different scenarios.

During the first field-exploration I made in Times Square in September 2017, I did not see many people using the installed tablets in the kiosks. But what I noticed there was how pedestrians were accessing the free WiFi. It looks like the other offered services are there just for being used in a few specific cases. However, during the second fieldwork in 2019, I found people in different places of New York making calls and charging their devices in there. Even one night, near Chelsea Market, I saw one guy lying in a wooden chair beside one Kiosk taking a nap and charging his phone.

Nevertheless, some scholars had warned of a supposed lack of interest from STS to city, “[either to the city per se or to the city as a strategic research site.” (Hommel, 2005: 325). Precisely, in her work about obscurity and the city—focused on Technology Studies rather than on Science ones—, Anique Hommels is extending her concerns about that situation. According to her, that “lack of attention for the relationship between cities and technologies is regrettable, because [and quoting Johnson-McGrath, 1997:696] correctly urban technologies are: ‘arti-facts whose use and design are deeply embedded in and reflective of the values of urban culture. These artifacts have politics, economics, geogra-phy, and socioeconomic class, and the study of them, so easily done in vivo and in situ, offers one of the most accessible, yet richly textured means of studying technology.’” (Hommels, 2005: 326)

But nowadays, to talk about that alleged lack of attention from STS seems to be a more problematic enterprise than before. There are two main reasons behind that situation: (i) Today, we have a more robust and varied urban-STS bibliography than 15 years ago. (ii) Retrospectively, it is easier to see that the usage of city was not a necessary condition for working in between STS and urban studies. Precisely, regarding the first point, in a paper called STS in the City, Ignacio Farias and Anders Blok (2017) propose a sort of academic inventory of the different relationships between STS and urban studies. Below, I will replicate the highlights of their review, without making any intention of going more in-depth on the debates across that imbrication but aiming to create a sort of index of the works and explorations in this emergent field.

P12a. A radiography of Urban-STS

As it was already proposed in P13a, the idea of this passage is to present, in a quick way, the different collisions between STS and urban studies that were already compiled in STS in the City by Farias and Blok (2019). There are two reasons for including in this dissertation a bare review of an already existent review. First, this exercise responds to Hommels’ concern (2005) about that supposed lack of interest from STS to urban matters. Second, it is necessary to situate my piece of research inside an academic tradition that not only conceives urban spaces as valid study objects in STS, but that is also continuing to grow its scope through the bidirectional epistemological experimentation of urban matters. So, the authors have divided their efforts of facing the encounters around urban/city and STS in three different moments:

[Those moments are] “three distinct avatars of STS in the city, each shaped by specific academic traditions, empirical sensibilities, and political concerns. The first section will review STS approaches that explicitly address the workings of science and technology in the city as a whole and unpack the technoscientific objects and practices overlooked by urban studies. The second section will be dedicated to STS work on the built environment, focusing on conceptual challenges associated with understanding what buildings do and how architects work on their realization. The third and final section will review what has been recently discussed as assemblage urbanism and which involves various attempts at studying cities and urban life via perspectives and concepts provided by actor-network theory (ANT) and related intellectual projects.” (557)

Moment one

This one, called Science and Technology in the City, starts with one of the famous controversies around Robert Moses’ bridges. The controversy was initiated by Winner (1980), who was arguing that “urban infrastructural artifacts should be seen as technical objects” (Farias and Blok, 2017: 557), and continued by Bernard Joerges (1999), extending the logic of planning and the composition of those devices to other domains such as economy and law. Finally, we have the intervention of Steve Woolgar and Geoff Cooper (1999) that “is an understanding of the effects of socio-technical artifacts in cities (as elsewhere) as contingent and subject to change, rather than (over-) determined by specific political strategies.” (Farias and Blok, 2017: 558).

The next subtitle, The City as a Technological Artifact, focuses on STS tradition Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) and its relation to urban planning issues. Quoting Anique Hommels (2005: 15), this approach proposes to conceive the city “understood [as] a seamless web of material and social elements [as] a giant sociotechnical artifact whose change could be understood with the same conceptual tools that are applied to other technologies such as bicycles, transport systems and refrigerators” (ibid., 21).
The classical study by Eduard Aibar and Wiebe Bijker (1997) “on the urban controversy about the extension of Barcelona in the mid-nineteenth century inaugurate this approach.” (Farías and Block, 2017: 558).

Then, we have Sociotechnical Systems and Splintering Urban Infrastructures that gather the works on urban transitions influenced by the sub-field of STS called Sociotechnical Systems (STS). “Its particular usefulness for urban studies resides in the very change of focus it proposed, from singular technological artifacts to large technical systems, that is, spatially extended and functionally integrated sociotechnical networks. [...] Three types of systems in particular were seen by LTS analysts as crucial: ‘the modern transportation, communication and supply systems, which one might subsume under the heading infrastructural systems, since their primary function consists in enabling a multitude of specific activities to take place’ (Mayntz and Hughes 1988, 233).” (Farías and Block, 2017: 559).

Some referents proposed for this topic on urban infrastructures are Susan Leigh Star (Star & Ruhleder, 1996; Star, 1999) on information infrastructures; Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin’s (2001) Splintering Urbanism; Fernando Domínguez Rubio & Uriel Fougé (2013) on urban political ecology, that is an integration proposal between urban spaces the natural and infrastructural ones; Oliver Coutard and Simon Guy (2007) STS and the City: Politics and Practices of Hope, a call to avoid technological positivism presented under this subtitle “that adopt a more symmetrical look at the capacities of human and nonhuman actors, while also breaking with the idea of imagining the city as one single, overarching metabolic process” (ibid:562). So, we have here Sarah Whatmore (2002); Erik Swyngedouw & Nikolas Heynen (2003); Steve Hinchliffe et al. (2005); Paul Robbins and Julie Sharp (2006); Bruce Braun (2008); Ryan Hodgfield (2009); Andrew Karwonen (2011); Jens Lachmund (2013).

Moment two

The next moment, The Discovery of the Built Environment (in the City), is shaped by the relationships between STS —having the located laboratory as a departure point— architecture and design concerning the circulation of different logics of design, agency, and usability. “Over the past fifteen years, however, STS scholars have come to actively address architecture, buildings, and the built environment from different perspectives and across divergent empirical sites, although almost always within urban settings. There are many ways of bringing together these inventive STS accounts; yet, one foundational route is precisely in terms of the problem of the “gap” between the design and use of buildings. [...] Here, we deploy the gap rather as a device for distinguishing different respects of STS work.” (Farías and Block, 2017: 564).

The first subtitle, Laboratorys of Architectural Design, presents Michel Callon’s (1996, 1997) work related to design and architectural conception. “Whereas this native term usually denotes an individual mental process, Callon reads it as a collective process involving not just different voices (of the ‘field’) but various material supports such as plans and models. Paying attention to such material mediators, Callon demonstrates that each of them settles in specific ways the epistemic and evaluative differences among the multiple actors involved in the design process. In fact, he goes even further to argue [...] that the entire architectural design process cannot be understood as incrementally advancing toward the realization of an object but rather toward the creation of a multiplicity of mediators.” (Farías and Block, 2017: 564).

Other contributions presented here are Albena Yaneva (2005) about “how architects gain knowledge of their emerging buildings through processes of scaling their physical Styrofoam models up and down, thereby enabling jumps between otherwise irreconcilable visual perspec-

tives” (ibid: 565) and about the public controversies produced by the architectural work (2011); Hans-Jörg Rheinberger (1997), and Boris Ewenstein and Jennifer Whyte (2009) on architectural plans as epistemic objects. Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer’s work on architectural plans as boundary objects (1998); Ignacio Farias and Alex Wilkie (2015) regarding the epistemic dissonance in architectural design process; Sophie Houdart and Minato Chihiro (2009) on architectural space, its frequencies, and alternatives.

“The critical importance of the question of what buildings actually do [question that is naming the next part of this second moment], addressed by sociologist Thomas Gieryn in the STS field in the early 2000s, becomes particularly evident when noting the ubiquity of certain modernist understandings of buildings as technologies tailored for highly specific human activities. In the famous words of Le Corbusier, houses would be ‘machines for living in.’ Gieryn’s (2002) discovery of buildings as somehow ‘difficult’ technolo-
gies opened a whole set of reflections on such modernist exceptionalizations.” (Farías and Block, 2017: 566).

There are more STS works on buildings from different perspectives of the field, for instance, from SCOT, Guggenheim (2010), and from maintenance and repair, Ignaz Strebel (2011); Stephen Graham and Nigel Thrift (2007); Stephen Cairns and Jane Jacobs (2011). Then we have the last part of this second moment, named The Sociomaterial Mediation of Urban Built Environments. It starts with Kevin Lynch’s contributions on cities from the ‘60s, a work about “how the built environment is mentally read and mapped by different types of city users.” [Other works under this category are exploring the production of urban symbolic landscapes of power by certain institutions and social groups.] (Farías and Block, 2017: 568). We have here, for instance, Sharon Zukin (1996), Paul Jones (2006), and Hanna Giebel (2015).

Also, thesubtitle is the Study of shopping prac-
tices in two English commercial streets [carried out by Monica Degen, Gillian Rose, and Begum Basdas (2010) and that] shows the extent to which the different formatting offers made by the various elements of the urban environment are vari-
bly effective in affecting urban dwellers. [Then, the study made by Ralf Brand and Sarah Fre-
genese (2013) shows how] the role played by the built environment in the political polarization and radicalization of urban conflicts in Belfast, Beirut, Berlin, and Amsterdam.” (Farias and Block, 2017: 568).

Making the Invisible City Visible is the first subtitle of the last part of this academic inventory of urban-STS efforts. Here we have Latour’s famous Paris invisible City (Latour and Hermant, 1998); Ola Söderström’s work on visualizations in the history of urban planning; Jennifer Gabrys’ work (2014) on “how smart city infrastructures perform the city as data sets to be man-
gaged and how they redefine citizenship as seg-
mmented practices of producing, managing, and monitoring data.” (Farías and Block, 2017: 569).

The works on urban assemblage — under the title Reimagining the Urban as Assemblage—are composing the last part of the review of urban STS. We have first Reimagining the Urban by Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (2002). “[T]his is perhaps the first book to propose a radical decentering of urban actors and spaces. [...]” (Farías and Block, 2017: 571).

Other contributions to this line of STS on urban assemblies are Steve Hinchliffe et al. (2005) ‘on the human-nonhuman hybridity of urban associations’; Alan Latham and Derek McCormack (2009) on “flattening of scalar and nested models of urban space”; regarding the entanglements between city and economy we...
P13c. Times Square as an infrastructure

Let us come back to the second point that is explaining why nowadays it is not possible to think there is a lack of interest from STS in Urban matters: Retrospectively, it is easier to see that the usage of city was not a necessary condition for working in between STS and urban studies. For example, Rudenko and Zemnukhova (2017) highlighted the growing popularity, especially since the 2000s, of the term infrastructure for talking about those “urban and non-urban systems and networks” supposedly composing what we understand as the city.

The authors were also proposing a sort of list of the most popular and relevant contributions from STS to infrastructures, a list that will be extended here, primarily focusing on infrastructures and networks in urban context. Despite many of those works — that will be referenced below — are focused on specific infrastructures, ecologies, systems, and networks, the city, as that thing that is holding everything together, continues being there, tacitly, omnipresent and inscrutable. We have, thus, infrastructure conceived as and approached by:

• “Big urban and technological projects” (Hughes, 1983; Graham and Marvin, 1996; Guy, Marvin and Moss, 2001).
• “Situational interactions between people and things” (Star, 1999; Star and Bowker, 2002; Kornberger et al., 2019).
• A label that “simultaneously covers the fields of urban studies showing the importance of the processes of privatization, neo-liberalization, and hybridization of city spaces” (Gandy, 2006; Graham 2010; Collier and Venables, 2016).

Relying on classical anthropology, Hetherington conceives and defines his idea of infrastructure as a sort of virtuality that is continually being actualized once it is used. In this case, as a tool. Infrastructure is, thus, a “figure-ground atemporal in which an analyst claims to reveal the grounds for social behavior, and in so doing turns those grounds into a proper object of study, such as “society” or “culture.” [The concept of infrastructure is also a critical one because it is] never transparent, always dependent on the position of the observer, and performed without guarantees. (Hetherington 2019: 7)

In a complementary way and referring to the idea of a city as a sort of virtual infrastructure that is permanently being actualized, Farias and Block (2017: 1-2) conceive the city as a space made by the action of the elements that are inhabiting or composing what that idea of infrastructure is shaping. In other words, cities are not pre-elaborated constructions working as containers of it does not matter what. Instead, “they are made and unmade at particular sites of practice, brought into being via concrete relations, materials, knowledges and engagements.”

So, when we talk about infrastructures, we refer to a virtual set of flows and relations that is being actualized once they are highlighted by the act of being named or recognized by others. This paradoxical situation makes temporally visible a collective element that is usually characterized by its invisibility. We are talking here about an ontologically ambiguous element. Paraphrasing Timothy Morton (2007:1), “when you mention the environment [infrastructure], you bring it into the foreground. In other words, it stops being the environment [infrastructure].” We may conclude that infrastructure is, at the same time, a seen and a non-seen movement, liminality that is shaped by a situated other.

The liminality condition of infrastructure is going further to appear and disappear depending on who is watching. Infrastructure is also ideal and concrete. However, it is always virtual but never possible. In an explicit reference to Deleuze — and this one being inspired by Bergson (2001[1913]) — Michael Hardt (2002[1993]: 17) clarifies that last statement: “The possible is never real, even though it may be actual; however, while the virtual may not be actual, it is nonetheless real. In other words, there are several current (actual) possibilities of which some may be realized in the future; in contrast, virtualities are always real (in the past, in memory) and may become actualized in the present.”

Having clear the ontological ambiguity of infrastructures, we can extend the idea of “city as an infrastructure” to any particular urban space. In the case of this piece of research, one can say that Times Square is an infrastructure in itself. To unfold this idea, let us come back to a now expanded Hetherington’s double meaning of infrastructure, (i) as an explanatory and discursive tool, and (ii) as virtuality being always actualized “via concrete relations, materials, knowledges and engagements.” (Farias and Block, 2017: 2). Also, I would like to conclude this paragraph with a quote (already proposed in P11-A:1) I will use below for starting with the unfolding process: “When we speak of time we think of the measurement of duration, and not of duration itself” (Bergson, 2007[1946]: 3).

When we speak of infrastructure, we usually think of infrastructure as virtuality, as a discursive tool that helps us explain how different semiotic-material elements have been organized — temporarily structured — “via concrete relations [...] and engagements.” In other words, infrastructure is “becoming [actual or visible, the original is real] in relation to organized practices (Star, 1999: 380). Times Square is a resource to organize, to structure —a heterogeneous set of constantly flowing elements, moving, changing, appearing, and disappearing, with the intention of giving them a particular sense of meaning. Times Square exists in-between the visible only when someone needs to organize what is it [watching, reading, dealing with, approaching, or experiencing] regarding the conjuncture of temporalities framed into a bounded spatiality. Times Square is, thus, structuring and representing multiple stabilizations produced by the attempt to translate, to repeat a flowing reality.

There is, for instance, Times Square as a place for working. But to make this structure visible, we need to be more precise. Let us talk about Times Square as a place for working as a panhandler. Regarding this version, Times Square is structuring a set of actions, agreements, and material-semiotic elements based on the act of getting money from strollers, particularly from tourists, in exchange for it does not matter what. There are groups of tourists, there are police officers, there are some strategies for seducing and trapping, and there is a mutual recognition—that does not mean acceptance. —

And one can continue actualizing and collecting different infrastructures resulted from describing and translating the way how a particular reality is assembling and organizing itself. Other examples of that bounded and stabilized piece of reality we are dealing with here are: (i) Times Square as a site to control. There are cameras, and there are police officers; there are billboards, and there are traffic lights. This infrastructure is also composed by rules and boundaries, by limits and areas, by temporalities, by screens, by bureaucratic activities, by a set of elements being organized regarding their activities in there, by distinct behavior logic. (ii) Times Square as a geographical spot. There are limits, buildings, land
I will use a metaphor borrowed from chemistry to present, in a different mode, how STS is elastic and flexible, and at the time, specific and particular. The intention is to flatten that acronym using the concept of structural formula to describe, graphically, how that composition is keeping itself glued. A structural formula is the graphic representation of a chemical molecule. The formula is a sort of map that aims to show all those heterogeneous elements around social controversies and scientific accumulated knowledge. The “S” in there is doing the same thing but speaking for all those heterogeneous elements around technological controversies and technological accumulated knowledge. What about the second “S”? Well, that second “S” is a complex construction. In a literal way, the “S” stands for society. Instead of being a specific domain (Latour, 2005), society is a metaphor, a resource we use for presenting a particular kind of group formation. A society is a temporal stabilization of any type of aggregates organized together in terms of either to do, to achieve, or to be useful for something. In other words, the category of society is different from the one gathering science and technology inside those two domains we can identify and follow different kinds of societies or, better, of associations.

Borrowing one of the fundamental principles of quantum mechanics, the wave-particle duality, we would be able to conceive a society as both an action, a state of being, and a situated temporal association that we understand here as a situation (see P02). Simplicistically, the wave-particle duality proposes that a quantum, a particle, can be expressed as a particle itself but as a wave as well. That sort of paradox (go to P08) is an epistemological response to a complex and incomplete reality going beyond our linear approaches and models of thinking.

“[T]here are phenomena which can be explained by the quantum theory but not by the wave theory. Photo-effect furnishes an example, though other phenomena of this kind are known. There are phenomena which can be explained by the wave theory but not by the quantum theory. The bending of light around obstacles is a typical example. Finally, there are phenomena, such as the rectilinear propagation of light, which can be equally well explained by the quantum and the wave theory of light. [...] It seems as though we must use sometimes the one theory and sometimes the other, while at times we may use either. We are faced with a new kind of difficulty. We have two contradictory pictures of reality; separately neither of them fully explains the phenomena of light, but together they do!” (Einstein and Infeld, 1966[1938]: 278).

The second “S” of STS, society, is thus, a way of naming n kind of things gathered together, of understanding associations. It could also be interpreted as a domain, as a particular, bounded, and temporal spatiality we have previously mapped. For instance, in terms of this piece of research, society’s concept is linked (i) to the idea of tracing and displaying associations, (ii) to a well delimited — although not solid — geography we have known as Times Square, and (iii) to a way of understanding urban (see A02 and beyond). But to say Times Square is as ambiguous as to display society. Times Square is everything but nothing at the same time. Times Square is just a frame, a name we agree to put on something. But that something right now is not the same thing it was when it got to be before. In fact, when we named it, it was not there anymore.

This situation is because we are talking about a fluid spatiality. That type of spatiality is a kind of bounded association that is continually being actualized due to its components is often making new arrangements and composing effervescent associations. So when I am talking about a fluid spatiality, instead of referring to the notion of fluid space (Mol and Law, 1999) as a topology without “clear boundaries [composed by objects] that aren’t well defined.” (Ibid: 659), I am pointing to a geography that is renewing itself, that is recurrently fluxing and changing. The kind of space I am proposing here is a moving space — behaving like fire Heraclitus could say—, a phenomenon that Latour (1993) framed and described using what he called the principle of relativity: “everything happens only once, and at one place” (162).

In other words, the Times Square I found during my fieldwork is not the Times Square that it is there at the time I am writing this section. And that Times Square will not be the same element you may find if you decide to go to the geographical location known as Times Square. In fact, the Times Square on the first day of my fieldwork was not the same element as the second day's Times Square. And we can continue expanding this idea by going as far as we can, making the times shorter, and finding different elements inside again and again. However, if we come back to the principle of relativity, we may notice that what is happening is flowing, is always being at one place: “everything happens only once, and at one place” (Ibid). But what does it mean? Does it mean that elements are transformed in terms of time but remain immobile in terms of space? Is not space a condition to flow? Yes and no. This situation is a paradox that will take us to a double connotation of space as a fundamental resource inside the construction of what is behind the second “S” of Science-Technology-Society.

Latour (2009) proposes a dialectical model for presenting those two connotations, forcing us to take a side: “There is probably no more decisive difference among thinkers than the position they are inclined to take on space: Is space what inside which reside objects and subjects? Or is space one of the many connections made by objects and subjects? In the first tradition, if you empty the space of all entities there is something left: space. In the second, since entities engender their space (or rather their spaces) as they trudge along, if you take the entities out, nothing is left, especially space. Tell me what your position on space is, and I’ll tell you who you are” (142).
VO7. SELLING MUSIC FOR FREE, A STORY IN FOUR ACTS

Act one. We are already full

August 12, 2019. 13:26

He saw me taking some pictures of a screen and immediately he came to me. Without saying any word, he attempted to give me a CD. I looked at him, pretending I did not know what was going on. With his hand outstretched and his merchandise pointing at me, he looked in the eye and said: “This is good stuff for you, man, and it is for free.” I did not take his CD, but I asked him back: “what is it? Is that your music?” “Yes,” he said. And continues: “It is a mix of hip-hop and reggae I made in my studio.” He replied to me it was in the Bronx.

Immediately he understood I was not a tourist and put his CD down. Now, it was my chance to continue with the conversation. So I finally asked him for his name, asking me where I was from. Despite that, by that time, I was living in New Jersey, I did not tell exactly where my place was located. “Just crossing the river,” I replied to him. Immediately he understood I was not a tourist and put his CD down.

“The scene starts with a black man following a white couple across Times Square and telling them: “don’t be scared of a black man, we ain’t nothing.” Everyone involved in the situation is laughing. The couple, composed of a mid-age man and a young woman, decides to stop. The black man approaches them and gives the other man a handshake. At the same time, he is introducing himself by Sean. Where are you guys from? They replied. “From the Netherlands,” they replied. “Ah! Europe! Nice, I was in France once but many years ago. Which language do you speak in there, French, German?” “Dutch,” the white man replies with a big smile. “Dutch? Never heard of that.” Everybody laughs. “What’re your names, guys?” Thomas and Hannah, Thomas answers. “Cool, nice to meet you, guys,” the black man says. Another handshake, but this time Hannah is included there. After that short introduction, Sean grabs a CD and a Sharpie from a bag holding around his chest and starts to write a sort of dedication to them. “Guys, I’m promoting my music” — Sean gives Thomas the CD, the Dutchman takes it — “I’m a New York rapper, and that’s my way of making my art going around the world. The CD is for free, but I accept any tip you want for supporting my music... five bucks, ten bucks, a hundred euros. Do you guys have euros in the Netherlands?” “Yes, Thomas replied.” “Well, so a hundred euros is also fine to me too.” The couple is having a short private conversation. Thomas gives Sean ten dollars, and Hannah asks Sean for a picture altogether. The scene ends with a group picture taken by another CD seller. Sean is in the middle with his tongue out of his mouth. Hanna is showing the CD and doing a horn sign with her hand. Thomas is just there, a little bit out of focus, smiling, standing straight.

Act two. Don’t be scared of a black man

July 24, 2019. 10:51

Three CD sellers working at the same time. 2019
Fieldwork. August 24

The Chinese couple tries to avoid the situation. They, boy and girl, are walking faster than before, skipping pedestrians going in their opposite direction. Near a CD vendor is about to catch them. He is getting closer. He asks them by their names, by the place where they are from, asking them to stop walking, and getting louder and closer. Still walking, the Chinese boy gives the vendor a nervous smile, and, using his hand, he expresses they are not interested in anything more than keeping going away. The man behind them continues following them and asking them by their names and origin. They ignore all the requirements. They are about to reach a corner. That corner seems to be a possibility the couple has for skipping that awkward situation. I am walking behind the seller, who is right now extending his hand with a CD, almost touching the tourist couple’s shoulders. I can see how this man is trying to catch them no matter what, but I cannot understand why. I mean, there are many people around. What is unique about that boy and that girl? Anyways, at the time I was asking that to myself, the couple near the corner (basically there!) was approached by other CD vendors that blocked their way. Smiling and asking for their names, the two new sellers surrounded the now defeated couple. The Chinese did not have any other option than to stop and smiled them back. The first seller arrives and tries to give the couple his merchandise. Of course, this time, it works. The Chinese guy grabs the CD, “it is free for you, my friend,” says the seller. The forced buyer says “thank you” in a shallow voice. His partner, who has been grabbing his arm, also says “thanks” with her head. Nobody moves.

Then, the seller asks for a tip. A $5 bill is proposed, the seller rejects the proposal. He wants more. Another $5 bill is added to the proposition. Rejected again. “This is good music, man, and we are three.” The Chinese...
Two guys are walking around Times Square. They look scared. They are one beside the other, and both are always looking around. It is as if they were constantly checking that everything is alright. They are selling CDs; they are trying to give their merchandise to the tourists, but they do not know how to do that properly. They look ashamed, shy, inexperienced. They have neither the necessary empathy nor the spark for doing that. Without saying a word, without a smile, without looking at the people’s eye, without even trying so much, they extend their hands waiting for the tourists to take their music and, perhaps at that moment, starting a conversation, asking them for some money. But all the tourists are ignoring them. The tourists do not care about those two guys. And those two guys are just there, lost, walking around Times Square, hopeless. Eventually, they are just standing in a random place, looking around, being together, and again extending their hands in a very lame way. It is hard to see them. It seems like it is their first day doing that in the Square. And they are failing, epically failing. Those two guys are not like the other CD vendors around. The others are right now gathering around together, talking to each other, speaking loudly, following tourists, chatting to them, yelling, singing, walking faster, and selling their merchandise. The two scared guys are looking at the other vendors. They are doing that frequently, but the other vendors are also ignoring them. I do not even think they realized those two guys exist. Otherwise, the situation would be quite different. A couple of days ago, I saw a group of CD vendors confronting three men that were also offering their merchandise—CDs too—in one of the designated activity areas in Duffy Square. Someone inside the group was boosting the three men and yelling to everybody: “They are not real artists, they are selling other people’s songs! don’t buy their music, they are just fake!” But today, so far, the two shy boys were outside of their radar. It seems like I am and without looking back, they finally escaped that tourist trap they got in.

Let me make an intromission, let me repeat the last four sentences I wrote above but adding a new element, a prefix that, even though we have not been talking about it so far, is necessary for making a statement here regarding the kind of space we are talking about: urban space as a social product is generated by specific group formations as a set of infrastructures that allow to mobilize and to stabilize matter and information. Urban space —what we call later urban formation (see A04-B)— is simultaneously a condition and a result of linkages. Urban space only exists when it is deployed. Also, urban space belongs to the entities that created it. Urban space is an element embodied in a sort of particular experiential amalgam of specific relationships. It means urban space is neither a sort of background nor a geographical container.

I will continue using the term urban for talking about the specific type of space, an open one, this dissertation is trying to describe. By open space, I am referring to the one regarding it, the streets, the sidewalks, the plazas, the parks. You can continue reading what is coming next, temporally taking for granted what does urban means here, or you can just go to A04, where there is a discussion about the meaning of urban and its implications inside this piece of research.

So space, urban space, is a specific product continuously made by the actions and interactions of heterogeneous groups of actors participating in different exchange processes. The production of a particular space that is neither a linear nor a positivist process could be categorized either into what has been called as technoscientific controversies (Collins, 1981; Engelhardt & Caplan, 1987; Latour, 2005) or just as heterogeneous urban situations:

• The arrival and consolidation of the Desnudas (P16-B).

On the other hand, we have what has been called as “heterogeneous urban situations” or just as “urban situations.” Generally, an urban situation (what later we will call as urban[some things] see A04) is a fleeting encounter, an effervescent, a momentary group formation where, apparently, nothing is happening. Those minimal and sporadic associations are often out of any academic radar due to either they were a priori discredited, or they seem to be irrelevant for being formally predictable (Collins, 1988). Regarding this work, we have, for instance:

• Paradoxically, the pedestrianized Times Square itself ([P26, P29]).

We have a 2002 Argentinian movie directed by Carlos Sorín called “Intimate Stories” [Historias minimas in the original language]. The story is about three random people crossing the Patagonia desert, each on their own, to go to a city called San Julián to attend to different situations. One character will participate in a tv show; another one is trying to find his lost dog that someone told him was in that place. The last character wants to surprise his client’s child with a birthday cake.

The movie focuses on life’s little things, on those small, intimate, minimal situations, expanding them until creating a crossed and simultaneous universe, full of details and more minimal situations, crossing with the vast and impotent Patagonian landscape. Sorín highlights those minimal situations through the script’s development and uses an imbricate structure composed of the wave movement of three storylines.

Nevertheless, the scope of this piece of research is not positioning itself as a pioneer in the study of those kinds of effervescent and minimal encounters but to suggest that those STS— and I am talking here about the High Church one—we should take care more of those trifles and, at first sight, insignificant situations where science and technology are mixed, with other kinds of aggregates, in what we have been named as an urban open space.

There are three examples—and more than examples sources of inspiration—from other perspectives and knowledge fields I would like to present regarding the study, description, and projection of what has been conceived as minimal, sporadic, and, apparently, non-relevant. There is also a classical ANT work, “Paris, invisible city” (Latour & Hermant, 2006[1998]) that takes care of those urban invisibilities, of those devices, codes, and materialities scattered throughout the city composing that huge amalgam of stuff we know as Paris. Meanwhile, let us begin taking care of the three exogenous works:

An imbricate trip of ordinary lives

One character will participate in a tv show; another one is trying to find his lost dog that someone told him was in that place. The last character wants to surprise his client’s child with a birthday cake.

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An imbricate trip of ordinary lives

We have a 2002 Argentinian movie directed by Carlos Sorín called “Intimate Stories” [Historias minimas in the original language]. The story is about three random people crossing the Patagonia desert, each on their own, to go to a city called San Julián to attend to different situations. One character will participate in a tv show; another one is trying to find his lost dog that someone told him was in that place. The last character wants to surprise his client’s child with a birthday cake.

The movie focuses on life’s little things, on those small, intimate, minimal situations, expanding them until creating a crossed and simultaneous universe, full of details and more minimal situations, crossing with the vast and impotent Patagonian landscape. Sorín highlights those minimal situations through the script’s development and uses an imbricate structure composed of the wave movement of three storylines.

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An imbricate trip of ordinary lives
Making relevant the irrelevant

The background of Manuel Delgado’s proposal (2009) of a naturalist ethnography of public urban spaces (see it on P08) is also an invitation to describe, using a pre-discursive gaze, those locations and scenarios where life is continually being composed and decomposed by small encounters, irrelevant situations, and flimsy associations. Despite the epistemological disagreements I have with Delgado regarding how to approach that life outside happening in the streets and sidewalks, we share the same interests of going through what was usually discarded and left behind. His questions are mine too:

“How to capture and to display the untold social formalities, the improvisations on the go, the rules and codes that are represented in an inexpressibly creative way, the piling up of both predictable and unlikely events? How to bring out the implicit logics that lurk under such confusion?” (Delgado, 2009: 8).

A collection of portraits and observations

“New York City is a city of things unnoticed. It is a city with costs sleeping under parked cars, two stone armadillos crawling up St. Patrick’s Cathedral, and thousands of and creeping on top of the Empire State Building. The ants were probably carried up there by wind or birds, but nobody is sure; nobody in New York knows any more about the ants than they do about the panhandler who takes taxis to the Bowery; or the dapper man who picks trash out of Sixth Avenue trash cans; or the medium in the West Seventies who claim, ‘I am clairvoyant, clairaudient, and clairsensous.’” (Talese, 2003).

The journalist production of Gay Talese is always looking for what is either unnoticed, out of focus, or irrelevant. His work is a detailed construction made by sharp observations and a great descriptive capacity. His article about New York City, “New York is a city of unnotices things,” is what inspired me, ten years ago, to go around the city, for making visible all those things we use to take for granted. Also, because of that article, I chose New York City as the locus and focus of my academic efforts so far.

That combination of controversies and effervescent urban situations shapes and produces a particular kind of double space full of intensities and disparities. That is a palimpsestic space composed of, on the one side, bombastic agreements on the disagreements and, on the other side by minimal and unnoticed things. However, we are not adequately facing here two different material-semiotic elements. In general terms, controversies are the repetition and the accumulation of those minimal and multi-perspective situations that give the sensation of being a singular element happening longer temporally than those individual and spontaneous encounters frequently occurring outside.

As it was already speculated in F03, the stabilizations that we understand as urban spaces seem to be the located imbrication of two different timelines, (i) one that is stable and that is made by the simultaneous repetition of many situations and (ii) an effervescent one created by the particularities of each case. Controversies are located as part of the first timeline. The difference between a non-controversy repetition and a controversy one is that in a controversy repetition, we can find a process of equivocation being maintained over time. An equivocation is “a difference in perspective” (Viveiros de Castro, 2004: 10), a disagreement some actants have about a particular element’s ontology.

Imagine her next phrases like: “…and now, we need a collaboration, it doesn’t matter the amount of the donation…”, however, I was also not able to stop imagining the situation she was telling me. Also, influenced by all the stories one can hear about her country, this one was not so hard to believe.

I remember that day being around Duffy Square the whole afternoon. I arrived in Times Square late, almost at 11 am. I was coming from southern Manhattan, following some groups of tourists going northbound. Generally, the area is crowded at the time of the day. However, I did not notice that before my arrival, they were already there. They were five people. Three sat in the ground, practicing yoga, and the other two holding a sort of banner. All of them were Asians. The poster was written in both English and Mandarin. I ignored its content.

And I did not read what they were holding there because immediately after watching that scene, something came to my mind. It was an article I read on Times Square’s official website that brings people together to practice yoga over pedestrianized Broad-
Chapter two

Flyer against harvesting organs in Chinese prisons. 2017 Fieldwork. September 2

Flyer in Times Square – for the past hundred years, America’s center for creativity, energy, bright lights, and over-the-top artistic expression.” (Solstice in Times Square).

Finally, it was a pause, an awkward one. The Chinese woman was staring at me, she was waiting for me to reply or something, and I did not know what she wanted. I made a move, I just wanted her, immersed in my thoughts, pretending I was listening to her. Still, my head was stuck in the same idea about those prisoners being killed for getting involved in Falun Gong practitioners—were part of the same group: Falun Gong followers that resolved to do something against their Government that decided to exterminate them.

Their weapons are propaganda, performances, and information. The group of Times Square is not the only one involved in Falun Gong; it is just the brand. One may say that each Falun Gong practitioner is a political element working on letting the world know about the Chinese prisoners’ organ harvesting practices. Below the flyer that woman showed me, it was a sheet where every person could sign a petition against organ harvesting. One just needed to write it down some personal data: name, zip code, city, state, and in the case of international visitors, one only needs to sign and mention what country one is coming from.

The yoga group practicing Falun Gong exercises remained in the same place until it was dark. The people on the ground changed their positions from time to time, but the whole performance was in Times Square p²³ for more than five hours since it started to count. And about the Chinese woman that approached me, after the sign process, she gave me another flyer with the five exercises of Falun Gong and some extra information. Then, immediately, she continued doing her job around Times Square. This time, she went towards a group of three that was at my side.

The disagreement or the difference in perspective around the practice of working in the pedestrian plazas of Times Square is an example of controversy23. Right after the inauguration of the first pedestrian areas in Times Square, once Broadway was closed, and the pedestrianization was declared something permanent, a group of people dressed like Disney characters started to arrive to get melted into the crowd, working as living attractions. Taking advantage of Times Square’s touristic spirit and its renewed —now family-friendly— spaces, those wearing costumes used to approach tourists offering themselves as decorative elements for taking pictures and recording videos.

Many tourists found that offer interesting, and they agreed to have a visual memory of Times Square with those characters. For instance, a family of four, mom, dad, and two kids, decided to have a picture with a Spider-Man. Mom organizes the kids and herself near the superhero. The four are inside a “designated activity zone,” which is, theoretically, the only kind of place in the whole pedestrian plazas where informal work is permitted. The Spider-Man is posing, initiating the original character, the mom is sitting out of focus, and the kids are in the middle of the frame.

Meanwhile, dad is in charge of taking the picture. Suddenly, a Hello Kitty appears and convinces the dad to pose. She will take the picture for him. When the dad joins his family, a Mario Bros and a Batman arrive on the scene. Then, and Olaf from Frozen is also posing with them. When the photo shoot is over, the dad gets his camera back, and the five characters involved ask him for a tip. They are negotiating for individual tips. But the dad gave them 20 dollars, and he and his family left the place.

The characters do not look so happy with the situation, but it is what it is. Tipping is voluntary, and there is not a stipulated rate for it. However, before June 8, 2016, the situation was quite different. Before that date, the characters worked around Times Square without any restriction. They could harass and chase tourists for many blocks. Some of them also used to stipulate a specific rate—depending on the kind of tourists— and, again, others got violent when someone refused to give them a tip. Some examples below:

• May 13, 2016. A free-hug man was arrested after punching a tourist in the face for not tipping him.
• March 27, 2016. A Spider-Man was arrested for punching a tourist after discussing a tip.
• March 1, 2016. A Spider-Man was arrested after retaining a 13-year-old kid that refused to tip him.
• February 10, 2016. A Cookie Monster, an Olaf, and a Minnie Mouse were arrested for harassing a tourist.
• January 26, 2016. A Statue of Liberty was arrested for harassing a tourist.

23. The rest of this section will take care, in a superficial way, of the controversy around the creation of designated activity areas in Times Square. The intention of this part is to show how a controversy is a set of gathered situations lasting in time where there is a dispute or disagreement keeping those situations together. For a deeper exploration of that controversy please go to P16.
But not only costumed characters were walking in Times Square trying to get money from tourists. On a typical day, it was possible to find a wide variety of hustlers offering any kind of stuff and often intimidating people for paying for their merchandise/service. The controversy around the idea of working in pedestrianized Times Square could be described in terms of an ontological equivocation regarding the plazas’ design. Meanwhile, the hustlers and informal workers saw the pedestrian plazas as a place for working without limitations. Due to that location was designed as an open-free-public space, the authorities saw the plazas as a space that must be regulated and formalized.

At the time costumed characters understood what they were doing as an activity that should be paid, the authorities did not consider that as a real job. Instead, it was perceived as an inconvenience. An inconvenience that was more or less tolerated for some years but that, sooner than later, turned impossible to maintain due to the exponential growth of harassing situations. Despite that, since 2012, there were documented confrontations between informal workers and tourists, it was only during 2015 and 2016 were things finally exploded. (This story is unpacked in P16). After long deliberation and some threats regarding reverting pedestrianized Broadway and prohibiting any informal work in Times Square, the plazas were redesigned to create specific zones for working, lying, and walking. Also, those locations were reshaped by new legislation that regulated the informal —now formalized— work in Times Square.

Summing this part up, the element Society in STS points to a palimpsestic structure consisting of two different timelines. One is composed of all the effervescences, improvisations, sporadic encounters, and unique linkages that are continuously and synchronously outside. The other line is gathering all the simultaneous repetitions of different associations, happening together in a specific location and extending their presence along the time. That particular location is a temporally stabilized social construction that can be found either following the different representations of the space: maps, laws, news, textbooks, images, etc., or in the field site —if the location is still available— after a detailed and stretched process of observation.

Depending on their inner configurations, those simultaneous repetitions can be understood either as controversies or just as non-controversial linkage. Those last ones refer to associations composed of general theories and traditional perspectives, often discarding and leaving aside. Nevertheless, regardless of their status and condition, both types of situations produce their own spatialities. The particular space that each one of those associations is generating, individually, in the end, is being mixed, interrupted, challenged, and even disputed by the other spatial formations. That heterogeneous amalgam of stabilizations, that kind of plural co-existence, sometimes chaotic, sometimes harmonic, is what Farías and Blok use to call, from a cosmopolitical perspective (Latour, 2004), as a “co-presence of multiple assemblages.” (Farías and Blok, 2016: 10).

Those temporal-produced spatialities have a double meaning, a double ontological condition. On the one side, there are sets of infrastructures that allow mobilizing matter and information. Their existence is conditioned to their capacity of being attached to the associations they belong to; in other words, those spaces last what their linkages are lasting. Generally, and due to their composition, those spatial infrastructures give the impression of being solidified. On the other side, there are those virtualities, those effervescent encounters that are continually being actualized. They are sporadic constructions continuously being actualized. Due to that recurrent condition, the spatialities composing this second timeline seem to be perpetually flowing.

P14. TIMES SQUARE AS AN (URBAN) ECOLOGY. PART ONE, FLATTENING THE CONCEPT

Another way to conceive the relationships between STS and urban studies but going around the concept of city is moving through the idea of urban spaces as ecological sites. Regarding this situation, we have a bifurcated path, but with related ways, which structure is mainly lying on ANT soil. The first of those ways is taking us to a theoretical and critical discussion about the possibility, or not, of considering Actor-network theory as an ecological approach (Murdoch, 2001; Lavé 2015). The second way aims to mix urban-ANT with different kinds of relational ecologies to expand STS to a green cosmopolitical scenario (Blok, 2013).

There is, additionally, a third approach, a sort of experimental one, that I would like to essay in this section. This path aims to use Bourdieu’s idea of social fields as a bridge between STS, mostly from an ANT side, and the urban as an ecological construction. After a general presentation of ecologies and ANT, I plan to propose a speculative exercise mixing Bourdieu’s social fields and ANT to conceive Times Square as a kind of virtual ecology in a constant process of actualization. A related exercise — but with a substantial conceptual difference to this one— was already essayed by Lavé (2012), using Bourdieu’s field concept as a hinge to connect political ecology and STS.

The first thing we need to do here is to define what we understand by ecology. I want to propose a standard definition that will help us to situate the whole discussion into a coherent but pretty decent frame. According to The Ecological Society of America, “ecology is the study of the relationships between living organisms, including humans, and their physical environment” (esa.org). This simple definition gives us all the elements we need for starting a more complicated process of assembling and disassembling ecology—and then urban ecology— from an STS approach, but we will go there soon.

But for now, let us expand this concept a bit more by adding an extra couple of definitions from two ecological approaches. (i) Political ecology “was (and is) an epistemological project, which set out to shatter comfortable and simplistic ‘truths’ about the relationship between society and its natural environment.” (Perrault et al., 2015: 5). (ii) Media ecology is “the study of media as environments” (Postman, 1970: 161). “These environments consist of techniques as well as technologies, symbols as well as tools, information systems as well as machines.” (Strate, 2004: 4).

We have, thus, that —from a generalist perspective— ecology is taking care of the relation-
ships made by heterogeneous elements inside a particular location. The contrast between this definition and the one that has been proposed from political ecology is the strong differentiation in the political approach does between society (humans and their relations) and its natural environment (everything else). On the other side, for media ecologists it is understandable and ecology entirely inspired by McLuhan’s (2003) “the medium is the message”—seems to be completely ideal in the way that the physical environment gives the impression to disappear at the time that virtual one starts to arise.

The discussion about ANT as a possible ecology has been mostly carried out by scholars inside the field of political ecology that have been using or trying to use ANT inside their pieces of research (Gareau, 2006; Holfield, 2009; Lave, 2015). Meanwhile, for instance, from a sociological perspective, Actor-network theory is considered as a possible ecological approach due to “ANT provides a useful exemplar of ‘ecological’ theory as the place for expanding and properly discussing of approaching humans and nonhumans (2001:126). Nevertheless, to conceive ANT as an ecological approach is perceived as problematic and inconvenient from a critical and a political-ecological perspective. Lave (2015) has strongly criticized ANT by pointing out how political ecology and ANT cannot reconcile. She presents “three primary incompatibilities [that, according to her, are making impossible to think of ANT as a sort of ecology. Those incompatibilities are: (1) ANT’s categorical denial of structural inequalities, (2) the uncertain political implications of approaching humans and nonhumans symmetrically, and (3) the neoliberal flavor of Latour’s conceptualization of actors.” (Ibid: 218).

If you look again at the last paragraph, you will realize it started talking about ANT, and then it ended with a personal reference to Bruno Latour. That is not a simple coincidence. Because Latour has turned into the most famous ANT, most of the critics made by outsiders use to merge and confuse both elements, Latour and ANT. Although I am afraid I have to disagree with Lave’s arguments, I do not consider this dissertation as the place for expanding and properly discussing her ideas. Notwithstanding, it is not possible to just let them go without any kind of intervention or contamination.

The easiest way to deal with this situation would be to list a set of ANT-bibliography where politics is deployed and structured. That set of academic products are, somehow, responding to the first two incompatibilities proposed by Lave. For instance, we have, among others works, Lave (1999); Law and Singleton (2014); Latour (2005, 2005a); Mol (1999, 2000); McFarlane (2009); Routledge (2008). However, my intention here is to approach Lave’s critics but going through two different ways, far from just a bibliographical review. First, quoting Graham Harman (2014: 2-3)—and taking care of the third inconsistency—regarding the political role of Latour:

“How long seemed to me that our basic political spectrum of Left vs. Right was hopelessly entangled with a modern ontology that Latour effectively destroyed in his 1991 classic We Have Never Been Modern, even if most philosophers and activists are still guided by this Left/Right schema. As Latour sees it, modernity is grounded in a taxonomic rift between a mechanistic nature on one side and an arbitrarily constructed society on the other. Ontology has consequences, and the effect of this modern ontology is that the dualism of nature and culture suggests a scheme in which politics is based either on a knowledge of the true nature of human things or on the conviction that knowledge does not exist and must therefore be replaced by a struggle for dominance. As a temporary placeholder for these two options, we might speak not of ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ politics, but of ‘Down’ and ‘Up’ politics, in the same wholistic spirit as the classification of quarks in particle physics. [...] Down politics sees itself as a political philosophy of knowledge as opposed to ignorance. [Meanwhile, in the Up one] politics becomes a power struggle without any transcendent court of appeal: a war of all against all in which seizing power for one’s own standpoint becomes an end in itself.”

24 However, that inspiration does not mean the fully acceptance of McLuhan’s ideas as valid ones. For instance, Friedrich Kittler (1986, 1990[1985]) agrees on approaching media as a valid study field and shares with McLuhan a compromise on media theory but his work about the impossibility of understanding media as well as his ideas that media and message are not structurally tied are taking him to a different side on media studies.

Perhaps the main disagreement between political ecology scholars and ANT, and between, again, political ecology scholars and Latour, can be reduced—with all the issues to consider and maintained in time. As a flashback, when we are talking about Times Square, we refer to a fluid spatiality, a kind of bounded association that is continually being actualized due to its components are often making new arrangements and composing different effervescent associations. Times Square is a produced space constructed by the assemblage of teleological linkages made by any element. We have that a particular urban location is a spatialization—it means the inclusion of space as an analytical category and an operative resource used for giving some sense to the world outside—of an uncertain, multiple, simultaneous, heterogeneous, and fluid reality.

However, despite all the possible uncertainty and volatility, and from an empirical perspective based on analyzing during more than four years the different dynamics of Times Square, there are specific structures one can identify and represent through not only a relational ANT-based description but also mixing that descriptive method with a more, let us say, traditional perspective in sociology. Although produced in synchronic and many times sporadic ways, the construction of Times Square was sometimes shaped by specific patterns that were mostly related to how humans were establishing relationships with space.

Space, conceived here as ecology and coming back again to Fuller (2005:2), indicates “the massive and dynamic interrelation of processes and objects, beings and things, patterns and matter.” However, this sort of ecology should not be understood as something already given. Times Square is a location that must be constructed continuously and reproduced to exist, in order to be. This section is composed of a speculative exercise that aims to describe how Times Square is built and shaped by the actions and relationships of different groups and elements inhabiting that geography. I plan to mix, mostly, ANT and Pierre Bourdieu’s social fields idea for conducting this exercise.

P15. TIMES SQUARE AS AN (URBAN) ECOLOGY, PART TWO, ECOLOGY AS A FIELD

Chapter two

Reducing Urban, expanding STS
P15-A. Two slippery moments

Despite all the possible differences between Bourdieu’s and Latour’s perspectives on the sociology of science and, in a broader sense, on sociology in general, I believe it is possible to build an epistemological bridge between academic programs to study urban places. The intention with proposing that linkage is nothing more than to try to achieve a more in-depth knowledge of some phenomena happening in public open places that, by their own nature, require the elaboration of a specific, although speculative and unstable, set of epistemological devices and strategies. I am referring to the composition and later stabilization of different territorialization processes resulting from tensions and conflicts between different elements inhabiting Times Square.

The central debates and discrepancies between Latour and Bourdieu could be described, briefly, in the way that “Bourdieu argues that the scientific world is a field with specificities, which under certain conditions, allow it to produce trans-historical truths. In contrast, Latour emphasizes the need for the relative autonomy of the scientific field. Latour emphasizes the need for associations.” (Kale-Lustovali, 2015:2)

The origin of the disparity in those points of view is based on the fact that both sociologists are in two different philosophical sides: “From his early work on developing an epistemology for sociology to his final lecture at Collège de France, Bourdieu embraces rationalism. In contrast, Latour’s trajectory is oriented toward problematizing epistemology in general and rationalism in particular. Notably, the two theorists concur in rejecting the idea that a statement’s truth depends on its correspondence to reality. Yet, their contrasting positions on rationalism lead them to oppositional positions on the specifi cities of science. [...] Bourdieu proposes to overcome relativism by rejecting the division between epistemology and sociology [whereas] Latour proposes to overcome relativism by rejecting the epistemological discourse through which it is defined.” (Ibid: 2-3)

Now well, even when those differences are creating two, almost, opposite ways of understanding and doing sociology — and without any interest in proposing a theoretical discussion about both academic programs — the linkage between Latour and Bourdieu could be made by following a strategy based on two slippery moments. But before going to the presentation of those procedures, it is necessary to make a brief clarification. The just-mentioned tendency to mix, somehow, those two sociological programs do not have any universal aspiration. In other words, the coming exercise should not be considered as an attempt to propose a general— or partial— theory for grasping and representing urban spaces.

So, this exercise must be understood as an experiment that may be possible, or not, to reproduce outside again, either in Times Square or in any other place. The reason for that uncertainty is that there is no magic formula, nor a set of steps one can follow like a sort of recipe to approach, like in the case of this experimental section, a territorialized space resulted from any kind of disputes inside of it. That is why the first slippery moment is related to the necessity of situating our focus of analysis on an empirical and particular situation —situation, again, should be understood as an acronym of situated temporal association —instead of just starting with any kind of theoretical claim.

But what does “situating our focus of analysis on an empirical and particular situation” exactly mean? Well, it means that one should not choose a place outside with the intention of either testing or validating any kind of hypotheses one may have. Also, and in a more profound way, it means that an urban location is much more than just a field-site, much more than a (constructed) place —where a piece of research is conducted. Times Square, for instance, is not the site I chose for seeing/testing/proving how some external forces are behaving/acting/modeling geography and the set of human beings living in there. Instead, Times Square is an unfinished construction constantly being re-produced by the action of different elements and a network of elements happening together.

For instance, sometimes, Times Square was literally a single block. Other times, it was expanded outside its administrative limits. Following specific trajectories, Times Square had the capacity to appear and disappear without any inconvenience, depending on the kind of networks one is following. Sometimes Times Square was composed by the simple conjunction of elements inside a particular set of relationships; other times it was deployed in front of me by the interpolation of a map and a bunch of dispersed walks; there were moments, like in the case of the situations are linked to this section, that Times Square appeared as the result of disputes and confrontations between groups of elements looking to conquer, to establish an exclusive relationship with a delimited geographical space.

Once the urban formation is conceived as an unfinished and multiple construction, once its components —at least most of them— are more or less identified, and some of their dynamics and trajectories are mapped, it is possible to continue with the use of the slippery moments. This moment is based on establishing the epistemological and theoretical scaffolding, let us say the whole structure that will hold and give some sense to the ethnographic work. But that structure, and it is one of the findings of this work, is mostly composed of the conjunction of epistemological tools one can get from our study object’s characteristics. Take this piece of research as an example of that.

Two of the main characteristics of Times Square are its multiplicity and its simultaneity (see P22). But those characteristics are not exclusive to that location. The way how Times Square is multiple —it means how any kind of elements and situations happening in that particular geography is occurring in a multiple sense, and simultaneously—is what makes Times Square a distinct element, either from other public spaces in the same area or from other public plazas around the globe. As we agreed before, it is the usefulness of a place that constitutes its meaning. And that usefulness is also happening, in relation to other elements, in the shape of regions25 of references, in general terms, of regions’ usefulness.

There are different kinds of relationships shaping all those the way of being with the other elements participating in the stabilization of those sort of spatialized associations is not standardized and can easily change. That is one of the main reasons for the uncertainty I discussed at the beginning of this section. The experiment of mixing Latour and Bourdieu, in order to describe how some particular versions of Times Square may have, is one of the elements inside a bounded geographic area are in relation to each other and with space itself. In this case, those relationships are based on disputes, competence, and disagreements.

So, the second slippery moment —the elaboration of that cognitive structure for exploring particular urban locations— proposes using the features of the locations as epistemological devices for both grasping and representing how those places were composed and stabilized. The whole idea behind learning from Times Square is

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25. The decision of using “regions” instead of, for example, “networks”, was based on the idea of keeping, somewhat, a geographical metaphor linking the concept of “space” to the process of making relationships.
based on that statement. This piece of research intended to observe how a spatialized ontological multiplicity was produced by paying particular attention to the semantic-material resources the different actors were using to compose that space. The rationality behind this method is not only to tell the story of how those locations were assembled but also to try to translate and apply those collected material-semiotic resources during the different processes of grasping and representing a bounded location.

With the intention to offer a more didactic version of this section, below you can find a sort of categorized summary of the main ideas presented here:

• An epistemological experiment is proposed.
• The idea is to mix two different, sometimes antagonist, sociological programs — one represented by Bourdieu (Field Theory) and the other one by Latour (ANT)— to explain a particular set of urban formations.
• Due to the particularities of those formations, there is not possible to make any kind of generalizations.
• The urban formations are the result of confrontations and disputes.
• A two-steps strategy has been designed to conduct this experiment.
• The first step is about to situate our gaze at a particular location, understanding that place not only as a container where things happen but as a multiple and unstable element.
• The second step is related to construct the epistemological structure that will allow us to grasp, capture, and represent urban formations.
• That cognitive structure is assembled using the characteristics of the bounded place one is decomposing as a set of epistemological devices to capture and represent a determinate reality.

After broadly presented the strategy for mixing those two sociological programs, we will start below speculating on the linkage of both perspectives with some empirical situations where the confrontations and disputes between elements created different Times Square versions. So, right now, in the next section, the idea is to propose a set of experimental stories where ANT and Field Theory are blended. However, you will not find any theoretical immersion or in-depth exploration of both sociological perspectives. And it is in that way because more than either a discussion or a presentation of theories, what I want to attempt is to use a mixed vocabulary that could help me to describe —more than to explain— some situations that happened in Times Square (as a field/ ecology) where Times Square was produced as the result of disputes and confrontations to get Times Square (as a capital).

P15.B. Constructing a field

The idea of thinking on the possibility of experimenting with Latour’s and Bourdieu’s vocabulary came from my observations of Times Square’s daily life. Despite its flowing nature and constant effervescences, Times Square is a location full of patterns. There are situations one can see happening and being repeated in there, every day. And most of these situations are related to different territorialization processes, disputes, alliances, and negotiations regarding keeping a dominant position concerning the geographical space.

Long before Times Square was being pedestrianized, the Naked Cowboy — a famous character of the area, a man wearing boots, a hat, tied underwear, and a guitar— was already there. In 2009, when pedestrianization was still an experiment (see P26), The New York Times reported the presence of “foot-tall Cookie Monsters” (Schmidt, G., 2009, December 14) walking around Times Square and informally working as unlicensed attractions for tourists.

There are many ways to analyze the construction of the pedestrian plazas in Times Square, from its Pilot program in 2009 to the last official improvements in 2017. One can study those places from a planning approach, mixing — depending on one’s point of view— positivist or critical perspectives to the revitalization gentrification of the area. Also, pedestrianization could be perceived as a transportation issue or as an infrastructural problem. One can go further and see it either as an economic matter, as an administrative movement, or as a historical process.

In 2013, CityLab published an inform titled “New York City Has a Costumed Character Problem” (Goodyear, S., 2013, April 10) due to not only the overpopulation of that kind of panhandlers but also because of the increasing number of incidents involving them. Some examples below:

• September 18, 2012. An Elmo was arrested for disorderly conduct and resisting arrest.
• December 20, 2012. A man dressed as Super Mario was charged with groping a woman.
• February 10, 2013. A Spider-Man was arrested after pushing a woman.
• April 8, 2013. A man dressed as Cookie Monster was arrested after being accused of punching a two-year-old kid.

Another way to study pedestrianized Times Square is through an ecological approach, as I have proposed in this section. The main particularity of this path is the importance gave to space as an analytical category. But to study that version—or any other one— of Times Square as an ecology requires to make two epistemological commitments such as (i) to understand space as a multi-ontological entity that, depending on its usefulness, will behave either as a relation, as a container, as a capital. (ii) To go to the specific is not only desirable but necessary. In other words, it is fundamental to situate our points of observation over particular and bounded spatialities we can fully encompass in a practical way.

Two years later, a group of topless women painted in red, white, and blue, known as the desnudas, arrived in Times Square. They were also posing for pictures in exchange for money, as well as the other characters. However, since their arrival, there were not welcome there, neither by the local authorities nor by the rest of the panhandlers. The situation quickly escalated until the point that Mayor de Blasio announced that “he was open to ending pedestrian plazas”²⁶ [in Times Square as a strategy for banning] “body- paint-wearing ladies and costume characters from soliciting cash.” (Jorgensen, J., 2015, August 8).

The second commitment is liberating us from any temptation to make general statements about urban places. Using an ecological approach for working on Times Square requires encompassing the ecosystem we want to study. It is, going to the particular. For instance, it is necessary to delimit—it means, to define—what is that Times Square (TS) we want to unpack. In general terms, the TS before the pedestrianization is not the same one after that process. But to say pedestrianization is still too broad. The way of framing, defining the ecology we are interested in describing, is a mixed one that would depend on four specific factors:

• A clear geographical distinction. Even to talk about pedestrianized TS is not enough. Corridors are different than zones. Each zone has its own participation. Distinct ecosystems are happening simultaneously, but in a differentiated way, in each zone.
• A specific temporality. Pedestrianized TS is a pretty long temporal line. Due to the flowing character of that public-open-place, and despite its patterns and repetitions, Times Square version 2009s is different, for example, to the 2011s one. And that version to the one I found during my fieldwork and, definitely, to the one happening during the last months of my doctoral studies due to the COVID pandemic.

²⁶ The strategy of reversing the pedestrianization of Broadway was suggested by—at that time— Police Commissioner William Bratton, the also former Giuliani’s Police Commissioner that implemented Broken Windows theory as a policy of “Zero Tolerance.” (See P27). Bratton was working with the Blasio who strongly supported Bratton’s idea. Two years before this moment, in 2013, and during an interview on a radio show, he showed not so much sympathy for the pedestrian plazas in Times Square. “I have profoundly mixed feelings on this issue... I’m a motorist myself, and I was often frustrated, and then I’ve also seen on the other hand that it does seem to have a positive impact on the tourism industry.” (Evans, 2013, October 24).
not solved their legal status yet. “Nearly all live in Passaic County, N.J., and hail from Peru or Mexico. Most get their costumes mailed to them from their home countries, where they're commonly used at children's birthday parties and other celebrations. Some rent the outfits by the day.” (Reddy and Benham, 2011, September 27). “They commute to Manhattan by bus [one hour, more or less, per way] and change wherever they can, often in subway stations.” (Gonzalez, 2014, January 31).

The first commitment proposes a spatial triad—an unrelated construction to Lefèvre’s (1991[1974]) and Soja’s (1996) one—based on three particular ontologies, three differentiated ways of being and behaving the space has. First, we have space as geography, as a measurable construction easy to find on a map, and following some semiotic clues such as street names, traffic signals, and administrative divisions. Also, the geographic space I am interested in describing here behaves as a capital, as a limited and valuable material element to get in order to achieve particular goals.

Despite there are rivalries among panhandlers and—as a report of an undercover reporter from the New York Post in 2013 presented—they are pretty territorial (Rosario, 2013, April 15), there is a sort of class consciousness and a general feeling that due to the arrival of the desnudas their job and presence in Times Square was jeopardized. Although in 2014, the City Administration started some discussions on regulating all kinds of panhandlers and street artists working there, the general conclusion the people behind those costumes was that the desnudas were the perfect excuse the City needed for doing that. But space is also a relation. It is a temporal construction in between two or more elements sharing something. Space as a relation, as a linkage, is simultaneously (i) movable and alleviate, and (ii) tied and restricted to the elements composing it. In other words, it is a flexible but particular way of being together. There are three short essays about three different ecologies, three bounded stories where space was disputed through a series of arrangements and imbrications among different elements, including space itself.

There are below three stories, three different situations, where Times Square was disputed and conceived as a sort of capital, as an element “whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.).” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97). However, Times Square has acted, during all those stories—as we have broadly discussed across this section—as an ecology, a term I would like to relate here with the idea of field.

“In analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objectivity relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations, they impose upon their occupants, [humans and non-humans], by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (capital).” (Ibid)

So, the exciting thing about those stories is the particular way to approach Times Square. It will be understood as a field, like ecology or network, that has continuously been shaped and reproduced by the confrontation of different actors. Those elements aimed to get, to dominate, Times Square—simultaneously conceived as a sort of capital—to have access to certain advantages granted by that particular way of being in relation to Square. In the end, we will have many different fields, many different Times Squares, shaped by three main conflicts that, at the same time, produced three different kinds of spatialities.

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27. There is fourth ontology of the space I did not explore directly here that understands this element as as sort of actor, influencing and being determinant—taking it from Simmel, as if the space has either its own life (Frisby, 1992; Rotzer, 2007) or agency (Goldman, 1984)—on the shape and structure of the different group formations happening inside the space as a geography that are trying to conquer the space as a capital.

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P16. TIMES SQUARE AS AN (URBAN) ECOLOGY. PART THREE, THE TIMES SQUARE WAR

**P16-A. general overview**

Part one, cleansing the Square

The recent history of Times Square could be framed inside hygienist logics of control and beautification. The last five mayoralities [Koch, Dinkins, Giuliani, Bloomberg, de Blasio], each of them doing that in its way, have centered their efforts on cleaning and recovering area from the domains of the undesirables. That last category, the undesirables, has hosted different kinds of elements over the previous 40 years: drug dealers, hustlers, prostitutes, and other sex-business-related individuals, homeless, poor people, costumed characters, and, later, the group of women known as the desnudas.

Regarding Times Square, the different city administrations have made alliances with private investors and businesses to retain and maintain their power and domain over the area. The alliances included rezoning and redevelopments plans—for example, the one proposed in 1984 (Goodman, 1984, February 21)—, agreements with big companies like the process of taking Disney to Square, reopening old historic theaters, and attracting more brands (Weber, 1994, February 3), and the practice of co-governance with the particular Business Improvement District (BID), mostly composed by the directors of the companies around.

Those alliances between private corporations and the different local administrations have dramatically reshaped, for years, the landscape, not only of Times Square but also of many other parts of the city. The transformation of Williamsburg in Brooklyn, along the first decade of the XXI century, or the most recent development projects in Hudson Yards and Chelsea, in Manhattan, are just a couple of examples of how the city has been imagined and expanded through a series of movements including—among others—speculating (with lands and properties), rezoning (neighborhoods), relocating (communities), and cleaning (the undesirables).

Even the main trajectory of Times Square could be categorized as the stabilization in time...
of many public-private associations created to accomplish different processes of transforming and dominating a particular space. In other words, of territorializing a bounded location. Let us take, for instance, the origin of Times Square. Before 1904 that location was named Longacre Square, and it was also known as the core of the horse carriage industry. Longacre was renamed as Times Square on April 18, 1904, “when the New York Times publisher Adolph Ochs moved the newspaper’s operations to a new skyscraper on 42nd Street” (Ochs persuaded then-mayor George McClellan to build a subway station there, which became the Times Square stop.) (Morris, 2018, June 25).

Giuliani’s cleaning and Disneyfication of Times Square in the 1990s, a process that had begun a decade ago (see V28), as well as Bloomberg’s pedestrianization, started in 2009, where two projects were public-private associations — temporarily — to territorialize a location. Those processes aimed to access some benefits granted by the capacity of stabilizing and maintaining a relationship with geographical space. Notwithstanding, those benefits are not fixed. It means that the advantages of controlling a particular location may change depending on many aspects such as, for instance, the intentions and logics of who is aiming to dominate the space, as well as the kind of (other) elements participating inside — and also, sometimes, seeking to dominate — that location too.

Those relations produced by an element, or a set of elements, aiming to territorialize a limited portion of space are strongly based on practices of domination and exclusivity. To dominate a bounded spatiality implies exercising a movement that could influence the proliferation of tensions, confrontations, and other kinds of controversies where other elements occupying the same location could be involved. Also, controlling a place implies monopolizing the power of decision over the other elements and relations enacted in the same spatiality. In other words, when an actant participating in a network that is affecting a particular geographic space decides to exercise control over that geography, what it is really doing is to (try to) manage the other positions and actants participating in a network that is affecting that geography, organically, for decades, tied to other movements and local connections. Meanwhile, the other one was the result of a territorial domestication process caused by an external force composed of developers, corporations, and a hygienist city administration.

“Through calculated campaigns by developers, moral crusades by politicians and resounding compliance from an electorate battered by epidemics of AIDS, drugs, and crime, Times Square has been ‘revitalized’ and sanitized for your protection. [...], the city has declared war on privately owned businesses frequented by consenting adults. Under the current Mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, New York has instituted a new zoning law that forbids adult businesses from operating within 500 feet of schools, churches, residences or other adult businesses. These campaigns are designed to destroy the sexual nature of neighborhoods like Times Square, eliminating virtually all adult businesses from the area, and the changes are already evident. [...]. Prostitutes have been replaced by Beauty and the Beast ticket scalpers, drug dealers have been replaced by shops selling $4 caps of coffee, and Peep Land and the Eros Theater have been replaced by Condé Nast and Morgan Stanley skyscrapers. Tourists push strollers down sidewalks once crowded with con artists pushing three-card monte and fake Seiko watches. [...] Rather than an honest moral or health crusade, the crackdown on sex is simply the means the city needs to clear land for development. But the process of creating the New Times Square [...] has destroyed more than buildings.

“However” unlike a Disney movie, the tale of Times Square’s so-called revitalization doesn’t have a simple beginning and a pat ending. There is no single villain and no obvious hero. And there’s certainly no agreement on whether everyone will live happily ever after.” (Hoffman, 1999 September 30).

Part Two, a pedestrianized hinge

During Bloomberg’s administration, a different kind of undesirables “appeared” in Times Square: vehicles crossing Broadway Avenue. Once Times Square was revitalized — and the location was claimed by companies and tourists — the main issue the area was facing could be described as the result or the side effects of the excess of tourists walking around the area. Due to the number of bodies on the sidewalks, those paths resulted in being insufficient for host touring. Those usually were using the streets for walking, and the intersections and pedestrian crosses resulted in being pretty dangerous zones where the incidents with cars were a constant denominator.

According to the pilot program (see P26) presented by the Department of Transportation under Bloomberg’s mayoralty, before February 29, 2009, “over 356,000 [people] [used to] walk through Times Square daily [and although] there were 4.5 times as many people as vehicles, only 11% of the space [was] currently allocated for pedestrians. [...] Broadway at Times Square averaged 137% more pedestrian crashes than at other Avenue in the area.” (BPPITFSHM, 2009: 9-10)

On December 23, 2010, The New York Times announced that “after 30 years, Times Square was facing a pedestrianized hinge. Because of the broad mix of people crossing Broadway Avenue, the excess of tourists walking around the area, the number of vehicles crossing it, and the number of bodies on the sidewalks, those paths resulted in being insufficient for host touring.” (BPPITFSHM, 2009: 9-10)

28. The concepts “public” and “private” are pointing to a traditional approach of understanding political relationships among group formations. “Public” elements are those related to administrative governance of a city. Meanwhile, the additive “private” is used for gathering those actors that belong to corporate trajectories such as developers, investors, CEOs... Nevertheless, the label public-private could also mean a double condition those associations have in order to behave and as a capacity to regulate the interaction and participation of other elements around.

29. The process of monopolizing, of territorializing, a bounded location requires to develop and to execute a series of material-semiotic practices that need to be placed not only along the geography that is expected to be dominated, but also across different centers of control — panoptics and elopigions — that are in charge of watching and administrating that spatiality. Those centers of control do not need to be necessarily located in the same territory they are affecting.
Square rebirth [was] complete”. (Bagli, 2010, December 23).

“Next month, 11 Times Square, a new, glassy 40-story office tower at 42nd Street and Eighth Avenue, will formally open with its first tenant. Compared with the metamorphosis that has occurred around it, there is nothing extraordinary about the building except for this: Its completion officially marks the end of the long and tortuous redevelopment of Times Square, an effort that began 30 years ago.

The plan, to radically make over 13 acres, between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, will formally open with its first tenant. Compared with the metamorphosis that has occurred around it, there is nothing extraordinary about the building except for this: Its completion officially marks the end of the long and tortuous redevelopment of Times Square, an effort that began 30 years ago.

The New New Times Square was the version that came after the (so far) last significant renovation of Times Square, its pedestrianization. It was the triumph of the corporative-hygienist logics that recovered and transformed a public place that was taken by crime, indecency, insecurity, mess, and lack of planning by turning it into a clean, safe, full of stores, restaurants, hotels, entertainment facilities, and family-friendly pedestrian open mall.

However, and despite the official plans to beautify and control Times Square, the pedestrian plazas started to experience the arrival and consolidation of two main sets of elements that, in different ways and circumstances, were challenging the central and predominant version of the zone. Both groups of individuals, the costumed characters and the desnudas, were presented as the side effects of the pedestrianization. Their existence, trajectories, and actions were uncomfortable for many of the tourists and visitors of the plaza, for the business-owners of the zone, and the authorities and local administration.

The Times Square war is composed of two events, two situations where confrontation shaped and transformed Times Square in different levels and temporalities. Those situations are framed into the main current version of this place, the one after its pedestrianization. The first of those cases, the Decency War, has been the most significant and more complex conflict that Times Square has experience in more than ten years. The whole stability of the zone was compromised. I named it in that way because it involved a hygienist set of strategies and logic that aimed to clean the plaza of undesirable elements.

The second case presented here, the other process of confrontation, is not so spectacular. In fact, more than being a single conflict, it is a sum of effervescent disputes. My idea with this set of stories is to offer a brief representation of many daily and unsolved encounters between costumed characters, small fights regarding territory control, tips, and group structure, that are daily snapping the general panorama and the daily routines in Times Square.

P16-B. The decency war

“There’s a moral panic that has seized New York City, and it’s emanating from the so-called Crossroads of the World.”

Kia Makarechi (2015, August 21)

“The city that never sleeps has good reason to remain sleepless these days. A new terror imperils New York, threatening to destroy all that it — nay, America — holds dear.

No, it’s not a bomb, underground al-Qaeda network, hurricane, alien invasion, asteroid, animatronic Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man or any other favorite bugaboo of the silver screen. Nor is it even the latest stock market panic. It’s boobs.”

Catherine Rampell (2015, August 24)

Also known as the Big War of Times Square, this confrontation started in April 2013 and ended in October 2015. It was a conflict that occurred in New York City between, mainly, two bands: the (i) administrative power, composed by the Mayor Bill de Blasio, the NYC Police Department and, especially, its Commissioner William Bratton, some members of the City Council, an elite group of bureaucrats, as well as some members of the media, and the (ii) costumed force, composed by costumed characters working in Times Square, and by the desnudas (from 2015).

The administrative power was a temporal association made sporadically to combat the insurgent forces territorializing Times Square and turning the place into an aggressive and non-official tourist trap. Although since the redevelopment of Times Square (see P26) the area was shaped as a place for capturing money hosted by tourists, that whole structure was designed to favor the interests of local landlords, business owners, and corporations. In other words, Times Square as a capture device belonged to a specific kind of actors, the winners of an old war against the sex-related industry that once controlled the whole area.

Indirectly, Times Square’s pedestrianization threatened the dominance of those that were already controlling the whole ecosystem. The change of Broadway use, from transporting vehicles to mobilizing and hosting people, opened the door to a different kind of elements that also wanted to capture the money that was kept in tourists’ pockets. Suddenly, an unexpected competitor arose: (mostly undocumented) Latin immigrants who barely spoke English, dressed in costumes and asking for tips in exchange for pictures.

Before closing Broadway Avenue to the vehicles, Times Square was daily occupied by a horde of tourists taking pictures of everything, visiting the theaters and attractions around, and buying all kinds of merchandise from the stores surrounding the area. The number of bodies, the limited space for walking and staying, plus a complex intersection between two busy avenues and a crowded street made the area a hostile territory for pedestrians. Removing Broadway Avenue from the city’s grid and turning the roadway into a series of plazas aimed to make the area more pedestrian friendly and controllable.

Some costumed characters, mostly Latin, desist from working in the plaza and migrate to streets and sidewalks in search of buyers. Some desnudas also abandon the place even though their earnings in the center of Manhattan are, in some cases, greater than those earned in the shops and restaurants around.

An example of this change is the Mirrors and Labryinta, a group of Autonomous Brewers, who moved from Times Square to a street near the subway station in the last month of P16-B. Their movement testifies to the instability of the configuration and the ongoing negotiation of the social elements that set the rules of the game in this place. The change is also a result of the knockdown of the main structures of the past, those that existed already controlling the whole ecosystem. The change of Broadway use, from transporting vehicles to mobilizing and hosting people, opened the door to a different kind of elements that also wanted to capture the money that was kept in tourists’ pockets. Suddenly, an unexpected competitor arose: (mostly undocumented) Latin immigrants who barely spoke English, dressed in costumes and asking for tips in exchange for pictures.

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safer and more attractive to tourists and any kind of visitors.

The construction of pedestrian plazas in Times Square not only made the area safer and most attractive for tourists but also changed the way those bodies were behaving in both time and space. Before the pedestrianization, Times Square was a space of flows. Cars crossing the area meanwhile bunch of tourists were moving from one place to another. After the pedestrianization, Times Square turned into a mixed place. Still, flows of people were going around the whole area, but many other elements were just staying, either taking a seat or strolling around the plazas going nowhere.

That “sedentary” way of being in relation to the pedestrianized zones attracted those costumed characters that saw in there a perfect location for working capturing cash through the elaboration of diverse tactics to attract tourists to them. The conflict started when some tourists complained about how those new elements used to get money from them. Many people visiting Times Square assumed those costumed characters were part of the place’s attraction and that either the city or someone else was paying them for being there. That is why many visitors refused to pay them a tip.

Also, some of those characters were aggressively begging for money, scaring tourists, and even sometimes—attacking them. However, and despite some sporadic confrontations with the authorities ruling the city, the presence of those costumed elements was tolerated. With its ups and downs, somehow, the coexistence of those characters and the ones dominating the Square (landlords and business owners) was quite possible to maintain. The situation changed dramatically with the arrival of a second wave of panhandlers: topless painted women.


The Cookie Monster incident

On April 8, 2013, Osvaldo Quiroz-Lopez, a man dressed as a Cookie Monster, was arrested in Times Square after being accused of hitting a two-year-old kid when the mother of the child refused to pay the character $2 for a photo. (Ramos, 2013, April 8). Immediately on the next day, the City Councilman Peter Vallone Jr. announced that he “introduced [two separated bills] that would either ban or introduce tight regulations on costumed characters in New York City. [...] One bill would require registration, as well as a permission slip proving that the character involved has been licensed [...] The other bill would go farther to ban costumed characters outright.” (CBSNewYork, 2013, April 9).

The incident with Quiroz-Lopez was not the first punitive action that involved a costumed character in Times Square. The difference this time is that to punch a kid crossed the line. It was understood as a defiant attitude to one of the main versions of this place that the City Administration and Times Square Alliance aimed to position: Times Square as a secure and family-friendly location. That is why, once the incident happened, local authorities started a sort of offensive to try to solve the panhandler situation in Times Square, hoping to put them out of there.

“...for years, New York City officials struggled to free Times Square of prostitutes and porn. The family-friendly tourist haven that replaced the seedy plaza introduced a milder menace: street performers dressed as popular children’s characters. [Also,] the performers work in a legal gray area, without permission from the companies that control the characters. [However,] according to Council Speaker Christine Quinn, and regardless of the circumstances, to remove those characters from there is ‘very challenging legally because dressing up in a costume and walking around Times Square is, we believe, a First Amendment-protected activity’.” (Grossman, 2013, April 9).

Even some media started to take sides. City Lab published a report of the situation describing the Characters as the coming back of the old Times Square, “an area that had once been home of legions of proud hucksters, hookers, and other ‘entrepreneurs’ dealing in everything unsavory under the sun. [...] When [the costumed characters are] not cuddling star-struck toddlers for the camera, they can often be seen hanging around the Times Square area subway stations and office buildings, smoking and looking like enormous furry delinquents. [...] ‘The Duce, at 42nd Street used to be known in grittier days, is having its revenge.’” (Goodyear, 2013, April 10).

However, despite the City Council’s intentions and the media hype that the situation generated, nothing happened with the costumed characters. The main reason was that “dressing up in one of those suits and posing for photos is not a violation of the law,” NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly said to the New York Post. (Phillis, 2013, April 10). “Our ability to treat these characters as vendors was eliminated,” said city lawyer Gabriel Tausig to the same media. (Ibid). The reality is that the City was not prepared for dealing with that kind of individuals due to the liminal and uncertain legal status those impersonators had.

“Members of city government have stressed the difficulty of classifying the costumed creatures—Are they street performers? Are they vendors, of a sort?—and henceforth, the difficulty of finding a law to regulate their behavior.” (Taylor, 2013, April 11).

Finally, the subject grew cold. The presence of costumed characters was tolerated again—and even accepted—by the ones ruling the City and administering Times Square. One year later, Tim Tompkins, the president of Times Square Alliance, was trying to conciliate the situation in an interview with New Yorker magazine:

“Many of [the people working as costumed characters] are just honest folks trying to make a living. [...] Times Square is the closest thing to Disney World that many of those tourists have ever experienced.” (His point was that they could perhaps be forgiven, given and now again, for skipping on tips; the Times Square scene could feel more like a show, put on for ambient amusement, than a web of business transactions.)” (Blitzer, 2014, June 26).

De Blasio’s declarations

During the 2013 city of New York was centered on the electoral campaign to occupy the position of mayor, in replacement of Michael Bloomberg. The democratic candidate Bill de Blasio, who was serving as the New York City Public Advocate, won the elections on November 10, defeating the Republican candidate and chairwoman of Metropolitan Transformation Authority, Joe Lhota.

In a debate held in October 2013 about pedestrianized plazas in Herald and Times Squares, and when he was still a candidate, De Blasio got some attention and many criticisms for saying that he was unsure whether he, as a mayor, would keep those plazas pedestrianized or not. (Bernstein, 2013, October 23). A couple of days later, in a new interview, de Blasio had space for defending himself “I simply said that in my experience which includes my experience as a motorist – we need to look again and see if those are configured as well as they could be.” (Ibid).

Nevertheless, and despite his explanations and the reasons he gave for considering “to take a look” again at those Plazas—which were mostly based on transportation and mobility—neither he nor anyone else was counting on the arrival of a set of elements that were about to change the landscape, use, way of being together and, in general terms, the whole configuration of Times Square: the Desnudas. What was clear at that time is that he did not want to rule the city under the shadow of Bloomberg’s legacy.

“Again, I simply want to give it a look given some of the concerns I have heard from people in the surrounding areas. I want to give that a look and make sure its being done right. I don’t think every specific way the Bloomberg administration handled different policies is sacred, by definition.” (Ibid).


On January 1, 2014, Bill de Blasio assumed as Mayor of New York City. One day later, William Bratton, former New York City Police Department Commissioner during the first years of Rudolph Giuliani’s administration—and best known for his Zero Tolerance policy—served as NYCPD Commissioner again. A week later, on January 10, a Woody from Toy Story was arrested in Times Square on sex charges.

The Broadway League, the National Trade Association for the Broadway Theatre Industry of New York City, a little less than a year after the election of de Blasio, announced, on July 9 the Costumed Characters of scaring away people buying tickets in Times Square. The same day City Council proposed to create new laws—again—to try to regulate the costumed characters of Times Square. City Councilman Andy King announced he was working on creating a bill to curve panhandlers in there.

Two weeks later, on July 26, a Spider-Man got arrested for aggressive panhandling and assault on a police officer. That same evening five more Costumed characters were arrested for aggressive activity.
panhandling too. On July 28, Mayor de Blasio held a press conference announcing strict regulations on Times Square. He said that things were going too far in there. He promised to take care of that issue as soon as possible.

Two days later, de Blasio started to take care of Times Square’s situation by sending a group of police officers to hand out fliers alerting tourists they should not feel obligated to tip costumed characters. Tipping was just optional. The message was clear, and it was not only for tourists. On August 14, just that same week, an Elmo, two Ironmen, and one Spider-Man were arrested for aggressive panhandling and disorderly conduct.

The situation was scaling quickly. Without so many options for regulating the costumed characters in Times Square—due to the lack of legal resources they could use—the de Blasio and Bratton administration was taking the promise of curving the growing population of panhandlers in the area by attacking the Costumed characters differently. The strategy was focused on (i) increasing the presence of police officers in the areas as well as (ii) decreasing their tolerance to any irregular situation related to panhandling, and, in a subtle way, (iii) telling tourists do not to pay tips.

P16-B3. United for a smile

One year ago, in 2013, Times Square Alliance revealed the results of a sort of informal census they made between the Costumed Characters. They found more than 50 people going daily to the Square to work as those kinds of performers, exchanging pictures for tips. (Grossman, 2013, April 9). According to the information reported by the Alliance, and replied to by the Wall Street Journal, Elmo from Sesame Street was the most popular character in Times Square with eight impersonators. Then, it was the Statue of Liberty, with six different versions. The third place was shared by five Marios and five Dora of Liberty, with six different versions. The third costumed character was ready to fight for Times Square. They were now organized and stronger than ever.

Three Minnie working. 2019 Fieldwork. July 19

Introduction

One of the daily tasks I gave to myself doing fieldwork in Times Square was to take a look at those recurrent elements and situations being repeated, again and again, to try to (i) find possible differences on what it gives the impression is not changing at all in the Square, and to (ii) identify plausible structures on those situations that seem to so effervescent and challenging to grasp in there. To observe the relationships between tourists and panhandlers and panhandlers and costumed characters was an activity that allowed me to take care of both processes of repetition.

Time is pretty tricky, but a fundamental factor one needs to take care of when it is about doing an ethnography of what is being repeated outside. Depending on the intensity of time, one could describe a situation either as a flow or as a stabilization. If that situation is observed quickly, by a short period, it may give the impression that what one is watching is unsettled and ephemeral. On the contrary, if one follows a situation being repeated by long periods—even when those repetitions are dissimilar—it gives the impression there is a kind of structure/network/system in there.

That is why the process of following and, somehow, translating what I was watching in Times Square—about how different costumed characters were behaving in there—required to take care, simultaneously, of those two ways of understanding time. Below, I will present some stories—some encounters, based on confrontation and disputes, between costumed characters and tourists where space was shaped and transformed across different temporalities.

A general context

After five years of discussions and bureaucracy, the costumed characters in Times Square—and “any person wearing clothing, accessories, makeup, a mask, or object that obscures or shrouds their face beyond recognition” (Int. No. 467-A)—were obligated by law to be registered to be allowed to work in there. The law was filed on December 31, 2017, having 30 days to start to operate. Meanwhile, after—more or less—two months of deliberation, in 2016, the City Council approved a bill that “would provide the Department of Transportation [DOT] the ability to designate pedestrian plazas, with all existing plazas grandfathered in; the authority to promulgate general rules of conduct applicable to all plazas and rules to regulate the use of and activities within individual pedestrian plazas and adjacent sidewalks” (int 1109-2016).

The bill that gave the DOT the power to create rules to manage the way how different elements should behave inside NYC plazas was promoted mostly to regulate the usage of the space in Times Square, seeking to delimited the activity of panhandlers by reducing their territory. By summer 2016, the costumed characters were gathered in different “activity zones” virtual spaces along Times Square where they were allowed to work.

In a broader sense, that was the panorama I found during the two fieldwork I made, one in September 2017 and then another between July and September 2019. Despite the rules, the demarcations, and the imposition of a single way of regulating a territory, the day to day in Times Square is full of strategies and tactics the panhandlers working in there use to implement to twist the imposed regulations, as well as to make
connections with space itself and with other elements in a different way. But the panhandlers are not a homoge-
neous group of elements. Not even the cos-
tumed characters that are unionized since 2014 could be considered as a uniform set. There are factions and rivalries inside the costumed characters, and those situations can be especially appreciated in how they use to work. Let us take a look at it.

**Working, cooperating, and segregating**

There are not many tourists visiting Times Square at seven in the morning. However, at that time, one can find some cost-
tumed characters walking around the pedes-
trianized plazas looking for early-birds. Although tourists start to abandon Times Square around midnight, it is also possible to see some costumed characters after mid-
night still looking for tips. In a normal situa-
tion, and regardless of if it is 33 Celsius degrees in summer or -3 Celsius degrees in winter, one can find—even if one does not want to see—people wearing cos-
tumes offering pictures in exchange for tips.

The characters rarely work alone. There is a logistical structure of cooperation behind them. Also, there is a set of scripts designed to deal with specific—and sometimes predictable—either elements or situa-
tions happening in the streets. Nevertheless, they often improvise and establish unsettled associations based on capturing as much money as they can from tourists, but without letting themselves be caught by the police doing that.

**Scenario number one.** A family of four—mum, dad, and two kids—is walking down Times Square. Elsa, from Frozen, approaches them, saying “hello” to the two kids and then offering them to take a photo together. The parents continue walking, but a kid, in particular, seems to be pretty inter-
ested in the character. Elsa notices that and starts walking beside the family especially interacting with the kid. Another character, Deadpool, sees the situation and tries to help Elsa with the hunting. Suddenly the other kid is also involved, and the parents finally decide to take a picture of their children pos-
ing with the characters. Deadpool convinces
tions first,” he continued. I asked him where he
got his costume. “A roommate rented it to me for $50. I think I just lost my investment; I do not think I will be able to get my money back from here.”

**Scenario number three.** A Spongebob was aggressively kicked out of a photoshoot. The reason is that he was getting so lazy and taking advantage of other characters’ work. It turns that, from one day to another, the woman inside the costume of Spongebob decided just to wait for others hunting, and then, when the prey was already caught, she just showed up for the picture. The other characters around were not happy with that. Minnie Mouse summarized the situation:

“I don’t wanna see her anymore. She’s basically doing nothing, and then she wants to have the same amount of money that the others. That’s not fair.”

Spongebob moved away, but she did not go too far. Taking advantage that the other characters were still involved in taking the picture where she was kicked out, she started to try to hunt a tourist to share with them. Waving some kids and trying to con-
vince two couples of adults, the yellow-
squidlike character was doing its part. Although nothing was working so far, she continued trying to catch something. “What are you doing? What is she doing? Go away! We told you to go away!” Minnie yelled at her.

But Spongebob remained in there. Dora the Explorer appeared and told Minnie that at least Spongebob was trying to do some-
thing that time, that she should let her work in there with them again. They continued discussing a bit more out of my range. Woody, from Toy Story, joined the delibera-
tion. Spongebob was immobile and without voice, just waiting for a decision. Dora left the group and started, successfully, to catch some tourists. The others stop talking and join Dora, Elsa, from Frozen, and an Iron-
Man arrives too.

Remaining in the same position and a bit far away from the action, Spongebob looks at the scene. She is doing nothing more than waiting for a decision. Tourists are crossing near her, but she is not trying any-
more. The picture is over, all the characters are moving around looking for someone else, but nobody seems to remember her. She tries to reach Dora, but the Explorer is busy. So, she goes to Minnie. “Go away! I told you to go away!” is what she gets.

But she does not go away. I guess that the rest of the characters’ sub-groups in Times Square are already “completed” and that the bunch of people around that kicked her out was composing her own group. And without a group to work with, she does not have access to a territory or a support net-
work for dealing with all the specificities of working as a costumed character. Things continue flowing in Times Square, but Spongebob is still there, in the same place, waiting to be accepted again.
eral dialogue to discuss the current situation they were facing in Times Square. The letter was an attempt to find a sort of peace agreement that would not require any kind of legislation or, at least, any kind of registration. Also, the characters used the document to complain about the excessive use of force by some officers and the stigmatization they were facing due to the actions of some isolated elements. They never got a reply. Nevertheless, the day after they sent the letter an Elmo was arrested accused of aggressive panhandling.

P16-B5. The city council campaign

Times Square's battle was taking place in two different scenarios, the plazas, and the City Council. The forces of Bratton and de Blasio were dominating the streets. The presence of police officers was more than enough to keep the pedestrian areas controlled. Meanwhile, the characters were being decimated by the actions of the police. Also, most of them were truly scared by the law enforcement. The forces of Bratton and de Blasio were there to regulate the characters. Some believed so—to be registered probably could make matters worse.

Regarding the situation in the City Council, things were not so clear there. Despite the bill — officially known either as the “Int 0467-2014” or as “A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to the registration of costumed individuals engaged in street performing” — was over the table, and despite every member of the lawmaking body agreed on the situation in Times Square must be solved, the councilmen were still debating what could be the best way to regulate the characters. Some members of the Council were not sure whether the registration was the best option for doing that.

“‘I’m not sure that just creating a licensing scheme is the panacea or the silver bullet here,’” said Councilman Corey Johnson. “[…] Councilwoman Julissa Ferreras, a Queens Democrat, worried that the $175 licensing fee was too steep. ‘These are panhandlers,’” she said. “[…] And Councilman Robert Cornegy, a Brooklyn Democrat, said he feared the legislation would lead to heavy-handed policing over minor offenses.” (Gay, 2014, November 20).

Batman and the Joker went to the City Council on October 19, 2014, representing their labor union NYCAUS. They were there to speak against the proposed bill “Int 0467-2014”. Supported by other characters’ testimonies, they were defending their work in Times Square, alleging being chased by the police, Times Square Alliance, and the media. Also, they complained about the way how some tourists were taking advantage of them too. Instead of a law that they considered was unfair and discriminatory, their idea was to work on self-regulation. The Union was proposing an inner solution by creating a set of rules that the — according to their data — more than 200 members they already had, were comfortable following.

P16-B6. Entry of the desnudas

With the bill still being discussed and without any agreement between both factions, the incidents and confrontations in the streets continued being part of a pretty tense and convulsed reality. However, those disputes were gradually decreasing. On January 24, 2015, a Winnie the Pooh was arrested after stabbing a man in Times Square. Four months later, on April 14, a Cookie Monster was also arrested after being accused of sexually assaulting a teenager. A Woody from Toy Story was detained on July 7 after allegedly assaulting a woman.

At the beginning of 2015, on January 26, The New York Times published an article concerned about Times Square's future. The problem they observed was a more general one than the panhandler situation: it was the crowds. “‘Crowding in Times Square is a big problem right now,’” said Tim Tompkins, president of [Times Square] alliance. “‘It’s not just the costumed characters, but all the different people who are hawking and hustling there.’” (Bagli, 2015, January 26).

Despite the crowds of tourists and other kinds of visitors were suitable for hotels, restaurants, and some retail stores, other elements such as landlords, theater owners, and office tenants were not having the same opinion about those multitudes:

“Some office workers and corporate clients complain bitterly of having to navigate thick and sometimes unyielding knots of tourists in various hot spots — including a giant video billboard outside the “Good Morning America” studios and a digital wraparound sign at the Marriott Marquis Hotel — just to get in and out of office buildings. A 30-minute lunch is nearly impossible because restaurants are jammed with visitors. [Due to the pedestrianization of Times Square the number of tourists] has jumped to as high as 480,000 a day, from about 350,000 before 2009.” (Ibid).

The situation is that Times Square was working as a magnet for tourists. Tourists, in turn, were acting as magnets as well, attracting — among other things — any kind of panhandlers and street artists. In summer 2015, where the presence of tourists was over 35.400,000, a new type of panhandler was about to transform all the board game of the zone, the desnudas

A story from New York Magazine is even going further in time and space, locating the origin of the desnudas outside of Manhattan and two years early than the date reported by the Times. But first, it is essential to highlight that a desnuda is never working alone. There is always a “manager” who is in charge of painting her every day, taking care of her belongings and security. Those “managers” — mostly men — are sat in Times

30. According to the pedestrian count provided by Times Square Alliance and regarding the months of June, July and August, the amount of people visiting Times Square, daily was: June, 361,002; July, 382,596; and August, 410,050, respectively.
Square the whole day, near the desnudas, most of the time chanting and playing in their phones, and eventually taking a look at the ladies and receiving the money the desnudas are making.

So, there is a point that the story from New York Magazine focused on a man who claims to nonexistent, summer 2015 was a pretty convulsed bill for regulating those panhandlers was almost despite the tension produced by the still-in-hold P16-B7. Administrative reactions tips represented an attack on the new Times Square.

Tourists gathered around them for long periods, due to their almost-naked striking outfits, many practice was frequently being antagonized. (ii) among the desnudas in Times Square: (i) they had that business idea after a party in the building—Gale Brewer told the News, “The whole situation is a disaster I think for tourists and New Yorkers and the family friendly image.... It’s just mind blowing... I really don’t believe in it...I wish it was illegal, but it’s not.” And mayoral spokeswoman Karen Hinton said, “A number of city agencies are working now to develop new approaches to this and other quality of life problems in and around Times Square. The mayor finds the Times Square situation unacceptable and expects to recommend administrative actions and other steps soon to address the issues.” (Chung, 2015, August 17).

V10. A scourge of morality

Despite all the articles that those media companies published trying to be impartial, the editorial line of CBS New York, The Daily News, and the New York Post —this group will be known here as “the Moral front”— were openly against the presence of topless-painted women working for tips in Times Square. The opposition could be seen by following two lines: (i) their editorial position and (ii) how their posts were seen by following two lines: (i) their editorial position and (ii) how their posts were presented or the increase of violence in the streets:

“Boobghazi,” as the tabloids inexplicably never got around to calling it (most went with “desnudas,” the term allegedly preferred by the topless practitioners themselves), was one of the more bizarre media frenzies in town built on them. But with hindsight and the aid of an online timeline provided by the news app startup Blockfeed, we can look back on how exactly the story unfolded and what it says about the state of modern scandals in this city.

The desnudas panic was launched by the Post back in April, with an article titled “Topless women posing with underage kids in Times Square.” [Gartland and Bain, 2015, April 22]. This iso-
On August 19, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo joined the group of politicians alienated against the Desnudas. In an interview with Spectrum News, Governor Cuomo criticized the situation of having painted-topless women working in Times Square for tips as a “serious issue.” (Rauh, 2015, August 19). Also, he started drawing a comparison between the times when Times Square was a red district, and the current situation of the pedestrianized area was facing: “I was around for the bad old Times Square, and this is starting to remind me of the bad old Times Square.” (Ibid).

P16-B8. Bratton’s campaign

Due to historical reasons — Bratton was the NYC Police commissioner that, during Giuliani mayoral, started to implement a policy of zero tolerance across the city, inspired by the broken windows theory—and, based on his position as Police Commissioner, as well as on his importance inside de Blasio’s administration, the opinion of William Bratton about the controversy with the desnudas was more than essential. At least for Mayor de Blasio.

That is why both, Mayor and Police Commissioner, were continually discussing what to do with the desnudas in Times Square. On August 20, de Blasio told in a press conference (Grynbaum and Flegenheimer, 2015, August 20) that he was considering the idea of removing the pedestrian plazas of Times Square with the intention of “restoring order” (Ibid) and ending all the inconveniences generated by the presence of those painted-topless women.

De Blasio’s idea was inspired by Commissioner Bratton’s way of approaching the city’s issues. Precisely, in an interview with 1010 WINS, Bratton gave his opinion on how to deal with the situation. “I’d prefer to just dig the whole damn thing up and put it back the way it was.” (CBSNewYork, 2015, August 20). The logic behind his way of thinking is that making Broadway on Times Square a vehicle free-way would eliminate de pedestrian plazas, the “area where people just hang out” (Ibid), the only place where the presence of costumed characters and desnudas happen.

The responses to Bratton’s declarations — amplified and kind of endorsed by de Blasio— were mixed. The New York Times compiled some of those reactions I am presenting next. For example, Paul Steely White, the executive director of Transportation Alternatives, an advocacy group for pedestrian and cycling safety, recognized the problems in Times Square but also pointed that removing the pedestrian plazas was not the best option. “There are challenges with hustlers and so forth, but that’s no reason to expose pedestrains to the dangers that we had before.” (Grynbaum and Flegenheimer, 2015, August 20).

Tim Tompkins from Times Square Alliance said that Bratton’s idea was not more to show a lack of capacity to face the issue and accused the City Administration of giving up. “Sure, let’s tear up Broadway,” […] we can’t govern, manage or police our public spaces so we should just tear them up. That’s not a solution. It’s a surrender.” (Ibid).

P16-B9. The task force, the force, and the topless parade

On August 20, 2016, the same day that he revealed he was considering the option to tear up pedestrianized Broadway, Mayor de Blasio announced the creation of a task force “to Curb Topless Individuals, Costumed Characters in Times Square. (NYC, 2015, August 20). That elite group gives the impression it was about to face a serious threat to national or local security. As Vanity Fair noted, it was “an entire government mobilizes to combat the threat of . . . body paint.” (Makarechi, 2015, August 21).

That multiagency City task force was composed of the Police Commissioner, City Planner Commissioner, Chairman of the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office, the Transportation Department, the Law Department, the Department of Consumer Affairs, the Department of City Planning, the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, NYC and Company, the Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development. “The Task Force will also include external stakeholders from the Times Square community and local elected officials. The group will study the legal and oversight issues associated with regulating topless individuals and costumed characters and report back findings by October 1 this year. Final membership of the task force will be announced soon.” (NYC, 2015, August 20).

The day after the announcement of the creation of the group constituted by bureaucrats, businessmen, and politcal officials, New York Times reported that “the ranks of the women and their male partners had thinned considerably.” [Just a few of desnudas were seen that day walk-around, as well as two other women] “dressed more modestly, in bikinis.” (Taylor and Najarro, 2015, August 21). Nevertheless, the decrease of desnudas in Times Square did not last longer than a few days. Gradually, those women started to appear again in there until their presence was the same as before.

Right after the elite group against the indecency was created, Commissioner Bratton was reaffirming what he would do if he were the one in charge: “My own personal preference, as I’ve looked at all the different options, is to return it to what it once was, [however, there] other options being considered, including designating the area a park, declaring it a public space or creating some type of regulation under the Department of Transportation that would restrict the flesh-peddling.” (Ferrino, Parascandola, and Siemaszko, 2015, August 21).

But meanwhile, the task force’s decision of what to do with Times Square was made. Bratton continued using his raising his authority over the whole area, even despite his own previous decisions, all to deal with the desnudas. Two examples below:

[On August 24] “three women who pose painted and topless for tips in Times Square say that ten undercover police officers collected and removed their clothing, purses, cellphones and wallets from the pedestrian plaza at 42nd Street last Wednesday night, while they were using the bathroom at a nearby parking garage. The women had to walk nine blocks in their paint and robes to the Midtown South precinct in order to retrieve their possessions. There, before returning any items, detectives questioned them each separately in an interrogation..."
room. None of the women had been formally arrested.” (Whitfield, 2015, August 24).

During the Kelly era, the previous Police Commissioner before Bratton, around 130 police officers worked in Times Square. This number was reduced by Bratton to 100 and then to 47, even despite the controversy with the costumed characters. (Prendergast, Schram, and Fredericks, 2015, August 26). Nevertheless, once the desnudas “became a tabloid sensation, the NYPD announced it was forming a new unit of about 100 officers to bolster existing patrols in Times Square.” (Hays, 2015, September 5). James O’Neill, Chief of Department, let it clear: “Times Square is an important piece of real estate in New York City. And we have to pay attention to what goes on there.” (Prendergast, Schram, and Fredericks, 2015, August 26).

At this point, it was clear that the Administrative power, the faction that declared war against the Costumed force, was not only divided but that it was a sort of “Cold War” in between both factions. On the most radical side, Police Commissioner William Bratton hoping to tear down pedestrianized Times Square. On a more moderate side, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and Tim Tompkins, director of Times Square Alliance, were looking for a different solution. Brewer and Tompkins were against the desnudas “became a tabloid sensation, the NYPD was suggesting de destruction the location as a business destination.” (Stasi, 2015, columnist for the Daily News was suggesting de destruction the location as a business destination. And Mayor de Blasio was in between both groups. Each of those two factions was supported by different elements located on pretty dissimilar fields, even outside of that elite force.

For instance, Kathy Wylde, head of the Part­nership for New York City, was convinced that the excess of tourism in Times Square was destroying the Daily News newspaper. “I think most of the big employers in the area (as well as anyone trying to navigate it by vehicle) would be happy to have the plaza disappear.” (Bergin, 2015, August 21). With a more extremist point of view, blaming Bloomberg’s administration, and directly attacking the whole idea behind the pedestrianization of Times Square, Linda Stasi, a well-known local media celebrity and contributor to the Daily News newspaper was suggesting de Blasio “with feeling […] tear down this mall.” [pedestrianized Times Square.] (Stasi, 2015, August 22).

“So, wait! The city spent bazillions to clean up Times Square in order to get rid of the half-naked hookers, pimps, buskers and hustlers – only to have almost totally naked women, pimps, buskers and hustlers take their places? We went from “Taxi Driver” to “Uber Driver” and nothing has changed but the amount of cash changing hands. We traded great, old Irish bars for the fast-food chains found in every mall in America. Hate it? Then call the mayor and complain! Not, no the current mayor, but former Mayor Bloomberg, the one responsible for the mess we’re in. […] They spent our money to build what we didn’t want and we’re now stuck with ill­thought­out plazas in the middle of traffic, surrounded by chain stores on all sides. They turned Times Square into Tits Square. […] In short, they simply ignored the review process. We now have pedestrian plazas filled with smokin’ tourists sitting in cheap aluminum furniture and sitting in ugly rafters where they watch naked hustlers and “real live New Yorkers” like a freak show.” (Ibid).

Back the moderate side, the one that aimed to keep Times Square pedestrianized, Jan Gehl, one of the minds behind the project of turning Broadway into a set of plazas for people22, was hoping the ones in charge of analyzing the recent controversy in Times Square would be able to find a different alternative to just tear down the plazas.

“There must be mechanisms for main­
taining a balance of activities, to avoid one particular group of users, like panhandling performers, dominating. Sometimes, that means regulating activities that are a nuis­
ance or offensive. But imposing conditions or constraints is only part of the solution. […] Public spaces like Times Square are the great equalizer in cities: Improvements in the pub­
lic realm benefit everyone. The city should view the challenge of Times Square’s pedes­trian plaza not as a reason for retreat, but as a call to create a diverse, dense, intense experi­ence of public life that we can all enjoy.” (Gehl, Risom, and Day, 2015, August 31). Meanwhile, and coinciding by chance with all that controversy regarding the desnudas and the attempts or, at least, the intentions to reverse pedestrianized Times Square, a group of, more or less, 100 topples women, backed by other hun­dreds of dressed supporters, were marching from Columbus Circle to Bryant Park on August 24. The parade was an event organized by GoTop­less.org, an organization seeking that women have the same constitutional right as men to be topless.

The conjunction of controversy and parade took the debate about Times Square’s future and what was happening in there to another level. The discussion was framed in a gender equality con­text: blaming the City of being sexist and accusing the Mayor of making women feel ashamed of their bodies: “There’s a double standard. Bill de Blas­siom has never tried to get the Naked Cowboy out of Times Square, ’ said topless marcher Priya Singh, 21, referring to the guitar­strum­
ning cowboy who buffs in only a hat, boots and a pair of tight­ly­whities. ’De Blasio is teaching women to be ashamed of their bod­ies. He should leave it alone. If men can show their bodies, women should be allowed to show their bodies as well,’ she added.’ (Sutherland, Wilson, and Strum, 2015, August 24).

P16-B10. Pedestrianized victory and Bratton defeat

The atmosphere in Times Square was tense on September 4. New York City Police Commis­sioner William Bratton decided to go to Times Square to conduct a “survey of quality of life con­ditions” just one day after a desnuda and her man­ager were arrested accused of prostitution and attempt­ing to sell drugs an undercover police officer. (Tracy and Slattery, 2015, September 04). Although it was unclear the intention of that sur­vey, the presence of Bratton surrounded by body­guards and “top deputy” (Ibid) had a lot of meaning in the area.

Some days after Bratton’s appearance in Times Square, the task force created by Mayor de Blasio — that bureaucratic elite group where the Police Commissioner was also a member— had its first meeting pretty far from Times Square in the City Hall on September 17. That encounter intended to discuss what to do with the current situation in the Square. As the result of that meet­
ing, and as a preliminary idea, at that time, the force recommended dividing the geographic pedestrianized Times Square into three different spaces:

[The idea, presented by the “Times Square Community,” would divide the Crossroads of the World into three separates areas. [...] A so­called “civic zones” would be for people like the painted topless women and costumed characters, who take photos with tourists for money, while “civic zones” would be set aside for public events and “flow zones” would be for people to move freely through the area. [...] The roadmap has three core elements, which include redefining the Broadway Plazas into zones, completing a Theater District congestion study to address pedestrian and vehicular issues, and sustain­

Two days after the meeting of the task force Politico published an article pointing out how “Bratton suggestion of destroying the pedestrian plazas was dead in the water.” (Paybarah, 2015, September 17) due to nobody in the task force wanted to take what. “We’re going to be dealing with this issue in the context of plazas, not streets,” said the Politico. (Gardland and Gonen, 2015). Also, Bratton didn’t weigh in on the zones proposal Thursday. “I’m going to have to give some thought to that,” he told reporters. (Ibid). Despite the Times Square war was not offi­
cially ending, the friendly confrontation inside the Administrative power had now a winner fac­tion and, clearly, a defeated individual. Also, without being announced, the war was over.

Despite the task force meeting results, and with still some pride and a defiant attitude, Com­missioner Bratton had a message for the desnudas: the winter was just around the corner. Hoping to get a new ally in his — every time more personal — battle, the last expectation William Bratton had is that winter could do the dirty job. “The weather has the tendency to do some favors for us […] They [the desnudas] tend to get very, very, how would I say, very resilient if they’re out there in 30 [Fahrenheit degrees equals, more or less -1°C] degree weather.” (Gardland and Gonen, 2015, September 17) However, winter came, and the desnudas continued in there.

On September 22, New York Magazine made official what everyone involved in that contro­versy known: “Bratton Admits Defeat; Times

Chapter two

32. In 2017 the Department of Transportation of New York City hired Gehl Architects for conducting a survey over Broadway Avenue in order to improve the relationships pedestrian-vehicles, and to propose new public open and human-scale spaces.

Reducing Urban, expanding STS Mirrors and Labrytnths

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Square Pedestrian Plazas to Stay.” (Godfrey, 2015, September 22). According to the magazine, it was in a breakfast organized by the Association for a Better New York when Bratton finally accepted the collective decision of the task force: “One of the consensuses emerging is to finish what we started … to finish the construction as designed with some additional improvements.” (Ibid).

The moderate side of the administrative power had officially won the war. That faction got the power to regulate the panhandlers in Times Square, preserving the pedestrian version of the place. Now, it was just a matter of making the laws and granting, perhaps, certain capitulations. Finally, on October 1, the task force formally announced its recommendations for Times Square through an online press release posted on The City Administration website.

“The recommendations include: increasing the police presence in Times Square with a dedicated unit that will develop familiarity with recurring issues; giving the City – through legislation to be developed in collaboration with the City Council – the ability to make rules regarding the time, place, and manner of soliciting tips and other activities in Times Square and in pedestrian plazas citywide; completing construction of the Times Square plazas and evaluating after its completion whether any further improvements can be made; and, mitigating traffic and crowding during construction by limiting street fairs and adding traffic agents in the area.” (NYC, 2015, October 15).

The media quickly focused on the recommendations, the new regulations, and the announced activity zones. They displayed the proposed map with the demarcated areas, reproducing the press release and making questions too, such as if the creation of the designated activity zones was legal or not (Robbins, 2015, October 1). However, the opinion of the defeated costumed force was never not consulted.


CHAPTER THREE
Speculating on urban ethnography

“Speculative [devices] are essentially tools for questioning. Their aim is therefore not to propose implementable product solutions, nor to offer answers to the questions they pose; they are intended to act like a mirror reflecting the role a specific technology plays or may play in each of our lives, instigating contemplation and discussion.”

James H. Auger (2012), Why Robot?

CHAPTER CONTENT

(i) A reflection about the possibility of producing academic knowledge about sociotechnical encounters happening in an urban scenario from other domains than science and philosophy.

(ii) A reflection on STS as a parasite and the experimental construction of a hosting field.

(iii) A proposal for abandoning disciplinary practices and adopting a sort of epistemology based on mixing our biography with our academic interests.

The discussion about speculating on urban ethnography will be divided into two movements, this chapter and chapter six. Although both segments are strongly related to the idea of doing urban ethnography, they have their own common thread. It means that you can freely decide how to approach them. You can read them following the proposed order, you can start with the second one instead, or even you can just choose the one you like more and discard another segment. The first movement begins with a short reflection on the (possible) other ways of thinking and producing knowledge. Can we make valid knowledge out of science and philosophy? What does valid knowledge mean?

Then, still in the first movement, I will propose a way of doing and understanding urban-STS ethnography inspired by John Urry’s idea of sociology as a parasite (P18). I will argue that instead of conceiving STS as a sort of solid and well-delimitated program —a box filled up with disciplines— we should think about it as a point of view, as a perspective that can be reinforced once it is included inside of hybrids-open fields. Then, I will refer to an unstable field I am proposing to create, and that is composed of an encounter between my private interests and my academic ones. That field will go together with an experimental research program I plan to present in the last part of this dissertation.

The second movement is taking care of a particle that has been so popular not only inside this piece of research but also as an additive element in different fields of human knowledge. I am talking about urban as a concept used for talking about any kinds of situations and scenarios happening inside the city. However, this proposed exercise is not aiming to establish a general and definitive definition of what is understood as urban but to contribute to the exploration and representation of the places and spaces labeled with that adjective. Finally, the last part of the second movement will be about urban-STS ethnography. However, more than a manual of how to do ethnography, the intention is to discuss the scope, limits, and possibilities of this way of approaching the world outside.
That is a complex and hazardous question due to logically and rationally.

Consider the death that they (we) are the only ones that can think also have a different ontology than the rest of nitive capacity that allowsthem to think. Humans excluded and marginalized. Understand as that. But what is the model of human thinking?

The first chapter of the book Deleuze, Borges and the paradoxes (Pérez & Bacarlett, 2019), called “Paradoxes and thinking” [Paradojas y pensamiento], is taking care of the question what do we understand by thinking? According to the authors, the widespread belief turned almost into common sense, says that only certain areas of human knowledge can produce genuine ways of thinking. In the case of the Western world, science and philosophy are taking that credit.

Thus, to think is an exclusively human activity, and every element which considers itself a parasite, will take advantage of other ways of producing knowledge to approach and represent sociotechnical entanglements happening in open public places.

Can we do STS research without STS?

The first part intends to propose the grounds of an unstable and experimental ethnographical field for exploring urban life based on mixing narrative and digital journalism, interactive design, and the creation of physical and digital multimodal artifacts. This field will serve as a host of a sort of urban-STS research program that, based on John Urry’s metaphor (P18) of sociology as a parasite, will take advantage of other ways of producing knowledge to approach and represent sociotechnical entanglements happening in open public places.

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Walking among parasites

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P17. TAKING AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE

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"Typically, in normal conditions, humans see humans as humans, animals as animals and spirits (if they see them) as spirits; however, animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (prey) to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators). By the same token, animals and spirits see themselves as humans: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their own houses or villages and they experience their own habits and characteristics in the form of culture - they see their food as human food (pajars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the maggots in rotting meat as grilled fish, etc.), they see their bodily attributes (fur, feathers, claws, beaks etc.) as body decorations or culture instruments, they see their social system as organized in the same way as human institutions are (with chiefs, shamans, ceremonies, exogamous moieties, etc.)." (ibid: 477).

Despite its speculative condition, this proposal for overcoming human exception is suggesting us a horizontal, inclusive, heterogeneous way to understand the ontologies of any kind of elements participating in the construction of associations outside and challenging not only the notions of human and non-human elements but also the distinctions between culture and nature.

Coming back to Pérez and Bacarlett (2019), the idea that only humans can think is traced to Descartes’ cogito ergo sum that is reinforcing human exception through a process of self-foundation. To think is an activity that does not need anything outside of the cogito. Following Descartes, to think is what is making us human, different entities from animals and other elements. However, to think is not a uniform activity.

According to Descartes, there are two structured forms humans can think. First, there is a perceptive line that is not just the most important way to think, but it is also the only one that can produce valid knowledge. Then, there is a passionate form, a secondary and not a desirable way to think. In other words, the structure humans have for thinking is a vertical one where reason prevails over passions.

With all this context presenting humans as the only elements able to think, the work of philosophy should provide people a set of rules, framed into a method, to guide their ways of thinking and behaving. Without a method, life may be governed by passions, and, as we were already pointed, passions are not producing good quality thoughts.

However, those rules should not be understood as subjective constructions. They must be following Kant — general statements. And it is precisely here where natural science arrives, making knowledge precise and objective. It is not only a matter of thinking but also about doing it well. Summing all of this, there are three figures of exception:

(i) Only human beings can think.
(ii) To think is a rational and systematic activity that is far from ambiguities and paradoxes.
(iii) Only science and philosophy can genuinely think.

Facing all that epistemological tradition, the one that considers humans as the only thinking entities, Deleuzean’s philosophy proposes that perhaps knowledge is not making us coincide with ourselves, as human beings. Instead, knowledge is that thing that denies all kind of identity and, at the same time, it knowledge what can transform us into other things: animals, vegetables or molecules. Deleuzean is, thus, offering us an exit from the cogito by the ontological transmutation of being something else.

“...This is because one does not think without becoming something else, something that does not think — an animal, a thought, a particle — and that comes back to thought and revives it.” Deleuze, 1984 [1991: 42].

V11. FROM TIMES SQUARE TO HEAVEN

I was just looking at nowhere, completely lost, sat on a concrete bench near the red stairs in Times Square when two women approached me. I assumed they were around their fifties, both were Koreans, and both were smiling almost all the time. Even when they were talking, they gave the sensation their smiles were still there, fixed on their faces. The one who looked a bit younger asked me if I had some free time to have a conversation about Jesus. "Of course, I have plenty of time for doing that," I answered them at the moment I gave them back a vast — kind of creepy — big smile, like theirs. Looking at their faces, I realized my answer took them by surprise, but I also could notice it made their day.

Those women were faith’s recruiters. It was not the first time I saw them in Times Square. Precisely, the day before, they were around trying to achieve the same goal of today, to find someone to talk about Jesus. Although I did not properly follow their trajectory, what I realized when I was observing them was that the few people they interacted with were not interested in keeping that kind of conversation. Yes, Times Square is a place full of people, but most of those people are tourists, and they are not usually up for spending their time there discussing religion. The best way to prove what I said is by paying attention to the material trace tourists leave after (the mostly failed) attempt to be recruited by those women or other similar elements.

The material trace I am talking about is connected to a flier the Korean recruiters
used to give those people they were interact-
ing with, but that were not interested in hav-
ing a Jesus talk. Although mostly everyone,
by courtesy, was taking that flier, almost no
one was interacting with that object. Although
tourists used to have the flier in
their hands, once they leave the Square, the
flier usually used to remain in there, now act-
ing as a spiritual medium of persua-
sion and propaganda but just as garbage.

The structure of that piece of paper was
horizontally rectangular. Each side was
divided into two sections. The purpose of the
flier design was to be folded as a small
brochure of four pages. However, the
recruiters did not realize that. If one folds
the flier, the pamphlet’s cover has a picture of a
cross with a heart-shaped hole in the middle
and the sun in the background. Also, as a sort
of title, using three different colors, one can
read “God is Love,” and at the bottom of
that, there is a phrase from the Bible related
to how much God loves the world.

The back cover was written simultane-
ously in Korean and English. There the
name of the religious group behind the flier
and the recruitment were visible. The two
women were part of the TalithaKoum Mis-
sion Church that seemed to be a division of
the American United Jesus Presbyterian
Convention-World Proclamation Missionary
Society.” The address and con-
tact of the mission were there too. Also, the
schedule of their religious services was
available in the pamphlet. I will review the
inner pages of the brochure (former flier)
below.

Once I told the women I was up for talk-
ing about Jesus, they immediately gave me
the flier I am just describing. However, they
started the conversation by telling me their
 creed: “Heavenly Father, I
am a sinner, I believe Jesus died for my sins,
and he rose from the dead to be my savior.
Please forgive my sins, and give me the gift
of eternal life. In Jesus’ name, we pray.

The two women were following my
praying continuously at my eyes and
lips. I was sat in the middle of Times Square
saying the correct, the magic
words for going for heaven, being observed
by two unknown Korean women that wanted
to save my soul. After I finished the reading,
the youngest congratulated me that I
secured my place in heaven. The only two

things I had to do were going to the church,
pray, and read the Bible. However, those
steps were optional because my name was
already “in the book of life in heaven.”

I asked both for the experience and
for helping me to go to heaven. But when I
thought that situation was over, I realized
the women were still there. The youngest told
me that, now that everything ended pretty
well for my soul, she wanted to sing a song
for me. It would be a song in Hebrew. And
before I was able to say something, she
started to sing loudly, looking directly at my
eyes and granting me a pretty weird and
uncomfortable moment there. With a forced
fake smile, just waiting for the end of the
song. I stayed there at their side for some
long, but long, minutes.

Once she ended singing, I thanked her
for the song, and I proposed them to go
around Times Square, the three of us, trying
to take more people to heaven. The youngest
agreed, and we started our way to save more
souls. However, things did not were so good.
For more than an hour, we tried more than
fifty times to approach people for talking
about Jesus, but nobody was interested in
that. Everyone had an excuse for avoiding
us, and our only strategy was to give them
the flier I had, hoping that, perhaps, tourists
will take it with them.

I asked the youngest woman if being
repeatedly rejected was usual in their work,
and she replied that it was indeed. “Nobody
has time for God anymore. Everyone is so
busy for him.” At that moment, I realized
why there were so happy when I agreed to
talk with them and why they even sang to
me. I guess, in the end, heaven is not for
everyone, but, by just pure chance, I got my
way to salvation, without taking any stop,
directly departing from Times Square.

Religious pamphlet. 2019
Fieldwork. August 21

I would like to expand Deleuze’s invitation
to take an alternative route from the traditional
way of understanding how knowledge is pro-
duced. However, instead of being just an ontolog-
ical one, my proposal is also based on an episte-
mological structure. Also, it will be limited only
to the scope of urban-STS, whatever it means
as a parasite, one of the keys arguments proposed by Urry is that nowadays,
the main corpus of sociological knowledge has
and it is uncertain whether it may work outside of
urban-STS or not.

So, I want to essay an ethnographic experi-
ment based on John Urry’s conception of sociol-
ey as a parasite (1981). This first part of the
chapter intends to try to conceive STS, as well as
doing STS research outside of STS’s disci-
plinary boundaries. I will expand this idea in
the next subtitle. Meanwhile, and coming back to
the concept of sociology as a parasite, one of the keys arguments proposed by Urry is that nowadays,
the main corpus of sociological knowledge has
The idea behind those experiments is to produce mixed and richer epistemologies that could grasp and reproduce those effervescent sociotechnical moments, situations, elements, and connections that, I believe, are composing what we use to call as urban life in a more diverse and detailed way.

P18. STS AS A PARASITE

Let me begin this part with some general clarifications before going deeper into the idea of the parasite. There is no such thing as STS discipline, neither in general terms nor related to urban studies. I will lean on Tight’s work about Higher education (2020) to deal with and support the statement I am just proposing here. In an attempt to solve whether Higher education is a discipline or a field of study, Malcolm Tight presented a sort of decomposition of what is understood as a discipline.

His decomposition of that concept started with an etymological definition provided by the New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1993: 685): Discipline is “a branch of learning or scholarly instruction.” (Tight, 2020: 417). Next, he continued with a perspective from Lawn and Konner (2006: 158) about “academic disciplines [that] can be seen as multi-dimensional socio-communicative networks of knowledge production.” (Tight, 2020: 417). Then, complicating a bit more the situation, Tight (2009: 9), but recognizing at the same time that disciplines do not have to fulfill all those characteristics, Tight (2020: 417) displayed six features a discipline should have:

1) disciplines have a particular object of research (e.g. law, society, politics), though the object of research may be shared with another discipline; 2) disciplines have a body of accumulated specialist referring to their object of research, which is specific to them and not generally shared with another discipline; 3) disciplines have theories and concepts that can organize the accumulated specialist knowledge effectively; 4) disciplines use specific terminologies or a specific technical language adjusted to their research object; 5) disciplines have developed specific research methods according to their specific research requirements; and maybe most crucially 6), disciplines must have some institutional manifestation in the form of subjects taught at universities or colleges, respective academic departments and professional associations connected to it.

From my perspective, the first characteristic above presented is precisely making valid the other five displayed features. The situation with STS is that the ontologies of science and technolog — and society too — are multiple and are continually being mixed with other domains. Also, those elements are context-dependent. I will stay with Susan Cozzens’s (1990:1) definition that STS, rather than being “a discipline, field, or area […] is a movement.” Her proposal is simple. We should abandon a disciplinary study of science and technology due to the practice of STS is going beyond any disciplinary perspective.

The metaphor of movement as both a collective of diverse elements and a flow results interesting for conceiving that — we do not know yet — set of aggregates, that are going further just science and technology, organized behind the acronym STS. However, to leave aside the disciplinary study of those aggregates, in other words, to understand STS as a movement, results to be a more complicated situation than just opting for a multidisciplinary approach. A multidisciplinary perspective is not doing anything different here. If considering I cannot talk abstractly about STS right now because all my thoughts are tied to (i) a specific perspective based on empirical work about a particular urban place, as well as to (ii) a set of epistemological and ontological concepts, and for exploring that place — STS needs to be contextu-

ized—, I will try to use this piece of research as an empirical resource for exploring and expand-
ing this proposal of abandon discipline as a way of conceiving and organizing my academic efforts.

There is a complex world outside, a world where different temporalities and spatialities are happening simultaneously, a flowing world composed of effervescences and instabilities. And there is a study object, Times Square, in the case of this dissertation. That study object has been framed, among other structures, as an urban element/scenario that belongs to urban studies and a socio-technical construction that belongs to STS domains. So far, so good. Nevertheless, some isolated academic ones often try to situate that study object inside a flowing and multiple world.

We are dealing here with a broad set of ontological and epistemological problems. Due to their own nature, those problems cannot be fixed either by using theory or locating them inside a particular discipline. During my doctoral process, I have been using different tools and strategies provided by other academic traditions in order to decompose and represent Times Square. Thinking about my study object and the cognitive elements for both grasping and displaying that element/scenario has been an exercise of mixing and matching whatever may help me decompose and describe Times Square as a sociotechnical stabilization without being worried about any kind of disciplinary purism.

Susan James, in this piece of research, I have been thinking — and acting — from the domains of science, as well as from the lands of philosophy on Times Square, trying to learn from this [multiple & effervescent] subject/location about different [possible] ways of relating and being with a bounded urban location, all from an STS perspective. A perspective from STS — it means a particular way of looking at the world outside paying special attention to the sociotechnical entangle-
ments between dissimilar elements — can be used and transported — as a sort of movement — into other domains, fields, and disciplines.

As a way of producing embodied and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) and as an imaginative and inventive approach (Lury and Wacławek, 2012) designed to follow and to trace any kind of heterogeneous associations and aggregates, as well as based on mixing history and biography with intellectual work (Wright-Mills 1999[1959]), I have been using and experimenting with STS, mixing with other strategies and resources coming from different sides of the human-knowledge spectrum such as journalism, literature, semiotics, and design.

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duce mixed and richer epistemologies that could grasp and reproduce those effervescent sociotechnical moments, situations, elements, and connections that, I believe, are composing what we use to call as urban life in a more diverse and detailed way.

F04. A REVERSE PARASITE

Despite my academic life has been con-
tinually moving — jumping, I would say — from a discipline to another, from design to journalism; from journalism to sociology; from sociology to that heterogeneous set of stuff called Technoscience studies, there is an element that has remained at my side during all my journeys. I call it urban-some-
thing (for expanding this concept, please go to A04-B). Nevertheless, during my journal-
ism studies, the interest in describing and portraying urban life got really strong.

Inspired mostly by nonfiction literature and that branch of journalism centered on writing urban chronicles, I decided to go out to the streets of Medellín to explore and nar-
rating what that reality happening there was. But that reality was always offered to me in a partial and limited way. It was comparti-
mentalized in the shape of stories of specific people and particular places, but never in the form of a city.

Nevertheless, and despite the usage of a variety of journalistic techniques — espe-
cially when I combined them with graphic and interactive design—I had the possibility of constructing well-made stories about the world outside, there was something missing, something I believed that was hidden inside social sciences. So, I decided to temporarily abandon journalism and going to social sciences to find that missing thing. The thing that journalism was not offering was something that I considered fundamental for improving my urban explorations. It was the possibility—I used to believe that—of getting deep enough inside the situations composing the stories I constructed by translating the world outside to different modes. Journalism provided me a good way of searching for and narrating things, but I could not interpret them because [as my professors used to say] that was not my job as a journalist.

As a journalist, I was allowed to ask questions and find answers, but I could not answer anything. As a journalist, I served as a bridge between those owning specialized knowledge and a big heterogeneous audience. In his experience, to go deep means approaching, using more precise epistemological tools, a particular phenomenon happening in the streets. In other words, to experiment and to develop deep insights, simultaneously, what we understand as an urban place. Sociology was the gatekeeper of social sciences that allowed me to be inside a new world. Weber, Simmel, Burgess and Park, Soja, Sassen, Goffman, Jacobs, and Bourdieu provided me different and sometimes contradictory approaches from where to see urban life, this time not only of Medellín but also of New York City, a place I started to explore during my master thesis. It was the combination of Gay Talese’s work (1960, July 1) about New York as “a city of unnoticed things,” as well as a personal exploration of that place—looking for nothing and for everything at the same time—that turned that city into a sort of academic obsession. Like Los Angeles to Edward Soja, like Chicago to Ernest Burgess and Robert Park, that was New York to me.

And it was New York, and it was sociology, but also geography and philosophy, with Lefebvre, and it was a lot of epistemological freedom and imagination with Wright-Mills. And it was networks, multiplicities, and plasma with Latour walking through Paris, and it was urban anthropology with Farias, and assemblages with Deleuze and Farias again, and a lot of STS readings and scenarios for thinking about the urban-something. However, I realized that the further I went from journalism, the closer I got to it. The way how I was doing ethnography of urban places was pretty similar to the way I used to explore those locations from journalism.

The ways of watching, grasping, and describing in ethnography had a pretty journalistic component. The main two differences were, perhaps, (i) the kind of questions I used to make and the (ii) resources I used to use to try to solve those questions. However—as well as in journalism—at the moment of doing ethnography, it was not me, at least not in a direct way, the one that was really answering the proposed questions resulted from the exploration of my study object. Most of the inquiries I was collecting were approached and solved by something else. Suddenly, and after many times being in social sciences, I felt like doing journalism again.

Nevertheless, there is just one thing I considered was missing related to the practice of doing journalism, and it is to offer a sort of bridge between a broad audience and a specialized node producing knowledge. That is why I decided to construct an academic proposal based on open science (See P31), taking care of that particular aspect. Suppose we, as human beings, are temporal associations of multiples ontologies. In that case, I must say that the one I considered extinct, myself as a journalist, instead of disappearing was hibernating, parasitizing the other beings inside this body, and now it is awake again.

So, after almost four years experimenting with any kind of sources, mostly coming from the sides mentioned above (journalism, literature, semiotics, and design), I decided to construct an open and extremely unstable academic program, a field that could serve as a host to my interests on following, describing and projecting, in a multimodal and interactive way, the different sociotechnical associations composing urban life. That field is a melting pot of epistemological tools and strategies mixed with that thing that will be defined in the second part of chapter six, urban-something. Thus, a field is paraphrasing Bourdieu, a space of differences, also a dynamic location of multiple and heterogeneous encounters. So, a field will be understood here too as “the place where the distinctive work of ‘fieldwork’ may be done, (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997:2). It means it is a virtual and an actual spatiality that needs to be continually composed and signified. One of the goals I plan to achieve with the field I am presenting at the end of this dissertation (go to P17) is to propose a way of doing STS without STS. It means outside of any either disciplinary, normative, or structured academic program.

Instead, STS will be conceived as a movement, as a perspective that can be hosted inside any academic program someone can construct by mixing and matching its own biography with its intellectual work. In the case of this piece of research, the selection of the sources and sides [design, literature, journalism, and semiotics] I chose for constructing the hosting academic program—as I already pointed before—was due to my intellectual interests, as well as due to other kinds of previous academic explorations, along different times, across my biography.

I believe that (urban) STS as a parasite, as a way of conceiving life in the streets using (other) multiple epistemologies, is becoming stronger inside experimental hybrid and plural fields that go beyond disciplinary boundaries and academic pre-made structures. I am also convinced that the commitment to this epistemological exploration on multiplicity will take us to a different academic-personal position without methodological but also without ontological borders at the moment of doing urban STS-ethnography, a long name for labeling the practice of going outside to grasp and represent a sociotechnical world.

That different academic-personal position I am talking about is related to what Cozzens (1990: 5) proposes as a future state of those working inside (with) STS. It is, basically, “[t]o see ourselves, as well as sociologists or philosophers, teachers, lobbyists, researchers, or policymakers not rather as part of STS, [in this way] we will be better able to achieve STS Thought and eventually make the disciplines, and even the contradiction between thought and action in STS, disappear.” Nevertheless, this is a goal that requires a lot of work to be accomplished. I mean, it is more than a cosmetic movement of calling oneself as an STS whatever (scholar, academic, researcher), and more an epistemological attitude.
CHAPTER FOUR

Some ethnographic speculations

“In practical life we are compelled to follow what is most probable; in speculative thought we are compelled to follow truth. A man would perish of hunger and thirst, if he refused to eat or drink, till he had obtained positive proof that food and drink would be good for him. But in philosophic reflection this is not so. On the contrary, we must take care not to admit as true anything, which is only probable. For when one falsity has been let in, infinite others follow.”

Baruch Spinoza (1966[1674]) Letters to Friend and Foe

As the subtitle of this chapter says, the content gathered here is a collection of ethnographic experiments and speculative texts I essayed and constructed as epistemological strategies for approaching my study object: a multiple set of spaces, temporalities, trajectories, and elements gathered —most of the time— in the same geographical location and responding to the name of Times Square.

This chapter is divided into three main parts or sections. The first one is proposing and discussing the creation of a self-ethnographic device as an embodied, multimodal and situated strategy for accessing, encompassing, and representing urban formations. This document is also talking about translation, reflexivity, and performativity.

The following section presents an empirical proposal of that self-ethnographic device, using the ethnographer as a multimodal instrument for accessing, grasping, and later representing an ontological multiplicity. The last part of the chapter is a collection of essays, devices, and artifacts which objective is to try to organize a flowing reality by stabilizing and situating some of its traces and trajectories.

CHAPTER CONTENT

(i) Blueprints for a self-ethnographic device

(ii) A self-ethnographic experiment

(iii) Designing an urban patchwork quilt

(iv) A studio of Times Square from some of its ontological constructions
To speak for others is to first silence those in whose name we speak. It is certainly very difficult to silence human beings in a definitive manner but it is more difficult to speak in the name of entities that do not possess an articulate language: this supposes the need for continuous adjustments and devices of intersession that are infinitely more sophisticated.” (Callon, 1986b: 216)

The structure of this chapter and some other parts of this work (mostly some vignettes resulting from exploring the fieldsite) have been proposed as a self-ethnography. The selection of this method was more a necessity, dressed like a casually than a planned and desired decision. One of the main interests I have as an ethnographer is as appearing as little as possible, acting as the protagonist of my ethnographic work. The compromise of the ethnographer with its work and the users of its academic products should be leaving aside its role as the author (even when it is writing its stories in the first person), acquiring a different role as a compiler. (see V15).

In What is an author, Michel Foucault (1977: 115) quotes Samuel Beckett’s phrase that is titling this section: “What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking.” (Beckett, 1974: 16). And although that phrase may be seen as a contradiction in a text that is presenting an auto-ethnography, the implicit question behind it when it is passed from a rhetorical form to an interrogative one, offers the possibility of thinking about the role and importance of (or not) a sort of ethnography where the ethnographer is writing in the first person: [Why does it matter] who is speaking?

Nevertheless, I will not dedicate so much space here to a formal discussion on self-ethnography as a valid, or not, pertinent, or not, and desirable, or not, method for doing ethnography. I am not interested in claiming the usefulness of this resource and, also, this is not a chapter about methodology. Instead, I would like to present an auto-ethnography, using the journey technique proposed by Muncey (2005) that is not more than a stylistic structure for displaying a personal experience.

35. A more inclusive writing requires to take the discussion about the ontology of the representation of the signifier to a broader space that does not depend on both human gender and its sexuality (Irigaray, 1989). Using the generalized symmetry (Latour, 1993; Callon, 1986), but without taking that discussion —just proposing it—, all actors participating in third person in the stories of this monograph will be understood as part of the same kind of semiotic set of elements and they will be referred by using the pronoun “it.” Since the use of “they” have been proposed in a context of “gender neutralization of language”, focused only on a human-centric set, the particle “it” is going further that discussion —overpassing it, more than just avoiding it— elevating the three counts announced by Martyna (1978), in a gender bias background, to an ontological level related the nature of the substance far from a human domain: (1) Ambiguity; (2) Exclusiveness; (3) Ineptitude.

36. For practical reasons, and due to that is not a main topic in this document, the presentation of other definitions of auto/self-ethnography as well as the possible discussion of the pertinence, or not, of each perspective, and then the election of one perspective or mix of some (or them…) will be reduced to a footnote, this footnote, and to the elucination of some works that are properly taking care of this method. So, for further information on auto/self-ethnography see Dunzin (1989, 1997); Ellis & Bucher (1996); Ellis (1997); Reed-Danahay (1997) Coffey (1999); Holman Jones (2005).

37. “highly personalized account that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological [or ethnographical] understanding” (Sparks, 2000: 21). It means that auto-ethnography is a valid resource as long as it helps to understand either a scientific or an academic problem.

“Any statement which holds that humans necessarily act or believe in particular ways under particular circumstances refers as much to the social scientist as anyone else.” [Woolgar continues] According to this formulation, the relativism in the claim that ‘humans necessarily act or believe in particular ways under particular circumstances’ also applies to those practitioners of extending sociological [or ethnographic] understanding” (Sparkes, 2000: 21). It means that auto-ethnography is a valid resource as long as it helps to understand either a scientific or an academic problem.

“A performative understanding of discur- sive practices challenges the re-presentationalist belief in the power of words to preconstruct preexisting things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn every- thing (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. [...] The move toward performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from the mere juxtaposition of descriptions and reality […] to matters of practices/ doings/actions. [...] There is an important sense in which practices of know- ing cannot be fully claimed as human prac- tices, not simply because we use nonhuman elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making found following Woolgar (1988) proposed path on reflexivity —later turned into radical reflexiv- ity by Anderson and Sharrock (2015) — which is also a starting point for other linked discussions such as cultural relativism in STS (Collins, 1981, 1984); the incursion of anthropological practices in STS (de la Cadena and Lien, 2015); the emer- gence, consolidation, spread, and particulariza- tion of the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK).” As Hamlin (1992: 516) has pointed, reflexiv- ity in STS “is simply the application of the rela- tivism imagined on the naturalized or interpretative social sciences that are used to study them. If we say that the statements natural scien- tists make are socially contingent, that same admission must apply to the statements of social scientists.” We have Woolgar claim on reflexiv- ity as an extension of Gruenberg’s statement (1978: 322) on relativism referenced by Woolgar (1988: 18): “Any statement which holds that humans necessarily act or believe in particular ways under particular circumstances refers as much to the social scientist as anyone else.” [Woolgar continues] According to this formulation, the relativism in the claim that ‘humans necessarily act or believe in particular ways under particular circumstances’ also applies to those making this claim.”

A second way to locate this sort of ethnogra- phy is through the feminist critics of representa- tion—for example, Barad’s (2003) performativ- ity proposal as a strategy for re-thinking discur- sive practices.

“A performative understanding of discur- sive practices challenges the re-presentation- alist belief in the power of words to preconstruct preexisting things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn every- thing (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. [...] The move toward performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from the mere juxtaposition of descriptions and reality […] to matters of practices/ doings/actions. [...] There is an important sense in which practices of know- ing cannot be fully claimed as human prac- tices, not simply because we use nonhuman elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making...
However, feminist critique to representation is going beyond the encounters between feminist theories and STS. We have, thus, some works where the stress of representation is on art. There are some examples gathered by Leibowitz (1990): Mulvey’s construction of “the male gaze” (1975) concept for talking about the modes of representation and generalization of women in movies; Kappeler (1986) work on pornography understanding deception as an expression of ideology. Regarding representation in media, Alvermann (1999) writes about gender construction and how it is projected; meanwhile, Watkins and Emerson (2000) turn around the idea of representation, focusing on the reception of what is projected and represented.

Coming back to the auto-ethnographical version I aim to introduce here, it is a sort of particular translation—translation understood as the process of converting elements [data, in the original definition] into representations in other media (Law, 1994:56)—that has been contaminated at least two moments in different circumstances: The first one by the act itself of translating—of “betraying” (Ibid: 49)—due to translating is “the work of making two things that are not the same, equivalent. (Law, 1999:9). In the same line, Viveiros de Castro (2004), paraphrasing Pannwitz and Benjamin, considers translation as an act of betrayal. “[Translation] betrays the desitn language, not the source language […] A good translation allows the alien concepts to be expressed within the new one.” (5).

The figure of the mediator has propagated the second moment of contamination, an intermediated media37 which function is filtering and letting the first element passing through its own corporeality, experiences, and points of view—using a Deleuzian perspective—to repeat that element but in other materiality. This kind of contamination is an extra layer—which is not always present in the movement of translating—that modifies an original element (a process in our case) and gives that element temporal, external, and multimodal corporeality to express itself.

Let’s temporally label the ethnographer’s role as that Hobbesian levitathan re-conceived by Callon & Latour (1981) in the earlier stage of ANT, whose function is being the spokesman, the amplifier, of a multitude that is behind it. In the case of this piece of research, but especially of this auto-ethnography, the one who is writing is representing—through a complex process of translation backed on its power of composing a document and of creating a discourse—its study object, which is a material-semiotic multiplicity where the ethnographer is also participating in more than one role.

Notwithstanding, and regarding the possible good intentions the ethnographer may have, the process of translating requires more than a sort of neutral and external spokesman (Scott et al., 1990) amplifying other elements’ discourses but without any compromise with those that it is representing. To translate is also a matter of managing different views and situated outlooks. That is an activity based on organizing, never on pacifying, different sets of dissimilar perspectives about the same element, event, or situation.

That activity is what Viveiros de Castro (2004) understands as perspectivism, a way of controlling equivocations. An equivocation “is not merely a negative facticity, but a condition of possibility of anthropological discourse […] The equivocation is not that which impedes the relation, but that which founds and impels it: a difference in perspective.” (10). So perspectivism, in other terms, is just another name for dealing with multiplicity: “perspectivism supposes a constant epistemology and variable ontologies, the same representations and other objects, a single meaning and multiple referents.” (Ibid: 6).

Using the idea of perspectivism as a tool for disassembling, somehow, this piece of research—and being ambiguous, generalists and reductionists on purpose—we have a bunch of groups, let us just call three of them: tourists, authorities, panhandlers, that are constantly talking about and referring to pedestrianized Times Square. Nevertheless, meanwhile for tourists, Times Square is a place to have fun and taking pictures. For authorities, this location represents an element to control, supervise and organize. Times Square, from the point of view of the panhandlers, is a place for working.

Let us repeat the same exercise over the same location but replacing the other involved

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37. The mediator, who is writing the ethnographic document—this introduction—using the “first person resource,” has a double role during the translation process: 1. as an intermediary that mediates in between the first and the second element, between the “original” data and its representation, and 2. as a content broadcaster that transmits and amplifies its voice.
scream: “watch! or not, watch! or not, watch, or not!” And then, again, his now-fa‐
mous: “Hey! Hey! Hey!”

Most of the eyes, of the cameras, and phones inhabiting the Square were on him. Momentarily, he was catching all our atten‐
tion, and he was achieving what he wanted to achieve: to saturate everybody around to watch his show. The world, Times Square world, was going around him: people were looking at him, laughing at him, recording him, enjoying him, making fun of him... and he was normally walking around, modeling on the virtual catwalk, going up and down the red stairs, playing some random songs (finally, I was able to listen to that), yelling phrases related to the moment, and facing tourists.

Precisely a tourist, meanwhile he was balancing his body trying to do a sort of rudi‐
mentary dance on the red stairs, a black woman who was seated around, started to do some breakdance at his side, with his music, but not with him. Immediately all the eyes were on her, and the laughs and jeers were on here, the laughs, the jokes, the feelings, the spon‐
taneity were on her. Even him, the former center of attention, was on her: dancing and yelling “hey! hey! hey!” trying not to let her overshadow him and pretending he was comfortable with the situation. But he was not. He was not the center of attention anymore, and it was visible how upset he was with that. He was not in Times‐
Square for getting some money. No, he was for the show, for getting attention. Times Square was, for him, a sort of showcase where everyone was able to see him. He was there for shine, for being ad‐
mired. That’s why, when the dancing woman ended her performance and came back to her place again, he — immediately — left the red stairs and come back to the ground, for continuing to his catwalk rou‐
tine. Again, the eyes were on him. New eyes, old eyes... finally, he was again in the posi‐
tion he wanted to be.

But due to his routine was almost in the middle of Duffy Square, I mean in the mid‐
dle of the “chill zone,” and due to that area was not re-imagined as a “designated activ‐
ity zone” and much less as a runway, a secu‐
rity person member of Times Square

Act 3, finale

A few nights later, he arrived again. In general terms, he was wearing almost the same outfit: same studded boots, same skinny jeans, same scarves, same navy sailor hat. However, instead of the black stripe white T-shirt, he was wearing a long black tank top over a white one and, the most inter‐
esting thing about his new outfit, instead of carrying on a speaker, he was wearing white earplugs. The message for me was clear: even though his show was about him being seen by everyone, his music — perhaps for preventing being overshadowed again — will remain private. It was only for his ears. That night nobody asked him to move away. Also, nobody tried to dance at his side. The runaway Square was only for him. He went up and down the red stairs multiple times, making his moves. Also, he walked around the tables in the food court, yelled to some people occupying his space, and, per‐
haps, the most important thing for him, catching everyone’s attention. I followed him for almost an hour that night. Then, he lost me. I left him there doing his perfor‐
mance, and I moved to other areas in Times Square.

About 45 minutes later, I came back to Duffy Square, and I saw him there again. He was doing the same performance as before as if only a few minutes had just passed. Also, tourists were still recording him and laughing at the situation. Meanwhile, he just continued walking, dancing, and singing along as if he was pretending there was nobody around him but himself. Pretending, because from time to time — without stop‐
ing his performance — he used to check if the glances and cameras were still over him. I moved out of Duffy Square again, and I did not come back that night. That was the last time I saw him there. We never crossed again.

to one of those blue-delimited areas for street performances and panhandlers. This time he did not yell a “ignore! ignore! ignore!” but he just moved away from there, but he never went to one of those shared work‐
ing zones for getting tips. He just left the Square northbound. I did not see him again neither that night nor the next day.

elements. For cars, pedestrianized Times Square is a space to avoid. Despite that, in a certain way, the required infrastructure for mobilizing vehi‐
cles is still there. Some new actants — bollards and barricades — are ready to stop and crush any automobile that wants to penetrate the pedestrianized plazas (see V24). For architects and urban planners, Times Square represents a symbol of how public open space should be. This location is like a triumph of pedestrians over cars, of people over machines, of Jacobs over Moses. As the last element, and leaving generaliza‐
tions aside for the one who is writing those words, pedestrianized Times Square represents a multiple multiplicity of components, spaces, and perspectives. More than just considering Times Square as a fertile field site, this location results in a set of permanently and simultaneously con‐
structed products, being assembled by minimal, sporadic, and effervescent associations of any kind of elements where the ethnographer is also participating. As another actant, inhabiting and creating Times Square, the ethnographer is mak‐
ing alliances, taking sides, temporally being part of groups, collecting and discarding other ele‐
mements’ voices.

Nevertheless, and although this proposed self-ethnography is a situated and embodied (Haraway, 1988) description of specific pro‐
cesses from the perspective of one of its partici‐
pants, it cannot be considered as a mere set of “personal narratives.” And it is in that way due to the stories being told here are not (only) the partic‐
IPANT’S stories. They are the narration of differ‐
cent processes of particular and temporal group formations. Also, this is not an “evocative or an emotional” narrative but a descriptive one. The purpose of this chapter is simple: just describing why and how Times Square turned out to be the study object of this piece of research.

The particle just that is right before describ‐
ing was intentionally added to propose a discus‐
sion about the capacities and scopes of the act of describing. Just describing is a direct allusion to the operationalization of ANT: the cartography of controversies. “The cartography of controversies is a set of techniques to investigate public dis‐
putes especially, but not inclusively, around techno-scientific issues [...] according to [this method (Venturini et al. 2015)] public debates [vaguely defined as situations where actors dis‐
agree] constitute the best settings for observing the construction of social life.” (Venturini, 2010a: 796).

Notwithstanding, the stress of Cartography of controversies in relation to just is on observing instead of on describing. “Just observe collective life” was the direction that Bruno Latour — the one who proposed this method as a sort of opera‐
tionalization of ANT — gave to its students (Ven‐
turini, 2010b: 259). That instruction seems to be

Chapter four

V17. A BRIEF

Clarification

As Scott et al. (1990) have noticed, the study of controversies is a scarce and double‐
edged weapon due to, on the one hand, “social processes normally hidden in labora‐
tories and offices are brought into open view in a dramatic fashion. Assumptions that are normally implicit are challenged by dis‐
putants, routine procedures scrutinized, and weak points in arguments attacked. [But, on the other hand, controversies] may give an unrealistic picture of the day-to-day oper‐
ations of normal science.” (474)

Although it is neither the primary methodological strategy nor the preeminent theoretical corpus, along this whole disser‐
tation we will face several controversies — although they will not always be approached using the method of “cartogra‐
phy of controversies” — such as, for exam‐
ple, the implementation of designated activ‐
ity zones (see V09, P23-A), as well as the pedestrianization of Times Square itself (go to P26) and the one regarding the possibility of destroying the pedestrian zones and tak‐
ing the cars back down to Broadway (see P16-B8).

Nevertheless, and due to the method of analyzing and mapping contro‐
versies was not the only way of encompass‐
ing Times Square, that sort of “disconnec‐
tion” between controversies (understood these processes as highlighted by dif‐
ficulties that to their boiled nature are hard to be repeated) and the other ordinary situations (those that are constantly repeated giving the sensation they are just one stable and solidified element) was minimized entirely and, even I could say it turned into an almost invisible gap.
naive and easy to follow. However, it involves three main consequences that are making the process of looking more complex. These consequences of just are:

(i) you shall not restrain your observation to any single theory or methodology; you shall observe from as many viewpoints as possible;

(ii) you shall listen to actors’ voices more than to your own presumptions (Ibid: 260)

So, the act of describing in ethnography should be the result of a multimodal exercise that involves not only linguistic but also visual, aural, spatial, and gestural semiotic resources. The directions related to “just observing” could be easily found in the process of description (of representation) that is the step after approaching the world outside. Even in a self-ethnography — at least how it is proposed here — those three consequences of “just observing” should be taken seriously, but, at the same time, one must differentiate between the moment of approaching reality (observing) and the moment of representing it (describing).

But what does it mean exactly? Well, it means that it is necessary to be precise in where the “auto/self” component in the ethnographic practice is located, either at the moment of observing or at the time of describing. To put the prefix in the first scenario implies to make an ethnography of oneself. In other words, it is putting us (regardless of if “us” is us either as individuals or as our processes or our situations) in the position of the subject object of our pieces of work. On the other hand, to locate the prefix in the second scenario is to tell an ethnographic story but from our own perspective. And this is where this chapter is situated.

Coming back to the two unsolved questions above presented: 1. Why is it necessary to include the point of view of the ethnographer? And 2. Why is its personal experience relevant for the description.

(iii) you shall listen to actors’ voices more than to your own presumptions (describing).

Regarding the metaphor of the oligopticon for talking about the ethnographer as a situated capture device.

As a complication, the concern is that the ethnographer, as an oligopticon, should not be taken for granted. It means it is something that has to be made. The whole point of the oligopticon is that it needs to be constructed. “An oligopticon is not on the data center, but also on the network of cables bringing the data into the data center (Latour and Hermant 2006[1998]). The oligopticon is a mode of building reality—the city. And this is where the AV opportunity: if we follow Haraway’s proposal of learning “in [and I will add with] our bodies,” we also must agree that it is necessary and desirable to use as much as we can from them. Following the oligopticon as a synecdoche, we should use the vision that sees and hears, the vision that feels, the other that smells, and the one that tastes. The multimodality I am proposing here implies a double process of translation and repetition: the first one is related to the act of capturing, of re-producing the world outside using not only our bodies but also other extensions of them: a camera, a cellphone, a piece of paper, a symbol.

The second part of the multimodal transalation process is related to display and to re-present the world that is there through a set of different modes that may, or not, match the original ones. For example, one of the modes [mode is understood here as “a socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning” (Kress, 2010:79)] I took from Times Square, using my oligopticon over different versions and regions of that location, was multiplicity. It is impossible to understand Times Square nowadays — anyone of its versions — without taking care of its (almost permanently agglomeration of diverse material-semiotic elements.

To capture multiplicity from Times Square required a detailed work of observation, what at first sight may look ordinary and irrelevant: short and sporadic interactions, agglomerations, routines and repetitions, landscapes, random pieces of furniture, touristic and gentrified scenarios. To project multiplicity — what intended of a set of multimodal devices and artifacts that, more than talking about that specific feature, were able to show the feature itself. Re-presenting intended to find the more accurate way of translating a mode into another to reproduce and describe that world outside through its own characteristics.

So, even if we accept the idea of the ethnographer and its ethnographic practice as oligopticon.
TTS, as machines to see, in multiple ways but from partial and situated perspectives, we still need to deal with the consequences of “just observing” that were raised in the cartography of controversies, especially with the numbers two and three: (ii) “You shall observe from as many viewpoints as possible”; (iii) “You shall listen to actors’ voices more than to your own presumptions” (Venturi, 2010b: 260).

The second consequence of “just observing” is taking us away from a possible—and undesirable—interpretation of the role of the ethnographer as a naturalist element incapable of interfering or having a commitment with the reality. As we already saw, the ethnographer is much more than just a neutral piece. “Observing from many viewpoints as possible” is not contradicting the limited and positioned condition of the ethnographer, but it is also forcing it to move from a location to another, from a discussion to another, and from a perspective to another, taking sides, making alliances and elaborating compromises:

“Researcher cannot pretend to be impartial just because they comply with some theoretical or methodological guideline [...] research perspectives are never unbiased [...] Objectivity can be pursued only by multiplying the observation. The more numerous and partial are the perspectives from which a phenomenon is considered, the more objective and impartial will be its observation.” (Ibid: 259-260).

The third consequence, letting the actors talk, recognizes that the (other) actors are often even more well informed than the ethnographer on its study object. “After all, actors are constantly immersed in the issues that scholars contemplate for a limited time and from an external viewpoint.” (Ibid: 260). The figure of the ethnographer-oligopticon as a naturalist element incapable of interfering or having a commitment with the reality. As we already saw, the ethnographer is much more than just a neutral piece. “Observing from many viewpoints as possible” is not contradicting the limited and positioned condition of the ethnographer, but it is also forcing it to move from a location to another, from a discussion to another, and from a perspective to another, taking sides, making alliances and elaborating compromises:

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This monograph is about Times Square. It is about Urban Studies, Science and Technology Studies, and about Actor-Network Theory. Furthermore, this is a set of ethnographic stories about a particular kind of ethnography: an urban-STS one (go to P12-A, chapter 3.2). Additionally, this is a document about how to create things with concepts and about a more interesting enterprise: how to create concepts with things.

But to specify what a concept is is not an easy job. Also, it is not a desirable one. However, and for this work’s purposes, a route has been suggested to offer, let us say, a common background or a conceptual frame. Notwithstanding, this is not the only route that exists, and perhaps who is reading these words has its own itinerary. The good thing is that both ways — yours and mine — can be taken simultaneously, either for complementing each other, for criticizing one of them, or just for the curiosity of experiencing what is walking synchronously.

In a nutshell, it does not matter the nominative definition of what a concept is. A concept must be defined by its properties, components, and relationships instead of just providing a didactic explanation. Without the intention of either proposing a sort of recipe or to minimize the discussion in order to traffic light-thing.

The process of creation is a double-way movement of stabilization, somehow, of the world outside. In addition to including concepts, this operation also involves things. It means here, materialities. But both concepts and objects could be, ontologically, located under the same category of useful things (UT). (Heidegger 2008[1962]). “The being of useful things is that they are ‘in-order-to-do-something,’ which means that they refer, that is related to something other than themselves and thus constitute a ‘multiplicity of references’ or in other words, a complex network of relations.” (Schielen, 2012: 777-778).

A useful thing, either a concept or a material, is always linked to another element. A UT only exists in relation to the others and when it is producing a difference. For instance, a traffic light is a traffic light in-so-far a “things” (Heidegger, 1971: 175 quoted by Schielen, 2012: 779). Doing “things” means to turn the substantive into a verb, into an action. In a raw way, a traffic light is in-order-to-traffic-light-thing. What a traffic light does — regulating the circulation of elements in the same space — is what turns a traffic light into a traffic light and not into another element, let’s say, a sidewalk.

From an ANT perspective, the differentiation between concepts and objects seems to vanish once both elements participate in creating new objects or temporal associations. “It is not possible to distinguish for long between those actors that are going to play the role of ‘[concepts]’ and those that will play the role of ‘things.’” (Latour, 1993: 184). Those useful things acquire, under that perspective, a new connotation as actors:

“What is an ‘actor’? Any element which bonds space around itself, makes other elements depend upon itself and translates their will into a language of its own. An actor makes changes in the set of elements and concepts habitually used to describe the social and the natural worlds.” (Callon & Latour 1981:286).

However, the aim of putting concepts and materials on the same ontological level is neither to defuse the discussion about the action of each kind of element nor to simplify the process of interaction between them. The intention of that proposed “ontological heterogeneity” (Callon, 1986a) is to overcome the duality of human/non-human that, traditionally, was locating the agency — that capacity of action, of producing a difference — over the first type of elements, marginalizing the second ones as just passive entities.

“Often in practice we bracket off non-human materials, assuming they have a status which differs from that of a human. So materials become resources or constraints; they are said to be passive; to be active only when they are mobilized by flesh and blood actors. But since the social is really materially heterogeneous then this asymmetry doesn’t work very well. Yes, there are differences between conversations, texts, techniques and bodies. Of course. But why should we start out by assuming that some of these have no active role to play in social dynamics?” (Callon & Law 1997, p.168).

But recognizing a sort of symmetry between humans and non-humans is not explaining the process of creating things with concepts and vice versa. We know so far that both elements share the same ontological level and that they exist, that they are, only in-order-to-do-something. An element is an element on its own, if and only if it is doing tie thing. But to specify what a concept is and to minimize the discussion in order to traffic light-thing.

“...” (Callon 1971) deduces the point that the words ‘to be’ and ‘with’ are linked and, furthermore, that ‘I am’ therefore means ‘being together with the world’ (51). This basic feature of being together with the world splits itself into a range of different modalities: ‘To have to do with something, to produce, order and take care of something, to use something, to give something up and let it get lost, to undertake, to accomplish, to find out, to ask about, to observe, to speak about, to determine’ (53).” (Schielen, 2012: 777).

That interaction between actors is produced in a context protipicated by a sort of semiotic mediation⁴¹ that is working in both directions: matter is semiotic, and semiotic is material (Haraway, 1988, 1991; Law, 2007). Nevertheless, this sentence’s supposed simplicity has a two-step trick that is hidden new layers of complexity. Because it is more a trap than a trick, the trap consists of displacing the capacities⁴² of the useful things — now known as actors — from a singular theoretical frame to a plural empirical one.

Let us focus on two capacities that a useful thing has. A useful thing has the capacities:

41. The notion of mediation in this monograph acquires a double meaning depending on its position and relation to other elements and situations. For instance, you will find a conception near Peirce’s (1913-58) idea of ‘sign’ — also worked by Callon (1968b)— as a third part representation who is “speaking for” something else. In this context, mediation is inspired by Haraway’s (1999) conception of “material-semiotic,” where semiotic is also material and not just the representation of the material.

42. Those two capacities, that are strongly tied and almost melted, are always expressed in relation to other elements. Those are: (1) the capability of being, in-order-to-do-something-to-others; (2) the ability of doing, in-order-to-produce-a-difference-in-others.
bility of (1) Being with. It means the ability to interact and being relational. (2) Doing things, that is, the potentiality of producing a difference, of affecting others. Let us come back to the traffic light example again, but this time let us talk about a particular traffic light: the one located at the corner of 7th Avenue and W. 43rd Street in Times Square. This traffic light is regulating the traffic flows of vehicles and pedestrians, but only over the Avenue.

The junction of 7th Avenue and W. 43rd Street is regularly a busy crossway. This intersection is connecting the southern part of Zone B — see the map of Times Square located at the beginning of the monograph — with the East B corridor, a busy walkway in front of Paramount Building where, among other locals, Hard Rock Cafe and Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. are located. Although this traffic light is, for sure, not an attraction of the area, almost everyone passing over there is taking a look at it. Although this traffic light is just a metal pole with switching lights, almost everyone follows its instructions and respects its authority. Anyways, the traffic light I am talking about is, in fact, an assemblage of lights dispersed around the intersection created by the overlap of 43rd Street over 7th Avenue. This traffic light is composed of two different sets of lights and accessories. One group is for vehicles, the other is for pedestrians. Each of those sets is composed of LED fixtures, by a yellow-metal case protecting a plastic container of cables and electronic components, by a metal pole, by software, by a center of control, by transportation officials, by the city Department of Transportation...

The traffic light over 7th Avenue is also a composition of three sets of signals. The first two are visual and based on colors. One is for vehicles, the traditional red-yellow-green lamps. The second one is for pedestrians. The pedestrian traffic lightbox has two different images on it. On the left, a palm red hand that symbolizes the act of stopping. On the right side, the shape of a human body is making a gesture of walking. This symbol is white. For switching between the red character and the white one, the first one starts twinkling for some seconds. The operation in the other way around does not count with a bridge in between.

Also, the pedestrian set offers an interactive possibility of letting the pedestrians control the interval of the whole element. There is a bottom they can press for, momentarily interfering in the City’s traffic system and accelerating the transition between the red hand and the white body. There is another less subtle but more popular way pedestrians use to intervene in the traffic circulation in the area. This way is based on crossing the Avenue when the traffic light says it is not allowed to cross. Most of the time I saw this situation, pedestrians were distracted by looking at the other screens, their devices, or street performances and did not realize the traffic light was sending them a message. Fortunately, the horns of the cars were constantly reminding them to stay alert.

The last set of signals composing the traffic light is an audible one. It was installed in 2018 “to assist pedestrians who are blind or have low vision in crossing the street.” (NYC DOT, 2018). Nevertheless, and despite I do not have low vision, this audible signal is always helping me cross the street without looking at the traffic light. Because I was continuously using my phone and camera when I was walking around Times Square, my eyes were constantly focused on the screens of my devices. Fortunately, the beep from the traffic light was always there. First, informing me how much time I still have to remain on the sidewalk and second, when it was possible to cross the street.

Coming back to the visual signals, the sets of lights composing this traffic light have their own intensity. They are shaped and limited by a particular timing cycle. For instance, the green light for pedestrians lasted 30 seconds. Meanwhile, the green light for cars had a duration of 50 seconds. Over the same intersection, but perpendicularly, the green light for pedestrians had two seconds less. The same color light, but for cars, had ten seconds more⁴³. As an additional piece of information, there is a surveillance device over the same metal pole holding the vehicular traffic light, a security camera. However, I never realized whether that device was part of the traffic light or it was a member of another association sharing a common element and spatiality. The act of being of this traffic light is to regulate the transit and interactions of vehicles and pedestrians crossing through 7th Avenue. In other words, to control the cohabitation or coexistence of those elements in relation to a particular space. On the one side, we have, thus, vehicles — cars, motorcycles, and bicycles — going southbound. On the other side, more vehicles going west-bound as well as pedestrians walking in any direction. The regulation of bodies also involves other elements that are creating temporal associations of relationships where the traffic light is participating:

- Two streets overlapped, a pedestrian walk,
- two sidewalks,
- a bike line,
- Some painted indications on the ground,
- a color code,
- vehicles,
- pedestrians,
- an ethical background,
- a sense of responsibility,
- a bunch of rules,
- a sense of spatiality,
- tacit agreement,
- a center of control,
- the Department of Transportation

Even if we isolate the traffic light from the association where it participates, we will find a hybrid multiplicity inside it. And this is where the first layer of complexity emerges: The first displacement of the capacities of a useful thing happens when it is recognized not only as a participant of a net of relationships but also as the temporal stabilization of a tangle of relationships. A traffic light is not a single object but connected to others. It is also a lot of elements gathering together, creating two temporal objects, the traffic light as a material, as a physical thing, and the traffic light as a concept, as a particular abstraction. Precisely, the traffic light can be unassembled⁴⁴ in multiple ways:

- A traffic light as a pure signal device with a certain function.
- A traffic light as a pure technological device.
- A traffic light as a pure social device.
- A traffic light as a pure aesthetic device.
- A traffic light as a pure economic device.

43. According to Kate Ascher (2005) New York’s traffic lights "have two phases: an east-west one and a north-south one. They generally operate on 60-, 90-, 120-second intervals; the cycle is determined by local traffic conditions and may even be longer at times.” (6).

44. As a sort of clarification, decomposing an object either into concepts or materials is not the same kind of exercise than the proposal at the beginning of this section: how to create things from concepts and concepts from things.
Decomposing into materialities. It means taking apart piece by piece until we have a collection of minor elements such as cables, screws, LED lights, welding points, circuits, and plastic chunks. Of course, those elements could be decomposed once again and again until the last circumstances. However, despite it is an easy possibility, this is not the most desirable and exciting way to disjoint an object. We will not, definitely, take this way.

Decomposing into concepts. Basically, going through this way is to follow the same logic that the first one had. The difference is that here the stress is on other kinds of elements. Decomposing an object into concepts requires more intellectual effort and a higher abstraction level than decomposing it into other materials. Nevertheless, this is neither the path we should take.

Dismantling its different regions of usefulness. Those regions are temporal and unstable associations of any kind of elements —unities of sense— gathered to remain responsible for their becoming. To take care of something in the way how de la Bellacasa (2011) proposes to approach this subject, we should be understood as an expositive agency, between the difference produced by objects and the capacities that concepts have of being-in-order-to, of affecting other elements. The contrast between practice and the capacities that concepts have of being-in-order-to do something is to take any element seriously, explaining everything and not just passive elements affected by those practices. Second, concepts should be untied to explore whether a certain kind of elements, conscious states, are produced, either in space or time. Bergson’s thesis is that those particular elements are a matter of temporality and should be measured in terms of duration and intensity. He also presents two different kinds of multiplicity — (1) qualitative and should be measured in terms of quantity and space, and (2) quantitative resources for approaching any type of element. Quantitative multiplicity being a matter of space, and qualitative one in terms of time.

The pedestrian counts in Times Square are an example of quantitative multiplicity. This kind of practice, extensive and measurable (ibid: 3), aims to organize, enumerate, and know in terms of quantity and space. “When one counts objects, one does so spatially. Moving successively from one item to the next; thus, a spatial knowing takes place.” (Latta, 2014: 58). The process of

"If practices are foregrounded there is no longer a single passive object in the middle, waiting to be seen from the point of view of seemingly endless series of perspectives. Instead, objects come into being —and disappear— with the practices in which they are manipulated." (Ibid: 5).

In order to define simultaneity, it means, to put that concept in relation with the rest of this monograph, let us move from the example of the Traffic light to another based on a daily market-research-practice carry on in Times Square: the pedestrian counts. “The Times Square automated counting system - phased in between August 2011 and September 2012 - provides 24/7 data on the number of pedestrians who enter and pass through the key intersections of Times Square Bowtiew. We have 18 cameras located on six different buildings, monitoring 35 unique locations in the area." (timesquareny.org, 2020).

In “Time and Free Will,” Henri Bergson (2001[1913]) proposes —as a critic to the Kantian idea of Space-time— that both concepts should be untied to explore whether a certain kind of elements, conscious states, are produced, either in space or time. Bergson’s thesis is that those particular elements are a matter of temporality and should be measured in terms of duration and intensity. He also presents two different kinds of multiplicity — (1) qualitative and (2) quantitative— as epistemological resources for approaching any type of element. Quantitative multiplicity being in terms of space, and qualitative one in terms of time.

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Translating qualitative multiplicity to this work, that kind of multiplicity, understood under the label of *simultaneity*, is a heterogeneous set of elements that are temporary existing together, synchronously, no matter their differences and contradictions, in-order-to-do-something, in order to be useful. The way I propose for approaching those material-semiotic set of elements is conceiving them as *regions of usefulness*. Those geographies that are not following the Cartesian model are efficient and unstable associations composed of three main attributes: Multiplicity, simultaneity, and intensity.

Now that they are ontologically defined and assembled, we will use those regions of usefulness as epistemological devices to approach Times Square as a multiplicity of multiple and simultaneous practices and materials but paying particular attention to the efficient and heterogeneous associations happening in the streets that are left out of traditional STS approaches.

One (another one) of the most famous examples that Heidegger ([1996][1927]) proposed regarding the ontological being of the elements, it means, regarding his useful thing idea (also referenced by Schelin, 2012) was the one of the hammer that in order to do things, in order to be a hammer is hammering: “The act of hammering itself discovers the specific ‘handiness’ of the hammer. We shall call the useful thing’s kind of being in which it reveals itself by itself handiness. [...] When we just look at things ‘theoretically,’ we lack an understanding of handiness.” (Ibid: 65).

In a theoretical way, it is so easy to understand either a hammer or even a traffic light as a useful thing. Ergo, it is possible to conceive the ontological identity of those objects, turning them into verbs, into actions. For instance, the hammer is a hammer when it is hammering. In a higher level of complexity regarding its being, a traffic light is being a traffic light when it is ‘traffic-lighting.’ Its usefulness acquires a double sense regulating elements’ mobility, allowing them to move and make them stop.

However, repeating that exercise with Times Square or another public place resulted in a more complicated enterprise. And it is in that way not only because it requires a more consider-
The first thing to know is that there is no metaphor involved here. To create Times Square implies to produce a new semiotic-material creature based on the conjunction of two situations: (i) what one can experience in the geographical version of Times Square, and (ii) what is(are) th(ate) conception(s), those previous ideas one had about Times Square. This current situation, the set of building Times Square, is the step after constructing a personalized point of observation, what we call in P20 as an olgotopicon, for doing precisely what we are claiming now.

It is essential to clarify that to talk about previous ideas, or conceptions is far from a theoretical intention of pacifying the study object. Instead, it is closer to an epistemological strategy of transposing multiple versions of the same element, one over the other, to compare, discard, add, reduce, and expand the beings of that element through its different shapes and modes. In other words, we are talking of producing a particular set of palimpsests (See P13).


Although it did not last long, a downpour modified some part of the landscape in Times Square temporarily. People were running away, looking for a place to be dry and cozy. Simultaneously, the now utterly empty furniture was being washed. The made-of-concrete ground was totally shining due to the mix of water and light over a surface specially designed to glow. It was like Times Square was being built on black mirrors, multiplying everything around, making space look bigger. Meanwhile, I found a spot for escaping the drops at the corner of Broadway Avenue and 46th street, right below the big led screen hanging on the Marquis Hotel over the Swatch store.

It was not the first time I was essaying the idea of considering the urban space as a palimpsest (there is, in fact, another reference to this metaphor here, you can find it going to P13). That metaphor and I were walking through Berlin at the beginning of 2018, facing a city composed by a lot of historical vestiges, evidence and referents of (i) different eras, and governments; of (ii) dissimilar materials and ideas; of (iii) multiple practices and potentialities, as well as of (iv) many presences and absences. The idea of that first attempt to understand urban as a palimpsest was linked to a set of different spatialities, temporalities, and functions related not only by geographical proximity but also by an experiential connection.

Instead of hindering my plans, the rainy afternoon gave some space for thinking about those elements I was aiming to capture and to organize under the metaphor of a palimpsest and about the figure of the palimpsest itself. What was guiding me along that speculative exercise was the question I made to myself in the Smorgashburg regarding what is that thing that Times Square does that is differentiating it from other places.

From the perspective of that issue, the scope of constructing a palimpsest should be enlarged by paying attention to the particular time-framed locations that a bounded place has and the actions that are constantly resigning the place itself.

Expanding the idea of urban palimpsest — with the intention of using it as a methodological tool — I mixed all that I was thinking so far with de Certeau’s (1984) metaphor of the city as a jumble, an assortment, of memories, routes, stories, and points of view. In that way, an urban location was not only a collage of spaces and temporalities but also a momentary accumulation of movements and individual perceptions produced by the act of exploring and inhabiting a particular place.

Using that resource in Times Square implied not only to decompose the plaza into its spaces and temporalities — like a sort of inventory — but also paying attention to the uses and practices of the different bodies interacting with and in that space.

I also had in mind my recent work on useful things and regions of usefulness (see P22), and the idea of considering Times Square — or any urban place — as a palimpsest was related entirely to the conceptualization of that element as a useful thing composed by different — independent and interlaced — regions of usefulness. The core of this palimpsestic structure, of this experimental ethnographic exploration of the life outside, is composed by mixing an ontological search for the multiple beings of a particular location with a perceptual expedition, a sort of multimodal and semiotic exchange between elements, particularly between humans and non-humans.

V18. Sewing a patchwork

What are the limits of technoscience? What counts as a technoscientific entanglement?

This whole piece of research is a single version of Times Square. It is a version that was constructed putting together different temporalities and spatialities. It is also a collection of self-experiences, located observations, exchanges, speculations, and other Times Square versions. Times Square is conceived as a constructed trajectory full of effervescent situations with different temporalities, producing different spatialities inside more or less the same geography. Most of those situations are virtualities waiting for being actualized, which means they are actual once they are in relation with other elements at the time, they are building a particular structure of relationships and meaning.

This is an artifact about artifacts, about the processes of creating artifacts, about how to represent and reproduce reality. Of course, it is about Times Square as a virtuality and a set of locations and heterogeneous elements happening together in the same geography. This artifact is a mess. It is a mix of related things that deserve individual aedicpe spaces for each one of them. But, at the same time, those things require to be together. Not only one after the another; no, they need (they demand) to be gathered and represented simultaneously, hindering and interrupting any kind of possible continuous linear movement.

The constant repetition of those situations and semiotic structures and different temporalities happening in the same location gives the sensation of stability, like if the urban space would be a solid space instead of a flowing collection of evidences. Let us take a closer look at the elements constantly flowing around Times Square that we label as tourists. Every day there are new tourists traveling from all corners of the world, visiting Times Square. Although bodies are constantly changing, the continuous movement of tourists circulating the same location acts as a sensory trick making other elements believe tourists are solidified.

The intention of producing an entanglement like this one is to reflect — in the most accurate possible way — a messy cognitive and creative process of spinning and unraveling ideas, materials, and any other kind of elements to design and craft multimodal and physical representations of conceptual models. Those models are the result (the result will be understood here as a bunch of temporal stabilizations being continually transformed) of doing ethnography in and with particular urban places.

That apparent solidification works as an epistemological resource that allows other elements, primarily people, facing an organized and linear reality, a kind of structured and controlled existence where one, as a vector, can quickly move from point A to a point B. That situation is useful and valid in both daily life routines and ethnographic explorations. However, as an ethnographer working from a constructivist and relativist approach — primarily based on ANT — it is essential to recognize that limited and situated scope resulted from an embodied vision. Still, at the same time, it is fundamental to conduct a sort of multi-situated exercise (see P02), from different locations inside the same territory, constructing different versions of it.

This is, thus, an artifact created with the solid idea of introducing and, in a certain way, displaying a double kind of topology derived from the observation and the subsequent attempt to describe a fluid reality. The first topology could be found in
the relation between a specific spatialized version of the urban—a located place—as the topos, and a cognitive process based on the observation, abstraction, and translation: reinterpretation of the main characteristics of that topos. The idea of creating this sort of topology is turning that cognitive process into a kind of object called, using a generic name as an epistemological device. As its name implies, an epistemological device is an apparatus, a partial construction, that proposes an epistemological decomposition of a particular location.

Those locations, designed for looking at a flowing and multiple reality, are sites of translation. From there, one can describe everything around, repeating—or at least trying to replicate—that bounded and particular world outside. One way to overcome the sensory trick of solidification is to describe as many linearities as possible to enact all those descriptions in a temporarily stable but multiple entity, in the case of this work, what we understand as Times Square. Perhaps the meaning of multiplicity of those multiple and temporarily stable entities is the level of proximity the linearities that are composing it have among each other. The stabilization of an urban place depends on how near and well connected its versions are.

Roughly, an epistemological decomposition of a place is the movement of going to a location for describing what is happening in that place—flattening it until the last consequences, using the elements (turned into tools) one can grab and stabilize from there. It is also an exercise of letting the actors (humans and nonhumans) inhabiting that place talk⁴⁷. Furthermore, it is the possibility of acquiring a double role, a double ontological identity, first as a compiler, gathering and somehow organizing those voices and, second, as an author, repeating them through the elaboration of a new kind of reality—a virtual and a stabilized one—building a topological copy of similarity or generalization or as an identical copy of something that was there before. Repetition is a complex and differentiated process of reconstruction. It is the universalizing of the singular, where the differences, not the similarities, are being repeated and multiplied.

“Difference inhabits repetition. On the one hand—lengthwise as it were—difference allows us to pass from one order of repetition to another: from the instantaneous repetition of this point to the intermediary of the passive synthesis. On the other hand—in depth as it were—difference allows us to pass from one order of repetition to another and from one generality to another within the passive synthesis themselves.” (Ibid. 76)

That proposed mobilization implies a physical displacement, but also it is about tracing linkages between different temporalities and subjects. Notwithstanding, regardless of the possible movements and connections one can make, those kinds of operations will always involve heterogeneous accounts of elements mixing humans and non-humans and study object and ethnography inside a complex entanglement structure of spatial co-production. That structure is nothing more than a mechanism for stabilizing a fluid reality before the construction of the ethnographer’s study object, and that will be there once the ethnographer moves away.

Following the way how Deleuze understands both concepts, difference and repetition, the elaboration of those new kinds of materials I am proposing as a first topology—devices—is presenting an ontological challenge in two times: “Deleuze claims that all our representations, senses, and concepts of identities are illusions (nothing fixed is real). [And that those illusions are covering—perhaps hidden—] pure differences” (Williams, 2005:1392).

So, the act of repetition is, thus, a process of altering, or jumping, between differences and reproducing dissimilarities.

So, this situation has two meanings. The first one is that it does not matter how harder we try or how much we can move from one point of observation to another, we will never be able to grasp that thing we want to grasp outside. That is that our epistemological efforts will always be located in the middle. There are again—two meanings of being situated in the middle. One is based on the world outside, and the other is related to our position as mediators. To be in the middle is to pay attention to what is flowing, to take care of what is happening in between two elements, it means that that action that keeps them together is.

One of my favorite examples for illustrating this point, which Deleuze also proposed, is Borges’ story Pierre Menard, author of the Quixote (Borges, 2007[1964]).

This narration is about the work of a poet, Pierre Menard, who embarked himself on a monumental and complex task: writing Don Quixote, but not another Quixote, I mean, not a contemporary Quixote or something like that. What Menard was aiming to achieve was to write the Quixote.
“Nor, surely, need one be obliged to note that his goal was never a mechanico-transcription of the original; he had no intention of copying it. His ambitious ambition was to produce a number of pages which coincided —word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes.” (Ibid: 52).

To be in the middle is a privileged position for taking care of movement and interaction. It is also a perfect spot for describing and stabilizing sociotechnical encounters one can find in any kind of space in Times Square and during all of its temporalities. However, we are not talking here about any type of technological determinism. Instead, what we are doing is pointing that it does not matter which portion, version, situation, or moment of Times Square one can choose, regardless of if it is actual or virtual, we will be dealing with heterogeneous encounters between technological devices, sociotechnical imaginaries* (Jasanoff and Kim, 2009; 2015), humans, and other nonhuman elements.

In order to create the Quixote, Menard essayed—or at least considered—different techniques and methods: “Learn Spanish, return to Catholicism, fight against de Moor or Turk, forget the history of Europe from 1602 to 1618—be Miguel de Cervantes.” (Ibid). The narrative of the story assures that although Menard tried to go that way, in the end, he discarded that path because it was either too easy or not interesting enough. Regarding the idea of being Cervantes “and arriving thereby at the Quixote” resulted in being less challenging “than continuing to be Pierre Menard and composing that geography —that useful thing—we have known as Times Square.” That exploration intends to essay a speculative method of description and repetition, mixing naturalism and realism, allowing us to construct and unravel five temporal stabilizations of any kind of elements composing different sociotechnical versions of Times Square. The descriptive method I am proposing aims to take a naturalistic aesthetic based on a pre-discursive attempt (Delgado, 2003) to reproduce reality rigorously without any kind of pre-made distinctions between, for instance, what is good and bad, ugly and beautiful, human and nonhuman.

Simultaneously, this method has a realistic structure based on a sort of circularity where reality is influencing how descriptions are made and, at the same time, those descriptions are affecting reality. In other words, this method intends to use naturalism as a descriptive device and realism as an epistemological approach. The speculative method of description I want to essay here is inspired by how Pierre Menard made his own version of the Quixote: producing a set of detailed and dense descriptions by the repetition of a previous reality transforming it by the action of reproducing it. “Menard (perhaps without wanting to) has enriched, by means of a new technique, the halting and rudimentary art of reading: this new technique is that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution.” (Borges, 2007[1964]: 56).

Deleuze wrote about Menard’s story: “Borges, we know, excelled in recounting imaginary books. But he goes further when he considers a real book, such as Don Quixote, as though it were an imaginary book. ‘Ok, richness,’ offered by an imaginary author, Pierre Menard, who in turn he considers to be real. In this case, the most exact, the strictest repetition has as its correlate the maximum of difference (‘The text of Cervantes and that of Menard are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer...’”). (Deleuze, 1995[1968]: XXII). Coming back to the exploration of those five random moments, those five sociotechnical stabilizations, the method I plan to use for seeing those —simultaneously— regions of usefulness and useful things—will be a detailed naturalist description of the bounded world outside using that textual construction as a tool to modify that particular reality by the repetition and translation of the reality itself from a medium to another. In the end, we will have six different sociotechnical constructions, five independent ontological situations, and, at the same time, six regions of a same element that was decomposed and experienced from different spatialities and temporalities.

Those constructions will be a set of short stories of particular self-ethnographic narrations based on the repetition of a specific piece of reality by grasping and describing that reality using other kinds of media and providing it with a different perspective and intention.

List of proposed Times Square’s regions of usefulness

- Times Square as a co-working space (V20)
- The Nordic device (V21)
- Expanding a corner in Times Square (P30)
- The chess player (V14-B)
- Mandatory contamination (V23)
- When infrastructures fail (V24)

At my side, other people were waiting for the rain to stop. One of them was a man wearing a Luigi Bros costume, half wet, half dry. A few days ago, I saw the person behind that costume getting ready to work. He was preparing his character in one of the corridors of the Port Authority Bus Terminal. In this place, many of those costumed characters used to emerge after a quick transformation and a long bus trip. But right now, he was just trapped in a corner in Times Square, alone, losing his time and waiting for the sky to be clear again. Then, suddenly, a couple approached him.

Constructing a palimpsest in Times Square, following those ethnographical directions, also implied carrying out a mapping of the zone based on how people interacted with—and transformed—their environment. More or less, this idea was to elaborate an amalgamated description of the (conceived vs. lived) usage of the spaces in the area, as well as of its affordances. In order to design that map, it was necessary to implement a “watch and ask” ethnographical technique—basically an emic movement of participant observa-

48. When we talk about sociotechnical imaginaries we are pointing to a “collectively imagined forms of social life and social order reflected in the design and fulfillment of nation-specific scientific and/or technological projects” (Jasanoff and Kim 2009: 120).
tion—that, depending on the (human) actor I was interacting with, had to be modified to grasp particular memories and imaginaries.

The couple, a man and a woman, said hello to Luigi, letting him know that their father—they were siblings—was also called in that way. After some laughs, Luigi asked them where they are from originally. “We are from here, from Connecticut, but our father was an Italian-American soldier that spent almost his whole life working in Cuba.” The man said. “Cuba? I am from Cuba!” The guy behind the Luigi costume replied at the time, he was taking his Luigi’s face off. The three of them continued chatting for a while. They talked about Cuba and its simple but happy life. They talked about working in Times Square and how exhausting it is. They talked about Trump and Latin immigration, about food, and their father again. The conversation ended with a group selfie, even including me at the back.

What I was interested in watching—and then including into the palimpsestic structure I was designing—was how particular spaces were being (re)constructed and (re)signified by the interaction between themselves and different elements inhabiting them. And for doing that, my strategy was elaborating an interconnected multi-layer palimpsest inspired by Lefebvre’s metaphor of the urban space as a “flaky mille-feuille pastry” (Lefebvre, 1991[1974]: 86). In the case of my experiment, each layer will contain a particular location, and, in an interspersed way, each location would be intersected by different layers containing, simultaneously, different ways of understanding and inhabiting that location.

The rain was gone from Times Square, and despite everything around was still wet, the area was again full of people. They came from nowhere to occupy all the predetermined positions that this plaza uses to have. The panhandlers were following tourists also. Meanwhile, the tourists were walking around, taking pictures of everything and being followed by the panhandlers. Some police officers were staying over a sidewalk, chatting and projecting a symbolic projection of authority just by the fact of being there. The people from maintenance were cleaning and making all the surfaces dry again. I, an anonymous compiler, was walking around, watching everyone and collecting effervescences.

Times Square looks beautiful when it is raining and when the rain is gone, but everything is still wet, and there are not so many people around. The lights reflected in the puddles and the pavement are duplicating the above-saturated landscape created by LED-lights, circuits, panels, and a computer center far away. Like liquid mirrors, the new version of the Square, projected on the ground, proposes a colorful and distorted atmosphere full of technical melancholy and material emptiness. Sadly, that scenery is just a temporary illusion that only lasts a few minutes, perhaps it is just a few seconds, and then everything goes back to normal again.
V19. NUMBERS AND IMAGINARIES

I did three long-scale exercises during my last fieldwork in 2019. The first one, called “Hunting the hunters” (artifact number P32-B16), was about a collection of 50 pictures of people taking pictures in Times Square. Emulating the Pantone color matching system, the second exercise, named “Materialtone” (artifact P32-B15), aimed to work as a catalog of the different materials and surfaces in Times Square. The last activity (artifact P32-B17) consisted of an infographic showing 95 people answers to the questions: (i) why are you here in Times Square? (ii) is this your one first time in Times Square?

Those two questions were part of a set of six I made intending to trace a small pattern of the reasons, expectations, and previous information people had before going to Times Square. The other three questions were: (iii-a) How did you imagine Times Square before being here? (iii-b) What is the most recurrent memory you have from Times Square when you are not there? (iv) How well did your imaginaries/memories matched reality? (v) Is Times Square what you expected? (vi) Do you plan to come to Times Square again?

87 out of 95 people I talked with were tourists. All of them were visiting Times Square for the first time. No one of them had plans for going back there again. In the same line, 77 tourists imagined that Times Square would be much better than what they were experiencing; 12 visitors told me that the place was exactly as they thought it would be, and only six people expected to find a place was exactly as they thought it would be. I have compiled plans going back there again. In the same line, 77 tourists imagined that Times Square would be much better than what they were experiencing; 12 visitors told me that the place was exactly as they thought it would be, and only six people expected to find a place was exactly as they thought it would be. In those cases, the transition time requires a lot of work: once the rain stops, the maintenance personal starts to clean the furniture around Times Square, especially the red steps over the 42nd St. entrances. The security personnel, hired for controlling the minor incidents and guiding tourists when those need any kind of information, are around paying attention that nobody is going up the stairs or running across the Duffy Square. The areas where this transition time is more evident are the A and the B ones. The responsibility of drying the furniture, in the other areas, is on those who want to use them.

But before the stabilization of that normality, when I was still going away from the rain, I drew on my iPad a sketch of Times Square—taking a look at the artifact P32-B2—dividing the location into ten different scenarios: five zones, the pedestrianized plazas, and five corridors, the side-walks around the plazas. Then, I zoomed into each one of those locations, and I put inside of them other (many) particular scenarios composing the corridors and zones. Using a different color each time, I also drew some groups of elements participating in spatial scenarios and their flows and intersection points. Times Square was repeated on my screen as a space composed of other spaces and uses that were, at the same time, composed by other spaces and uses but also individual materials and semiotic elements. Everything mobile, everything temporal.

There is a sort of transition time between the wet version of Times Square and the normal one. However, it does not last so much, and it is a focused situation. This transition time requires a lot of work: once the rain stops, the maintenance personal starts to clean the furniture around Times Square, especially the red steps over the 42nd St. entrances. The security personnel, hired for controlling the minor incidents and guiding tourists when those need any kind of information, are around paying attention that nobody is going up the stairs or running across the Duffy Square. The areas where this transition time is more evident are the A and the B ones. The responsibility of drying the furniture, in the other areas, is on those who want to use them.

Nevertheless, and despite the idea of urban palimpsest as a tool sounded good and had some coherence, its application turned to be naïve, insufficient as well as (sometimes) pretty deterministic at the moment of being used in Times Square. To apply that metaphor, only paying attention to the spatial composition and the usages of that place may produce a functionalist scenario of solid—although mobile—structures and pre-determined behaviors. In other words, the palimpsest had the risk of being turned into a tem‐ plate of a systemic scheme of stable although effervescent actions and positions.

Another interesting situation to highlight is the capacity that some pedestrians inside Times Square have to retreat themselves once the rain starts. We did not have any warning from the sky, and we did not have time to make decisions. Suddenly everything was grey, and the drops started to fall. The tourists, mainly without a plan, were running from one side to another, looking for a place to shelter from the rain. Many of them ran into the stores, others remained outside, on the sidewalk, but near the buildings below the façades. The ones with more experience regarding weather conditions were carrying on 10 dol‐ lars umbrellas and wearing transparent ponchos one can have for free inside the touristic busses across Manhattan.

Having that possible risk in mind, it was necessary to expand and, simultaneously, to reduce the idea of the palimpsest, but this time adapting it to the situations and challenges I was collecting and experiencing walking in Times Square. The point here was to create a sort of col‐ lection of fragmentary and dispersed situations, including materialities, spatialities, semantic and semiotic elements, routes, and trajectories, but without interfering in their structures, inner logic, and compositions. At the moment of talking about the metaphor of an urban place, especially of Times Square, like a palimpsest, a more paused and detailed approach was required.

Because they have the most extensive knowledge and background dealing with any kind of urban space, the informal workers know exactly where to go when the sky is falling apart. I saw many of the formal workers, especially those in charge of mainte‐ nance and repair, going to a sort of warehouse-pa‐ RK where they store those working staff. Meanwhile, the ones in charge of security did not leave the pedestrian plazas because, I suppose, their work is not allowing them to do that. What they did instead was to find some kind of refuge below the skyscrapers’ façades but protecting their mandatory hat using a plastic cover.

But before developing that paused and detailed approach, and to have common concep‐ tual ground, it is important to introduce the two central notions I have been referring to (i) palimpsest and (ii) version (of a place). Groszian models, a palimpsest, is about two—or more—superimposed media on it. The most recent one was carved over the old ones but without making them disappear. In that way, looking at a palimpsest, it is possible to trace and to see all the imbricated pieces of information that this ele‐ ment previously contained. However, and as an obvious situation resulting from that overlapped composition, each media has a different latency and intensity levels.

The informal workers in Times Square are the ones who need to run faster than anyone else from the rain. For example, the costumed charac‐ ters have to protect their fluffy armors, and the desnudas have to avoid the paint on their bodies faded. Many of them use to go to the subway sta‐ tions around the area: those in the northern part of Times Square to the 49th St Subway station's entry over the 47th street. Those at the south to the 42nd St Station. Others prefer the Marriot Marquis parking area, a sort of passage between the 46th and 45th streets.

When we talk about a version of a place, we are referring to a materialized virtuality that is “real but not actual” (Shields, 2002: 2) and, going further than Shields, that is also [ontologically] concrete despite it is graphically abstract. When we talk about a version of a place, we refer to an element that is more complex than just an idea. We are talking about a kind of material-semiotic entity without the need of a space but with a potential sense of spatiality pointed at a specific place.

Nevertheless, the rain is only passing. Momentarily, the normal flow of bodies around the pavement of the pedestrian zones and also closing, temporally, some specific spaces such as the red stairs or the XXX chairs. But the rest of Times Square —regarding the heavy downpour—is never stops. Offices, hotels, thea‐ ters, restaurants, and stores continue working. The screens permanently shining around and display‐ ing ads seem to be the glue that keeps all the areas together. Those billboards are a digital reminder of where we are and what kind of urban reality we live in. Notwithstanding, and as a metaphor of our current times, those big pieces of technology are taken for granted once one is in that area for more than ten minutes.
One of the theses that I have supported throughout this doctoral research process is that everything inside Times Square is constantly moving and changing: bodies, messages, information, etc., this location is like a modern and shining Heraclitus mock-up where flowing is the main feature. However, sometimes — especially when one is inside that geography — it gives the impression that Times Square is a solidified element where everything, flowing included, remains static. That was my impression that night once I came back from the Meatpacking District. After being a few hours away, Times Square seemed like an already-seen picture that one has been watched thousands of times. I realized that that night I was about to exhaust what I have been called here as the “normal version” of Times Square. Basically, that version is what one can describe after going there for a while and walking around. The “normal version” of Times Square (NVoTS) is the result of describing, in a pretty naturalistic way and using a situated — although mobile — strategy of doing ethnography. The NVoTS is a flattened, extensive and detailed description of a particular place located in a specific timeframe. In the case of this work, that version is a material-semiotic element composed by mixing the experiential exploration of a geographical location with other versions resulted from historical approaches, all regarding — as we already announced — a specific timeframe: Times Square after its pedestrianization (see chapter five).

The set of situations happening that night was not offering me anything unique or different compared to what I had experienced the night before or even the week early. Of course, what I was doing was neither fully encompassing Times Square — or as I pointed in the paragraph above, in an apparent reference to Perec — nor exhaust- ing the whole location. I was trying to delimit a particular version of that place to construct a new element by translating and repeating that bounded reality into a different media. The finite but objective scope granted by a situated perspec- tive is not only restricted by a particular vision, but it is also limited by the affordances and beings of the element we want to describe.

When we talk about the material-semiotic element resulting from the repetition of reality, we refer to the conjunction, to the interpolation, of the two states of the particular version of a place that creates a new and different version of the exact location. That new version is either a personal or a small-scale one due to the process of interpolating states is only possible in an expe- riential way. That is why, due to this situation, those versions are generally marginalized and discarded or just relegated — in a derogatory way — to micro-sociological or phenomenologi- cal practices. That last movement attempts to dis- credit everything that is not fitting into generic macro theories from where it is possible to gener- alize.⁴⁹

Notwithstanding, the personal or small- scale process of interpolating states of a version should not be confused as an attempt to vindi- cate the old and already overcome dichotomy micro-macro. When we talk about mixing virtuality (first state) and actuality (second state), we are not saying that one is above and the other is below, or that one is bigger than the other, or more import- ant, or more relevant. No, to interpolate those two states of the same version is just melting, as a sort of Lefebvrian trialetic, the conceived (vir- tual) space with the perceived (actual) one into a lived (experiential) space that contains the other two but that, at the same time, is overcoming them.

I went to the top of the red stairs in Duffy Square, and I took a seat in there. From that posi- tion, like a sort of metaphor related to the situa- tion of being about to exhaust a version of that place, I was able to watch Times Square from some kind of “from above” perspective. But more unsettled and rudimentary way — this piece of research, it means this way of describing and pro- jecting Times Square, is a palimpsestic labyrinth of other unities of sense, of different versions of the same place, sewed together through an embodied process of located self-reflection. After a couple of hours exploring the Meatpacking Dis- trict, I went back to Times Square to continue my ontological decomposition exercise. Everything there was just “as usual,” the same kind of situa- tions and interactions but different bodies flowing around.

A21-E. August 3, 2019, 21:36. Just a common night

⁴⁹ As a heterogeneous arena of knowledge, STS is shaped by different theoretical corpus and ideological structures that conceive the relationships and associations of elements through big structural models such as systems or networks. Nevertheless, there are other spaces in STS where the “micro” analysis (Knorr-Cetina, 1984) and the performative (Law, 2008), the situated (Haraway, 1988) and experiential (Lataur, 1987) vision is privileged.
than watching whatever it was in front of my eyes, what I was doing was thinking about the course of my fieldwork. I already spent a month in Times Square, going there daily and describing everything that I could see from the act of being there. I also had previously compiled a lot of information regarding the history of the location and, specifically, about its pedestrianization. My point that night was trying to find some answers to the idea that was going around my head: how can I stretch Times Square and my work.

Taking a mental inventory of what I had done so far, I was pretty okay with all the things I collected during my fieldwork exploration. I mean, for sure I was able to construct a good and functional sociotechnical piece of research about the pedestrianization of Times Square using all the empirical and historical information I had compiled during my doctoral process until that night. Nevertheless, something was missed. Strongly influenced by the city I was living in, by my previous readings in creative (Berry, 2017), inventive (Lury and Wakeford, 2012), and imaginative (Wright-Mills, 1959) ethnography, as well as by the study object one is aiming to describe, I decided to find a way to experiment with a sort of STS ethnography that could parasite in an unstable mixed field composed by narrative and digital-and-interactive journalism, inspired, epistemologically, by the study object one is aiming to describe.

Once my table was secured, I used to switch my words in progress from my phone to another device with a bigger screen. That movement implied having at least two free chairs available—one for sitting myself and another for my backpack. Also, I used to secure all the food and drinks I may want because once that workspace was settled, going away was not possible anymore. Contrary to what one might think, it was always easy to find a free table in Times Square due to the constant flow of bodies around the area. In general terms, turning this location into a temporal office resulted in a practical and comfortable experience except for the back-pain that the metal chair produced me after being typing there for a while.

Especially in the mornings, spread around the whole pedestrianized area, it was easy to see other people working with their laptops and phones, always including a cup of coffee at their side. Despite they were different bodies every day occupying different locations around Times Square and, perhaps doing other things too, together we were a sort of dispersing and unconnected set of particular associations: a person + a digital device + a cup of coffee (sometimes a bagel) + a set of tasks and duties + a data plan (or the free WIFI granted by Times Square Alliance) + a specific space + some pieces of furniture + a particular location = a version of Times Square...

And although we were not a considerable amount of mid-level entities⁵⁰, and despite some of the elements involved inside that diffuse set of associations were changing from time to time, we—as a floating collective—were challenging there, somehow, one of them versions of that place: Times Square as a touristic thematic park. Although minimal and intermittent, our presence proposed another way of approaching that spatiality, taking advantage of its affordances and modes and using them with other intentions without compromising its meanings and integrity.

Following Akrich (1997[1992]), we, as a floating collective, were de-scripting Times Square using its affordances to accomplish a particular, continuous—although marginalized—activity based on turning that location into a某种 temporal open office. According to Akrich, any piece of technology has a pre-scription, that is a script, a particular vision, a specific way of using that artifact based on “specific tastes, competences, motives, aspirations, political prejudices and the rest, and they [the designers of the artifact] assume that morality, technology, science, and art evolve in particular ways.” (Ibid: 208). In other words, those scripts are hypotheses designers create to propose—or to predict—a possible interaction between a particular artifact, a piece of technology, and a specific human group.

Nevertheless, at the time we were redefining Times Square, Times Square was also redefining us due to the process of de-scripting is going in both directions. We have that this is “a process of reciprocal definition in which objects are defined by subjects and subjects by objects” (Ibid: 222). In other words, the whole process of de-scription involves a negotiation, a constant semiotic mediation between designers, users, and the object itself—as well as between its components too—to redefine and organize a bounded location. The idea of highlighting the individual participation of the elements composing a particular object results from the kind of objects we are dealing with here: temporal stabilizations of (other) heterogeneous elements.

For example, pedestrianized Times Square (see chapter five) was the result of cutting the vehicular circulation along Broadway Avenue in between 42nd St. and 47th St. That portion of Broadway was adequate for allowing the free circulation of bodies, especially of tourists’ bodies, giving...
them the possibility of remaining in that location by turning the whole area into a sort of family-friendly concrete-made thematic park. The Square was redesigned thinking on a high volume of people constantly flowing. The furniture was divided into two different kinds of usages. On the one hand, there were a reduced number of surfaces, like the benches made of concrete (see V21), designed for being used collectively by big groups of people. On the other hand, there are pieces of furniture, like the round and square metal tables, that were massively introduced but that only have, individually, the possibility of hosting a smaller number of bodies.

Pedestrianized Broadway was also enhanced with big stores and luxury hotels and restaurants, and other spectacle facilities that, mixed with the already famous theaters in the area, were providing a lot of entertainment options for those who were visiting the area. But also pedestrianized Broadway was covered with a layer of elements that were not included in the original design of the site: a lot of panhandlers and street performers found in that geography a perfect scenario for working, as well as us, but in a different way. Those panhandlers and street performances were proposing new kinds of associations (another case of de-scription) with Times Square and with the other elements around—tourists, police officers, planners, etc.—that although were not planned in the original script of the Square were, somehow, fitting into it because they were sharing some common interests regarding keep Times Square attractive.

The touristic version of the whole area has been re-negotiated, among other elements, by the designers’/policymakers of the zone and those who have been using pedestrianized Times Square as their primary work source through the act of attracting and seducing tourists. Sometimes antagonists, sometimes hated by the counterpart, both designers and street performances are continuously co-producing and maintaining that mainstream version that we, anonymous mid-level entities spread across the whole geography, were challenging with our presence. One of the most interesting aspects of this situation I am relating here is that both versions of the same location were (are) taking advantage of Times Square’s (same) affordances to construct and maintain a different kind of associations, expanding Times Square’s ontologies through the stabilization — by my work as an ethnographer— of two different regions of usefulness.

That inspiration coming from the study object was something that was not so clear at the beginning. The whole idea of “learning from Times Square” was extraordinarily ambiguous and hard to translate. What does go to Times Square and learning from it really mean? I was already in Times Square, making myself a lot of questions about figuring out how to stretch my work and study object, but that was something one could also do not exclusively in there. I did not want to be so obvious driving that question only to the experiential. I mean, my idea at this point was trying to avoid a possible common answer based only on an experimental approach that could be summarized at the end of this dissertation as a sort of conclusion or parable. After many discussions that, of course, overcame my thoughts that night, I decided to experiment with a kind of strategy that could allow me to grab Times Square’s features and turned them into epistemological tools for approaching a specific and bounded multiple and heterogeneous reality.

Perhaps the most important and exciting part of “learning from” an urban place was precisely the challenge of using the particularities of that place to encompass and represent the place itself. I used to pay special attention to two specific features I encountered walking in Times Square: (i) its simultaneity and multiplicity represented, among other things, by the number of elements (bodies, trajectories, spaces, temporalities, etc.) cohabiting together inside a specific geographical location and (ii) the inscribence of the kind of relationships the elements entangling and maintaining pedestrianized Times Square used to compose. So, once those features were identified, the next step was to figure out how to really use them rather than just describe them.

That Saturday, that day, I decided not to work, and without any real intention, I just traced the whole idea of my doctoral research and what I would like to continue doing after that work is done. That night, after being walking a lot and thinking even more about the things I was currently doing, and like in a cliché scene in a random movie, I ended my workday seated in Times Square, in the middle of Manhattan, surrounded by a lot of bodies and lights, with many, many things to do, and mainly trying to deal with a question that—spoiler alert— was just finally and fully solved once I came back to Germany in a sort of serendipitous situation: how to use Times Square’s features as epistemological devices for doing STS ethnography. It was then just a matter of writing, composing, designing, and writing again.

That defiance of the main version of Times Square is nothing more than exploring a specific being this location has concerning its usefulness. Times Square is not only a touristic place, but it can also be used and scripted in different ways by different elements like, for instance, as a temporal office as we, that uncoordinated and effervescent group of mid-level entities, used to stretch it to be. Nevertheless, that defiance was completely unintentional and improvised. Nobody wanted to make a statement, and nobody had a double agenda but, still, we were there. And without thinking about that and without doing something different from just being there, we made Times Square bigger by adding a new ontological layer over the same element.

To expand this location is an interesting exercise that tries to break a linear and a sort of deterministic approach to what urban places are for. To broaden this location is to try to defeat the totalitarian imaginary that, in this case, Times Square has as a tourist trap destination. An image that is neglecting, or at least marginalizing, those other versions that are neither big nor fashionable at all but that, nevertheless, they are there, appearing and disappearing, turning Times Square into an interactive and intermittent patchwork quilt.

51 Designers is a wide category that is not only gathering urbanplan and architects but also, as it was pointed before, police makers too. Notwithstanding, the negotiation between designers and street performers taking place at the time, mediated by other elements such as, for instance, police officers, zone demarcations, laws, surveillance cameras and even the media. Most of the time, due to a hybrid situation of presence-absence, the negotiations between designers and street performances are carried out through a scripted third party.
nite shapes depending on how one is organizing, compiling, and displaying its different versions. One could metaphorize Times Square like constructing a palimpsest, designing a labyrinth, or adding new layers to a puff pastry structure.

On a typical day, Times Square is temporarily hosting an average of 350,000 visitors. There are tourists, office workers, salesmen, police officers, maintenance personal, panhandlers, hustlers, and flaneurs. There are New Yorkers, and there are foreign people. There local tourists coming from the different states of the country and there are also tourists coming from any part of the world. There are people just passing by, and others are remaining longer. There are people lying outside, and there are others staying indoors, working in a store, a theater, or in an office building. There are those that are basically running for going out of that place as soon as possible, but there are others just taking their time, taking a seat, or even taking a nap.

Early in the morning, one can find some joggers crossing the empty public space of Times Square. At that time of the day, the Times Square Alliance workers are just starting to re-accommodate the mobile furniture they use to remove every night. One can see some homeless people still sleeping across the plazas. From time to time, there are trucks unloading food supplies. Around 8 am, there are busy office workers everywhere. They used to walk really fast, and they do not have any patience for dealing with whatever that is not moving at their own velocity. Also, there are some early-birds tourists spread around the plazas. There is not a day one does not see someone dragging a suitcase in Times Square. Usually, that someone is a newcomer who just arrived in the city either via Port Authority bus terminal or through the metro, more likely from the JFK. The range of visitors in Times Square is quite broad. However, despite the category visitor seems broad, it is neither including the bikers, the car drivers and their passengers crossing by — around 100.000 per day — nor the rats, the pigeons, the house sparrows, the horses, the bees, and dogs that are also temporary and from time to time, inhabiting the Square but whose census is not available. There are some snakes, I guess they are boa, that are visiting Times Square regularly at night. The snakes are hidden almost all the time inside cloth bags and plastic boxes until eventually they are mainly offered to young tourists making selfies. Even though the snakes are spending hours in the Square, working hard as exotic models for decorating tourists’ pictures and videos, they also do not count as visitors of the place. Neither they nor the Caribbean birds, parrots, and cockatoos are also working in the same business.

Every morning, a guy uses to go to Times Square to pick up the empty water gallons from the food kiosks and replace them for new fresh ones. At night, the people from the kiosks left the empty plastic containers outside, and when there is nobody around, this man, like a sort of tooth fairy, does his magic and immediately disappears. He is out of any official count. There are some people that also use to go daily to Times Square to grab from them plastic bottles and soda cans. Even some of them have their own keys for opening the Bigbely solar trash bins and subtract the elements to be recycled. They are not in any statistic as visitors of Times Square. The homeless people are also out of the census, even despite the considerable number of them choosing Times Square as a temporary refuge to sleep at night.

The homeless people use to sleep in the corners and furniture along the whole area until someone wearing a uniform kick them out. Roughly, one can say that there are three main groups of homeless people: the ones that are set along the corridors begging for money. Usually, those are using funny signs (or pets) to attract tourists’ eyes. Others are walking around the area — and beyond — looking in the garbage for something either to recycle or to eat. The last group is composed of those that only go to sleep in there. Some of them are taking blankets and unfolded cardboard boxes for creating improvised sleeping spots. Others are just laying on no matter what surface, without any worry about the noise and the bright the environment around is producing.

Ten vignettes of multiple Times Square. 2019 Fieldwork.
V21. THE NORDIC DEVICE

There is a, more or less, 15-meter-long black granite bench on the northern side of zone E. The bench is located exactly in front of Nasdaq's offices, the stock exchange company has in Times Square, over the pedestrianized Broadway near 43rd Street. Zone E is perhaps the less transited space in the whole Times Square. The main reason that can explain the lack of popularity of this zone is that a massive portion of the area has been under repair during the whole time I was in there. Zone E looks empty, with some located messy spots full of construction materials, workers, barriers, and scaffoldings. Also, due to the height of the buildings around, this geography uses to look darker and colder than the other zones.

Notwithstanding, what results more interesting about zone E, at least for tourists, is its northern side, precisely the area where the granite bench is located. From the north side of Zone E, it is possible to capture good portraits of the buildings, the billboards, and the general touristic-pedestrianized environment of Times Square. The northern side of this zone is surrounded by 43rd Street, by the 7th Avenue at its left, and by the Condé Nast building —also called One Times Square—at its right. Broadway, still turned into a walkable space, is crossing the zone perpendicularly. Precisely, the bench is in between the right side of the zone and the right adjacent corridor.

Unlike the open spaces of zone E, that corridor is a bustling location—the granite bench too. One of the main functions this bench has is to organize the space around dividing both areas, the zone E and the corridor beside the zone. According to one of the workers that are participating in the reparations of the pavement, this zone will be adequate in the future with some extra food kiosks and many tables to take advantage of the, right now, empty space. However, he does not have any clue about where the renovation of this location will be done. He just confirmed that they are working hard to have the space ready before Christmas, but that is it. Meanwhile, the public open space of the northern side of zone E continues attached to Times Square's main version by offering great views of the surrounding spaces and giving visitors a place—the granite bench—to take a pause.

However, to call that structure a “bench” is a bit unfair. That piece of furniture has more functions than just letting people sit over its flat and cold surface. In fact, and because of its shape, the possibilities of interacting with that device are multiple. But before going there, let us construct first a small anatomical studio of that embodied technology: it is an item of two-piece furniture, each one of them is a rectangular structure with an independent size, the bigger one is approximate, 15-meters long, the smaller one is, more or less, 10-meters long. Both structures are adjacent by one of their sides. The shape of the smaller rectangle is flat, and the biggest and longest one is increasing its size from one side to another: it starts at the same level as the flat one, and then it is getting bigger until its height is doubled.

Due to the different shapes and heights one can appreciate along that black piece of furniture, it is easy to find there a continuous bunch of bodies (with interchangeable individual components—tourists—that are arriving and leaving permanently) interacting with the “bench” in different ways and positions, (almost) always being so close to each other but without disturbing or affecting the interactions of those around. Below, there is a shortlist of the six most common ways of using the black piece of furniture. The granite bench is useful for:

- Taking a seat in the flatter structure.
- Leaning against the bigger and irregular-shape one.
- Sitting on the smaller part of the longest rectangle but doing it from the other Side of the structure where there is enough space for doing that.
- Laying on the upper and higher surface of the element.
- Standing on it for taking pictures and videos of the area from a better angle.

But to trace the limits between a zone and a corridor, to let people go around and over its surface, providing new spaces for resting, chatting, eating, making a call, or taking pictures are not the only tasks that a piece of furniture has. This element was also designed to hide and store a complex, robust electrical system connected to the city's electrical grid. A system composed of cables, circuits, alternators, screws, control panels, welding points, and so on and that was assembled to provide enough power to all the possible activities that the zone of Times Square may host.

The “bench,” designed as a multifunctional structure, is an example of a good Nordic design. It was also made for looking good, for being a decorative element in the New New Times Square (go to P26). The responsible behind this furniture is the Norwegian firm of architects Snøhetta, the same company that from 2010 to 2017 was in charge of Times Square's whole redevelopment process. So, this black made-of-granite device of sleek outlines and clean lines is, in equal proportions, aesthetic and functional. Its minimalist shape proposes a sort of inclu-
There are millions of lights working day and night in Times Square. There are multiple sets of lights —mostly LED lights— shining simultaneously from any single building in the area. The lights are organized and grouped strategically to work, without any interference, in the production of images and visual content. Nevertheless, those multiple and organized set of lights, shimmering and projecting multiple graphic messages, are constantly competing against each other, always showing their best choreography, to catch as many of those multiple eyes walking in the ground, as well as the budgets of the advertisers that pay for keeping the bulbs always on.

The groups of lights shining in Times Square are also multiple entities defined and organized by their shape, message, function, owner, price, and location. There are lights working together over flat —either square or rectangular— displays, and there are others composing signs and logos. There multiple sets of lights projecting precisely the same kind of content through different screens and spatialities. For instance, there are a group of four enormous digital and interconnected billboards over the Miller building facade —in the corner of 7th Avenue and 46th Street— that use to work together magnifying and hyperbolizing what they are projecting.

A group of 15 signholder companies, composed of international media holdings and local businesses, are owning the 184 vinyl and LED signs, 37 screens included, that are spread along Times Square. Those multiple and incandescent options for exhibiting information also have numerous price ranges depending on the screen, location, the duration of the ad, and the number of days one is planning to rent that space. For instance, an annual renting contract of an average screen in Times Square may cost over $1,000,000, but if one intends to rent a screen for a shorter period, prices start from $5,000 per day.

So, there are LED screens and vinyl panels. There are informative billboards, there are interactive screens, there are screens for displaying third parties’ advertisements, and there are panels boasting the same message every day of the year. But neither the LED lights nor the screens know what they are projecting. In fact, the kind of message is not relevant to them. The only things they really care about are that the videos have the correct format and enough power to keep them working on. The users of those devices also do not care so much about what the billboards are displaying.

I made a short survey on the evening of August 19, 2019. It was a quick exercise that neither aimed to prove anything nor generalize what ever it could be generalized. I was standing in front of the American Airlines theatre over 43rd street, a place where there are not so many billboards but near to where those devices are. My idea was to ask some people —35 in total—that were recently in Times Square if they paid attention to the billboards in there and, if they do that, what was the last advertisement they can remember.

Of all them assured me that they watched, for sure, the billboards around the Square. Twenty-nine people said they just took a look at the street, a place where there are not so many billboards but near to where those devices are. My idea was to ask some people —35 in total—that were recently in Times Square if they paid attention to the billboards in there and, if they do that, what was the last advertisement they can remember.
the other six pedestrians tried to remember what was precisely the last ad they watched about. Pedestrian 1 (P1): “It was about a phone, I guess it was about an iPhone.” (P2): “I remember a girl, it had to be some makeup brand... or was it an apparel one? I think it was about shoes.” (P3): “it was a Coca Cola advertisement.” (P4): “[it was something... I guess it was about a bank.”” (P5): “I guess it was a YouTube ad. Is it possible, right?” (P6): “I guess it was the one from Hard Rock Cafe.” Notwithstanding, all of the 35 people I talked with were emphatic in stating that Times Square without the shiny billboards would not be a place worth visiting.

What is interesting about this situation is the possibility of opening a new line for discussing the meaning and purpose of an actant inside of a particular group formation and the way how that element is behaving in a simultaneous but codependent ontological way. The being of the screens as the visual representatives and speakers of an unknown third party is subjugated to the being of those devices as brightly and electronic decorative ornaments and their capacity to draw the attention of other elements. In other words, to their ability to make emotional connections.

I realized that sometimes, like in this case, the different ontologies of a particular element are happening simultaneously and through a kind of linear event resulting from the ability of an element of creating effective relationships that are making it deploy diverse and codependent ways of being. For example, suppose the billboards in Times Square are not working well as devices for catching people’s attention. In that case, their being as mediators and representatives of a third party will not be successful. And if that version, that being as a speaker of other elements, will not work, the being of the billboards as elements to trade in business transactions will not work either.

Simultaneity, as a particularity of Times Square, is provided by the different versions of the element happening together and composing a specific spatiality. Notwithstanding, those versions—being understood as useful things—are conditioned by a linear but momentary process of ontological assemblage. We are talking here about a set of effervescences happening after the other, like a chain of intensities. For being an international tourist going around Times Square, one needs to be accepted as a valid element inside an extensive entanglement we know as the United States of America. Being accepted in there results from other economic and political processes one uses to take for granted. That is a sort of paradox of linearity-simultaneity.

However, the linearity I am highlighting here explodes in a multiple and simultaneous co-presence of different times and intensities but without losing its consecutive structure. Coming back to the example of the billboards, they, as mediators, exist simultaneously as shiny ornaments, as devices for capturing people’s attention, and as goods to trade in exchange for money. All the regions of usefulness that belong to Times Square’s open public spaces are conditioned in the same way. We can talk about effervescence and improvisation; we can speak of unpredictability, but we should also talk about scription and affordances.

V23. MANDATORY CONTAMINATION

Based only on my observations around the whole area, and without any official confirmation or any other source that could endorse my words, I believe that the most significant contaminating source in Times Square is the light emanating from the massive screens and signals that are hanging from the facades of the skyscrapers in the whole sector. Notwithstanding, that light pollution generated by the excess of LED lights and bulbs is the result of a zoning resolution (81-732 Times Square Signage Requirements), a mandatory act that forces each building “between 43rd and 50th Streets with street frontage on Seventh Avenue and/or Broadway [to have] ...[at] least one illuminated sign [that also] shall be provided with a minimum aggregate surface area of 12 square feet [1.11 square meters] for each linear foot of street frontage of the zoning lot.”

There are daily piles and piles of garbage produced indoors and outdoors in Times Square. The maintenance workers have to constantly gather the trash and transport it outside of the Square’s domains and the tourists’ eyes. However, the lights are on all the days of the year, all the time. Meanwhile the garbage is flowing, the light remains static, immobile, always shining from above. Sometimes, when it is raining, the light is being repeated on the ground.

Each puddle turns into a mirror, reproducing the colors of Times Square’s sky. But once it is dry, the sky continues shining over everyone, polluting the area with short sequences of videos being reproduced repeatedly.

The light contamination in Times Square is regulated, protected, and promoted by law. It is part of the intangible heritage of the area. It is a spatial feature that has been around in all the versions of this place since 1937 when the first neon-light screen was installed in the zone. With the heyday of electric energy and the popularization of the light bulbs during the last three decades of the 19th century, Broadway theaters, a still-emerging but a strong group of theaters and show venues, started to use the light bulbs inside their locations as well as outside of them. Suddenly the whole area was covered with that new, safe, and very lasting invention, creating an extreme contrast with the rest of the City.

Walking through Broadway at night turns the area into a very popular activity that democratized the night in Manhattan. Lights allowed people to go out massively, not only for moving from a point A to a B but also for enjoying a futurist experience full of lights and entertainment. Later, that portion of Broadway would be known as “The Great White Way” in allusion to the emergence, consolidation, and overstatement of that element that transformed and gave the zone a new connotation. That glowing and colored pollution has been an essential part of the touristic attractiveness of Times Square’s public spaces, even perhaps it is the most important one. Nowadays, the lights on are also a symbol of Manhattan and a global referent for New York City.
The question here is what (a specific) space is usefully formed and situated, configuring a specific kind of territorial imaginaries are translated and applied—or ignored and discarded. The multiplicity of beings and re-scripted. Sometimes, that plan is just a matter of design, produced, and reproduced in Times Square, by the interaction and interp...ation of virtual and actual spaces, go to A02-A.

Highways for transporting bodies. We have here the first conceived pedestrian areas. Summing it up, those areas were imagined for walking faster. Those places, called by the experts as express lanes, were designed to mobilize a constant flow of people from one side to another. Generally, they are located surrounding or delimiting the other pedestrian spaces. The main express lanes Times Square has—looking at the zone northbound—are the left sidewalk over the 7th Avenue, from the 42nd Street to the 45th Street, and the pedestrianized Broadway Avenue between the already mentioned streets. For security reasons, those lanes are delimited by granite and metal barricades and bollards.

As for the imagination of the conceived space, the actants recognize the existence of those places, their boundaries, and their rules, when they may disagree with their presence, and although they may decide not to obey those rules all the time.

(iii) Negotiation. The particular space resulting from the interpolation of the conceived space over the lived one must be continuously negotiated and renegotiated by implementing different alliances and strategies. The result of that process is new, temporal, different, and syncretic spatialities.

Next, I will formally present each one of the pedestrian areas we have been talking about here. However, if you are interested in knowing how that space is designed, produced, and reproduced in Times Square, by the interaction and inter...tions of virtual and actual spaces, go to A02-A.

The heavy multi-shaped devices projected this area as a pretty safe pedestrian location until 2017 when a car drove along three blocks over the left sidewalk—northbound—on the 7th Avenue between 42nd St. and 45th St. The whole infrastructure created around the idea of protecting the walkable spaces failed the afternoon of May 18 when a not desired object transgressed the being and meaning of a sidewalk turning that element into a momentary different thing.

52. To talk about the affordances of the space is a vague way of considering an embodied and localized process of entanglement made by a particular element and its environment. But, nevertheless, its environment is also an ambiguous term due to it needs to be decomposed by way of considering an embodied and located process of describing what is inside that environment. At the end, the affordances of a random space are not more than the particularities of other elements that are composing a relational spatial structure.

53. Nevertheless, when you are a ravenous tourist looking for spectacle and entertainment, and despite that there are bridges—signs—between conceived spaces and lived spaces in physical Times Square, to know those kinds of things is not a necessity for living the experience of being there. Translating that to a practical situation, as a tourist in Times Square you don’t need to know the same three different pedestrian zones, even you don’t need to know they exist. You can move around the chill area like if you are in a hurry, you can stand and take a picture of whatever, surrounded by the six members of your family, and blocking temporarily an express lane, you can walk through an activity zone and nobody will tell you anything.

A car was riding over an entire delimited space for pedestrian usage producing an alteration of the ontology and usefulness of a particular technological device, the sidewalk. A sidewalk is a sidewalk in so far as it allows the safety and continuous circulation of pedestrians. However, during some long—minutes, the already referenced footpath vanished. Using almost all the materialities and affordances the environment provided, the car—a maroon Honda Accord—transformed the walkway into a roadway. Suddenly, the horrified pedestrians turned into the exogenous elements of an emergent and momentary car lane that confronted the previous and stable version of that zone.

Without counting the car and its driver, the bollards and barricades in the area had the most significant role in the transmutation of the space from sidewalk to roadway. Paradoxically, by both action and omission. First, the incident was possible because the contingent elements resulted not being enough for preventing the incursion of a vehicle inside the sidewalk. The external device found a hole in the pedestrian area's security system and, quickly, transmuted the ontology of this circulation infrastructure. This time it was not something like a linear and simultaneous ontological co-presence. What happened there was the transmutation, by the temporal emergence of a third element, of the whole being of an element without losing its material integrity.

Second, those two kinds of elements, bollards and barricades, were also responsible for ending the whole situation and turning back the sidewalk's previous ontological state as a sidewalk. The Honda finally crashed into a group of bollards near the Marquis Hotel. Sadly, along its path, the vehicle left one dead person and twenty-two injured. After a period of transition, the original being of the flattened device was restored. I visited Times Square four months after this incident, and the place where the car was finally crashed was still waiting for being repaired.

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During the summer of 2019, a portion of the sidewalk where all that situation happened was renewed. Some of the pavement was removed, and, for replacing it, a structure of mixed materials was installed on the ground. Also, new bollards made of hard plastic were assembled along the sidewalk (see P32-B15). This action was part of a strategy the city administration implemented around some public open spaces of New York to reinforce those areas' security. On January 2, 2018, mayor de Blasio informed that the City planned to spend $50 million on installing metal bollards. Times Square would receive more than a thousand of those devices.

Most of the bollards in Times Square were designed and implemented by a company called Calpipe Security Bollard to minimize any possible security threat or terrorist attack. Also, the devices should be easily removed by the ones in charge to make more flexible the movement of emergency vehicles and other kinds of supporting transportation elements. “Due to the high traffic and heavy pedestrian presence in Times Square, there were many safety and security requirements that had to be met during the design and manufacturing stage of the project. The bollards had to be removable and lockable so that authorized vehicles could access the protected area, without compromising the security of the system.” (Securing Times Square, n.d.).

However, the bollards are not the only security elements preventing possible collisions and zone transmutations. Depending on the area of Times Square, one can also find big plant pots serving as barriers for pedestrian zones. Also, some pieces of furniture are delimiting and separating the plazas from Seventh Avenue. Those elements are large black granite benches located at the edge of the pedestrian area, and their primary function is to divide both environments separating flows and preventing unnecessary encounters. Nevertheless, the metal bollards are the city officials’ favorite elements at the time of creating defensive structures to preserve the pedestrian version of the Square.

In a random conversation with a police officer outside the American Eagle store, we talked about the bollards, barricades, and other elements with the same function. I told him that every time I was coming back to Times Square, it gave me the impression that the area looked more like a military location due to the massive amount of bollards and powerfully armed police officers. “We (the police officers) are here just for the tourists taking pictures with us—” he told me. “The real force is on the ground (the bollards) as well as in the air (pointing at the surveillance cameras sprayed around Times Square).

Virtual showcases for trapping tourists. There are also zones where panhandlers and street artists can work anytime. The planners named those areas as designated activity zones. They are, theoretically, the only places in Times Square where it is allowed to work and receive tips in exchange for a performance, a picture, or any other (legal) activity. Those areas can be easily recognized because some signs are announcing them and explaining their rules. Those rules are written in English and Spanish. The designated activity zones can also be identified because they are delimited by some pots, and blue duct tape stuck over the pavement.

Multipurpose outdoor public space. Finally, there are the chill zones. Called officially in that way, those are spaces where pedestrians can just take a seat and enjoy the view of the multiplicity of multiple situations happening simultaneoulsy around them. Those zones are the largest pedestrian areas, and they are also a multiple set for other officially delimited places. Inside the chill zones, one can find three different locations: (i) food courts—the only places in Times Square where drinking wine and beer is allowed—; (ii) seating areas, composed of a different kind of outdoor furniture such as the famous red chairs and tables; (iii) empty space, that is outdoor open space used by pedestrians for walking around, staying there and taking pictures, and by the officiality as a stage for different activities.

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There is another location that, by its primary use, could be included as part of the chill zones, but that due to its particular rules, it deserves to be highlighted individually: the famous red steps in Duffy Square. Installed in 2008 over the TKTS booth, those 27-steps-glass-structure is also used to chill, take a seat, rest, wait, watch, take pictures, and record videos. They are also a pretty popular place for making video calls, proposing, singing, eating and drinking, and just being there and doing nothing.

One of the things that are making those stairs different from other zones is that, due to security reasons, those stairs do not remain open all the time. The red steps are administered by the Theatre Development Fund together with Times Square Alliance and, despite there are not so many rules involved around that structure, two of them are strictly followed:

- Every day, after midnight, the steps are closed at 1:00 and reopened again early in the morning, around 7:00 - 8:00. They want to prevent possible vandalism, but, more importantly, the closure of those long horizontal devices aims to avoid an ontological transmutation, from stair/chair to stair/bed.
- It does not matter what, when it is raining the steps are closed too. They are available again once the rain is gone and the people from maintenance have cleaned the zone.

The maximum capacity the steps have is 700 people. However, it seems nobody is taking care of how many bodies remain in there.

There is also a sort of fluid space, which means “without clear boundaries” (Mol & Law, 1994: 659), happening simultaneously with the other conceived locations in Times Square and mixed with them. The connotation of fluid is referring to a kind of melted space where “it’s not possible to determine identities nice and neatly [...] [o]r to distinguish inside from outside, this place from somewhere else” (Ibid: 660). That fluid space is being continuously constructed by the interference, the meddling, and interaction of the otherspaces of Times Square.

For instance, the express lanes are constantly turning into chill zones when, for example, groups of tourists suddenly stop in the middle of a sidewalk for taking pictures or just talking or for observing something particular. The express lanes are also being vanished when the crowds of people cut the mobility of a whole sector, and nobody can pass through. From time-to-time panhandlers and street-performances abandon the designated activity zones, the only places where they are allowed to work, for avoiding competence and getting in that way more attention (and tips) from tourists.

Tourists, on the other hand, often use to walk without realizing where they are stepping at. They are usually in the middle of an activity zone, just laying, interrupting a performance, or simply occupying a place that was not re-designed for them. But all those melted situations are often decomposed when a mitigating element uses to appear. For instance, the activity zones get their blue boundaries clear again — and “magically,” all the costumed characters go inside them— when police officers are walking around. The express lanes turn into express lines again when people start to push (to yell at or insult) other people who are just blocking the way by taking pictures or just talking to each other in big groups.

V25. HUNTING TOURISTS IN TIMES SQUARE

The first time I saw that woman was the 6th of September 2017 during my fieldwork in Times Square. I walked early in the morning, from the 87th St. to the 46th St, and when I arrived at Duffy Square, around seven, she was already there. Wearing a half costume of Minnie Mouse, she was crossing the chill zone below the red steps at the time she was waving to a Mario Bros located at the opposite side of the Square. I went to her, and I asked her for a short interview. After some doubts, she acceded only with two conditions: (i) no pictures of her without her full costume, (ii) the interview should not last more than 10 minutes that, according to her, is the time she needed for getting ready for work. Later, both conditions were broken.

Two years later, I saw there again in the same place, working for tips and wearing the same Minnie Mouse costume. However, I did not approach her that time. I just observed her and her coworkers closely but from some distance. I was interested in following the way how they were laboring, how they were creating their own sense of spatiality, challenging and hacking the previous institutionalized and conceived space, the one that was designed for them, but without them; the one that was made in an office full of planners, executives, and technicians but far from the daily life of the Square. Minnie and her friends had to work inside of a small space, like a sort of invisible
There is another kind of fluid space happening in Times Square (version 2019). It is an intermittent one that can be found over the corner of 7th Avenue and 47th Street beside the Olive Garden. I am referring to the area around a tourist bus stop that belongs to one of the most famous companies of that kind of tourism. That particular spatiality is a mixed geographic location that can be appreciated over a portion of the sidewalk and the Avenue. The size of the space is constantly changing. It depends on the way how several factors are related. The spatiality is composed by the conjunction of tourists, plus a tourist bus, plus a timetable and a working schedule, plus the time of the day, plus the day of the year, plus the weather outside.

The area produced by those elements works, in general terms, like a knot in a set of touristic destinations —must-see sights— that the company owning those buses is offering to anyone visiting New York City. For example, in Times Square, an army of auctioneers is walking around the whole place selling touristic bus tickets to anyone. I took one of those tours in 2017, the downtown one that offered Times Square as a destination in its itinerary. However, by that time, there was not a bus stop in the area I am talking about. The stop, known as “Times Square North,” was located over the 7th Avenue nut between 50th and 51st Streets. In the case of the tour I took, my Times Square station, known as the “west” one, was located over 46th Street between the 7th and 8th Avenues.

Times Square is the most popular area of New York City for those kinds of touristic services. Two reasons are supporting those statements. The first one is that it is where tourist

A woman costumed like Elsa, from Frozen, is outside the designated area. It is hunting time. The woman wears a huge mask of the character she represents, but the mask is up to speak and breathe in a better way. She is moving from one side to the other, trying to find the best option to capture. Two women are crossing by, and Elsa is waving them: “hi, take a picture, a picture,” but the women just avoided her. A Mickey Mouse is joining the hunting. Behind Elsa, he is also waving everyone outside, asking them for pictures. But nobody seems to be interested in that. They continued moving, every time farther, from the designated activity zone. Other costumed characters follow the hunting process, another Mickey, a Deadpool, and Minnie Mouse, the woman I met three years ago. After some time where more people were rejecting them, a Chinese couple appeared walking at the edge of the pedestrian zone, near 7th Avenue. Mickey approached them from the back, putting his arms around them and kind of making them stop. Elsa jumped up in front of them, making them some signals with her hand regarding taking a picture. It gave the impression that the Chinese were not so convinced of the situation, but they never did anything to skip that. At the same time that Elsa was sending the couple some signals relating to taking pictures, Mickey was calling from a distance, more costumed characters. Minnie, Deadpool and the other Mickey Mouse immediately arrived. A Spider-Man that was hunting by himself came there too. The Chinese couple was surrounded. All the characters except the last Mickey Mouse were at their both sides, ready for the picture. The “last Mickey,” because it was already one character of his type, was in charge of taking the Chinese girl’s phone. Meanwhile, with a not-so-happy smile, the couple was also getting ready—two shoots, then a quick reorganization, and another shoot more. The masks were up again. Elsa was de self-designated speaker. Kindly, she invited the couple to go with them to the designated area. Mickey Mouse was the first to start to walk there, still with the Chinese girl’s phone in his hands. The couple agreed on going there and the rest of the characters following/escorting them too.

Once in the designated area, Elsa showed the Chinese couple a sort of card from where it was possible to read that they, the costumed characters, were asking for some money voluntary donations. The Chinese guy extended her a bill I could not see well, but Elsa told him that they were six people and that every costumed person wanted to have its part. The rest of the characters got closer; the pressure increased. Despite a regulation in Times Square that says that tourists are not required to pay anything for a picture with the costumed characters, most visitors ignore that. Also, the panhandlers’ passive-aggressive attitude during the whole process of hunting, taking a photo, and asking for money may result in quite intimidating. In the end, the tourists just give up and pay the amount the characters asked.

After months of observing the relationships between costumed characters and tourists, it is easy to understand why Chinese visitors are the most wanted: they are (almost) never confronting the panhandlers, they avoid discussing, and they (almost) have money. The conversations between Elsa and the Chinese couple, more than a negotiation, was an imposition. After a couple of minutes, the tariff was agreed on sixty bucks. Fifty bucks for three pictures! That time I was closer enough to see the money exchange. The Chinese guy gave Elsa 50 dollars bill plus another one of 20. She took the money, and for some time, she tried to find ten bucks for giving the couple back. Although she had a pile of bills in her hand, she tried to find those ten dollars inside a small purse she was wearing. The Chinese did not say a word but continued there, waiting. Finally, after a while, Elsa grabbed the money from the pile in her hand and gave them 10 dollars back. Also, Mickey gave the Chinese girl her phone back. All the involved costumed characters moved away to spare the money, and the tourists were finally free again for continuing enjoying the different attractions that Times Square was offering them.

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bus tickets are sold. The second one is that the area is an obligatory passage for four of the six tours the company offers. Notwithstanding, only in three of those routes tourists can go off the bus and explore the area around the stop. The mechanic of those tours is based on buying an, at least, 24 hours ticket which price will depend on the kind of route and the amount of them. If one, as I did in 2017, takes the downtown tour, has the possibility of going off the bus along 15 stations and exploring the zone near surrounded the stop the time one decides —having in mind that despite the ticket is for 24 hours, the service of the buses is limited. In the case of the downtown one, service starts at eight and ends at 18 — and then taking the next bus and continuing with the tour.

Coming back to the bus stop Times Square version 2019, there are moments where that spatiality was huge due to the number of bodies gathered on the sidewalk waiting for the following vehicle. Sometimes, when the bus was delayed, the line of tourists started to grow exponentially to the point that the whole sidewalk was temporarily blocked. Fortunately, during those situations, there were always workers of the company organizing, more or less, the structure of the line to let the other pedestrians go around. There were other times where nobody was waiting for the buses in there. And a couple of moments where the bus was so full of previous tourists that nobody in the line in there was able to go inside.

Nevertheless, the flowing and intermittent structure of this spatiality was produced by the sum of different, although related, movements and associations. For example, the every-time-new-group of tourists regularly hopping on and off the touristic vehicles, and its feature of expanding and contracting their waiting area as well as the walking one around. We also have the unscripted routine of a general, unstable, and multiple body of tourists, composed of different kinds of individuals, and its unplanned efforts to territorialize the sidewalk. That sidewalk is a place of dispute where its being is continually changing from a place of movement to a waiting area.

The situation of intermittent zones creating different versions of Times Square is more common than one might think it is. In fact, it happens all the time. A group of Jew girls occupying half of the red stairs over the TKTS booth, singing, dancing, and jumping — for more than an hour in a summer night — was producing a particular kind of spatiality, transforming not only their way of being with Times Square but also modifying the experience of other elements around them. A similar situation happened with other kinds of sporadic encounters and situations: a fashion designer using Times Square as her shooting location or a shirtless Asian tourist playing with a sword meanwhile someone else is taking pictures of him.

But the daily life routines, those predictable situations occurring every day in Times Square, are also producing intermittent and unstable spatialities (P16 is an example of that). For instance, one can predict that on a typical day in there will be tons of tourists walking up and down the Square. However, what is impossible to foresee is how those tourists will behave and the kind of relationships they may have with other elements such as cars, panhandlers, and pieces of furniture. So, despite that, from a general perspective, (almost) all the days in Times Square are the same day, once one is decomposing, empirically, that geography, a multiplicity of ontologies starts to sprout.

Times Square is a multiple multiplicity. It is a multiple multiplicity composed of multiple and heterogeneous elements and multiple spatialized effervescences happening simultaneously in the same geographical location. There are many Times Squares inside Times Square as many associations occurring in (and related to) there one can follow and trace. Notwithstanding the efforts of expanding and exhausting (Perec, 1982) a particular area — a series of plazas in this case — and despite all the time and the work invested during the fieldwork and beyond, this exercise — even this whole piece of research — is just a minimal piece of an expanding universe we are watching how it used to be many times ago and that, perhaps, it does not exist anymore.
CHAPTER FIVE
The pedestrianization of Times Square

“There is nothing comparable to Times Square [...] The Ginza district in Tokyo has lights and stores but not the diversity of people. Piazza Navona and Piccadilly Circus have the mix of cars and pedestrians but nowhere near the density. There are pedestrianized spaces in central Copenhagen and Berlin, but they’re not also the transportation hub and the lobby of the theater district. You will not find another Times Square anywhere in the world.”

Craig Dykers in Tierney, J. (2016), Reimagining Times Square

CHAPTER CONTENT

(i) A set of stories of Times Square before, during, and after its pedestrianization.

(ii) The processes, negotiations, and challenges behind the pedestrianization of Times Square.

(iii) A discussion about the pedestrianization of Times Square as an experimental project.

Despite its multiple spaces, flows, elements and times, this whole piece of research has been carried out in a, more or less, same stabilized version of Times Square: the one regarding its pedestrianization. The pedestrianization of Times Square has been working here as a sort of meta-narrative that has allowed us to locate a set of diverse situations, happening in a particular geography and sharing a common feature, the production of a specific kind of social space — social, regarding that it has been made by a multiplicity of associations — as the result of their interaction with space itself.

The pedestrianization of Times Square seemed to be the last step of a set of different hygienist strategies developed by the City Administration and some private organizations to restructure and recover the area occupied by porn theaters, sex shops, street prostitution, drug trafficking, and other kinds of undesirable and illegal activities. Although the pedestrianization did not face any one of those issues because they were already solved a decade ago, the closure of Broadway to vehicles, between 42nd St. and 47th St., meant the “end of the long and tortuous redevelopment of Times Square, an effort that began 30 years ago.” (Bagli, 2010, December 3).

Times Square’s redevelopment started in the 1980s during the mayorship of Edward Koch, from 1978 to 1989, and continued during the Dinkins’ era, 1990 - 1993; the Giuliani’s one, 1994 - 2001; and, finally, the Bloomberg’s one, 2002 - 2013. Each mayor was facing and approaching the transformation of Times Square in a pretty particular way. Koch started to take care of the buildings around the area, most of them cracked and in pretty bad conditions, and a few occupied illegally by homeless and drug abusers. He also proposed an ambitious renewal plan for completely changing the whole face of the area.

“At the heart of the project, first conceived in 1981, was Times Square Center: four huge Rockefeller Center-like office towers, designed by the architects Philip Johnson and John Burgee, which would loom above the square’s southern border. There were also plans to build a 2.4-million-square-foot merchandize market and a 550-room luxury hotel, and to renovate nine historic Broadway theaters. [However,] the project died as the real-estate market crashed in the early 1990s.” (Feuer, 2015, October 16).

Then, during Dinkins mayoral, the City Council started to seriously consider the proliferation of nude bars, porn theaters, and, in general terms, all kinds of sex shops by elaborating a zoning law that could regulate those businesses. “Walter McAffrey, a former City Council member, said the idea to rezone wasn’t even related to Times Square at first. It started with a neighborhood in Queens near the Queensboro Bridge that had suffered when topless bars and porn shops moved in. After the study, the City Council drew up stricter zoning laws that prohibited sex-oriented theaters, bookstores, massage parlors, and dance clubs from operating within 500 feet of homes, houses of worship, schools or one another. The law passed in 1995 - about two years after Giuliani took office.” (AP, 2007, December 28).

Also, it was David Dinkins who started the idea of bringing Disney to Times Square. “From the ashes of the Koch plan, today’s Times Square rose. In 1992, city and state officials hired the architect Robert A. M. Stern and the designer Tibor Kalman to replace the Times Square Center plan with something that looked back to the square’s jazzy past. [...] The new plan sprang to life when Disney agreed to sign a long-term lease on the New Amsterdam Theater, persuaded in part by Mr. Stern, who sat on the company’s board. Initiated under Mayor David N. Dinkins, and finalized by his successor, Rudolph W. Giuliani, the scheme soon led to the arrival in Times Square of entertainments like Madame Tussauds wax museum and the AMC multiplex movie theater.” (Feuer, 2015, October 16).

During the Giuliani era, many things were already settled, especially regarding the zoning...
propose and the relationships with public-private companies and local institutions that were already working for developing Times Square. For example, The New 42nd Street, “a nonprofit partner established on September 18, 1990” to find new uses for seven of the historic theaters lining a street that had come to represent the city’s absent decay,” (THE REINVENTION OF 42ND STREET, n.d.), or the Times Square Business Improvement District, known nowadays as Times Square Alliance, a non-profit organization founded in 1992 “that promotes local businesses [...] manages an Information Center, and advocates on behalf of its constituents with respect to a host of public policy, planning, and quality-of-life issues.” (About the alliance, n.d.). Nevertheless, what Giuliani and his Police Commissioner William Bratton did was adopting some extreme actions such as adopting a broken windows approach and a policy of zero tolerance “toward lifestyle crimes such as panhandling, public drunkenness, and graffiti writing. In practice, “zero tolerance” meant aggressive police harassment of homeless people, and intensified drug war directed at poor black youth, and “the dissolution of existing constraints on police power in the name of reversing the decline in public order” (Smith 1998, 4). [... It also made it possible to reclaim downtown areas—like New York’s newly DisneyWed Times Square—for redevelopment as upscale entertainment centers and festive marketplaces catering to middle-class suburbanites and tourists.” (Macek, 2006: 111). Keeping the meta-narrative of the developing of Times Square, but dealing with different kinds of issues, the Bloomberg administration transformed the whole area in an attempt to organize, revitalize and recover a public space from a particular way to understand and to administrate the public space itself to a different one. That new one was, perhaps, the most extreme redevelopment proposal so far. Meanwhile, the other administrations were focused on cleaning and reestablishing a, somehow, previous version of Times Square, the one led by Michael Bloomberg was betting on a different and radical way to understand and manage a public open place. And it is in that different and experimental version of Times Square where this piece of research is located. Pedestrianized Times Square is acting as a recurrent element going along with all the other versions presented here and going through the seven routes, the seven ways, designed for exploring this document. So, even with the possible disparity of Times Square’s versions this dissertation has presented, each one of those accounts of happening has in common with the others the fact of being, somehow, in relation to the process, to the logic or the idea of Times Square as a pedestrianized location. The linkage between pedestrianized Times Square and those other versions of this place is related to either being opposed to, faced with, or overlapping in, or compared to, that main narrative of that place. Precisely, this chapter is taking care of the pedestrianization of Times Square from different angles and perspectives in an attempt to represent the complexity and multiplicity of situations and elements interacting among each other, and composing the multiple set of spatialized temporalities happening, simultaneously, in the middle of Manhattan and that we know here as Times Square.

P25. WHAT DOES “TO TAKE CARE” MEAN? To take care of Times Square's pedestrianization is a recognition that we face a complex and multiple entity composed of a multi-ontological structure of virtualities and actualities, potentialities, material, and immaterial elements, happening together in different times and spaces. To take care of the pedestrianization of Times Square is, following De la Bellacasa (2017: 5), “a concrete work of maintenance, with ethical and affective implications.” To take care of Times Square's pedestrianization is going multiple by presenting both—as if we would be talking about a particle that is also a wave—a process and a stabilization from their different beings and possible becomings.

Notwithstanding, and continuing with De la Bellacasa, the idea with situating this descriptive work as a matter of care is not to divide the multiple beings pedestrianized Times Square as a sort of categorization of closed and isolated universalities but to take responsibility for each of one its ontologies, at least the ones that are possible to grasp. “Instead of focusing on the affective sides of care (love and affection, for instance), or on care as work of maintenance, staying with the unsolved tensions and relations between these dimensions helps us to keep close to the ambivalent terrains of care.” (Ibid).

In that imbrication of dimensions, of beings and relations, I would like to situate this chapter and its principal subject: pedestrianized Times Square. Times Square’s transformation was a process full of nuances, composed of different logics, intentions, materials, and visions. That is why any attempt to reduce that movement to a single matter — transportation, planning, governance, gentrification, revitalization— will be insufficient. That is why to take care of its multiplicities, effervescences, and relations is at the same time an academic and a political obligation. And that is why a based-STS perspective is perhaps one of the most fruitful and complete ways to approach an element(stabilization)/situation/process) like this one.

P26. WHAT IS AN URBAN EXPERIMENT? PRESENTING THE “GREEN LIGHT FOR MIDTOWN” PROGRAM In general terms, an experiment is something that you do to either validate or reject a hypothesis. That something is an organized and controlled procedure that one should be able to be replicated in a similar scenario following a specific set of instructions. But experiment is not an easy concept. When we talk about experimenting, we have to put generalizations away and go to the particular. There are different magnitudes, levels, and logic involved in any kind of experimental process. Even some of them are challenging the general definition of this particular notion. In fact, to challenge is one of the main features of experimenting. Controverting, provoking and stimulating are also part of its kernel. Nevertheless, sometimes this procedure is often framed into positivist methodologies tying the

However, with this set of stories, there is not any intention of proposing and displaying a linear and historical imaginary that could project the pedestrianization of Times Square as a positivist process composed of a sum of situations that, together, formed a specific logics that could serve as an epistemological model for approaching urban transformations. So, the goal here is to present different situations and stories related to the phenomenon of pedestrianization of Times Square that, together, are composing a specific version of how this particular movement happened and what else occurred in there once the pedestrianization was made.

core of what does experiment means to a unique logic-model of explaining reality. But not here. In our case, we will dispense with positivism as our analysis-frame for using, instead of that, a constructivist approach (Sismondo 1993), opened, particular, and located, also inspired by the proposal of Gros and Krohn (2005: 65) of thinking on a kind of experiments that are “not modeled on the laboratory [belonging, exclusively, to the domains] of the natural sciences.”

So, an experiment is a practice that scientific people often use to do: a chemist, a physicist, a biologist, someone that wears a lab coat for work is into experimenting. But also, policymakers and bureaucrats do experiments as well, and regular citizens, in their daily life, too. We have, thus, that experimentation is an activity that has the capacity of being translated and applied into different contexts and scenarios. The pedestrianization of Times Square is, for instance, a long-term experiment produced by a series of experimental procedures in other spaces and disparate fields such as architecture, urbanism, public politics, surveillance, tourism, and daily life. The date was February 29, 2009. The place was the Marriott Marquis Hotel in Times Square. The intention was to announce a pilot program for reducing the traffic congestion in Midtown Manhattan. The proposed plan was closing Broadway between 42nd and 47th Street for vehicles from 4:30 pm to 7:30 pm in order to make Broadway a pedestrian way around Times Square and Herald Square, respectively. The protagonists of the announcement were Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Department of Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan.

Chapter five

V26. PAST IS THE NEW FUTURE. PART ONE. AN EMBODIED REALITY

One of the most famous confrontations/rivalries in urban planning and New York City is, without any doubt, the one started by Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs. The cause of their dispute was the construction of The Lower Manhattan Expressway (LOMEX). This 10-line elevated highway aimed to connect the Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges with the Holland Tunnel that crosses the Hudson River and connects New York City with Jersey City. The Expressway construction was supposed to be a threat to the Greenwich Village, SOHO, and Little Italy communities, a sort of collateral damage of progress, from Moses' view, and something that should be stopped, without any concession, from Jacobs perspective.

Back in the 1960s, Robert Moses was still a sort of urban planner as an outsider in New York City and the United States. He was mainly recognized for constructing monumental and aggressive transportation infrastructures across the city, prioritizing private vehicle circulation over other ways of urban mobilities and formations. Moses biography, written by Robert Caro (1975), projects the image of that urban planner as a tyrant continually tempted by power and control who did not have any problems with destroying whole neighborhoods by displacing communities to pursue his urban vision, following a strict policy of slum clearance, kicking low-income families off the city and attracting taxpayers.

On the other side, Jane Jacobs was a journalist and resident of the Village that gained notoriety by opposing Moses' urban renewal plans, especially to the idea of dismantling her neighborhood by destroying public open places to construct vehicular networks such as the extension of the 5th Avenue, a project that aimed to cross, and to eliminate, Washington Square Park, as well as the already mentioned LOMEX. To face and deal with Moses' renewal intentions, Jacobs exercised a sort of activism that gathered most of the residents of the area into the defense of their spaces and community. But despite Jacobs did not have at that time the whole fame and national recognition that Moses had, at the time she organized her community against the redevelopment plans for the Village, she already had a broad background writing and thinking about different renewal projects in the United States, as well as by experiencing firsthand the contradictory capitalist process of urbanization and suburban growth (Flint, 2009: 66, 76, 158) that could be represented following Lefebvre’s metaphor of “imposition-explosion” (Brenner, 2015: 17).

Aside from the specific disputes around the Greenwich Village's future and the plans for urbanizing New York City, the confrontation Moses-Jacobs got a new level of complexity when both ideas were extrapolated to a more general and articulate vision of how urban and public space should be conceived and by whom. Their points of view started to symbolize two different sides of understanding city development and neighborhood change. Moses’ view represented the corporate, administrative, private, fastness, and full-of-concrete model of constructing and managing urban spaces. Meanwhile, Jacobs’ side typified the human-communal scale production of urban public space.

The grounds of Moses’ perspective could be understood based on (i) profitability. What really matters was to elevate the value of the land to get higher taxation. (ii) On promoting the usage of private vehicles, creating huge transportation infrastructures composed of bridges, tunnels, and highways. (iii) On the idea that urban development was a matter that belonged (almost) exclusively to urban developers and policymakers. (iv) and on the solid conception that progress—at the most positivist way—is an unstoppable force.

Meanwhile, Jacobs’ conceptions of urban redevelopment were the antagonists of Moses’ perspective. Those notions were based on (i) a better collective quality of life, where (ii) communities would be able to take care of their own development and their own ways of being organized. (iii) That development should prioritize parks, walkable, and green areas and stimulate public transportation and bike usage. (iv) Urban development should be based on and made for people, not for the sake of cars or buildings.

However, despite all the criticism one may have about Moses’ work and personal conceptions, it is impossible to conceive New York City today without his planning interventions and urban visions. Of course, things could be done differently, there is no doubt about that, but the reality is that the city's skeleton was sculpted following the kind of urbanism Robert Moses represented. Notwithstanding, if New York's structure reflects the faceless corporate-speculative way of understanding how a city should work, its soul belongs to the human-communal scale walkable and green vision embodied in Jane Jacob’s vision.

The second part of this story (go to V28) will situate us many years after the Jacobs–Moses dispute over the future of the Village and the city itself, in a similar manner to the one we just briefly described above. The idea illustrates how those two visions were reinterpreted and applied to other space-temporal scenarios and how that impacted Times Square’s trajectory and posterior transformation.

A pilot program is a way of naming a small-scale experiment. In a nutshell, it works as a trial or an explorative version to test the features, procedures, and implementations of a bigger-scale experiment. The dimensions and meanings of a small-scale experiment depend on the particular intention of each project. In the case of closing Broadway to vehicular traffic, the pilot program’s scale was measured in terms of time. The duration of this experiment was settled until the end of the year.

Times Square is a bottleneck with a bad mononymy as a name. It is everything but squared. The way how Broadway is crossing Manhattan, defying the rectangle-grid design of the island, produced four narrow triangles in its encounters with the 7th and the 6th Avenues: Times Square and Herald Square, respectively. Nevertheless, those are not the only triangles in the quadrilateral Manhattan’s street design. There are many examples of grid disruption, especially in the lower area of the island. We have, for instance, Sheridan Square, Christopher Park, St. Vincent’s Triangle, and Jackson Square in the West Village. Cooper Triangle and the block from the E 4th St. and the E 8th St., and in between Lafayette St. and Cooper St. in NOHO. Tribeca Park, Bogardus Garden, and Duane Park in TriBeCa.

Most of those interruptions were the result of juxtaposing the Commissioners’ Plan of 1811’s definitive grid over the previous roads that were, at that time, either significant for the mobility around specific areas or that—the commissioners believed so—were close to disappearing. Broadway was part of the last group. Manhattan’s grid resulted from the Common Council of New York City’s desire to create a legislature for planning current and future streets on the island. The main goal they had was “laying out Streets... in such a manner as to unite regularity and order with the public convenience and benefit and in
and make Times Square an ever more famous tourist attraction.

Now suppose you are a pedestrian still in the Times Square version of the same map. Take a look around you and appreciate the other thousands of people who are visiting the place. Every one is distracted by something by shopping, by watching the screens, by walking. The space for walking is quite reduced, and the intersections are dangerous and chaotic. Suddenly, this triangle Square is not enough for all of the pedestrians visiting it. Many of them are standing over the roadway, and the cars are waiting at the different intersections to arrive there.

Also, the time in the traffic light is not enough, neither for pedestrians nor for vehicles. There are many people crossing the streets, in both directions, when the pedestrian signs are still red. Meanwhile, cars are honking and dodging bodies. Drivers are blaming pedestrians, pedestrians are blaming drivers, people are blaming traffic lights, and traffic lights remain silent. Everyone on the ground is in a hurry. Everything is chaos. That new Times Square, the cleaned one from sex business, homeless, and delinquency, was still a troublesome vestige of a planned grid system that completely underestimate the usage and future importance of that diagonal Avenue. Sadik-Khan (Sadik-Khan and Solomonow, 2017) summarized the struggles Times Square was having, in terms of traffic congestion, as a useless effort of trying to make Broadway work as a part of the grid:

“But beneath the showbiz glare of Times Square lay a fundamental transportation problem: 137 percent more pedestrians were struck by cars in Times Square than on adjacent avenues, at tragic product of the masses of people walking in the road. The streets themselves were old and warped, pooling with water after every heavy rain. The existing roadbed was basically composed of layers of street strata, with streetcar rails and other remnants of bygone transportation eras paved over the decades. It was a classic transportation problem hidden in plain sight. And the problem, once again, was Broadway, which meets Seventh Avenue at Times Square and Sixth Avenue at Herald Square, creating wide, irregular intersections. Instead of trying to force Broadway to work with the grid, we looked at how to make the grid work better without Broadway.” (92)

I want to propose a speculative exercise, an imaginative movement by situating you driving along Broadway Avenue in the scenario presented by the first map. Try to dimension all the pedestrian crossings, the traffic lights, the thousands of vehicles trapped in that bottleneck, noise, the general congestion, the crowds of tourists walking from one side to the other, the confusing intersections between the avenues, the slow movement of vehicles. For many decades, that was the daily panorama of the area surrounding Times Square. Congestion, mobility, and safety issues were some side effects of the previous attempts to revitalize the zone in the 1990s particular to promote the health of the City…” (Burrows and Wallace, 1998: 419-422).

Below, you can see two vehicular maps of the area surrounding Times Square. Please take a close look at the first one and watch Broadway crossing the 7th Avenue disrupting the squared order of Manhattan’s traffic. Then, now take a look at the second map and observe the resulted simplification in the mobility after removing Broadway Avenue—in that area—from the roadway grid. The red dots are indicating, both maps, the former and current traffic lights and encounter points of vehicles-vehicles and vehicles-pedestrians.

Different crowds of people occupying multiple spaces around Times Square
vehicular conversions, and to improve safety, access, convenience and the urban environment. (MMPNDP, 2000: iii).

After the preliminary explorations resulted in elaborating a series of recommendations and the whole structure of the plan, the methodological intention behind the MMPNDP was to conduct some field tests —without any specific scale— to validate their proposed ideas. 

Despite that Giuliani’s project was more ambitious in terms of the spaces and locations aimed to transform, Times Square was the main element it wanted to take care of. And this is because in Times Square “the competition for space is intense and the resulting pedestrian environment is impeded by obstructed sidewalks, conflict with traffic, and poor directional and informational signs” (Ibid: 1). The limited pedestrian space in Times Square plus the high volume of tourists was another issue that increased the competition for space itself. Below, there is a general description of the main situations producing and derived from the fight for the public space. Those are:

“Pedestrian congestion; pedestrian-vehicular conflicts; inefficient curbside management; underutilized taxi stands; lengthy truck loading/unloading hours; inappropriate signage; vehicular non-compliance with existing curb and moving regulations; and the absence of amenities for pedestrians. Vehicular congestion and delay, particularly due to turning vehicles, double parking, taxi pick-ups and drops, contribute to reduce capacity of the streets and, in many cases, obstruct buses from reaching curbside bus stops.” (MMPNDP, 2000: iii).

After identifying all the issues happening in Midtown Manhattan, especially in Times Square and around it, the Pedestrian Project recommended three actions to solve the most critical problems happening there. “The study recommends exploring [i] the Times Square at West 45th Street, Broadway and Seventeenth Avenue decrease in street width and then increase again to the south. This provides excess roadbed space to the north and south sides of this narrowed intersection and creates an opportunity to widen the sidewalks.”

The fight for the sidewalks was another issue that Times Square was facing after its pedestrianization. Those spaces were regularly overcrowded by pedestrians, primarily tourists, plus a strong presence of street vendors that used to place their products over improvised tents across the walkways an example of a situation is the work of the green light netal (2007-2006) on the Senegalese peddler’s in Times Square]. Nevertheless, and despite the MMPNDP recognized there was an issue with the sidewalks, the reason for that inconvenience was quite different from the excess of bodies going around: “the walking experience is affected by the quality of the sidewalk paver material, the finish, and the uninterrupted flow of spaces.” (MMPNDP, 2000: 25).

The temporal but continued privatization of the sidewalks by street vendors was not a topic for developing pedestrian networks in Midtown Manhattan. The inadequacy of these structures, produced by the congestion inside them, was only important when pedestrians used to invade the streets. “Pedestrian congestion is severe; pedestrians often spill off the traffic islands into the roadbed or occupy the street in front of tour buses standing at designated layovers in the Bow Tie. Broadway/Seventh Avenue and West 45th Street is one of only two high-accident intersections without subway access.” (Ibid: 20).

In a more detailed way, the actions proposed in this plan to improve pedestrian circulation included: “Clear corners and relocate street furniture that obstructs pedestrian circulation […] Increase signal time for pedestrians in the Bow Tie and near PABT during evening off peak hours. […] Widen sidewalks by taking advantage of excess roadbed north and south of the bottle neck while maintaining the existing three traffic lanes each on Broadway and Seventh Avenue […] widen sidewalks and reconfigure Broadway with two traffic lanes and Seventeenth Avenue with four traffic lanes to facilitate through traffic. (MMPNDP, 2000: iv).

There is no report, either produced by Giuliani’s administration or Bloomberg’s one, that evaluates the application and results of this development project. The closest document one can find is from February 2009, and it is a working paper —a PDF containing some PowerPoint slides— called “Broadway Pilot Program. Improving Traffic Flow & Safety in the Heart of Midtown.” (BPPITFSHM, 2009) Although with another name, this document contains all the structure and intentions of the “Green light for Midtown.” The reason for highlighting that “Broadway Pilot Program” is due to this PDP contains some data of how the traffic congestion and the relations pedestrians-vehicles were before the “Green light.”

Nine years after the MMPNDP was proposed, Giuliani’s Midtown project, Times Square, seemed to have still pretty much the same unsolved issues as before. According to the BPPITFSHM (2009), there were four main problematic situations still happening in the area that the current Administration, the Bloomberg one, considered that must be solved. Broadway Avenue was involved in any of those inconveniences:

(i) “Wide crossings require long red lights, while pedestrians clear intersections, causing traffic delay” (4).
(ii) “Though there are 4.5 times as many people as vehicles, only 11% of the space is currently allocated for pedestrians” (9).
(iii) “Broadway at Times Square averages 137% more pedestrian crashes than at other avenues in the area” (10).
(iv) “Traffic makes it nearly impossible for emergency vehicles to get through Times and Herald Squares” (13).

This pilot program and the whole plan for pedestrianizing Broadway can be categorized under the label of field experimentation. “Field experiments are studies using experimental design that occur in a natural setting. Researchers examine how the manipulation of at least one independent variable leads to a change in a dependent variable in the context of the natural environment. […] A common goal of field experiments is for researchers to be as realistic as possible in order to provide useful data about how variables influence each other in the real world. The experiment may not be 100% realistic because researchers manipulate independent variables, but the experiments often are more realistic than what occurs in the context of a laboratory setting. (Gross, 2017: 560-561).

In fact, and without aiming to make any kind of generalist statement, almost all kinds of urban experiments are field experiments. The additive “urban” refers to a procedure carried out in a city landscape such as a project of a city station, a neighborhood. However, sometimes, as Wilks-Heeg (1996) points, the concept of experimentation is used in a merely symbolic and utilitarian way for naming any kind of urban policies and practices of governance:

“Designating a programme as ‘experi‐mental’ has a number of potential implica‐tions. As experiments, such schemes can be presented as radical solutions to urban prob‐blems while no long-term commitment to par‐ticular urban areas is required. Moreover, ini‐tiatives may be cancelled at short notice if, for instance, public expenditure cuts are required or if the experiment is not operating in the way the government would like.” (1264).

Notwithstanding, experimenting in urban areas is neither something new nor related exclu‐sively to implementing urban governance and planning policies. Urban experiments (Evans, 2011; Karvonen et al., 2014) entanglements and scenarios for testing political, economic, biological, and social hypotheses and theories. This sort of testing and experimenting is neither something new nor related exclusively to implementing urban governance and planning policies. Urban experiments (Evans, 2011; Karvonen et al., 2014) entanglements and scenarios for testing political, economic, biological, and social hypotheses and theories. This sort of testing and experimenting is neither something new nor related exclusively to implementing urban governance and planning policies.
The experiment starts on the laboratory bench (Latour 2007, Savini & Bertolini 2019). (v) An urban experiment is going beyond the obvious idea of conceiving the world outside as a construction made by any kind of aggregates. Urban experiments are collective and have politics because there is a continuous negotiation process during all its phases of execution. All the elements participating in that sort of mediation are constantly deploying all kinds of strategies and making pacts and alliances to achieve their—sometimes common, sometimes individual—goals.

That is the case of “Green Light for Midtown” that, despite it was proposed and developed by The New York City Department of Transportation (DOT), had to be negotiated and structured hand by hand with the community affected by the pilot program/experiment. In this particular case, that community was mainly represented by a local administrative organ: the Community Board Five. “Community Boards (CB) are local representative bodies [...] each one consists of up to 50 unsalaried members. [...] CB are composed by active, involved people of each community and must reside, work, or have some other significant interest in the community. (About Community Boards)

The Community Board Five, CB5, that local structure in charge of approving—or not—the development of any kind of program in its territory, is the last big part of a vertical bureaucratic chain of power that regulates the different types of issues affecting most of Midtown Manhattan area. In general terms, the City of New York’s command structure comprises the Mayor, the City Council (51 members), the Borough Presidents, and the Community Boards. Other local private organisms known as BIDs (Business Improvement Districts) are in charge of administering specific City commercial areas. The BID in control of Times Square is Times Square Alliance.

As you can see in the map below, despite Times Square is just a tiny part of the zone that the CB5 is regulating, the pilot program proposed by Bloomberg’s administration was affecting a more extensive area than only Times and Herald Squares. For example, the plan for closing Broadway near both plazas also included some general traffic circulation changes over Broadway Avenue. That corridor was adjusted overall its Midtown presence, from Columbus Circle, over the W. 59th St., to the W. 25th St, close to Madison Square Park, where Broadway meets the Fifth Avenue.

That is why studying and validating the pertinence, composition, and structure of the whole pilot program was a priority for the Community Board Five members. Although the “Green light for Midtown” project was officially announced at the end of February, its implementation was thought to start in May (See P26). Meanwhile, the CB5, specifically its Transportation Committee, focused on analyzing the Pilot program’s pertinence. In April 2009, with a vote of 28 in favor, seven opposed, and two abstaining, the CB5 decided to approve Bloomberg’s project “but with the underscoring that [their] concerns and issues have to be addressed by the DOT in implementing and continuing this program.” (MCBF-1). The issues this committee had before starting the Pilot Program included, among others, three main specific concerns: [i] that “a fire lane will be maintained at all times down Broadway [during the pilot program]” [ii] That over three acres of new open space will be added to midtown Manhattan in this pilot program, with greenery added at 24 locations. [iii] That the DOT will utilize in-house staff and resources to complete this project this year [2009] quickly, efficiently, and in an effective and time-effective at an estimated cost of $1.5 million.” (Ibid).

A few months later, in November 2009, the same committee from the CB5 was reunited to evaluate the pilot program. Despite they recognized the positive changes around Times and Herald Squares, and although they highlighted the general positive response to “Green light for Midtown,” they decided not to approve of making that urban experiment permanent until the DOT accepted some recommendation the CB5 made to the pilot program, “specifically to honor CB5’s charter mandated role to review and comment on proposed events and sub-concessions for the duration of the License Agreement.” (MCBF-2).
DOT and CB5 had two months of negotiations and agreements due to the announcement of the pilot program, and a month later released an official communication announcing “Green Light for Midtown” a permanent reality. The press note was also announcing the next steps for the project and offering a brief recount of the pilot program’s main achievements.

In February of the same year, a resolution was also launched by the CB5 as an update report of the pilot project. [...] CB5’s prior resolutions has yielded positive results by fostering and improved dialogue and communications with the BIDs, DOT, and the Office of the Mayor to address their concerns regarding the Pilot Program.” (MCFB-3).

Closing temporally Broadway to vehicular traffic between 42nd St. and 47th St. implied a complete restructuring process of the whole area, and even beyond. The diagonal avenue changed its use and kind of relationships with the other elements around. In 2009, and in a stepped form (the pilot program was announced in February, started in May, and completed in August), Broadway began its transformation. The Avenue moved from being one of the most concurrent pathways for crossing Midtown southbound to a basic prototype of a rudimentary and improvised plaza, a place not only for walking but also for resting and staying there.

During the whole year, and coming from many different sides, the experiment of closing Broadway to vehicular traffic in Times and Herald Squares got a lot of comments and opinions (Dunlap, 2009 May 24; Del Signore, 2009 May 27), mixing critics and compliments at the same time. Despite that, the positive comments were mainly focused on the same elements: reduction of traffic congestion (Montero, 2009 May 27), walkability (Naparstek, 2009 May 26), improvement of the life quality in the area (Drake, 2009 June 3 [May 27]), the concerns about the plaza were pointing to many different scenarios, expanding the criticism from direct attacks to the current administration to the kind of used materials for developing the pilot program.

Andrea Pessier (2009, May 27) from the New York Post was suggesting that Mayor Bloomberg not only was wrong launching that pilot program but also that his idea was “the worse [idea] ever [...] in the annals of stupid ideas”. Meanwhile, Amber Sutherland (2009, May 27) —from the same newspaper— was more interested in highlighting and criticizing how cheap the temporary furniture was. “The $15 beach chairs [that] were bought from Pintchik Hardware in Brooklyn at a steep discount from $15 retail price”. Nicolai Ouroussoff (2009, May 25), an architecture critic working for the New York Times, was worried “about the character of the mall, with its string of disconnected plazas [...] they feel like odd leftovers.”

One of the most interesting things about all this urban experiment is seeing how the original idea: to remove Broadway, partially, from the grid of the city, was powered and expanded, from a solid transportation issue to a more complex process of development. That was a risky decision that affected the direct relationships between pedestrians and vehicles in the area and the logical structure of the Avenue itself by modifying its usefulness (p.22). Broadway, in the case of this work, along Times Square, was switched from a major vehicular artery to a pedestrian way which meant not only to transport and to store different kinds of bodies, but also to behave differently on the maps, in the administrative and planning documents and logics, and in local and international imaginaries.

Changing the usage and nature of a street requires a multi-scale re-domestication process that implies taking care of each of the ways the street interacts with other different kinds of elements. As a didactic deconstruction of an imbricate reality, there are two possible routes one can choose to approach that multiplicity. The first one deals with all the possible beings resulting from the usage of that element —Broadway— inside specific networks. The second one is focusing on the way how other elements are perceiving the one we are describing. The first one is about the ontologies of an actant —those ways of existing with others—, the second one is related to how these others are perceiving and being in relation to that particular element.

So, in general terms, when we are talking about urban experiments, we refer to particular, bounded, and located scenarios that are being reterritorialized to establish specific logics and points of view regarding how those places should be in relation to others. The pilot project for pedestrianizing Broadway in Times Square had been initiated as a structural logic that aimed to solve an old transportation issue by modifying the usage and status of the Avenue. Broadway was transformed from a lane for moving and storing vehicles to a boulevard for moving and storing pedestrians.

P29. AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF PEDESTRIANIZED TIMES SQUARE. DISCUSSING URBAN LABORATORIES

I want to begin this section by summarizing—in three paragraphs—the main trajectory of events that happened right before the announcement of turning Broadway Avenue, along Times Square, into a pedestrian area. In other words, the event that we have already called here as “Green Light for Midtown.”

So, Times Square’s transformation, from a congested car-lane to one of the most famous global sights about human-scale walkable public spaces, results from an experimental process that occurred during the Bloomberg mayoralty. In a brief sense, the portions of Broadway Avenue crossing Times Square and Herald Square were eliminated from the City’s traffic system, changing their use and meaning and displacing the vehicular sovereignty in the area.

As an official date, the pedestrianization of Broadway started on February 29, 2009, with the announcement of the pilot program called “Green Light for Midtown.” In her book Street Fight. Handbook for an Urban Evolution (Sadik-Khan & Salomone, 2017), the former Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan narrates how the idea of fixing Broadway’s grid started in 2008 after her first walk through Times Square “with the eye of a commissioner” (p.91) and realizing how many senseless delays in crossing the area and transportation the Square had. All those issues were related to the way how Broadway was crossing the area:

“In late 2008, we initiate a plan to correct this anachronism [Broadway’s bowtie] and it’s dangerous consequences, resulting in one of the most transformative and rapid redesigns of a public space in modern urban history. Y closing diagonal Broadway to cars at Times and Herald Squares, we restored the right angles of the traffic grid. Along Seventh Avenue in Times Square, the street was reconfigured with a four driving lane. The traffic signals were retimed to give motorists more “green line”—the length of the green light. Clearer signals and simplified intersections created safer crosswalks. Pedestrians had fewer lanes to cross and wouldn’t have to guess next car was coming from.” (p.92)

Nevertheless, the first attempts to explore different ways to transform and improve Times Square as a public place can be traced back to 2006. That story begins with a collaboration between two institutions: Times Square Alliance (TSA) and Project for Public Spaces (PPS). The first one, formerly known as Times Square Business Improvement District, was created in 1990 as a public-private initiative to “provide everything from sanitation to security services for Times Square.” (de Witt, 1990). The second one was founded in 1976 as a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping sustain public spaces that build strong communities.” (“PPS/about,” n.d.)

My intention with this section is to explore the metaphor of the “urban laboratory” for talking about the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) and its work and influence in Times Square. In general terms, I want to experiment with that metaphor as an epistemological device for approaching differ-
ent urban transformations of specific places carried out either by closed, localized, and controlled stabilizations or by collectives of heterogeneous ones. However, right now, all my efforts will be pointed to deal with that concept in a pretty particular way, only paying attention to PPS and Times Square's relationships.

V27. THE ROOTS OF PROJECT FOR PUBLIC SPACES

Although we have approached Project for Public Spaces as an urban laboratory that has been experimenting in Times Square before and during its pedestrianization, that non-profit organization focused on public spaces was also the result of an experimental procedure of working on public spaces. PPS was founded in 1975 by Fred Kent and Kathy Madden in New York City. Kent was previously working with one of the most influential sociologists and urbanists in the city's recent history, William H. Whyte. Whyte's work and conception of public spaces served as the main inspiration for PPS.

In 1970 Whyte created "a small research group, The Street Life Project, [that] began its study by looking at New York City part-time, in museums and such informal recreation areas as city blocks." (Whyte, 1980: 10). As a result of the Street Life Project, an unfinished book, as Whyte used to call it, named as "The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces," served as the theoretical and methodological structure for composing PPS. In fact, since 1978, when Project for Public Spaces was already consolidated, Whyte used to strongly collaborate with the PPS, especially on topics related to Bryant Park's transformation, (PPS/our history).

At first sight, an urban laboratory (UA) seems to be a pretty self-explanatory concept. However, it could be a term used for talking about at least three different scenarios. (i) A UA is a laboratory of any kind of matter happening in the city. This one is the most generic definition of this kind of space. Its urban character is granted by its geographical location. (ii) A laboratory tied to urban issues. The idea of urban issues is also gathering any kind of situation happening in cities. An urban laboratory for approaching the city’s urban (transportation/sanitation/housing/environment, etc.) matters. (iii) Urban Laboratory is another way to conceive a particular space, either a city or a part of it, as a site for experimentation (Heathcote, 2005).

Those three scenarios could also be compacted in two: (i) an urban laboratory is the field-site (Hudson and Marvin, 2009) where some urban experiments are conducted by either local administrations, private companies, academic institutions, individual scholars, or the communities inhabiting the site. (ii) an urban laboratory is a heterogeneous structure that conducts all kinds of experiments in urban locations. That structure could be, in that way, either a design, an academic, an administrative, an artistic, a political structure, or a mix of some—or all—of them. The Project for Public Spaces is a mixed laboratory focused on urban matters, composed of administrative-design-planning-academic structures.

Due to the flexibility of the concept and, at the same time, the close relationship between its meanings, there is not a standardized definition one can start with for talking about what is an urban laboratory. Instead, one can find many different—but related—versions of how those kinds of stabilizations are. However, what is also possible to see is the proliferation of those experimental sites for experimentation in different scenarios across the globe. For instance, in the United Nations has its own urban laboratory as an initiative “to respond to the growing demand from cities to find transformative solutions to complex urban challenges. (UN-Habitat/UrbanLab).

Perhaps one of the most notorious academic examples of an urban laboratory nowadays is the one from the University College London (UCL) that has been working, since 2005, “as a platform for collaboration between urban geographers and urbanists, architects, engineers, and developers” (UCL/Urban Laboratory/about). Notwithstanding, the most classic and famous register of an urban academic laboratory is taking us to the early 20th century to the Chicago School of (urban) sociology. The Chicago School expanded the idea of an urban laboratory through the application of that concept’s two main meanings: It worked as a site for experimentation in sociology, criminology, and ethnography, and at the same time, it took Chicago as a laboratory itself, as a field-site for observing the different urban transformation of the city, and at the same time for testing their own academic processes.

That conjunction of both ways to understand an urban laboratory is what Bulkeley et al. (2019) have named as “Urban Living Labs for referring to those organized sites for experimentation that are sharing some features such as: “geographical embeddedness in a specific urban context; an explicit learning function; participation and user involvement; alternative modes of leadership and ownership to those found in traditional private sector projects or urban planning processes; and the intention to undertake evaluation and ongoing improvement.” (319).

In terms of administrative and planning logic, an urban laboratory is composed of (i) a center of control and governance and (ii) a bounded finite set of facilities and activities (set of particular location(s) outside is(are) measured and calculated by a variety of experts in a multidisciplinary context: urban planners, policymakers, urban researchers, and urban designers, among others). However, we have that the scale of those research spaces may vary—and it really does—from a generalist and sometimes blurred scale, where the whole city turns to be their test-bed, to either a more delimited location (pedestrianized Times Square, this entire piece of research) or a specific network/project/initiative (Go to V6).

So, coming back to the urban laboratory we are unpacking here, the Project for Public Spaces was hired by Times Square Alliance, “from May 2006 to June 2007, to better understand and reimagine how Times Square performs as a public space [...] through systematic observation techniques such as time-lapse film analysts, activity mapping, tracking, and user surveys. (PPS/Times Square). After a year of research, Project for Public Spaces presented five points that they considered were both issues and opportunities regarding how Times Square was composed at that time. Those points are: (i) “Ground floors – Most building bases in the district do not support sidewalk activity, gathering and smaller destinations.”

(ii) ‘No square there’ – Demand for use and activity in median is very high yet there are no amenities in square to support this activity.

(iii) Movement and circulation – Street design does not support pedestrian movement – there is a lack of sidewalk space and crosswalks and crossing times are inadequate.

(iv) Flexible spaces – District needs flexibility to close side streets and even Broadway at various times to facilitate planned events.

(v) Reach out like an octopus – Not perceived as a district. Side streets (especially theater blocks) are underperforming as destinations in their own right.” (ibid).

Despite there is not any record of whether or not those recommendations were attended, somehow, by Times Square Alliance, the five points that resulted from PPS’s exploration in Times Square turned to be fundamental after 2009, when the pilot program was announced as a permanent reality. However, it was not just a coincidence but the alienation of many different situations inside a temporal space that also worked as a kind of urban laboratory: The New York City Department of Transportation, DOT.

In April 2007, the same year that PPS ended its work on Times Square, Janette Sadik-Kahn, “a former deputy administrator of the Federal Transit Administration [and] as senior advisor on mass transit issues to Mayor David N. Dinkins” (Neuman, 2007, April 28), was announced by Mayor Bloomberg as the new Transportation Commissioner of the New York City. Two months later, Sadik-Kahn hired Andy Wiley-Schwartz “Project for Public Spaces vice president and transportation program director [that started to work] ... on new public space initiatives [...] at DOT’s new Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability.” (Naparstek, 2007, June 15).

The incorporation of Wiley-Schwartz to NYC DOT, and with him the PPS know-how, contributed to the construction of that temporal version of the city Department of Transportation that, in the case of Times Square, understood the constant confrontation between pedestrians and vehicles over Broadway Avenue not as an exclusive transportation issue, but as a more complex situation that involved a more comprehensive range of elements, spaces, and associations. In the end, after designing a pretty ambitious experi-
ment, not only pedestrians won the confrontation. Although Broadway was closed to vehicles, the traffic circulation in the area was improved too. A win-win situation.

V28. PAST IS THE NEW FUTURE. PARTS TWO, THREE, AND FOUR, A TALE OF TWO VISIONS OF A CITY

V28-A. Part two. Fighting fire with fire

This is the story of a dirty and nasty place that should be cleaned. This is the story of a systematic process of discarding elements that cannot be attached to traditional and hygienist logics and regimes. This is a short description of how bigger actants—with more and better connections—reorganize their networks in order to get more robust and durable relationships with the geographical space—an element that everyone wants to be with—to create their own stable and particular areas of control.

Especially during the decades of 1970s and 1980s, New York City was facing a vast crime epidemic. Nevertheless, it was the experience that last decade when “a diverse set of organizations in the city—pursuing their own interests and using various tactic programs—all began to try to restore order in their domains. [for instance, different Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) started to employ] profs team security and hiring the homeless to clean the streets. [Also] the New York City Transit Authority (NYCTA) began a five-year program to eradicate graffiti from subway trains. [...] neighborhood organizations, too, began demanding that order be restored.” (Kelling, 2009).

Nevertheless, there is a more or less sort of general-official consensus on that it was in the 1980s, especially from the mayoralty of Rudolph Giuliani, where the crime rates of the city dropped dramatically due to its strategy of Zero-tolerance influenced by Wilson’s and Kelling’s (1982) Broken windows theory. The person designated by Giuliani to lead his program against crime and for serving as Commissioner of the New York City police was Willam Bratton, who at that time was working as a chief of the New York City Transit Police.

“Bratton used his prior experience combating subway crime as a springboard into a citywide campaign to aggressively apprehend the perpetrators of quality-of-life crimes on the streets. Bratton’s managerial reforms were brilliantly innovative, using up-to-the-minute technology. But at the neighborhood level, his crime-fighting strategies were grounded in traditional law enforcement methods and in relentless crackdown campaigns to arrest and jail low-level drug offenders and other petty perpetrators.” (Greene, 199: 174-175).

But Giuliani’s and Bratton’s strategies have been widely criticized by academics (Joanes, 2000; Sridhar, 2006) and human rights organizations due to its excesses and discriminatory politics against minorities. “Amnesty International has reported that police brutality and unjustifiable use of force is a widespread problem in New York City [...] There is a wealth of documentation to support the charge that police misconduct and abuse have increased under Giuliani administration’s zero-tolerance regime.” (Ibid: 176).

Regarding Times Square, Giuliani implemented a mixed strategy that included its zero-tolerance policy, a hand-by-hand work with developers, and other public and private efforts to control their local areas. The process started with Koch, and he continued with the plans that former mayors started in the area (Powell, 2009, October 25).

“It was kind of like a perfect storm for him,” said Arturo Ignacio Sanchez, a City and Regional Planning professor at Cornell University. The process started with Koch, picked up speed under Dinkins and really accelerated under Giuliani, he said, adding: “It fast forwards with warp speed under Bloomberg, and you have the city today, however] while even his critics will say Giuliani deserves praise for his part in redevelopment of the area, the finished product was the culmination of decades of work that came before he was elected, according to lawmakers and urban planners.” (AP, 2007, December 28).

Benjamin Chesluk (2008) situates the redevelopment of Times Square—that started in the late 1960s and finished in the early 2000s—inside of in a context of neoliberal planning and governance where multiple mid-level entities were working together: “The ‘deregulation’ rhetoric of neoliberalism is paired with massive re-regulation, as local property owners exert new forms of control over city spaces by forming public-private hybrid governmental associations to control their local area better. The Times Square redevelopment is full of such groups, the Times Square Business Improvement District, the Friends of Bryant Park, the Forty-second Street Development Corporation, and the Midtown Community Court.” (20).

In general terms, Giuliani’s political strategy of zero-tolerance not only helped to reduce crime rates in the City—paying a high price—but also drew the blueprints of a particular hygienist way to understand and regulate a territory: “But [Giuliani’s] tactics had the added benefit of paving the way for selective gentrification of inner-city neighborhoods by cleansing them of masses of ‘undesirable’ low-rent residents [...] It also made it possible to reclaim downtown areas—like New York’s newly Disneyfied Times Square—for redevelopment as upscale entertainment centers and festive marketplaces catering to middle-class suburbanites and tourists. (Masek, 2006: 111).”

One of the ways Giuliani’s administration used in Times Square for “taking place back” was the creation of special zoning regulations for the whole sex-oriented industry of the city. But with a significant impact in Midtown Manhattan and, especially in Times Square where it was a big agglomeration of those businesses. In a nutshell, the proposal aimed to prohibit “sex businesses from opening within 500 feet of residences, schools, houses of worship or one another. It permits such businesses to operate chiefly in manufacturing areas” (Hicks, 1995, March 14). Despite some unsuccessful legal actions made by the Adult Industry Trade Association and the warnings from New York Civil Liberties Union about the possibility that those regulations were unconstitutional, the zoning plan was welcomed and endorsed by the rest of the stakeholders around Times Square:

“This starts a new day,” said Gretchen Dykstra, president of the Times Square Business Improvement District. She estimated that the proposed regulations would reduce the number of adult stores in Times Square “from 47 to about 5 or 6. [Meanwhile] Ruth W. Messinger, the Manhattan borough president, responded cautiously to the new plan. ‘We need to take a careful look at all the maps to understand exactly what neighborhoods will be impacted,’ she said. ‘This is a broader spread than the Mayor presented at first, but I still want to see the impact, so that there are not business neighborhoods with excess concentration.’ (Ibid)

On the other side of Giuliani’s development policies and aggressive crime-fighting—but related to Times Square’s transformation—we have the New York City Department of Transportation. Presented in June 2000 (for unpacking this go to V27), The Midtown Pedestrian Network Development Project aimed to solve the long data conflict vehicles-pedestrians generated by how Broadway Avenue was crossing the area. The project was signed by Giuliani as Mayor of the City, by Joseph L. Rose as Director of City Planning, and by Wilbur L. Chapman as Commissioner Department of Transportation.

Joseph B. Rose, who led the Department of City Planning for eight years, came from a well-known skyscrapers builder family. Paradoxically, one of his most considerable efforts during his time as Commissioner was to review and reorganize the city’s zoning laws to “set height limits in most neighborhoods asked on the scale of existing development.” (Lucck, 1999, December 8).

Meanwhile, Wilbur L. Chapman came from a 29-year career in the Police Department of New York City (Mayor’s Press Office, release #289-98), and only served for over two years (from June 1998 to September 2000) as NYC DOT commissioner.
Transportation Commissioner. Weinshall switch

Part three, an unexpected reported a press conference where Mayor blogNYC (Naparstek, 2006, August 2) NewYorkCity'sstreets: describes all this situation in his analysis of ing under Bloomberg's administration, were claimed by cars marginalizing other development over almost anything else. Neigh‐

Administration. the first six years of Michael Bloomberg's Press Office, release #335-00), as his new Transportation Commissioner. Weinshall also served as DOT commissioner during the first six years of Michael Bloomberg’s administration.

Since Robert Moses’ times, New York has privileged automobile-structures develop‐

ment over almost anything else. Neigh‐
borhoods and communities were destroyed for building bridges and highways. Streets were claimed by cars marginalizing other kinds of elements such as pedestrians and bikes. And along Giuliani’s mayoral, as well as during the time Weinshall was still work‐

ing under Bloomberg’s administration, things did not change at all. David Labofrom describes all this situation in his analysis of New York City’s streets:

“DOT Commissioner Iris Wein‐

shall, a respected public administrator who was initially appointed by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and reappointed by Bloomberg, had focused on improving the basic management of the depart‐

ment, which had been led by four com‐

missioners in six years prior to her appointment. The rebuilt agency’s staff primar‐

ily had focused on basic opera‐

tions and improving traffic flow. This meant that for the most part, DOT retained advocates’ calls for substantial expansion of the city’s nascent network of bicycle lanes and for new policies assigning more street space to pedestrian‐

ans.” (6).

In August 2006, the website StreetsblogNYC (Naparstek, 2006, August 2) reported a press conference where Mayor Bloomberg, after arriving late, was offering “a depresssing-yet-illuminating dose of com‐

placency about the city’s traffic crunch […] Before I was mayor, I believed mayors for traffic. Now I blame Department of Trans‐

portation officials and Police Commission‐

ers.” After getting the laugh, the mayor shrugged: ‘We like traffic, it means econo‐

mic activity, it means people coming here.’ Soon he left in a private car.”

Naparstek was strongly criticizing the lack of vision the City Administration had regarding how traffic should be in Midtown Manhattan: “While world cities like London and Paris are finding that reducing motor vehicle traffic in the urban core is a boon to local business, quality of life and overall competitiveness in the global economy, New York is still stuck in a 1950’s traffic engineering mindset that insists the grid‐

lock, honking, and spewing tailpipes of 1.1 million vehicles cramming into Manhattan each day is prerequisite for a healthy, vibrant urban center.” (Ibid).

But just three years later, Bloomberg’s opinion dramatically changed when on Feb‐

uary 29, 2009, announced the pilot program “Green Light for Midtown” (see P26). The quick answer that could explain that transform‐

ation is the arrival of Sadik-Khan to DOT in 2007. The long — and not so intrici‐

ate — one involves more actors, networks, and also different scenarios. In the same year, in the middle of his second term as a Mayor of New York City, Bloomberg pro‐

posed a government strategy called PLAN NYC, a great “French” plan (PLAN NYC, 2007). Grosso modo, that plan intended to prepare the city for 2030, when the local population was estimated to grow to nine million people, in terms of infra‐

structure, climate change, and quality of life derived from the growing process itself.

Besides other kind actions such as improving the transit network with a better road-infrastructure and a novel and ambi‐

tuous bike plan, the City Administration pro‐

posed a sort of experiment: “Pilot conges‐

tion pricing plan.” In other words, “a system that charges drivers a fee for entering a city’s center.” (Ibid). Nevertheless, and despite “polls showed that New York City residents backed the proposal by a 67% to 27% [and that] a majority of City Council members

voted to support a modified pricing proposal [the] inaction by the New York State Assembly meant that the Legislature did not adopt the authorizing legislation by an April 2008 federal funding deadline. An attempt to revive road pricing a year later in the form of bridge tolls also failed to win Legislative support, although the positions of the two houses were reversed.” (Schuller, 2010: 1).

Putting aside, again, the bike proposal, the rest of the main transportation strategies of PLAN NYC, regarding how streets should be in Midtown Manhattan, are receiving New York City streets. There were significant infrastructures, expanding and improving the corridors for vehicles. Not‐

withstanding, and despite there were no more specific plans for reducing/dealing with congestion in the area — due to the fee system plan was ambitious enough — a gen‐

eral vision such as “We must also reduce growing gridlock on our roads through bet‐

ter road management” (PLAN NYC, 2007:13) served as a goal-umbrella for developing any other kind of proposal that could help to achieve that loosed target and, at the same time, to deal with a more specific issue, the lack of mobility of one of the busiest areas of the city. And that whatever proposal that was expected for dealing with traffic con‐

 gestion was the responsibility of the Depart‐

ment of Transportation Commissioner.

Let us come back to the time between Iris Weinshall’s departure from DOT and the new Commissioner’s arrival. As it was already discussed, the core of Weinshall’s work was to continue with a long tradition of prioritizing vehicular growth and, in that way, traffic infrastructure expansion designed for motorists over any other kind of either mixed or alternative way of con‐
 ceiving New York City streets. There were two names Mayor Bloomberg considered, at that time, for his new Transportation Com‐

missioner: “Janette Sadik-Khan, a new‐

comer to the government sector, and Michael Horodniceanu, who did a traffic‐

azar stint under Dinkins. Sadik-Khan is seen as a mass-transit-touting progressive […] Horodniceanu, conversely, is expected to hold up Weinshall’s generally car-friendly policies”. (New York Magazine, 2007, March 14).

The former newspaper The New York Sun was predicting that, in case of being appointed, Sadik-Khan “would focus on expediting mass transit over rather than making streets more accommodating of vehicles [meanwhile, Horodniceanu was] widely viewed as the candidate who would stay with [Weinshall] (Weinshall, 2007, March 14). The Mayor of New York, as that article was also suggesting, was about to decide not only the head of the Transporta‐

tion Office of his administration but also which kind of transit imaginary wanted to pursue during the rest of his term. “In the next few weeks, Mr. Bloomberg will make his choice between what experts termed a ‘people-first’ and a ‘car-first’ traffic chief.” (Ibid).

And Major Bloomberg made his choice. Sadik-Khan became DOT Commis‐

sioner in 2007, and a year later, Michael Horodniceanu was appointed as President of the MTA Capital Construction, leading some mega projects such as East Side Access, Fulton Center, the new South Ferry Terminal Station, the No. 7 Line Extension, and the Second Avenue Subway. That same year Commissioner Sadik-Khan announced her DOT master program called “Sustain‐

able Streets,” a five-point plan that repre‐

sented a change from the traditional way how the Department of Transportation used to understand (i) the balance and relationships between different elements interacting, daily, out‐

side. In hindsight, it is possible to relate and locate, somehow, the pedestrianization of Times Square in between three out of five of the points that were composing Sadik-Khan’s plan. The first point, called “Adopt a complete streets design typology to accom‐

modate all users,” had as its primary goal to “develop a Main Street Public Life program that applies complete streets designs and creates or revitalizes public space in key commercial districts.” (Sustainable Streets, 2008). The next point related to our study object named “public plazas” aimed —
Ibid. The last point, “Enjoying the city,” herself, as well by the former Mayor of the city should be conceived — the one presented by Robert Moses and the one performed by Jacobs debate — in a utilitarian, reductionist but also effective way (see V26). In that way, and focusing on only this work’s subject, it is possible to find in the pedestrianization of Times Square different movements and logics that one can relate with both Moses’ and Jacobs’ points of view, of course with some shades and intensities.

If we adjust our focus on an administrative way to understand the pedestrianization, and as an illustrative effort to link some empirical situations to the thesis that Sadik-Khan’s plan for Times Square took the best of both legacies, another way of decomposing the pedestrianization process should be identifying and grouping the different actions of this urban experiment into Jacobs-inspired movements and Moses-related actions. But more than focusing on the particular here, and without any interest in vindicating either a reductionist perspective that may grant an individualist prominence or a positivist vision of history as just a sum of elements — or names —, the intention of trying those names and visions is to propose another way of addressing the pedestrianization process, a movement with different times, different locations and many elements participating. But many other versions can be too.

As a last thought before ending this passage, the idea of tracing a relation between Moses and Jacobs on Sadik-Khan’s conception of how to administrate the streets of a city is not something that belongs to this work. It was a construction highly repeated and powered by the DOT Commissioner herself, as well by the former Mayor Bloomberg, who even called her “the child that Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs never had” (Sadik-Khan and Solomonow, 2017). The linkage of those personified ways of conceiving the city can be seen — with different detail and depth levels — in Sadik-Khan’s “Sustainable Streets” and “Green Light for Midtown” projects, as well on the book where she is gathering her memories of leading the DOT.

“Jacobs understood that the neighborhoods and the streets of a city contain the seeds for renewal, and its local residents who will ultimately lead the way. [But] retrofitting our cities for the new urban at and achieving Jane Jacob’s vision today will require Moses-like vision and action for building the next generation of city roads, ones that will accommodate pedestrians, bikes, and buses safely and not just single-occupancy vehicles with their diminishing returns for our streets”. (Ibid: 19).

P30. THURSDAY, 7:27 AM

This is the story of nothing in particular. This is a draft of a couple of hours on a random day in pedestrianized Times Square. This section intends to present an alternative perspective — a version— of the pedestrianization of Times Square, mixing some memories and observations from the field site with other kinds of documents and resources collected online. This is an exercise I have essayed before; it is just a realistic document composed of a naturalist description of not a place in particular and without a specific intention. It also contains subsequent extensions of some of the situations that will be described there.

Expanding a corner in Times Square

Around seven and a half in the morning, a man dressed red is dragging a kind of metal rack with wheels around the northern part of Duffy Square. The rack contains twenty-two chairs and sixteen tables. All of them are metal painted red. He stops near the TKTS booths and starts to organize first the tables and then the chairs. Two chairs per table. It looks like he knows by heart the exact position where each table should go. Patiently, table by table, he organizes them into two imaginary lines of four tables and eight chairs each. Then, a little bit more to the south, he repeats the same activity one more time.

Using a professional camera and big headphones, a young white man is located at the intersection of Broadway Avenue and W. 47th Street. He is recording the screens above the Mexican restaurant Dos Caminos, over the 1567 Broadway. He is focusing on adding his camera and capturing the digital advertisements, and it gives the impression that nothing around can either distract or disturb him. The ads he is recording are part of a set of preset commercials, programmed by some random person in front of a desk, some blocks away, over Park Avenue. The worker behind those ads is an employee of Clear Channel Spectacolor, a brand division of Clear Channel Outdoor Holdings, that is the owner of the screens that this man is recording.

Clear Channel Outdoor is a company specialized in “billboards, digital billboards, airport signs, and other outdoor advertising options” (“Where we are,” n.d.) with a presence in 48 cities around the United States and in 22 countries across Asia, Latin America and Europe. This company offers one of the seven options for launching an ad on Times Square’s screens. They offer 23 products (either screens or group of screens) for publishing an advertisement in this area. The price of a campaign depends on (i) the kind of screen(s) and (ii) their locations, as well as on (iii) the time and (iv) frequency those ads are displayed.

However, the screens are not only for big companies. One can also broadcast a personal message “in almost real-time and scheduled for later in the day” (“about us,” n.d.). Big Sing Message L.I.C. is a company that offers an online service for publishing texts, pictures, or videos on three specific locations around the Square: The Waterfall and the Crossroads, both at 7th Ave & 42nd St, and The Triple Play at 49th St and 7th. The process seems pretty easy. The first step is going to its website called iDisplay, choosing a location, time, and date, uploading the message we want to publish, and paying the price for it. 15 seconds cost $34.50; half a minute, $49.50; one minute, $89.50; two minutes, $169.50.

Three decades ago, the image of a solitary, relaxed, and focused man recording something in this area of Manhattan was not possible to conceive. The now familiar-pedestrianized-full-of-tourists-restaurants-cameras-screens-hotels-and-trending-stores spot was until the middle of the 1990s too dangerous and wild for being there early, in a random morning, on a workday, just recording a screen. Right now, the man uses a tripod and a different (bigger) set of lenses: same objective, different technique, tools, and position. To go back to the old times of Times Square, the times when this place was a vast red district in the heart of New York City, is relatively easy. Due to the significant amount of information that one can find about those old days, to have an idea of Times Square’s vibes before its — depending on the point of view we are considering: Decentralization/revitalization/vanification/gentrification does not require a significant effort. There are blogs, books, videos, entries on Wikipedia, chats, and forums full of nostalgia, memories, longings, and complaints about Times Square. Youtube will be our departure place for this first immersion.

A user on this network called Tom O published a documentary made by the filmmaker Charlie Ahearn titled Doin’ Time in Times Square. “Shot from his window, the forty-minute video includes everything you’d expect from candid 1980s Times Square footage—slow-mo knock-out punches, neon XXX signs, plenty of cameos from the NYPD, and chaos. The chaos, however, is interspersed with quiet scenes from inside the apartment where the audiovisual product was filmed. This documentary has been described as ‘the home video from hell,’ and it was projected at the New York Film Festival in the 1990s.” (Tom O’, 2015. Video description).
The documentary starts with a neon signal on the facade of a porn theater. “For adults only” we can read in there. It is dark outside, and few people are walking on the sidewalk. At the background a [police/ firemen/ ambulance] siren is setting the scene. (00:53). W. 43rd Street and 8th Avenue. An angry guy, holding a bible and using a megaphone, is yelling at a group of pedestrians that are just passing through and ignoring him. (1:33). The next scene is Ahearn’s wife, the painter Jane Dickson, carrying on their first kid. (2:27). The family’s cat is watching a discussion that is happening on the street. A group of people is yelling, and, eventually, the confrontation scales to a fight. Two police cars arrived. We can see one person being arrested — Next scene: the first birthday party of the couple’s son.

Charlie and Jane's apartment was located on a high floor in a building that no longer exists. Nowadays, the place is occupied by the Westin New York at Times Square, a 45-floors, and more than 850 rooms hotel. Since 2002 this 162.2-meter skyscraper is decorating the corner of a different street in the limits between Midtown Manhattan and Hell’s Kitchen. The Westin is part of a massive offer of more than 40 hotels around the zone. This area is also hosting 41 Broadway theaters, home of the most famous musicals around the world, but it is also a place full of stores —101 according to Times Square Alliance (TSA, Shop‐ping, n.d.) — and business offices, with a vast gastronomic offer of more than 160 restaurants and 34 different cuisines (TSA Dining, n.d.). The street food spots are not counted here.

The man dressed red is still dragging the now empty metal rack. He continues going down to the W. 46th St., but before reaching the street, he stops to say hello to other workers gathered in the middle of the Square. It is a group of five people. One of them, an old white man, is wearing the same kind of red uniform as the first one. An overall and a cap, both labeled with the logo of Times Square Alliance. The older man is a cleaner. Cleaners are a group of people —70 Sanitation Associates (TSA about the alliance)— and objects that are continuously walking, around the domains of TSA, in the shape of “unities” in order “to keep Times Square clean and beautiful for more than 300,000 daily visitors (ibid). Let us unpack both concepts below.

TSA domains: The extension of land controlled by the Alliance, the area that the red dressed workers have to maintain clean, the same piece of land that other wearing suits organize and administrate from their headquarters in 1560 Broadway, is “most of the territory from 40th Street to 53rd Street between 6th and 8th Avenues, as well as Restaurant Row (46th Street between 8th and 9th Avenue)” (Ibid). A cleaning unity is composed of a person and a set of tools. There is the classic one: a person + a mobile trash can + a broom and a dustpan. There is also a lite version of the classic one: a black garbage bag instead of the trash can. Other unities are equipped with just a spatula or a rag and a soap bottle. A two-way radio is always present in any one of the unities.

Two other men of the group of five are also members of the Alliance. Their uniforms are red too, but quite different, for instance, instead of an overall, they are wearing a red polo shirt and black pants. They look like they are from a superior level in the organization, like if they were supervisors or something like that. There are other three men, near the group of the five, also wearing red working clothes. They are in the Square, not doing so much, just watching two men repairing a sidewalk. It gives the impression that, at that time in the morning, one can see in Times Square more workers —not only from Times Square Alliance— than tourists.

Near them, a cleaning unity is passing through. The element leading the unity is a young black guy wearing headphones. The particularity of that stabilization is that instead of a mobile trash can, there is a huge trash container. I decided to follow it. Its task was going around Times Square, visiting each trash can around, and collecting the full bags of garbage inside the cans. Patiely, the young man was stacking bags inside his own mobile trash can until it was complete. Then, taking with him all the material he wanted to take away, he started to go to Eight Avenue, and once in there, he organized the bags in a pile in a corner near a Duane Reade. Then, he returned to Times Square to continue with his duty.

I returned to Duffy Square, the plaza located in the middle of Times Square, and the man recording the ads was still there. Same position, same activity. Near him, a couple and two children were walking southbound. Almost running, but in the opposite direction, a man in a suit was crossing the place. A horde of Office workers and a bunch of tourists were also going around. Two costumed characters were getting ready for a long day of work ahead, and I, an unnoticed observer, just wanted to call it a day just before nine am.
CHAPTER SIX

Stabilizing the urban, an opera in three acts

“IT doesn’t make a difference how beautiful your guess is. It doesn’t make a difference how smart you are, who made the guess, or what his name is. If it disagrees with experiment, it’s wrong.”

Richard Feyman (1963) The Feynman Lectures on Physics, Volume I

A02-A. PROGRAM

With more than just an aesthetic intention, the structure of this sort of sub-chapter is inspired by “The abduction of the Seraglio” (Original in German Die Entführung aus dem Serail), an opera Singspiel created by Mozart and the libretto written by Gottlieb Stephanie. The opera, interpreted by The Chamber Orchestra of Europe, was playing at the background of my improvised studio, in Lübeck, when I was writing this chapter. As it almost always happens when I am working on a text, I wrote it in a pretty random way. In this case, I began taking care of the last part of the document. Then, the opera started, and a few minutes later, when the overture was in the middle, the connection was made.

The idea of using this performative piece of music as a metaphor for talking about my work, in someplace in between urban studies and STS, came to my mind as a pretty didactic, colorful, and precise way to talk about composition, ethnography, and the located and bounded world lying behind an urban-(something) structure. Before writing this text, I tried to link my empirical work in a different moment and thinking about other things — also as a sort of plastic exercise of composition and representation — with jazz elements and salsa music. But it did not match well. Although I had both genres regularly playing — by a personal preference, not because I was trying to force anything — things did not work. However, this time things seemed different, so I deleted all that I was writing, and I started again from scratch.

As an illustrative exercise for introducing “The abduction of the Seraglio,” this opera’s plot is about the actions and strategies of a distressed Belmonte for releasing his betrothed, Konstanze. Konstanze was abducted by pirates and sold to the Pasha Selim, a Turkish governor who had a palace in Mediterranean Turkey. Konstanze was kidnapped with her main servant, Blonde, and with Pedrillo, another servant and Blonde’s betrothed. The first act starts with Belmonte going to Turkey and finding Pedrillo at the garden of the Pasha’s palace. They, together, design a plan for liberating the women. Nevertheless, they were discovered and caught by a Pasha’s servant called Osmín.

Belmonte, trying to get out of the situation, told the Pasha that he is the son of Lostados, and a Spanish aristocrat who is the governor of Oran. The thing that Belmonte did not know is that his father and Pasha Selim are enemies. After that revelation, the Pasha decided to torture them and finally kill them. However, he is able to appreciate the love Belmonte and Konstanze have for each other, which makes the Pasha reconsider his decision. Finally, to show his mercy, he decides to let them go. The opera ends with Belmonte and his friends exalting Pasha’s judgment and behavior.

As an additional comment, this time related to the reception of the opera, and as a sort of gos‐ sip or apocryphal piffle (Gurewitsch, 2002) when the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II heard this Opera—a product that he commissioned to create—in its premier in Viena, in 1782, told Mozart: “Too beautiful for our ears, my dear Mozart, and monstrous many notes.” [and Mozart replied him:] “Exactly as many as are necessary, Your Majesty.” (ibid). We will come back, three paragraphs below, to this anecdote to relate it to a proposal for designing a specific epistemological device.

Anyways, more than copying the way how the opera was composed—an overture and three acts—and more than just adopting an “operatic” terminology for naming the logic divisions this text has, I am using Mozart’s opera as an inspiration, and as a methodological tool, for constructing two devices that will help me to think about, and to represent the main idea this document aims to propose: the elaboration of a mixed and stable, although temporary, definition of urban as an analytical category for approaching and describing open space as one of its main components.

In a more precise way, the influence received from “The abduction of the Seraglio” to the elaboration of this academic construction is related to two particular points: 1. The multiplicity of

CHAPTER CONTENT

(i) A general overview of urban studies focusing on what is the study object of that field.

(ii) A study of the concept of urban, from a historical perspective to a methodological assembly of the term as an epistemological tool.

(iii) Some speculations about the idea of doing urbanSTS ethnography.
What I am planning to do here — and that I never particular places. produce general but effervescent theories about tion of the just disappears once I try to grasp it, until now. But a kind of intellectual obsession with the idea of excess of details appears. To talk about the meaning of urban means and represent — could be seen either as an unnecessary and highly scrupulous proceeding or, even, as a procedural fad. Nevertheless, I consider that it is necessary to take care of that meaning, like a sort of semantics of relations, where the being of a word is not only displaying its roots and grammatical structures but also its usefulness and capacity to produce linkages and encounters. This exercise is divided into three acts. The first one is about the meaning of urban in urban studies. I will talk here about what is understood as urban in this academic field. The second act aims to discuss the adjective urban as a conceptual tool and delimiting the field in Urban Studies. The last act is a speculative exercise of thinking on what could be understood as an urban-STS ethnography, what would be the flow of that kind of movement, and some of its components will also be displayed.

Urban Studies is an exciting concept that has been used for talking about four different things: (i) A supposed disciplinary (heterogeneous) field (Bowen, Dunn & Kasdan, 2010). (ii) A set of academic (undergraduate and graduate) programs. (iii) A journal. (iv) A contradiction. In the end, (without including the number four), this signified diversity is pointing out—from different angles—at the same thing: the multidisciplinary and systematic study of either [what is commonly understood as] urban agglomerations or human settlements.

The first issue here is that it seems like there is a tacit agreement that reduces the supposed study object of Urban Studies to the conceptual category of city. And that is a huge part of the above-mentioned incoherence mentioned in the numeral four. But before adequately taking care of what I see as a contradiction — and at the same time as the departure point for redefining and constructing urban as an epistemological category from STS — let us explore some examples where the reduction and misunderstanding of the aim of Urban Studies can be appreciated.

The exercise I am suggesting conducting this exploration is based on two different levels of analysis. The first one is a basic examination of the relationship signified-signifier related to the discipline-studies-city. This examination, a small set of references, is divided into three move- ments. The first movement is offering a general perspective of urban studies and its study object. The second one focuses on the incoherence and issues resulting from the implementation of city, or any other disciplinary subject — from economy or politics, for example — as the study object of urban studies. The last movement is a vindication of urban as the valid study object of urban studies.

The second level of analysis is taking care of the idea of urban. That term will be decomposed by using, precisely, a mixed historical and philosophic perspective. On the one side, that deconstruction will attempt to establish an epistemological device for exploring (grasping and representing) what is urban-studies-wide. On the other side, it will serve as a conceptual mechanism for understanding how those things happening outside are composed and stabilized. Also, some derived speculative and unsettle structures will be presented during this exercise: urban[something] and urban formation.

The finale of this opera is also proposed as an alternative ending for the whole piece of research. This part intends to offer a brief and unsettled perspective of how to do an ethnography of urban places using an STS approach, plus the elements, methods, and thoughts I got from Times Square. However, the list of epistemological devices and multimodal artifacts will be displayed in chapter number six. Without anything else to add, please enjoy the play.

A03. ACT ONE. LOOKING FOR THE SUBJECT OF URBAN STUDIES

A03-A. First movement, a general overview of urban studies

Lights are on again, and the music is already being played. Act one goes very fast, like keeping the same consistency as the overture. Several players enter the scene, and, one by one, each of them starts to introduce itself. They, together, are called the general background. Everyone inside the general background is sharing something. We cannot see that yet, but for sure, something will be introduced to us at any time. The thing they have in common seems to be shiny and attractive, but it is so hard to identify from here. The public’s attention is divided between visual presentation of those composing the background and that thing they are about to show us.

Wikipedia54 refers to the concept of Urban Studies as “the study of the development of cities.” Encyclopedia.com defines it as “the umbrella for several disciplines engaged in studies of the city.” For Collins dictionary, Urban Studies are “the various disciplines associated with the study of urban areas...” the word urban in urban areas has a link to its own definition: “urban means belonging to, or relating to, a town or city.” The Stanford program of Urban Studies understands its subject as “an interdisciplinary, undergraduate program [...] that combines academic approaches with real-world experience to understand city[s].” The major in Urban Studies at Yale conceives Urban Studies as “an interdisciplinary field grounded in the city’s physical and social spaces and the larger built environment.”

54. For accessing to the whole set of references of this section, please go to References > other online resources > urban studies exploration.
For the undergraduate program in Urban Studies at York University, Urban Studies “is the attempt to understand cities and city life.”

The Master’s programme [at Brown University] teaches students to analyze the city, urban life, and urbanization through various disciplinary lenses. Students learn where cities come from, how they grow, thrive, and decline, how they are organized, and how to construct meaningful, inclusive, secure, and sustainable places.

“The Master’s programme "European Urban Studies" (EUS) addresses current challenges of cities in Europe. [...] Cities are the place for concrete solutions for problems from all fields of everyday life and the place for sustaining democracy.”

The well-known journal Urban Studies has “remained at the forefront of intellectual and policy debates on the city (...). The Editors aim to maintain and extend the role of Urban studies as the journal of choice for those working on the cutting edge of academic research about cities. Due to the intentions of this exercise are first, to connect signified and signifier and second, to show the homogenization of the scope of Urban Studies, reduced to the study of the city, this journal is the only one that will appear here.

Hasty conclusion: that shiny thing everyone in the general background shared is an empty concept they are using as their main common threat. Traditionally —and as a contradiction— it is the city, an abstract, an ambiguous, homogenizing, and reductionist category the study object of Urban Studies. Urban is just an ornament and adjective, for talking about a sort of behavior, a kind of way of being inside cities.

A03.8. Second movement, going in circles

The components of the general background left the stage. Another one arrives. The stage is dark again—except for Stadies lighting directly to the new element. A few seconds of silence, then a strong voice starts singing an aria where the conflict of this composition is getting more evident. The aria framed in the lands of sociology—an arid terrain where anything new is growing—tells us the story of a misunderstanding living in those rough terrains and sometimes growing in a gaseous way. Finally, this movement ends in a crescendo, full of tension, when someone appears on the scene trying to unravel, to turn the misunderstanding into something else.

Despite more than a half-century of accumulated knowledge, it gives the impression that urban sociology⁵⁵ is somehow stuck inside its disciplinary and theoretical boundaries. Although the situation is not bad per se, it is also not providing new perspectives to study what we call—even referring to different things—urban. Roughly, the issue is that what urban sociology and has been doing is to create same already-made theoretical models and the same set of concepts, again and again, over a reality that is constantly changing, that is always flowering.

Another situation that sets off crisis alerts inside this academic subcategory is what Wu (2015: 1) argues, leaning on Castells (1968), regarding that “urban sociology has no subject matter [...] Instead of a dominant and substantive area, urban sociological study has focused on urban life around, for example, race, poverty, crime, immigration, and sexuality. [That is the reason why] it should not be considered as a scientific sub-discipline distinct from sociology in general.” The situation related by Castells is mainly centered on the contributions to works made by the scholars of the Chicago School.

As a sort of historical recount, Wu (2005: 2 - 3) illustrates how a set of urban scholars gathered under what she names as the “new urban sociology”, [...] [Kemery, 1982; Gottsden and Peagin, 1988; Zukin, 1980, 2011] [...] were trying to make major inroads in bringing the city back into focus. [...] The city is not merely a physical entity but is itself an effect of more fundamental political, economic, and cultural forces. Cities are shaped by structural powers that affect all aspects of human life.

So, urban sociology got a subject, the city, but at the same time, it turned that subject into just landscape, into a container, something they just took for granted to study a different kind of phenomenon and set of elements.

“In general, the consensus became that to study urban society was to study how cities reinforce, mediate, and articulate the effects on social life of structural-level factors such as consumption culture, political power, and capitalism (Zukin 1980). [Notwithstanding, for this new agenda of urban sociology] the city [is converted into] a container for social processes such as cultural consumption, competition, or collaboration between agenci-...” (Zukin 2011) notes, urban sociology has become more diffuse than ever and “seems to be as much in crisis as it was when Castells challenged it” (ibid: 8).” (Wu 2005: 3).

Jifi Musil (2004), in a paper included in a book called Advances in Sociological Knowledge (Genov, 2004), describes the fifty years of development that urban sociology has faced. Musil proposes three phases or stages in the growth of that sub-discipline. As a reader, one can identify two common plot lines in all those three phases presented by Musil—plot lines that overcome Musil’s document—two plots that belong to the particular evolution of urban sociology as a branch of sociology and not to the particular way he has organized his arguments.

The first common issue is regarding the usage of urban and city. There have been, sometimes overlapped, sometimes presented individually, that compromises both elements’ ontologies. On the one hand, they are implemented as interchangeable resources with a common ontology. In a general way in sociology, we have here that those two concepts are considered synonymous that can be used without any reflexive consideration. On the other hand, that duality is understood as differentiated unicity between materiality (city) and an immaterial element (urban).

So, the city is the framework, the set of physical structures happening inside a particular geographic location; meanwhile, the urban is a way of living, a way of being, inside that material reality. Henri Lefebvre (2017 [1978]) attenuates the differentiation between both concepts highlighting two kinds of morphologies, a material one and a social one. “The city, like the workshop, favors the concentration of the means of production (utilities, raw materials, workforce) over a limited space. [...] the city is an actual reality, it is a practical, sensitive and architectural data, meanwhile, the urban is a social reality composed by the relationships to conceive, to build or rebuild that are produced by human knowledge.” (Ibid: 28; 71).

Nevertheless, Lefebvre warns us about the risk of going through the differentiation between urban and city that he just proposed. The situation is that the urban, as a social reality, “may give the impression of being without any kind of material form like a sort of spirit or soul, putting that concept, at what it is representing, it is kind of imaginary transcendence [...] if we adopt that terminology, the relationships between the city and the urban should be handled very carefully by trying to avoid the confusion, the semantic metaphysics, and the reduction to the sensitive immediacy.” (Ibid: 70).

Manuel Delgado (1999), following Lefebvre, is also proposing a differentiation between the city and the urban by keeping their material-immaterial dichotomy: “The city is not the same thing that the urban. If the city is a large settlement of stable constructions inhabited by a large and dense population, the urbanity is a kind of society that may be produced inside the city... or not. The urban has its place in many other contexts that are going beyond the territorial limits of the city. It means that there are cities where the urban, as a way of living, appears in a weak way or even does not appear.” (12).

Meanwhile, Robert E. Park, one of the pioneers of urban sociology in the United States, conceived the duality urban-city from an integrative perspective where those elements are melted in a sort of organic structure that encompasses both notions of materiality and immateriality as well as Lefebvre and Delgado do—as “a set of attitudes and sentiments;” in other words, the urban. So, in a more detailed way, for Parks (1902 [1925]), the relationships between the material morphology and the immaterial one can be summarized in a kind of vital process:

“The city [...] is something more than a congeries of individual men and of social conveniences— streets, buildings, electric lights, tramsways, and telephones, etc.; something more, also, than a mere constellation of institutions and administrative devices—courts, hospitals, schools, police, and civil functionaries of various sorts. The city is, rather, a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of the attitudes and sentiments that inherent in these customs are transmitted with this tradition. The city is not, in other words, merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction. It is involved in

55. By focusing this overview mostly on urban sociology, I am not pretending to deny the contributions and developments of other disciplines such as urban anthropology to the study of a—possible—common study. Also, I do not intend to equate urban studies with urban sociology. The point of going through urban sociology is the selection of some specific texts that have been interesting in a more general usage and definition of the concept urban as well as the validity, or not, of a dedicated study of the urban. But despite those issues are directly related to urban sociology they are not exclusive to that (sub)discipline and could be found, transversally, in other academic spaces that use the name urban as an adjective.
the vital processes of the people who compose it; it is a product of nature, a particularity of human nature.” (Ibid: 1)

The second similarity one can infer from Musil’s text—and this particularity is also shared mainly through all kinds of sociological traditions—is to consider the urban/city binomial either as a sort of structure or as a set of structured elements. This vision is also shared by Wu (2005: 4), who considers “the structural power” as the subject matter of that new urban sociological agenda. “The disciplinary way of seeing the role of macro level economic, political, and cultural power. New urban sociologists treat the city as a container of social processes and consider the effects of structural power.”

For example, following Musil’s organization of urban sociology in three different phases, the sociologists involved in the first one “devoted their energy mainly to descriptions of cities and urban regions as well as to the understanding of regularities in the structures of cities. [Meanwhile] (i) in the second phase, urban sociologists tried to explain the urban structures that were discovered. […] The stress on causal explanation of urban structures and processes meant that the city was conceived mainly as a product, as a dependent variable” (Musil, 2004: 293).

Now well, and regarding the third and last phase, “some urban sociologists reacted by introducing a pluralistic conception of the city. The city started to be understood as a community linked to a concrete space as well as to national and global society. […] The cities are also understood as active elements affecting society. They are not seen as only recipients of impulses from outside. […] The main analytical dimensions in urban pluralistic analysis are economy, power, social structure, culture and environment. The crucial elements of urban social structure are, for most contemporary sociologists, various types of inequalities in the space of cities.” (Musil, 2004: 293).

The thing here is that due to its dense and structuralist way of seeing the world, traditional sociology—a discipline that prioritizes analysis and theorization—is incapable of going further the thing—subject—society (family, work, education...) as a discipline focused on how different social forms are being organized and, in general terms, happening in space. According to Lamy, the study object of sociology is inquiring about how the elementary elements of social life are understood. Things do not happen in space. Instead, things construct their own space of relationships and usefulness (for a deeper understanding of this last concept, please go to P22). The dissatisfaction that Latour and his followers—“sociologists” (Latour, 2005), my work is lying on the “sociology of the associations” that does not understand the social as a domain but as a way of being together. The crucial point in traditional sociology of the urban is, precisely, the way of understanding urban as a social process happening in a specific space. However, some issues start to appear. As a sort of process involved in the spatial organization of some social groups, the meaning of urban is not clear enough. Notwithstanding, Lamy tries to solve that situation by going deeper into the connotation of that process, as well as on the focus of her proposal on urban sociology and, following that path, she is also contributing to define, in a more specific way, what should be understood as the subject study of her urban program.

“Sociology of the urban [SOFTU] is not the sociology of everything happening in the city. In a transversal way to other fields of sociology (family, work, education...), [SOFTU] focuses on the different aspects of social life. This kind of sociology is inquiring about how the elements structuring, in a specified way, the relationships between actors, institutions, and social groups [it results pretty interesting the way of Lamy is differentiating those categories] are constituting the city as their environment. [And she continues.]

For a sociologist, the city is where some social groups live, work, have families, interact, or not, with other people. Those social groups are geographically, economically, politically, and culturally distributed, and they, together, are composing a social system. This is the first study object of the sociology of the urban: they are interested in the
set of relationships created between the constructed spaces and the societies. The city is a social and spatial form. The sociology of the urban does not dissociate the social phenomena from the space where those happen. At the opposite, SOFTU is turning the linkage between the social and the spatial the core of its analysis.” (Lamy, 2006: 213-214)

After reading the two paragraphs above-presented, one can appreciate a sharper definition of her idea of the sociology of the urban. However, it is still not sharper enough. As a sort of schematic structure, only constructed here as a didactic exercise, it is possible to reduce/simplify those two paragraphs in the following way: There is a branch of sociology interested in a particularity — what we understand here as urban — that shapes specific aspects of social life. That particularity is structuring, somehow, the way how some elements are constituting the city. Also, the sociology of the urban focuses on how the social and space are being related.

In the end, Lamy’s work, and despite that she starts in a provocative way proposing more than a semantic modification in the field of urban sociology, results insufficient for facing what she calls the urban phenomena. The thing is that there is neither any kind of ontological defiance nor any epistemological strategy for approaching (describing and representing) as well as for the social — more like a domain — and its relations, those inconveniences are related and shaped regarding her sociology of the urban. Neverthe-

less, that was an intentional situation. As it was already announced, the idea was to propose a discussion about urban as a concept and not to document the historical development of urban studies. Two reasons can explain my decision. First, the historical development of urban disciplines is not necessarily related to the process of reflection, discussion, and consolidation of urban as a concept. Second, the history and linear evolution of the different urban disciplines have been already documented and essayed many times, as we will see below.

So, the idea during the following paragraphs is to elaborate a pretty rudimentary state of the art of how, mostly from sociology and anthropology, the study object of those disciplines related to urban issues — whatever that term means now — has been constructed and maintained especially around the concept of city, neglecting or taking for granted the urban one. For this exercise, I have gathered more than ten works, mostly handbooks and readers, of that sociology [traditional study] of the social, due to those are not only texts of reference but also compilations of many different disciplinary perspectives, as well as of classic and contemporary academic productions.

The compiled works were categorized under three different subjects: “cities,” “things happening in cities,” and “disciplinary matters. The first one of those subjects is completely self-explanatory. Those are the works that consider that the subject of urban studies is the city. Some of them reflect on that category, on what a city is, on how one can trap a city, but most of them are just taking the city for granted. The second subject, “things happening in cities,” is referring to those elements/networks/subject disciplines/matters that have been framed as independent study objects but framed in cities: transportation, sanitation, housing, poverty... the third and last subject is about methodological and theoretical concerns of urban disciplines.

As a last introductory paragraph to that state of the art I am about to present, the documents below referenced are randomly organized that is not related to their importance or relevance inside the set of academic works that use the word “urban” as a category to identify and organize their content. This here is also an introductory presentation of a group of books and papers that represent a small portion of the “urban” spectrum. A deeper immersion of this category, using a more significant sample of documents and literary production, is entirely out of the scope and possibilities of this piece of research.

List of primary documents referenced during this exercise:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V12A. Cities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Cities: reimagining the urban (Amin and Thrift, 2002)</td>
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<td>• Of states and cities: The partitioning of urban space (Marcuse and van Kempen, 2002)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The sustainable urban development reader (Wheeler, Beatley, 2014)</td>
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<td>• The city reader (LeGates and Stout, 2015)</td>
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<td>• The city cultures reader (Miles, Hall, and Borden, 2003)</td>
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<td>• Cities and crisis: New critical urban theory (Fujita, 2013)</td>
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<th>V12B. Things happening in cities</th>
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<tr>
<td>• The sustainable urban development reader (Wheeler and Beatley, 2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The urban design reader (Larice and Macdonald, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being urban: a sociology of city life (Karp, Stone, Yoels, and Dempsey, 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cities and crisis: New critical urban theory (Fujita, 2013)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56. There is a book referenced by Lamy that seems to be one of her main sources of inspiration for her idea of sociology of the urban: Sociologie de l'urbain (Clavel, 2002).
V128. Things happening in cities

- Being urban: a sociology of city life (Karp, Stone, Yoels, and Dempsey, 2015[77])
- Urban sociology in an urbanized society (Mellor 2007[77])
- The new urban sociology (Gottdiener and Hutchison, 2011)

P19. The city is everywhere and in everything

The pretty strong statement that is naming this section was proposed by Amin and Thrift (2002:1) to talk about our current model of living together. The city is our primary way of being as humans. The city is our global reality more than ever in history. But that way of thinking is also shared inside the academy as well as outside of it. The well-known United Nations’ prediction that in 2050 the 68% of humanity will be living in cities—an increase of 13% from our current situation when more than the world’s population, 55%, is already doing it—is a good example that reinforces Amin and Thrift’s idea.

From positivist approaches (Glaeser, 2011; Montgomery, 2013) where the city is presented as the epitome of the human associativity to self-proclaimed radical ones—inspired mainly by LeFebvre’s work—where the city is a global phenomenon, the product of a “planetary urbanization” (Brenner and Schmid, 2014, 2015; Soja and Kanai, 2005), full of (social, political, geographical...) contradictions, the city is an omnipresent and immutable reality. I mean, one can discuss its shape, structure, organization, governance, outcomes, and futures, but ontological validity is a sacred reality that does not admit any work on self-reflection. Having that context in mind, the idea of the urban appears as a process, urbanization, that produces cities, Amin and Thrift (2002:1), in a scenario where cities are everywhere, ask themselves, “what is not urban nowadays?” And they conclude that the old differentiation between the city (urban) and the countryside (non-urban) “has been perforated due to, precisely, the omnipresence of the city. That ubiquity can be appreciated in terms of “commuters, tourists, teleworking, media, and the urbanization of lifestyles.” In other words, there is urban life, a way of being with cities that is not necessarily related to the act of inhabiting a city.

The city is expanding itself through a series of administrative, geographical, and theoretical conquests labeled under the names of urbanization, urban development, and urban sprawl. These terms point to the same two processes: (i) extending and producing cities, and (ii) expanding and producing urban life. Both movements, as the reader may realize, may occur together or in separate ways. There are also some space-time intersections the authors name as urban moments.” Those are the temporal stabilizations of the same element, the city. An urban moment is a framed city where something particular has happened.

Notwithstanding, in the context where cities are omnipresent, and where, also, those elements are conceived as the primary study object of urban studies—and their ontology does not need to be discussed—urban is just either (i) a secondary term, a synonym of city, (ii) a process which result is creating cities, (iii) something—a sort of happening—in cities, or (iv) just an adjective for putting on everything without any kind of reflexivity on its meaning and usage. As an example of those somethings happening in cities, there is a variety of elements, domains, or fields, where the use of urban, most of the time, is just ornamental—way of understanding human sociability processes happening in cities. The urban here acts as a gathering concept for naming all those situations, in the case of their compilation related to sustainability, the different sustainability processes happening in cities. The urban here acts as a gathering concept for naming all those situations, in the case of their compilation related to sustainability, the different sustainability processes happening in cities. The urban here acts as a gathering concept for naming all those situations, in the case of their compilation related to sustainability, the different sustainability processes happening in cities.

For instance, Marcuse and van Kempen present us some kindness of urban spaces one could quickly identify in relation to cities: “ghetto,” “conclave,” and a third one they call as “state.” This one should be understood as an “entire apparatus of government” (Ibid: 9) one guess, of government of cities/urban space. Precisely there is not any kind of reflexive work regarding the implementation of urban and urban space. Those two terms are neither problematized nor deeply discussed, and it is the reader who has to realize by itself what an extremely meaningful task it is not a hard job due to both concepts, since the beginning has been related to the city as both a synonym of a term and as a geographical part of the city itself.

There is another—although still attached to the image of city—way to understand the concept of urban. Wheeler and Bealtry (2014) have compiled a delightful collection of essays and study cases regarding sustainability and the different sustainability processes happening in cities. The urban here acts as a gathering concept for naming all those situations, in the case of their compilation related to sustainability, occurring inside what we understand as cities. As an interesting academic procedure that will be present during this review, the idea of sustainability—or any other specific matter—was widely presented and discussed, but the urban one was just taken for granted.

Even despite, urban is also conceived as a way of producing cities—they implemented the term “urban expansion” for talking about that movement. The main usage of that concept is for just labeling a set of academic, political, and economic encounters between the ideas of city and sustainability. We have, for example, a series of urban concerns in this particular field, such as Sustainable development; Climate change planning; Land use and urban design; Transportation; Environmental planning and management. Energy and materials use; Social equity, and environmental justice.

All those concerns are, again, explored and defined in relation to the urban. Here, in that collection of essays and study cases, the concept of urban works as a container —although in a different way that city is doing that—as well as a label for naming and gathering other elements, as a process of developing land, or as a set of particularities happening in cities. In the same line as Wheeler and Bealtry, there is a City Reader (LeGates and Stout, 2015), a work focused on how academia teaches about cities.

From an administrative and organizational perspective, that book starts offering a discussion about the implementation of urban disciplines: urban geography, urban sociology, urban politics, urban economics, urban anthropology, gathered in the concept of urban studies, as theoretical and methodological tools for studying cities. The first inference is that city continues to be the subject of urban studies, and urban continues to be just a way of sorting elements. Then, the trajectory of urban is bifurcated in two different main lines. The first one keeps the idea of urban as an adjective to name things happening in and related to cities “urban culture,” “urban space,” “urban planning.”

The second line turns urban—and under the label of urbanization—into a set of different processes related to the idea of cities as big agglomerations of things. This line is also bifurcated into more specific conceptions of the urban as a process of whatever. For instance, there is one that conceives urbanization as the proportion of the total population concentrated in urban settlements, it means, of cities. There is another line understanding that process as the built environments of cities; a different line is also taking care of the growth of urban population, comparing it to the rural ones, but highlighting that there is not a direct relationship between the growing of cities and the growing of urban population. Another line is shaping the idea of urbanization by talking about suburbanization as a movement for segregating social classes. Finally, there is one focused on urbanization as a historical and positive way of understanding human society.

At this point, it seems this review/state of the art of the urban is bifurcated in circles with the same definitions and conceptions of what is the subject matter of urban studies and what does urban mean. Cities continue to be omnipresent in any conception of urban disciplines and urbanization, as a process of growing and producing cities has more relevance than urban, a concept that does not matter so much. But...
Cities are seen today not simply as accumulations of classical urban thinkers such as Tönnies, Durkheim, Simmel, Park, Lefebvre, and Wirth. My intention right now is to focus on the last one and on his proposal to define the city from a sociological perspective. In that way, Wirth (1938:4) proposes “five criteria that a sociological definition of city must satisfy:

• Urbanism must be defined as a mode of life.
• A serviceable definition of urbanism must be generic and not particular; that is, the mode of life referred to must not arise out of specific locally or historically conditioned cultural influences.
• The definition should denote the essential characteristics that cities in our culture have in common. Conversely, the definition should not be detailed to include all the characteristics that our cities have in common. Instead, the more significant features of cities—size, density, and differences in functional type—must be included in the definition.
• The characteristics of cities included in the definition should be as few in number as possible, but as comprehensive as feasible for deduction of significant sociological propositions. (This is implicit.)
• The definition should lend itself to the discovery of significant variations among cities.

Urban sociology in an urbanized society (Mellor 2007[1977]) is, perhaps, one of most notorious classic works in urban sociology focused on vindicating the disciplinary relevance of this academic branch over other approaches of the urban phenomenon—the kind of stuff happening in cities—gathered under the name of urban studies. Mellor’s efforts are pointed to advocate for a “truly” urban sociology, which means a kind of sociology based on a “liberal pragmatic conception of science” (ibid: viii-ix).

Another characteristic of this proposed program of truly urban sociology is the strong influence of a British context the author claims is necessary. As a general objective, Mellor tries to draw a parallel between a positivist and liberal British urban sociological point of view and the French socialist urban question mainly represented in the shape of urban and regional studies.

We have that what was called before as “urban phenomena” is not just a single class element. Instead, it is a plurality happening in a specific—sometimes problematic—kind of geography we name as cities. Fujita (2013) conceives those agglomerations as almost any author we have displayed here, but he focuses on studying them from a crisis perspective. The idea of Fujita was to propose a new critical urban theory. In order to achieve that goal, he is exploring some “national and urban experiences resulting from the 2008 global financial crisis and its aftermath” (involving and rethinking contemporary urban theories”) (4), at the time he is also compiling a set of other people’s works following the same line.

Following this plural set of case studies and essays, a—a new—critical urban theory is nothing more than a way of encompassing all those things in cities—cities, acting as containers—resulting from exogenous elements. “Cities have played an important role in the [financial, environmental] crisis [either energizing them or in the shape of urban protest movements]. They have embodied what the crisis and its aftermath meant in the spatially condensed form.” (3). The urban is playing a double role here. First, it gathers those traditional and critical theories about the city; then, it works as a procedural context—the author talks about global and neoliberal urbanization—where the city is produced.

Although the city has been taking place as the primary study object in those disciplines interested in urban affairs, Gottfried and Hutchison (2011) consider that the urban should be analyzed in a broader context. In other words, they advocate for a kind of urban sociology focused on regions instead of cities and suburbs. This administrative and scale turn has sense, according to them, due to urbanization processes have overcome shape of cities creating new geographies and connections. “The built-up region contains a mix of cities, suburbs, vacant space, industrial parks, intensively farmed agricultural land, shopping malls, and recreational areas—all of which are interconnected and bridged by communication and commuter networks including highways, rail, telecommunications, and satellite or cellular-based links.” (2)

Nevertheless, regardless of whether the focus is on cities or regions of cities—plus other geographies—the idea of the urban did not have a relevant role in this brief approximation to the urban literature. That is why I decided to choose Lamy’s work as a common thread to go through the development of an academic and multi-perspectivist program of studies of the urban. And yes, even despite Lamy’s proposal is not going deeper enough inside the terms of the urban, it is—with no doubt— an interesting point of departure for starting to think on the urban as a valid and necessary construction from where to describe and represent the world we have outside.

The sociology of the urban as both an actuality and as a potentiality results in an attractive epistemological concept that promises a different—and perhaps more precise and accurate—way to do urban research. However, that possibility seems to be wiped out by our own (already presented) limitations that were framed in the context of what has been presented here as “sociology of the social” (Latour, 2005). In order to try to overcome those inconveniences, as well as to propose a clear and bounded definition of both “urban” and urban ethnography, there is below an experimental proposal of constructing a program of sociology of the urban but from the “sociology of associations” (ibid) side.

A03. ACT ONE. LOOKING FOR THE SUBJECT OF URBAN STUDIES

A04-A. First movement, in the end, everything was about scales-

Act number one ended, and the setting turned dark. After a short pause, a yellow light pointed at the middle of the stage, where a voice started an inner monologue. The voice was focused on the experiences and challenges resulted from the journey of looking for the urban. The voice was talking about the reiteration, the platitudes, and the possible devoted point of this whole enter-
What is the point in continuing to inquire about Godot...suddenly, other elements appeared in the city — as a resource in this work for situating New York City — but without any reflexive effort, one can find cities in literary spaces, on maps, in administrative logic, and traditional historical tales. I am myself using the concept of ‘city’ as a concept that might have some repercussions outside (it means that it could be pointing at something that may exist), at least as a type of virtuality, is granted by the ability that the sociology of the social has to gather and maintain any kind of stabilizations stable: it repeats itself so that something will stick in the mind. […] Memory is redundant: it repeats signs so that the city can begin to exist.” Italo Calvino (1974[1972]), Invisible Cities

And maybe there are cities after all. Paper cities, imaginary cities, cities happening in other fields and disciplines. Without any translation or interpretation effort, one can find cities in literary spaces, on maps, in administrative logic, and traditional historical tales. I am myself using the concept of New York City — but without any reflexivity — as a resource in this work for situating Times Square in an administrative socio-political context. Also, cities are synonymous with universality and generality. Nevertheless, I do not believe the idea of “city” works neither as a field site nor as a study object for doing urban ethnography. The main reason — and it was already presented in A03 — is that we cannot comprehensively approach what that concept tries to encompass and to represent. As urban researchers, as ethnographers, the city is nothing more than some noise, coming from nowhere. The idea of using the “city” for seeing and describing our reality outside is the opposite of what Donna Haraway (1988) understands as situated epistemologies:

“I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people’s lives. I am arguing for the view from the body, always a complex, contradictory, structured, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. Only the god trick is forbidden. Here is a criterion for deciding the science question in militarism, that dream science/technology of perfect language, perfect communication, final order.” (Ibid: 589).

So, my intention here is not to deny the possible existence of something that might be useful in other domains — even doing ethnography, the idea of city could be handy for framing our work into a more traditional general context [in case that it will be necessary, of course] — but to highlight that the adoption of “city” as the primary concern of urban studies is not only unnecessary but also counterproductive. The study object of urban studies should be the study object of urban studies is the best place for finding that matter should be in the streets and not inside theoretical frames that we construct for being tested outside.

The problem we face is both epistemological and ontological. We need to define first what is that something we understand by urban, and then it is necessary to establish what are those strategies we plan to make in order to approach it. This whole dissertation pretends to take care of that problem by proposing a research program on how to grasp and represent an urban something using the resources and features of that something—a place, a temporal association, a trajectory—to describe and display that situation itself. 42 Nevertheless, and independently of all those discussions about the urban as the subject matter of urban studies, about where to find that study object, and how to grasp it, the city will continue being here, among us, but losing all its prominence and being concealed just as a real coyote that we participate, or may not, in the production of that constitutive something we have not defined yet.

57. The impossibility of defining, encompassing and working in with a city is related to the discussion of Ontological incompleteness (go to P08); specially to the reference to Farias (2011: 369) and its definition of city as a never ended multiplicities of assemblages.

58. The title of this section was inspired by the most famous Augusto Monterroso’s short story “El dinosaurio” (“the dinosaur”): “When he awoke, the dinosaur was still there” (original: Cuando despertó, el dinosaurio todavía estaba allí) (Monterroso, 1959)
Notwithstanding, someone may say that a similar issue can also be appreciated at the moment of describing a smaller space, such as a park, a plaza, or a street. And that person may be right. Since everything outside is continually flowing — that situation is not only happening to large (networks/geographies/associations) — to encompass a continuous movement, it means to stabilize, temporarily, a set of elements circulat- ing, and giving them some limits, is an enterprise that requires a lot of effort.

That is why the most challenging part of doing an ethnography of Times Square was, precisely, the one that, apparently, seems to be the easiest: to define what and where Times Square is. Notwithstanding, this situation may be perceived as an exaggeration since you can go at the beginning of this piece of research (see page P04) and finding in there a clear demarcation of the Times Square I was working with and about: “the space resulted after the pedestrianization of Broadway Avenue, between the W. 42nd street and the W. 47th street.”

However, that supposed location is nothing more than a virtual, arbitrary, and outdated repre- sentation of a flowing multiplicity composed of effervescences and some mobile structures. To say that the main version of my work is the space resulted after the pedestrianization of Broadway is to locally reproduce, consciously, a fallacy. And it is a fallacy, a misconception, due to two main reasons. The first one is that although I gave so much relevance to the description of how Times Square was pedestrianized, that story is related to it. Nevertheless, for those small and approachable geo- graphic/structural areas, rather than on general and ethereal ones — cities, for instance — is per- haps the first requirement one should fulfill in order to try to find those urban[something] we are about to define below.

A04-B. Second movement, a genealogy of urban formations

It was not a real cut between the first moment and the second one of two things. Just things had happened almost one over the another, without any space for finishing the scene and without even being prepared for the next one. The only thing announcing the change of acts was the hand pro- gram. It has the structure, and it has the titles. However, those titles seemed to be, most of the time, randomly located just for interrupting the performance and development of a piece that was made as a long-take production. So, keeping the same background and just changing some ele- ments sporadically, the flashback announced before was about to happen just now.

What I am about to do right now is to elabo- rate on a pretty unstable and volatile signifier that will serve as a temporal container for a signified that is multiple and constantly changing. Thus, the challenge is to design a flexible structure that can be elongated as much as one requires but without losing its integrity and sense of unity. In other words, I would like to draw the blueprint for a definition of what is an urban[something], that could keep the main idea of what urban means but that, nevertheless, could be mounted — and dis- mounted — every time in any particular context.

The prototype I have in mind is an episte- mological and multimodal device that will help us approach and represent the world outside in a much better way. We are talking here about an ethnographic instrument we can use once we are in a random and particular place outside (it could be a street, a park, an intersection, a bridge, a hall, or even a neighborhood) to classify and store —for working with them later— all kind of mate- rial-semiotic elements we can find inside that spe- cific location.

The dynamics and usage of that mechanism are pretty simple. However, the only requirement the device has is that it needs to be used as part of a process of assembling and disassembling the world outside. That set of actions based on con- structing and deconstructing a spatiality is one of the things I wanted to create and to propose, an ethnographic program based on the idea of “learning from,” as a sort of conclusion/invitation resulted from going to Times Square and doing this piece of research.

So, right now, let us focus on the idea of the urban[something]. And for doing that, I would like to trace a parallel between the origins of the terms urban and city and the construction of an epistemological device. Since my intention is not to present a sort of state of the art of both urban and city, I will just lean on the work of Mas- simo Cacciari, who is proposing not only a histor- ical recount of those two terms but also, he is tak- ing care of their philosophical implications and developments. Below a short genealogy of both concepts will be deployed.

Massimo Cacciari is an Italian philosopher that —as a curious fact— also served as mayor of Venice (December 9, 1993 - January 25, 2000, and, again, from April 18, 2005, to April 8, 2010). He starts the first chapter of his book La Città (The City, [in Spanish La Ciudad (Cacciari, 2009)]) with an overwhelming statement and an interesting movement challenging the title of his production: the city does not exist. Instead, what really exists is a set of different and well-differen- tiated urban shapes. (9)

That is why, according to him, there are different terms for talking about that thing we understand as a city. “For instance, Latin city basi- guage does not have a word corresponding to the Greek concept of polis. The difference between those two languages is taking us to the [historical] origins of the city and, as it is itself, a crucial differ- ence [instead of just being a terminological con- cern], (ibid).

“When we talk about polis, we are refer- ring to the leading site —the seat, the abode— the place where a group of gens, a particular lineage, a social group with com- mon descent, has its roots. In the Greek lan- guage, the concept of polis is strongly related to the idea of rooting. The polis is where a specific class of people, differentiated by their habits and heritage, have their own resi- dence and own ethos.

Ethos is a Greek word similar to the Latin seat —sede, in Spanish— and does not have any moral meaning. On the other way around, the Latin word mos has a moral sense. The mores are traditions and habits —mean- while the Greek ethos is the primary seat that has been before any custom and tradition, and it is where my genos, my people, have their abode. The polis is, precisely, the place of the ethos.

That ontological and genealogical deter- mination, on the other hand, cannot be appre- ciated in the Latin concept of cives. […] Civ- itas, a derived term from civis, is understood as the product of the biological meeting of a nonuniform group of people inhabiting the same location under the same set of laws. […] Since the beginning, Romans considered that civitas was that place thing that groups a set of people, regardless of their ethical or reli- gious determinations, is together under the same laws. (Cacciari, 2009: 9-11).

More concretely, in Ancient Rome, the ver- sion of the city, the Urbs, is that flowing concur- rence of diverse and dissimilar people — with different backgrounds and beliefs— who agree under the law. I want to take that last definition of Roman cities, of urbs, and expand it, so we can use that concept to construct our own definition of urban[something].

In that way and following the idea of urbs as the conjunction of dissimilar people being together under the same laws, I propose to under- stand urban as the temporal and heterogeneous association of any kind of elements —human and non-human, material and immaterial, actual and virtual— creating their own space, the urban space, and gathering together with the intention of achieving specific and communal goals of interests (Dewey, 1946[1927]: 126).

Also, the urban resists being understood either as a condition, as a result, or as an immate- rial component of the city. The urban is a spatial- ity itself resulted from the conjunction of a partic- ular group, a specific public. One can find urban formations outside the idea and the geographic limits of what is pointed and encompassed by the city. Thus, an urban formation is a public space produced by a specific public with a common goal.

As we can infer here, there are many urban formations as too many publics are. It is possible to find, in the same geography, an x-number of those associations being constantly assembled and disassembled depending on the interests and necessities those publics may have. According to Dewey (Dewey, 1946[1927]: 16), the formation of publics is based on a sort of defensive and col- lective attempt to deal with an external threat:

Stabilizing the urban, an opera in three acts
V14. TRACING AND REPRESENTING AN URBAN[something]

V14.A. Introduction

It could be anything happening outside in a public place. It could be any temporal set of elements being stabilized in Times Square—even if they are not physically in there—creating their own spatiality. It could be either a complex structure of continually mounted and unmounted situations or just an effervescent situation that happened once before being evaporated. An urban[something] does not have a particular shape, extension, or duration. It could be, really, anything if one goes through and loosens the skein until the last consequences.

This is a realistic exercise—based on the fabrication of experiments—which goal is to display an urban[something] through three different representations resulting from a work of observation, in a naturalist way, of a set of elements related to a particular geographical space in Times Square. The three representations I am proposing here are situated and unfinished descriptions of a reality that is impossible to exhaust.

The first representation has the shape of a simple story. It is a textual construction mixing what I grabbed from the Square with other elements that I found by following my observations of the different trajectories happening outside. The second representation is a superficial deconstruction of what is composing that something that creates the particular urban formation I am describing. The third and final representation pretends to go deeper than the second one, unpacking the described elements more straightforwardly and speculatively.

V14.B. The chess player

September 4, 2017

I saw him by chance. He was lying on one of the granite benches near the TKTS booths. It was Monday night at the beginning of September, and the Square was full of people, but next to him was a free spot. I went there, and I sat at his side. I did not talk to him. Also, he was not aware I was there. He was busy, taking a look around, like if he was searching for something specific. I started to look around too, trying to guess what was that thing that grabbed his attention so badly. I did not see anything strange or even interesting. Tourists walking, tourists resting, tourists taking pictures.

His outfit, however, caught my eye although it was nothing out of the ordinary: He was wearing a bowler hat pretty small for his head, a white t-shirt, and an opened white-blue squared shirt, black pants, and impeccable white Nike Air Force 1 sneakers. I recognized those Nikes because I was wearing the same kind of shoes but in black. A yellow tote bag on the ground from M&M’s World, a store located two blocks far from us, completed the whole attire.

That was it. That was all. There was nothing else to say about him. He was an old black man wearing a funny small hat and looking for something around I could not identify. In the end, he was just another person in crowded Times Square. In a place like this one, where many things are happening simultaneously most of the time, and after spending more than 6 hours daily watching and walking around, everything tends to become part of a sort of mobile landscape.

I forgot that man for almost 40 minutes, and I started to take a look at anything in particular. It was just people walking and a woman who spent 28 minutes taking a photoshoot of her drink. Located in the middle of a sidewalk, she tried many, but many, times to capture the perfect angle of her cold Starbucks coffee, but first, the ice got melted, and she abandoned her plans. Meanwhile, the man at my side finally found what he was searching for: an empty and circular metallic red table.

That table I am talking about is part of the free-use public furniture available for locals and tourists after the pedestrianization of the Square. Usually, the tables are accompanied by two foldable metal red chairs. As almost all kinds of furniture in Times Square, both table and chairs are mobile. One can add or subtract chairs to the collective depending on the necessity one may have and, of course, for the availability of those elements. The table that the old man got only had one chair.

He took a seat and cleaned the table. He grabbed his yellow bag—that was on the ground in between his sneakers—a chess board composed of white and green squares. He unraveled the board, and immediately, from the same bag, he took a wooden black box that was put beside the plastic board. The box contained 32 chess pieces, 16 blacks, and 16 whites. Before organizing the pieces and having them ready for battle, he returned to the board to flatten it more, especially in the corners.

After some minutes, the plastic board seemed flat enough, and then he organized the pieces one by one. He started with the blacks that were at his side of the board. Then, he put all the whites in front of him. After that, he grabbed from the yellow bag two black clocks that ended at another side of the wooden box. The man was taking his time. Everything was slow motion. No rush at all. The table was ready, and he started to look around again. This time I realized he was looking for another chair.

But all the chairs around were occupied. That area of Times Square was mainly full of people that night. Near that particular space the old man activated, other tables were occupied by loud groups of people chatting and eating. It gave the impression nobody wanted to leave that place, and that was something the man did not care so much. He seemed to be so calm, silently waiting for an empty and abandoned chair to hunt. And it finally happened. Three tables away, a group of five people moved. Taking all the time of the old man, he went up from his chair and slowly walking he finally grabbed another chair that put in front of him.

According to Chess NYC (chessnyc.com), the best and most popular public places for playing chess in the city are—not necessarily in that order: (i) Bryant Park; (ii) Washington Square Park; (iii) Central Park;
The only issue is that nobody was there to play with him. The game was divided by the color of the clothes of each player. The Rasta, wearing a vast white t-shirt, was playing with the white pieces. Meanwhile, the ultra-orthodox Jew, playing with the black ones, was wearing traditional black attire. 95% of the game was happening outside the board. The way they look at each other, their gestures, the movements, the way to hit the clock, all of that make that game look like a really —friendly— confrontation. The tension behind each activity was evident. The viewers gathered around were suffering with them. Some people from the public were commenting in a lower voice on the possible movements and tracing strategies. A woman holding a kid was taking pictures. The excitement was in the air. Finally, and with just a couple of pieces left on the board, the blacks won. The white king was trapped in a corner and fall down like alienating that piece of furniture with the ground's patterns. Then, he moved the board, and then he did the same thing but with the clocks. He continued to stand looking around with the firm intention of being seen, trying to connect with someone. But it was not working. The situation turned sad, and I was just there, observing him and taking some pictures of his loneliness. Times Square was full of people, but it was like nobody was able to see him.

Street chess is a pretty common activity in New York City. It is also a way some people have for getting a few dollars extra. Daily, dozens of New Yorkers are ready for playing either a $3 or a $5 match—the amount is sometimes negotiable—along with the parks and public plazas of the city. And Times Square is not the exception. Although there are not so many players as in other parts, it is possible to find, from time to time, two, three, or even four professional street chess players around its pedestrian area. “Like basketball, chess hustling is a city game—fast and gritty and played on street corners and in parks with the thrub of street life as a backdrop.” (McClain, 2007, September 17).

Time was ticking, and despite everything around was flowing, the man and his hat were still alone. The board was ready to be used. An empty chair in front of him was also ready too. But he was there, waiting, still looking at nowhere. Suddenly, the old man was up again. He went to the next table —now empty— and took two chairs from there. And despite his table was full of chairs still nobody was there to play with him. The contrast between the continuous mobility of the pedestrian plaza and that small space created by him was huge. Meanwhile, the outside was circulating in many directions simultaneously, his little universe was suspending. And he, he was just waiting with a passivity that resulted so hard to explain. The expression of his face was an uncomfortable mix of serenity and melancholy. Not a smile, not a sad gesture, not a sign that could be interpreted either as a happy or a painful sensation, not a single attempt to invite someone to play with him, not even a curse. Although I am terrible at playing chess, two times, I was tempted to go to his table and playing with him, but in the end, I decided not to participate. I wanted to see what could be the outcome of that temporal entanglement. Will the old man make a relationship that will allow him to play chess that night? It was so hard to believe that in New York City, in Times Square, and after more than one hour of being waiting, nobody was remotely interested in playing with him.

Finally! Finally, after some time, I do not even know how much time passed, three women went to his table: a grandmother, a mother, and her daughter. The youngest one took a seat in front of him, and the game started. I took the last photo of them, and I left my spot. I was not interested in the development of the match. For me, it was enough to know that the old man was already a chess player and that his playing-chess space was not virtual anymore. I continued walking around Times Square, watching other random things, following other minimal and unnoticed associations. One hour later, more or less, when I was about to leave Times Square, I saw him again. He was sitting in the same chair, playing chess but this time against a man watched by six of his relatives. Also, some curious people were gathered around the game. In the end, and regardless of who won the game, it was not a lost night.
The elaboration of urban[somethings] are experimental exercises that one should make — as many times it is necessary— first, doing field-work to trace and redefine the different spaces and versions one is dealing with in a multi-situated ethnography (see P02), and then as resources for mapping, tracking and representing the complexity and incompleteness of the world outside, either as a sort of cartographies, story planners, infographics, or whatever else.

A03. ACT ONE. LOOKING FOR THE SUBJECT OF URBAN STUDIES

According to the hand program, what is coming next is nothing more than a classic outcome where many elements that were deployed before are appearing and disappearing again. This is an extended act composed by a single movement — some critics say that movement is, in fact, a sum of many movements “smashed together” — that is concluding the whole opera, giving it a sort of general coherence, and promising things for an uncertain future that is more poetic than real.

A05-A. Last movements, just an (other) possible way

This section is proposing a triple closure. (i) It is finishing the exercise of “stabilizing the urban” that is the core of the second part of the movement based on speculating on urban ethnography that we started in chapter three. (ii) It is also completing this chapter itself, and (iii) it is presenting a more general conclusion, a proposal for closing the whole piece of research. In that way, the responsibility of the third act is also triple. Instead of ending each one of those three situations independently, my intention with this document — with this section — is to essay a way to answer the dissertation’s central question: what STS can learn from Times Square for doing (urban) ethnography.

Nevertheless, with other nuances and other intensity levels, both elements I took from that piece of research, one can see without so much effort — and following the metaphor of an operatic production — a multiple set of voices and instruments, guided by a director and following a plan, being assembled to produce a collaborative and pretty detailed production.

As the final goal of this third act, a program for doing urban ethnography will be unpacked. But far from being a sort of theoretical manual containing a set of general steps to be applied in any kind of urban formations, this will be an epistemological discussion regarding how to translate the particularities of a bounded location, as well as the resources and situations involved in the production of that space, somehow, into epistemological devices and multimodal artifacts that could enrich the way of talking about that specific place.

A05-B. setting the study object of urban studies

The inspiration received from “The abdication of the Seraglio” for writing this chapter, (i) the excess of details and (ii) the multiplicity of voices organized into a coherent plot, can be easily extrapolated to a broader context such as, for instance, this whole dissertation. During all the components of this piece of research, one can see side producing urban formations were to me like a very gaseous operatic play that got solid once they were translated to a textual — or any other kind of — structure like, for instance, this piece of research.

As a way of concluding this chapter, I would like to take — in a simultaneous way — a bifurcated and unsettled route with the intention of connecting two different, but still related, paths.
where the concepts of urban, ethnography and STS could be assembled and expanded. The goal of that concatenation is to create a research program to encompass and represent the world outside. So, the first path is a general one that was already announced at the beginning of this piece of research, and that is, precisely, the construction of that sort of urban-STS ethnographic program. The second path I want to reach is a more particular one related to this chapter’s main intention: to propose a definition of urban.

Although each one of those two paths requires a particular strategy for being transited, they—at the same time—should also be understood as an indissoluble analytical and methodological binomial made for exploring bounded and particular locations we have called urban formations. So, the movement of going through that double route will allow us to recover urban as the study object of Urban Studies and, at the time, it will settle down an epistemological strategy for describing those spatialized effervescences using the idea of urban[something] as a device for watching, grasping, and representing a multiple, simultaneous, and constantly flowing reality.

Urban[something] do not follow so many rules regarding their composition and ways of being together. As we already saw, the reason for establishing those kinds of formations is that the elements implied want to achieve a (set of) goal(s) where the fact of being together is giving them a sort of advantage. Another rule is that, generally, each of those particular stabilizations is dissolved once the goal is achieved. Those kinds of associations are what Latour (2005) understands as group formations.

A group formation is a dynamic way to approach the world outside by focusing on actors making connections—making associations—and on their connections as well, rather than on the solidified structures they left behind. “There is no relevant group that can be said to make up social aggregates, no established component that can be used as an incontrovertible starting point.” (Ibid: 29).

The communal goal that stitches together heterogeneous set of elements—giving them a sort of structure and providing them a type of temporal stability—is something that will vary depending on each situation. Our task, as ethnographers working outside, should be to describe and to tell the story of how that stabilization happened:

> “Whereas, for the sociologists of the social, the great appeal of virtues to society is that they offer this long-lasting stability on a plate and for free, our school views stability as exactly what has to be explained by appealing to costly and demanding means.” (Ibid: 35).

A05.C. What did __ learn from Times Square?

Sometimes the best way of ending something is coming back to the place where that something started. But instead of an invitation to go in circles, what I would like to propose you here is to repeat a different moment—that was already introduced two times along this dissertation— as a strategy for producing a new sort of semiotic-materiality framed in a discussion that pretends to review and to conclude, somehow, a flowing sum of realities that were stabilized multiple times, in different ways, along this labyrinth.

The first time that moment appeared was in P02, presented as “the main discussion piece of research aims to deal with.” The second time we saw that moment was deployed as the common thread of the whole dissertation, which idea was to try to find a temporal and unstable answer to that main discussion introduced in the introduction of this dissertation. We are talking here about that initial question shaping and giving some general sense to the development of my doctoral research.

> “What can STS learn from Times Square for doing urban ethnography?”

Notwithstanding, and as an essential variation, I would like to empty the subject of that question and, at the same time, modify the verbal tense of the phrase by going to the past. The idea of this movement is to induce the user of this dissertation to a set of personal flashbacks that—I believe—will directly solve the above-displayed question. So, the variation of that question I want to essay here, as the common thread of this document, is the one I chose for naming this section:

> “what did __ learned from Times Square for doing urban-STS ethnography?”

Although this research was conducted following a disciplinary commitment to STS, I quickly realized that in order to fulfill that engagement, it was necessary to expand the scope of STS out of the disciplinary boundaries of STS. The reason is that an ethnography of an urban location, from this STS perspective, requires the vindication of other methods, strategies, and discourses coming from different disciplines such as, in my case, empirical philosophy, journalism, design, semiotics, and literature. As the same time, that linkage was imperative for getting a broader perspective of my work’s study object. Inspired by George Perez’s exercise of trying to exhaust a place in Paris, I also wanted to try to wear out—and to fail trying in—a specific location by paying attention to everything (I was able to get from my different and situated viewpoints) happening in there. To pay attention to everything represented an epistemological challenge based on approaching and describing a flowing ontological multiplicity.

After trying many things and having in mind that I did not want to copy theoretical frames from other places and then paste them in there, the strategy I decided to go through was going to Times Square and learning from that particular— but multiple location—how to approach and to represent the spatial reality itself. Watching everything happening around and using some semiotic tools, I found myself collecting different—I called them semiotic-material resources—elements I was able to see/hear/sense/perceive from my fieldwork outside.

The lights, the number of bodies constantly going around, the spectacle, the screens, the rest of technological devices, the mobility, the multiplicities, the pedestrianization, the different pieces of furniture, the flows, the effervescent formations, the etheral structures, the imaginaries, the routes I took, the music I was listening at that time, the personal experiences that happened to me, the different encounters I had, the news I read, the distance I took from Times Square, etc., were some of those resources I compiled not just for describing them, but also for using them as epistemological devices and multimodal artifacts for continuing approaching that multiplicity as well as for representing it.

In other words, I did not go to Times Square to describe either how a specific situation was developed or for explaining either the causes, origins, components and controversies of a particular development. No, I went to Times Square to learn from that location, whatever that place could teach me, about the process of making an ethnography of an urban location, from an STS perspective and using the elements one can grab from that place, as the primary tools for constructing the whole ethnographic proposal.

A05.C1. Epistemological devices

An epistemological device is a conceptual construction made for approaching an ontological multiplicity happening in the streets. The main idea of those kinds of devices is to grasp and to stabilize a portion of that multiplicity—what has been called here as a version—by using the particularities of that bounded reality as tools, after making them pass through some mechanisms of translation.

Epistemological devices could also be mixed—and it often uses to happen—with any other type of resources the researcher is carrying with it. In a more general context, that blended situation is Wright-Mills’ (2000[1959]) proposal of intellectual craftsmanship: “to use your life experience in your intellectual work” (196).

And in a more concrete scenario, this is what I have been doing during this doctoral research, experimenting with elements taken from outside and with others I just had from before.

Creating epistemological devices starts with a particular obsession for the singular, for what is specific about what we have understood as the urban life. That urban life is the general way to name those heterogeneous urban formations being constantly assembled and disassembled outside. Those devices are useful for describing how a group of effervescences was producing their own spatiality by temporarily stabilizing their trajectories and structures.

This process is also an empirical effort that does not aim to validate any kind of pre-elaborated theoretical frame by going to the field and testing it there, but that is looking for constructing a sort of science of the particular (De Certau, 1988[1984]), a single-use theory, that is nothing more than the repetition of a unique and bounded reality. But that act of repetition is not an exclusive movement produced by the elaboration of epistemological artifacts. That feature is also shared with other kinds of elements we will unpack below.

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59. To say that “it is a unique reality” should not be understood as an attempt to magnify that framed set of spatialized elements. It is unique because life outside constantly flowing and the particular reality—or sum of realities—does not exist anymore.
As we presented before, epistemological devices are conceptual constructions. They do not have a type of materiality themselves despite that, sometimes, they are inspired by material elements. The way those structures use to be embodied is through the implementation of a set of material-semiotic entanglements known here as multimodal artifacts.

Multimodal artifacts are the resulted element of a multimodal strategy for representing all the possible layers or attributes we can grasp from a multi-ontological reality. The idea of repeating reality through the elaboration of new materialities or, even, other realities—artifacts—was inspired by the work on “repetition” of Gilles Deleuze (1995[1968]).

According to Deleuze, the idea of repetition is far from being considered either as a synonym of similarity or generalization or as an identical copy of something that was there before. Repetition is a complex and differentiated process of reconstruction. It is the universality of the singular, where the differences, not the similarities, are the ones being repeated and multiplied.

“Difference inhabits repetition. On the one hand —lengthwise as it were— difference allows us to pass from one order of repetition to another: from the instantaneous repetition thorough the intermediary of the passive synthesis. On the other hand —in depth as it were— difference allows us to pass from one order of repetition to another and from one generality to another within the passive synthesis themselves.” (Ibid: 76)

As well as it happens in the construction of epistemological devices, the process of elaborating multimodal artifacts has a strong component based on grabbing any kind of elements from outside and translating them into tools for, in this case, representing that reality one is attempting to describe. A multimodal artifact could be anything: a map, an infographic, a text, etc., any kind of object that contains a well-framed epistemological intention regarding how to understand a multiple reality.

Borrowing a metaphor from computing, one can relate the idea of “epistemological devices” with the concept of software, as a set of instructions and protocols, and the notion of “multimodal artifacts” with the image of hardware as the physical component containing and shaping the software. The second part of chapter six is hosting a set of blueprints of artifacts derived from my ethnographic explorations in Times Square, based on the idea of learning from...

A05-C3. An Urban-STS ethnographic proposal

Retrospectively, perhaps the biggest lesson I got from going to Times Square and working there, in between Urban Studies and STS, is to recognize the act of doing ethnography not as a method of something else, but as a way of producing valid knowledge by itself. However, I will resist the generalist temptation of calling ethnography a discipline and, instead of that, I will reuse Cozzens’ (1990) metaphor of “STS as a movement” (see P18) for thinking about ethnography in the same way, as a collective of diverse elements, and—simultaneously—as a flow.

And especially, because this essay does not pretend to take care of ethnography as a universal issue, it means it does not aim to discuss ethnography as a general and single-way procedure. I want to focus my efforts on a specific kind of ethnography—specific due to its study object and conceptual background—and to use the metaphor of movement for constructing a particular and limited proposal of doing a sort of STS ethnography of urban formations.

V15. HOW DOES STS TAKE ITS DATA?

This essay is a short and superficial exploration of how STS understands and reflects on its methods, how they are produced, and the implications of using different methods, especially those produced from with the study object like the ones proposed in this dissertation. This vignette intends to situate my proposal of urban-STS ethnography in a kind of procedural tradition inside of Science and Technology Studies, paying particular attention to those works focused on ethnography or something like that. However, it does not pretend to be a state of the art of either methodology or ethnography and STS.

There is nothing peculiar or specific in how STS handles its methods for collecting, gathering, and displaying data. In a broader sense, there are no differences—empirically speaking—between STS and other fields regarding how they are using their tools and devices in a practical sense. However, related to Science and Technology Studies, what is particular in this field has approached, discussed, and reflected on its relationship with reality through its own methods for approaching it and its way of being in relation to its methods themselves.

As it has been pointed before, my work in Times Square encompassed much more than a long and detailed description of how that assemblage was made. It is also a discussion about the multiple ontology of the world outside that is framed into the idea of the urban, and about the epistemological tactics created to approach and stabilize that multiple but also constantly flowing reality we use to bounded in Urban Studies. This work contributes to the discussions about social sciences methods but more specifically in STS and urban studies.

[There is a] “current renewal of interest in the politics of method in some social sciences” (Burrows and Savage, 2007; Thrift, 2007; Adkins and Lury, 2009; Rabinow and Marcus, 2009), as evidenced by the recent discussion of research methods and dissemination activities that critically engage theory and practice. As there is a need to reconsider the relevance of method (Fraser, 2009) to the empirical investigation of the here and now, the contemporary (Rabinow and Marcus, 2009) ([Lury and Wakeford, 2012: 1-3])

The departure point, as well as the trajectory, I will situate us first to try to answer the question naming this section, is John Law’s After Method (Law, 2004). Law’s book is a seminal work on thinking in a reflexive way about ANT and a broader sense about STS, procedures, and devices to approach reality. One of the remarks of that book is Law’s call to reorganize, to reconstruct, and to adapt our methods—and to design new ones if it is necessary—producing “methods assemblages” that could face, in a more satisfactory way, the challenges proposed by their study objects.

“While Law insists that all social science methods ought to be understood as assemblages—inasmuch as traditional methods invariably draw together (or assemble) distinctive objects, problems, representations, techniques, and modes of inquiry (pp. 84)—the notion of method assemblage as Law deploys it relies on an altogether different ontological ‘hinter-land’ (pp. 122-160). Method assemblage in this stricter sense is premised on a picture of social reality understood as interactive, remade, indefinite and multiple” (p. 122). Each of these terms serves as a messy alternative to the “independent, anterior, definite and singular” properties of the more familiar ontologies characteristic of traditional social science inquiry.” (Duff, 2012: 269).

This doctoral dissertation opened its pages quoting a whole paragraph from After Method that, with just a few changes, perfectly matched the main goal and whole intention of my work in Times Square. Although at the time of my work, about Times Square, I was neither inspired by the work of John Law nor expecting to work on STS methodology, the encounter I had with that place, as well as the things that I found in there, produced a sort of parallel moment with the one where Law used to be at the time, he wrote the words I am reproducing again:

“This book [...] is about what happens when social science tries to describe things that are complex, diffuse and messy. The answer, I will argue, is that it tends to make a mess of it. This is because simple clear descriptions don’t work if what they are describing is not itself very coherent. The very attempt to be clear simply increases the mess. So the book is an attempt to imagine what it might be to remake social science in ways better equipped to deal with mess, confusion and relative disorder.”

I had many things clear and sold the first time I went to Times Square in the con...

Stabilizing the urban, an opera in three acts

Chapter six
I would not take care, but started their analysis with this question: 'How might we think about social research methods?' (3). And for trying to answer that, they are displaying two possible responses. The first reply is a basic and a regular one. “It assumes that methods are tools for learning about the social world. That this is what they are. End of story.” (Ibid). The second reply is divided into two analytical parts.

The first one of those parts stipulates that “methods are constituted by the social world of which they are a part [...] First, methods don’t come into being without a social purpose. And second, they don’t come into being without advocates, or more exactly without forms of patronage. Often the state has been the key player here. [...] The claim is that methods are of the social world; that they are tools that tend to reflect the concerns of those who advocate them, and that they subsist in particular ecologies” (Ibid: 5-8).

The last part of the second reply is named “the social life of methods [and the logic behind it is that] methods are in turn implicated in the social world. They are thus also of the social in the sense that they constitute and organize it. Or, to use the jargon, that they don’t just represent reality out there; but that they are also performative of the social [...] If methods are framed and by that means also help to create social worlds, to make them current, and to circulate them. In short, the argument is that methods are fully part of the social world, embedded in and constitutive of it” (Law, Savage, and Ruppert, 2011: 8-11).

The correlation between methods and the reality they are constituted of, as well as the vindication of their role as elements participating—and transforming—that reality itself, by being more than just tools for approaching the ‘world outside’, were also issues I explored at my own. However, I did not go so deep into a discussion about methods as independent ontological elements producing differences. Instead, my focus was on the co-production of reality, approaching that ‘world outside’ in many ways how we conceive and use them and, at the same time, to highlight the tremendous capacity of creation and inventiveness (Lury and Wakeford, 2012) that STS is proposing as an alternative for exploring the multiple, effervescent, and essaying those methods as a conscious activity. Their participation is transversal and entirely accidental. However, their trajectories and contaminations can still be traced and projected.

The main reason for talking about collaboration in the production of those methods made for grasping and representing a bounded and stabilized reality —methods that were not only inspired but also produced by that bounded reality itself—is that the process of designing and building those methods (like a sort of epistemology of the epistemology) was asking the elements composing the urban in Times Square to answer that, they are displaying two possible answers to Ingold’s disciplinary distinction between ethnography and anthropology—a distinction that is also including a sort of classification between ethnography and anthropology, but that is not directly related to the primary debate between those two ways of approaching the world.

In an attempt to display the benefits—especially related to the social appropriation of scientific knowledge—of the ethnographic practice, Daniel Miller (2017) is introducing his collective project called *Why we post*, “which comprised nine simultaneous fifteen-month ethnographies all studying the use and consequences of digital and social media,” (27-28) as an example to highlight the relevance of ethnographic practices.

What I find interesting about their work is the way how Miller is referring to what they did and the way he is perceiving that process: “In our project, we call ethnography holistic contextualisation. [...] Ethnography is never just observation because the whole point of an ethnographer is that as soon as you make the decision to describe something, with that comes a responsibility to account for what you claim to have observed [...] My own [ethnographic] model came from the ethnographies I was given when I first learned anthropology.” (Ibid: 29).

There is a sort of subtext one can get in the words of Miller. That implicit message is related to two of the most essential ethnographic features: its plasticity and its potentiality as a transformative element. In order to take care of both components and use them as common threads for developing this section, I would like to connect them to my work in Times Square. But let us go general first.

This dissertation is a multi-situated ethnography of many different locations happening in the same place. As an ethnography, one can find in the way how it was made some generic elements that are shaping the whole process as an ethnographic construction: there is a field, there...
is an attempt to be specific and to avoid any possible generalization, and observation is a fundamental element in the process of collecting data. Also, field notes are more than just a sum of anecdotes and thoughts.

Notwithstanding, and despite the inclusion of some broadly accepted features, the ethnographic program—or model as Miller named it—I am presenting here was constructed based on the particularities of (i) its study object and on (ii) the conjunction resulted of mixing the academic interests of a researcher with his private life, and that embodied mix with a geographical location framed into a specific temporality.

It was, precisely, the plasticity of this way of approaching the world the one that allowed me to experiment with any kind of elements I took from anywhere—from Times Square, from sociology, from philosophy, from journalism, from anthropology, from design, from semiotics, etc.— in order to design a stable and particular way to explore and to represent urban formations, what I have named here as urban-STS ethnography.

Ethnography, as a movement, can be expanded and contaminated without any sort of disciplinary inconvenience. It is flexible enough for containing and enacting tools and resources from many different sides, but it is also rigid in terms of offering a sort of methodological structure for organizing and taking care of each aspect, or phase, of the ethnographic process. Those phases can be described through the main action involved in there: (i) collecting, (ii) representing, (iii) transforming.

So, the flexibility of ethnography, that ability to be expanded—theoretically and methodologically—without compromising its core, as well as its capacity for structuring and maintaining a sort of operational continuity, are two characteristics that make this process a tremendous hosting element for arranging and keeping together a movement like STS (see p18), and a set of temporal, heterogeneous, and located associations as urban is.

When we talk about an urban-STS ethnography, we are pointing to a way of approaching the world outside through a continuous process of translation and stabilization of different and heterogeneous trajectories happening in a particular location. Those trajectories are the traces left by any kind of sociotechnical elements working together—and creating their own space—intending to achieve specific and collective goals of interests.

The two first aspects of the ethnographic process, collecting and representing, have been widely displayed during this piece of research. The plain text (the sections starting with P + a number) that can be found in the first part of this dissertation—from the introduction to chapter three—contains most of the discussions regarding that topic, especially the strategies related to the elaboration of epistemological devices. Meanwhile, the second part of the appendix displays all the proposed multimodal artifacts for representing the multiple versions of Times Square.

The capacity of transforming, of affecting both the urban formations where the ethnographic work was done and the elements implied in the construction of that sort of spatiality, is a bet on the future, a possibility of taking the ethnography to another level, as a political tool, as a resource for reshaping the way how a specific space is produced. However, the possibility of transforming Times Square, in this case, was something I did not explore during my work there. It definitely exceeded the scope of my piece of research. Nevertheless, there are some speculations regarding this capacity you can find going to the appendix.
This piece of research was a continuous learning process in many different aspects of my academic and personal life. It was also a space for experimenting with any kind of tools coming from many different sides. This piece of research was a space for failing and testing, for trying, for mixing, for producing scientific knowledge, and for designing and creating ethnographic methods and materials.

The idea of going to Times Square was to learn from that place how to do an ethnography of urban formations from an STS perspective. Precisely, this dissertation is the operationalization, the empirical result of that learning process which has turned now into the proposal for a still unwritten research program I have named as the Artefaktenatelier.

This appendix intends to present the blueprints of two different—but strongly related—products that resulted from my encounter with Times Square during the last four years. When I was doing fieldwork and writing this dissertation, I was also working simultaneously on two side projects. The first project aims to go beyond this doctoral dissertation. I want to create an online/offline space, like a sort of ethnographic medi–lab— for ethnographic experimentation in urban places by mixing digital media, design, social sciences, and literature.

The second project is located between this piece of research and my idea of a place for experimenting with ethnographic methods. I would like to present a proposal for constructing a set of multimodal artifacts, focused on reproducing and representing Times Square, as a sort of mobile exhibition of what I just did during my doctoral research. I conceive this exhibition as the pilot program of the ethnographic proposal derived from the encounter between Times Square and me.

Operatively, this chapter is moving from the general to the particular. I will introduce first the draft of the experimenting site, and then I will focus on the idea of the exhibition, presenting some artifacts I would like to craft and displaying some samples of the ones that are currently under construction.

CONTENT

(i) A proposal for creating a workshop for experimenting with multimodal ethnography of urban places.

(ii) A presentation of a mobile exhibition, a collection of artifacts resulted from this dissertation.

"My intention is not to replace one set of general rules by another such set: my intention is, rather, to convince the reader that all methodologies, even the most obvious ones, have their limits. The best way to show this is to demonstrate the limits and even the irrationality of some rules which she, or he, is likely to regard as basic."

Paul Feyerabend (1993), Against the Method
P31. THE ARTEFAKTENATELIER

P31-A. An overview

The Artefaktenatelier is an ethnographic workshop that produces multimodal artifacts resulted from urban ethnographic research. This workshop is based on experimenting with digital and analog tools—mostly from digital media and design—mixing them with social science’s epistemologies and following a logic based on approaching, decomposing, representing, and—hopefully!—transforming urban places.

The idea of “learning from” a particular location, a process already essayed during this dissertation, represents a solid commitment to the singularity of the spatiality we plan to explore and decompose. Extending that commitment to learn from should be understood as a matter of care not only of our study object but also of the methods we use and construct for encompassing and representing our study object.

Attending Puig de la Bellacasa (2011: 90) recommendations about taking care of things “in order to remain responsible for their becomings,” the process of learning from a place also recognizes (i) the being of our study objects—those specific but multiple urban[somethings] (see A04-B)—as active participants in the construction of their own ethnographies, and (ii) the process itself of learning from, as a collective activity, as a temporal formation of a set of elements, in order to produce something.

As a final remark regarding that last topic, to learn from a particular urban formation is also a multimodal and a kind of metonymic process of translation where a spatialized stabilization is decomposed into different material-semiotic elements. The decomposition of that spatiality is made to turn those elements into capture devices and descriptive artifacts that could talk about themselves and about that primary stabilization where they came from.

The primary resource of this project will be an online platform that will serve as a multipurpose artifact. It will act, for example, as a container, as a space for communicating and exchanging knowledge, and, even more important, as a flexible and portable tool for working, at any time, from any part of the world. Also, the technical advantages of an online platform perfectly match the multimodal and interactive intentions of this atelier.

P31-B. Goals

There are two main objectives I would like to accomplish with this project. Each one of those goals is representing two different scenarios that require their own resources and planning times. As a didactic exercise and a better way to define them, they are framed into two components. Each component—unpacked below this section—has been designed to fulfill a specific objective. Those goals are:

(i) Exploring mobile, multimodal, heterogeneous, inventive, and interactive methods and strategies that could enrich the way of doing urban ethnography by implementing a research program based on a strategy of “learning from” our study objects through the elaboration of epistemological devices and multimodal artifacts. (Experimental component)

(ii) Generating face-to-face and online spaces for discussing, exchanging, and displaying ideas and information about urban formations, about multimodal, digital, and interactive ways of doing urban ethnography, about ethnographic methods, and about the concept of using STS as a sort of parasite (see P18). (Academic component).

P31-C. Experimental component

As its name is pointing, this part is just about experimentation and conducting research. This component is based on doing ethnography of the world outside, on crafting methods, mixing fields, logics, and epistemologies. It is based on exploring and describing urban formations by using them and (some of) their components as strategies and materials for capturing and representing their bounded, effervescent, and multi-ontological reality.

The agenda of this component will depend on the movements and other temporalities regarding the specific research projects carried out by the researcher(s) being part of the workshop. A user navigating through the online platform of the Artefaktenatelier will find in this part of the website a collection of artifacts, of study cases, fieldwork notes, booklets, vignettes, memories, and other kinds of ethnographic products—like this work in Times Square—resulted from decomposing and representing particular urban formations.

Requirements: A space online + a physical space + someone coding (eventually/outsource) + funding for doing research.

P31-D. Academic component

This second component is a proposal that aims to design and conduct courses and seminars in two main areas: (i) urban studies and (ii) multimodal ethnography. Those lectures could be either linked to an already existing academic program or independent learning spaces. The intention of being so general with the areas is to have the possibility to adapt and redefine the courses to the particular requirements of the academic unity where this project will be developed.

The dynamics of this component will be flowing in between online and face-to-face scenarios. I want to explore those kinds of hybrid scenarios, not only because of their practicality but also because I plan to locate all this knowledge production process into a context of open science. The Artefaktenatelier, and especially this component, will be based on the idea of appropriation and circulation of scientific knowledge. All the documents, artifacts, resources, courses, and so on should be available online under a Creative Commons license of attribution.

Requirements: A space online + a physical space + an academic plan.

P31-E. Roadmap

The Artefaktenatelier is a project composed of four different phases: (i) design, (ii) consolidation, (iii) evaluation, and (iv) continuity. The first three phases are framed into my postdoctoral research proposal, this proposal. Meanwhile, the last one is just a continuation of that research. The first three phases are also active elements of each one of the two components. This roadmap offers a detailed introduction of the phases but also of the temporalities and requirements for developing each stage. Nevertheless, below this roadmap, a more detailed timeline will be deployed.

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temporalities and requirements for developing each stage. Nevertheless, below this roadmap, a more detailed timeframe will be deployed.

**Design (i). General project and experimental component**

This is a stage for planning and constructing the foundations of the Atelier. A general working plan and a dossier with the concepts and methodologies supporting this project will be elaborated. The dossier is a product resulted from this piece of research. It will act as a theoretical and methodological short version of this dissertation. Simultaneously, the primary online architecture, as well as the visual proposal, will be elaborated.

**Estimated time:** up to four months.

**Requirements:** hosting + domain + templates.

**Design (ii). Academic Component**

After a previous conversation, where the intentions and interests of the university are deployed, the curricular program supporting this section, as well as the cross-platform structure supporting test program will be elaborated. This phase could be developed at any moment of the project. In the beginning, precisely after “Design 1,” or once the stage of “consolidation” is working. The contents and methodology of the courses and/or seminars will depend on that first meeting with the university.

**Estimated time:** It will depend on the amount and the kind of academic content to plan—up to twelve months.

**Requirements:** A website linked with an online learning platform.

**Consolidation (ii). Experimental**

Once the general design of the Atelier is done, the next phase is to propose a research program based on ethnographic experimentation as well as two particular cases, the two first empirical pieces of research, as a sort of pilot experience, to test the proposed methodology as well as its working flow.

**Estimated time:** One month for planning both particular cases, up to five months for conducting each piece of research.

**Requirements:** Possible funds for conducting research in case the ethnographic work requires that.

**Consolidation (ii). Academic**

The consolidation phase will depend on what was decided on the design phase regarding the kind of contents and the proposed methodology. However, it is possible to develop at least one face-to-face seminar and/or an online course during this stage.

**Estimated time:** Having clear that the times of planning and designing are done, the times of this stage will depend on the duration of each course or seminar. This is a topic for discussion in the “design phase.”

**Requirements:** A calling process, a working platform, and/or a classroom.

**Evaluation**

This stage aims to generate a retrospective space for checking all the work done during the previous phases. This activity intends to improve each possible situation that could require any kind of improvement. Notwithstanding, although this will not be the inky moment for evaluating the whole project, it will be the main one to go to the last phase.

**Estimated time:** A month

**Continuity**

Once the process of evaluating the whole project is done, and after fixing what could need to be adjusted, the final step of this plan is to turn the Atelier into a permanent space for (i) experimenting and producing ethnographic knowledge resulted from exploring the world outside and for (ii) teaching, and for generating all kind of academic exchanges in between STS, urban studies, empirical philosophy, design, literature, and digital media.

Although it could happen before, this stage is expected to include new scholars that could enrich and making the atelier grow. Those scholars should be supporting the existent projects as well as creating new ethnographic pieces by using the methodological program of “learning from” and the development of multimodal devices resulted from the explorations of bounded places.

**Estimated time:** Undermined

**Requirements:** Same already presented conditions for doing research and teaching that were proposed during the previous stages. The possibility of having new researchers.

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**Beyond Times Square, flashbacks and futures**

In the end, the intention with this way of organizing information is to offer an interactive experience of approaching the partial results of an ethnographic product, but also to propose different stories, different versions of the same place, and to attempt to reproduce the place itself through the interpretation of some of its features. The exhibition is also mobile because it hopes to mobilize knowledge in both directions, from the ethnographer and its exhibition to the user and the user and its experience to the ethnographer and its exhibition. There are some elements in this exercise, as we will see below, that instead of displaying information, they aim to collect it to make it part of the exhibition and the whole ethnography of Times Square.

**P32. EXHIBITION PROPOSAL**

**P32A. Generalities**

The main idea of this exhibition-collection-of-artifacts is to present my doctoral research results out of the linear version of a traditional doctoral dissertation. The content proposed here will be split into different units of sense and stored online and inside a box, acting as a mobile resource for transporting and hosting those materials. Nevertheless, both online and offline spaces will be complemented by each other.

The exhibition is composed of a set of multimedia artifacts resulted from my ethnographic work in with Times Square. It pretends to be a strategy for representing a specific set of locations, features, temporal formations, and trajectories through a process of experimenting with methods, formats, and any kind of resources coming from different fields such as design, digital media, and literature. But, most important, each one of those devices has been inspired by Times Square and its own dynamics and features.

This proposal is gathering at least 17 different artifacts displaying xx different versions of Times Square and producing, each one of them, a particular way to explore a specific urban formation. This exhibition is imagined as a mobile one, a space that can be moved, assembled, and disassembled anytime that can be used in a modular way. The user(s) of this product will have the chance to compose different Times Square versions depending on how those artifacts are put together.
P32-B. AN UNORGANIZED AND INCOMPLETE LIST OF ARTIFACTS AND DEVICES

P32-B1. Containers

Due to its mobile and online/offline structure, this proposed exhibition will be divided and stored either in a (wooden or plastic) box or on a website. Both spaces will act as a container, but they will not have the same relevance inside this proposal. The users of this exhibition should start using the elements inside the box due to the online content is just complimentary. On one of its sides, the box also contains a written invitation named “How to approach this work.

How to approach this work

Jumping freely between stories and multi-modal artifacts, that’s how you should approach this document. This is an experimental work, and, at the same time, this work itself is a collection of experiments. It was made piece by piece using different methods, different timetables, different drafts, and designed without knowing what would be happening at the end. The work you have in your hands was assembled and disassembled many times. Its shape and content changed radically from the original idea to what it is now in different circumstances.

But this, far from being a problem, is a well-documented learning process. What you are watching here is the result of a series of attempts, failures, and expectations turned into an interactive experience of exhausting, decomposing, and learning from and with a place. You can also find its own decomposition process included and a kind of making-of documenting the creative process behind this piece of research. All the artifacts are connected through the same plotline but, at the same time, they can be navigated independently. The only recommendation is going initially to the artifact number one and starting your journey from there. However, this is up to you. Have a great time!

P32-B2. A table of instructions

This is the proposed first artifact to interact with. I see this one like a small folder with some cards inside. Each of the first six pieces of paper has a specific thematic route, in the shape of a map, suggesting a particular way to approach and navigate around the set of elements inside the box. There is also a QR code included, either at the front side of the folder or in an introductory paper inside it, that has a link to a small application online where the user can select, randomly, either an artifact or a device to explore.

The other pieces of paper are (almost) empty. They are reserved for those users who do not want to follow a proposed route and want to draw their own one. Each of those “empty” pieces of paper also has a note and either an email or a URL where the user can upload his proposed drawn trajectory as a new artifact. Those maps will be available online, and their routes could be seen and used by everyone else.

P32-B3. A detailed map

Geographical Times Square has been divided into ten different parts, five zones, and five corridors. The zones are spaces for staying there meanwhile, the corridors are constantly moving bodies around. This map will display not only the artificial divisions proposed here, but it will also contain the official demarcations, the flows of the elements composing Times Square, the furniture, and other spaces.
This artifact intends to present my fieldwork displaying two detailed infographics of my work in Times Square. Each day will be decomposed to show the time I spent there.

This labyrinth will be split into many different units of sense. The idea is to create a collection of booklets based on their own purposes. It will be one, for instance, based on the ethnography of Times Square. There will be another focused on the epistemological discussion on methods. There will another one just compiling the vignettes presented in this dissertation plus other stories that were not included. It will be a visual atlas of Times Square and another booklet focused on the different relationships between urban and STS.

This will be a timeline showing different academic works about Times Square from the past three decades and other disciplines to display their focus and study object. It will be a comparative chart between the number of products working on Giuliani’s redevelopment of Times Square (see P27) and the ones focused on the pedestrianization of this location.

This is a game based on a spinning wheel mechanism. It is composed of a table, seven cards, and a wheel. The wheel will be divided into eight parts, hiding seven pictures of Times Square. Each of those pictures is related to each of the cards that should be over the table. Once the player spins the wheel, a picture is shown. Linking image and card, the player will identify other possible points of departure for conducting research in Times Square following traditional social research approaches. The card also has a QR code for expanding the experience online.
P32B8. A “learning from” dictionary

As a sort of terminological dictionary, the idea of this artifact is simple. I will display all the main concepts presented during this dissertation. I will define them by using the definitions used here in this work and the examples—in case of being necessary—from the ethnography of Times Square.

P32B9. Three maps of the transformations

A palimpsestic and mobile structure. It will be four maps of Times Square printed on a sort of onion paper. Each map is showing a specific transformation of the area. The first one is “classic Times Square” before the plaza turned into a red district. The second map will precisely show the Times Square of sex business, drugs, and crime. The third map is about cleaned Times Square or “the new Times Square.” Then, the last one is showing pedestrianized Times Square. People can just mix and overlap them to compare them and see how they have changed over the years.

P32B10. A set of postcards

Dealing with the misunderstanding that Times Square is just an artificial place for tourists that does not belong to New York anymore, those postcards will try to link both places through the presentation of some (either positive or negative) features of New York City and how they are deployed in Times Square.

P32B11. A set of screens

Five screens are displaying Times Square. Each of them shows a particular zone of the plaza, repeating the videos again and again. The idea is to present Times Square through one of its more famous components. There are two options to make this artifact portable: a group of iPads or some raspberry pi with individual monitors.
I want to create a graphic composition of the complexity, the mess, and the way how multiple trajectories coming from many sides are composing together their own and temporal spatiality and how to follow only one or two domains from social sciences for trying to hinder dramas an urban formation will be insufficient. An urban formation requires an urban approach.

There will be some images of Times Square showing some examples of this place acting as hyperbole. The pictures will be located one beside the other and linked to a detailed description of what is happening there. What is particular about those images is that their size is so small that they can only be seen through a magnifying glass.

How does Times Square sound? Well, this artifact is just focused on that. An hour of the ambient sound of Times Square could be used as a background of the exhibition once this one is assembled, or just as an artifact for being used individually.

Ninety-five people were interviewed regarding their experience in Times Square. Is this your first time visiting Times Square? Why are you here in Times Square? The idea is to present some imaginaries and premade ideas regarding this place.

The cards are designed to let the users of this exhibition draw their own routes. Those artifacts have a QR code that takes to the platform, where a user can upload and share the card to a list of user-suggested routes.

This artifact will be composed of 50 pictures of people in Times Square taking pictures of Times Square. Under the title “hunting the hunters,” the idea here will be to present one of the most famous and used mechanisms of capture of Times Square, capturing Times Square, being temporally captured by the bright charm of Times Square and by my phone too.

This is just a compilation of different objects such as fliers, cards, souvenirs, and religious pamphlets I got from Times Square.

This artifact is proposed as a collection of cards named Materialtone. Each card will display a picture of a single vme material composing Times Square. Those materials will be labeled and classified, presenting just another way to approach Times Square. Inspired by the color palette Pantone, the idea of this artifact is exhausting Times Square, decomposing that location in many of the elements one can find there.
P32&20. A Bestiary
It will be a collection of Times Square elements described and represented using hyperbole as a device for highlighting their characteristics. The bestiary is proposed as a collaborative project between the ethnographer and an illustrator who will draw the beasts composing this exercise following the descriptions presented by the ethnographer.

TIMES SQUARE BESTIARY
A bestiary is a “literary genre in the European Middle Ages consisting of a collection of stories, each based on a description of certain qualities of an animal, plant, or even stone.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013, April 18). As a multimodal artifact, this bestiary presents 20 of the main elements inhabiting Times Square as an imaginative exercise of exaggeration and reinterpretation of their main characteristics and attributes.

The reconstruction of those elements is based on a double translation process — made by two different people — that has produced two different versions, each one contaminated in a different way, of the same reality. Times Square’s hyperbolic composition inspires this bestiary that will act, in its own manner, as an inventory of momentary associations — moments — that can be traced during the other elements of this dissertation.

In other words, this bestiary can be used not only as a rhetorical device either for overstating elements or inflating realities but also as a navigation system to go around — this version of — Times Square by paying attention to a set of spatial stabilization and their processes of producing particular spaces/connections.

(i) **Surveillans**
*oculus in caelum*
**General attributes**
Small, generally rounded creatures with a super potent single eye. They use to live in high locations from where they are constantly observing what is happening around them. Surveillans can spend years without sleeping, they are incredibly silent, and they have a remarkable ability to camouflage themselves. Their shape and location sometimes are making them hard to be identified. They can be found around any area of Times Square.

**Allegory**
Surveillans are the security cameras hanging on building facades, traffic lights, and billboards. They are the representation of the 24/7 surveillance.

(ii) **Bareding**
*primus hominum platea*
**General attributes**
It was the first creature of its class of being seen in Times Square. There is only one individual of its species. The bareding has a hairless body with long hair over its head. Its head is most of the time covered by a membrane protecting the head from the sun. It also has a lengthy external appendix going out of its abdominal area. There is a hole in its appendix, and some fibers are crossing the whole external organ. Sometimes, the bareding moves its fibers for making a particular kind of sound that mixes with its voice to attract people and be fed. This harmless specimen is also eating flat and numbered elements.

**Allegory**
Times Square’s first costumed character was the naked Cowboy, a man wearing underwear, a pair of boots, and a hat playing guitar. He gained a lot of popularity when he sued M&Ms for copying his costume. He won the case. He is also famous for trying to be a mayor of New York and for wanted to be president of the United States.

[...]
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