

LEISURE, ACTIVISM, AND THE ANIMATION OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Introduction to the Special Issue

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Introduction to the Special Issue

While writing this Introduction many people around the world have experienced enforced physical distancing and lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, considering the themes of our Special Issue (leisure, activism, and the animation of the urban environment) has seemed surreal, whilst also curiously appropriate. During spring and early summer of 2020, news coverage of major cities around the world offered scenes almost completely devoid of people, with eerily silent streets that reminded us of the missing immediacy and absent vibrancy of what animates a city. When the pandemic hit, it was those familiar spaces of leisure and hospitality that were among the first to be made silent. Covid-19 has highlighted, through many absences, the importance of leisure, particularly in the animation of public spaces.

Recent events have demonstrated that activism remains a vital component in the animation of urban space, too. On 18 May 2020, Extinction Rebellion lined Trafalgar Square, in London, with 2,000 pairs of children's shoes (Campbell, 2020), its banner ("COVID today > Climate tomorrow > Act now") echoing the UK government's then recommendation of "Stay home > Stay safe > Save lives." Such creative forms of dissent emphasised the emptiness of this typically busy space to make a point about the risks of climate change to children, while complying with guidelines to avoid mass gatherings during the pandemic¹; however, not all activism has followed that approach.

Following the 25 May 2020 killing of George Floyd, who was suffocated whilst held to the ground by police officers in Minneapolis (USA), protests erupted across the United States

¹ Another example is the increased use of the performance art piece Mirror Casket as part of the activism undertaken by Black Lives Matter. Initially created in 2014, following the murder of Michael Brown, the Mirror Casket is a coffin covered in mirrors, with a cracked mirror on top. The surfaces of the funeral casket reflect back the gaze of the police as they seek to contain the protest action (Yoganathan, 2020).

focused on the injustice of Floyd's death and similar incidents of police brutality, and the persistence of systemic racism within many organisations at multiple levels of contemporary society. Anti-racism social justice protesters also took to the streets in cities around the world. These demonstrations, and those connected directly or indirectly to the Black Lives Matter movement, opted for direct action via mass rallies in public spaces. Protesters (and in turn, counter-protesters) also clashed over civic memorials, especially where these memorials (e.g., statues) connected with racist oppression and historic slavery. Some public spaces were dramatically re-made, such as the creation of Black Lives Matter plaza in Washington D.C., while in others (such as Bristol, UK), statues deemed controversial due to their association with the slave trade were removed (Wall, 2020). In many cities, protests became violent in clashes between citizens, and between protesters and police, and lead to physical damage to the city itself. These examples indicate that, as well as seeking social change, activism often has consequences for the material fabric of the city. Drawn in sharp relief during a global pandemic, such events of dissent bring to the fore numerous and complex questions around the relationships between leisure, activism, and the animation of urban spaces. To set the stage for the nine papers that follow, in this introductory essay we map out some of these questions. First, we ask: "What constitutes 'activist leisure'?" to consider theoretical links between leisure, activism and critical events. Second, we question "public space" and its centrality in leisure and the animation (and disruption) of cities. We briefly turn to the project that served as the catalyst for this Special Issue, "*disrupt! Creativity, Protest and the City*" (2016-2017), before concluding with brief synopses of the nine papers that comprise this collection.

Leisure, activism, and critical events

If we are serious about exploring the relationships between leisure, activism and the animation of the urban environment then some consideration must be given to where those concerns are currently situated within leisure studies. Within the field, activist leisure/leisure activism is arguably underexplored and warrants greater attention.

In his 1982 paper 'Serious Leisure: A Conceptual Statement' Stebbins, was among the first to consider a connection between leisure and activism through a discussion of 'career volunteering'. In setting out a conceptual framework for serious leisure, Stebbins stated: "In

the *political and civic* sphere, volunteers get involved in citizens' movements, social advocacy, social action, and political functions" (1982, p. 264). Indicating, if not directly stating, a connection between participation in activist activity and leisure, Stebbins differed from prevailing positions which, whilst acknowledging that leisure was of political significance (Wilson, 1980), suggested that activism was not itself considered to be a leisure activity. The tension between leisure as a politically significant area of human activity and activist leisure as an aspect of volunteering persists.

In some of his earlier work, Rojek seems drawn to the former position. Seeking to ground leisure studies philosophically in a radical rethinking of the field (Rojek, 1995), activism is mentioned; however, it is a tangent to the main thrust of the book, whose trajectory ran towards grappling with the political significance of our use of free time. Similarly, in Colin Rochester's literature review for *Volunteering England* (Rochester, 2006), activism is not ignored; however, in this instance the line of argument was that, as volunteering is a form of leisure and some forms of volunteering can be construed as a kind of activism, then some leisure can be understood in terms of activism. The route is circuitous and, consequently, its impact diluted. Mair's (2002) paper, 'Civil Leisure? Exploring the Relationship between Leisure, Activism and Social Change', provided a different and direct perspective in which Mair asked "Why are people using their non-work time to attend political demonstrations? [...] Is it leisure? If so, what does this mean for the development of leisure theory more generally?" (2002, p. 214).

Developed from foundations in Rojek's idea of *deviant leisure* (Rojek, 1995), though moving beyond it, Mair (2002) argues that "social activism, particularly protests, cannot adequately be described by current leisure theory" (p. 213). Instead, Mair introduced the concept of *civil leisure* – understood as "leisure that resists the hegemonic tendencies towards consumerization and commodification, and most importantly, attempts to generate open discussion about issues that are important to society" (2002, p. 215). Whilst recognition of the political significance of leisure is essential for a critical dissection and analysis of policy, and for policy development, Mair argues that the pathway that considers leisure and activism from a perspective of volunteerism is an essential step, but one that is also insufficient. She contends that "investigating leisure within the context of social and political

activism from within labour, environmental and other social movements [requires]...a new understanding” (p. 217). Mair (2002) also argues that Stebbins’ conceptualisation of *serious leisure* is not up to the task. Whilst acknowledging that the characteristic of commitment is important in his construal of *serious leisure* “[t]he risks that [are]... taken to meet this goal” (i.e. the goal of the activist) “are arguably beyond the scope of serious leisure’s sense of commitment” (p. 227). Engaging in activism in one’s *discretionary time* is to take significant personal risk in the reclaiming of discursive spaces: to investigate such leisure practices, she concludes, requires greater theoretical strength than prevailing leisure theory affords. Mair (2002) concludes with a call for further research into the relationship between activism and leisure across five broad themes as the basis for future lines of inquiry into what she calls *civil leisure*. These themes include: (1) who is out there?; (2) what are they doing?; (3) where are they doing it?; (4) why?; and (5) have their activities changed?

All of Mair’s identified themes are relevant to this special issue, as we will explore later, but perhaps most important to this special issue are questions of what people are doing as activist leisure, and where they are doing it. Along with others (e.g., Lashua, 2005; Rojek, 2010), Gilchrist and Ravenscroft (2013) have asked similar questions in order to explore “how the relationship between leisure and politics can be understood” (p. 51). Following a detailed reflection of Mair’s position, and others that have followed (Glover, Shinew & Parry, 2005; Sharpe, 2008), Gilchrist and Ravenscroft argue: “what is not clear is how these forms of political participation and their occupation of space through practices such as guerrilla gardening, or the regulated occupation of space for events such as music festivals, really confront political authority” (2013, p. 57). Adopting a case study approach, they examined the activities of a self-styled “anarchitect” group, Space Hijackers (Space Hijackers, ND), particularly the group’s tactics as politically-overt leisure interventions (such as *Midnight Cricket*²) “to challenge the governance of urban space” (p. 61). Gilchrist and Ravenscroft’s interest in (re)animating and disrupting urban space also connects leisure to the politics of *events*.

² In *Midnight Cricket*, the game of cricket is played in symbolically significant and highly surveilled urban sites, at night, as a “means to defetishise the exclusionary infrastructure of urban space” (Gilchrist and Ravenscroft, 2013, p.61).

Spracklen and Lamond (2016) argue that a critical approach to the study of events must seek out the essentially contested nature of the *event*, where the referent 'event' is something that is, itself, ontologically and epistemologically problematic. It is only through problematising the referent "event" that we can confront the regimes of truth and the political logics that seek to structure the "event" to be analysed. Fundamentally this means that events are open to interpretation through more than a singular narrative; they are multiple. Some will cohere around event management, others around dissent, space, concepts of economic growth etc., and some may bridge more than one other narrative. It is this complexity that lies at the root of suggesting all 'events' are contested, and that by seeking out these contestations we may find richer and deeper understandings of the "event" being scrutinised. Such a construct of *events* and *event* also embraces narratives of leisure and leisure activities, with which it becomes entwined. One core thread that connects all of this together is that of space. Event landscapes require a spatial component (that is, rather, they comprise spatial and *event-al* components), whether that be a material, digital, emotional, cognitive, or imaginary space. To conceive of "event" without a consideration of space is to remove something crucial to understandings of the study of events. It is to a consideration of the spatial that we now turn.

In "The production of space", Lefebvre (1991) considers spatial relationships through three interconnected fields – space as it is conceived (*le conçu*), lived (*le vécu*), and perceived (*le perçu*): activism encompasses each of these fields. Through the animation of urban space, activism and acts of dissent challenge the ways space is produced through the routines of daily life, demonstrating how space can be lived differently, whilst exposing the underlying relationships of power that frame spatial relations. A strong element in his later work, such as 'La Présence et l'Absence' (Lefebvre, 1980) and 'Éléments de Rythmanalyse' (Lefebvre, 1992), is the manifestation of relational spatialities through rhythm and repetition, difference and dissonance.

If we extend the metaphor suggested in the lines from Tennyson cited earlier, then it can be argued that Lefebvre provides a strong motif for the musicality of the city. As a theme, its variations reverberate through the work of critical geographers such as Edward Soja (1989);

Andrea Huyssen (2003); Doreen Massey (1994) and David Harvey (2012). The concentration on the relationality of the spatial in the investigations and theoretical explorations of their enquiries draws heavily on the foundations of Lefebvre's three field dialectic of the production of space. It is, however, through the incorporation of his dynamics of the spatial with the *tactics* of de Certeau (1986), that we begin to see the dance and the drama of the city more clearly. It is through the fugue of their intersection that Lefebvre's construal of presence, absence and rhythm can come to the fore.

In 'The practice of everyday life' Michel de Certeau wrote: "There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can 'invoke' or not" (1988, p. 108). It is the invocation of some of those hidden spirits, hidden through hegemonic power and articulated by repressive regimes of truth (Foucault, 2014), that animates urban spaces. Those invoked spirits, haunting an urban spatiality through the disruptive action of dissent, that are manifest through activist leisure as a "rift [that] presents itself as an event [...] more fundamental than the continuity [of] the surface" (de Certeau, 1986, p. 178). The ideas of surfaces, rifts and events bring us to Deleuze (1968 [2015]), underlining the significance of "event" and approaching that concept critically, when examining leisure activism. It is through Deleuze that event and space converge, and activist leisure gains a potential for affective and effective change. It is the striations of space, its patterns of repetition and difference, that "event" interrupts, exposing the multiple potentialities of moments and spaces, which Deleuze refers to as the virtual, with power seeking to coalesce that potentiality into an actuality, i.e. as something that can be framed, interpreted, and managed. To grasp the nuances of activist leisure, therefore, we must consider both the *evental* and spatial. Having dug into the *evental* in the previous section we turn to concepts of public space and leisure.

Public Space and Leisure

On its surface, for Campos (2017, p. 236) "urban public space is everyone's, a democratic territory for the circulation (or hanging around) of its inhabitants." Yet, critiquing its apparent superficiality, the architect Helen Stratford (in press) offers, "public space is a term that is everywhere and nowhere." Digging deeper, Stratford argues that although public

space aspires towards a democratic ideal that is open for all, “it can never be assumed that public space is democratic or, for that matter, public.” Equally ambivalent, the sociologist Mark Kingwell has conceptualised public space as both a gift (2009) and a prison (2014). Kingwell (2014) described public space as “the age’s master signifier”, an elusive concept “variously deployed to defend (or attack) architecture, to decry (or celebrate) civic squares, to promote (or denounce) graffiti artists, skateboarders, jaywalkers, parkour aficionados, pie-in-the-face guerrillas, underground capture-the-flag enthusiasts, flash-mob surveillance busters and other grid-resistant everyday anarchists” (p. 212). Hou (2010) noted similar contradictions and complexities of the term, celebrating the freedoms afforded by public leisure spaces as “an important facet of cities and urban culture ... [providing] opportunities for gathering, socializing, recreation, festivals, as well as protests and demonstrations” (p. 2). Conversely, some public spaces such as large urban parks or plazas have become synonymous with displays of State control and power (Hou, 2010). Hou (2010. p. 7) concludes that public spaces are always contested, never static, and in a “continual state of emergence.”

To help navigate this contested and emergent terrain, Johnson and Glover (2013, pp. 193-194) outlined a typology of public spaces, dependent on ownership (private or public) and perceptions of access. They noted four categories:

- (1) *Public-private (or quasi-public) spaces* are privately owned and access may be denied but are generally viewed as public by users, e.g., a shopping mall, a café or pub;
- (2) *Commons*, such as easements, footpaths and walking trails, and some community gardens, are privately owned but it is difficult to deny access;
- (3) *Club spaces* are government-owned, but are designed for controlled access (e.g. municipal swimming pools, lawn bowling greens, or a municipal ice rink);
- (4) *Outwardly public spaces* are publicly owned and access cannot be denied, such as an urban park, and as such are the “least contested type of public space” (p. 194). Nonetheless, there are debates about access and “improper” users, such as the homeless, or sex workers, as well as debates over creeping privatisation, commodification and commercialisation of outwardly public spaces.

This typology offers a useful starting point for definitions, and further questions, of public spaces, and what it is that may be said to “animate” them. As Kingwell cautions, public space “also means something larger and looser: the right to gather and discuss, to interact with and debate with one’s fellow [sic] citizens” (2014, p. 213). For Hou (2010, p. 9), such gatherings and interactions in public spaces often take the form of “spontaneous events, unintended uses, and a variety of activities that defy or escape existing rules and regulations.” These practices animate urban spaces into what Watson (2006, p. 19) calls sites of “potentiality, difference, and delightful encounters.”

Such encounters are key for Iris Marion Young (2014), for whom the ideal of city life is “the being together of strangers” (p. 249). Young explained:

by definition a public space is a place accessible to anyone, where anyone can participate and witness, in entering the public one always risks encountering those who are different, those who identify with different groups and have different opinions or different forms of life. The group diversity of the city is most often apparent in public spaces. This helps account for their vitality and excitement. Cities provide important public spaces - streets, parks, and plazas - where people stand and sit together, interact and mingle, or simply witness one another, without becoming unified in a community of ‘shared final ends.’ (pp. 250-251).

This being together, in a “collective culture” (Amin, 2008), or “throwntogetherness” (Massey, 2005, p. 151) in public space, is a conceptual focus of the animation of public space. Glover (2015) defines the animation of public space as a means to bring people together through “the deliberate, usually temporary employment of festivals, events, programmed activities, or pop-up leisure to transform, enliven, and/or alter public spaces and stage urban life” (p. 96).

Yet, as Kingwell (2014) cautions, the ideal of urban public spaces, and also varying ways to animate (or re-animate) it, have been widely co-opted by private corporate and commercial interests (see also Hoskyns, 2013; Massey, 2005); once-innovative interventions such as pop-up events (Harris, 2020; Lashua, 2013) and impromptu gatherings such as flash mobs (Hou, 2010) have become standard in the arsenal for advertising, marketing and selling

major brands. These are characteristic hallmarks of neoliberalism. In this, we are left with what Stratford (2020) has named “pseudo public space”, suspect in Kingwell’s view too, as a “public good” that is now regulated, as well as competed for, consumed, and even traded. In one recent example of neoliberal encroachment in pseudo public spaces, the technology giant Apple sought to create a new store in the Kungsträdgården (the King’s Garden), a historic public park in the heart of Stockholm, Sweden. The Kungsträdgården is “one of the city’s oldest parks, the venue for public events from Pride parades to election debates, political protests to winter ice-skating” (Orange, 2018, paragraph 10). Apple’s plans blurred public and private space by referring to its stores as “gathering places”, which would see a large chunk of the surrounding public park rezoned for retail. Following citizen protests, the local government blocked Apple’s plans. Similar plans and concomitant civic protests have taken place in Melbourne, Australia (Alcorn, 2018), Berlin, Germany (Lock, 2018) and London, UK (Hunt, 2018). Through “creeping privatisation” (Hunt, 2018), many such plans for pseudo public space aim to rezone city parks into commercial or retail spaces; most have been fiercely opposed by local interest groups.

Some scholar-activists have turned to the arts (Duncombe, 2002; Gielen, 2015; Hou, 2010; McDonald & Wiens, 2019; Sharpe, 2008; Yuen & Fortune, 2019) to re-animate and reclaim public spaces. The cultural sociologist Pascal Gielen (2015, p. 278) embraced art as a means of interrupting the city, as a way to introduce “dismeasure” into the everyday “measure” that is regarded as normal. This approach is particularly interesting given that much of the neoliberal commercialisation of civic spaces appears “normal”, unchallenged and inevitable. For Yuen and Fortune (2019, p. 1), the combination of leisure and art allows unique affordances for activism and engaged protest to stand out:

traditional methods of protest (e.g., marches, chants, civic disobedience) have become outdated and ineffective, and they tend to result in messages that are easily ignored and discounted. In contrast, leisure in politics is useful because it is “participatory and productive” and ultimately increases the efficacy of disrupting the status quo.

Here Gielen’s (2015, p. 278) idea of “dismeasure” may become something more than momentary interruptions in struggles over public spaces. In this sense, “*interrupting the city*

is one way of forcing the public sphere to renew itself; or if not renew then at least to rehash itself" (Bax, Gielen, & Ieven, 2015, p. 11). Here the idea of animated urban space and leisure intersect via creative disruptions. Hou's edited volume, *Insurgent Public Space* (2010) celebrated many examples of these kinds of disruptive acts of renewal, ranging from unsanctioned sidewalk sculptures, street intersections repainted in bright colours, 'sleep-in' protests in expensive city residential districts, installing "guerrilla" benches in empty parks, and reusing residual and derelict industrial urban land: "From Seattle to Shanghai, citizen actions ranging from gardening to dancing have permanently and temporarily taken over existing urban sites and injected them with new functions and meanings" (Hou, 2010, p.2). In other words, they have injected a spirit of *dismeasure* into public space discourse and leisure practice. Such *dismeasure* also sat at the heart of our research cluster project, *disrupt!* (2015-2017), which brought together a group of scholar-activists at Leeds Beckett University, and served as the impetus for this Special Issue.

***disrupt!* Creativity, Protest and the City**

In 2016, through the support of a research cluster award made by Leeds Beckett University (UK), colleagues from event studies, leisure studies and cultural studies collaborated to explore methodologies appropriate to researching how activist leisure can animate urban spaces. Its purpose was intentionally disruptive, both around more familiar frameworks of what constitutes academic collaboration, and how methodologies examining activism in the urban environment can emerge through negotiations with non-academic collaborators and research participants. Consequently, the project concentrated on relationship building and developing networks. In place of working from a pre-set agenda the *disrupt!* project (2016-2017) incorporated a range of cultural and social interventions that emerged from discussions with non-academic collaborators, making use of public spaces, and with elements of the publics that occupy or frequented those spaces. One intervention, which offered an urban walking tour, was developed in association with local residents in Leeds, using their individual lived histories and memories of space to peel back hidden stories that collectively challenged the anonymity and commercial homogenization of the city through the heterogenous voices of the walkers. In another intervention, a collaboration with postgraduate architectural students, a freight-carrying bicycle was adapted to serve as a mobile cinema and used to disrupt the city through cinematic projections (Lashua & Baker,

2018). A further set of interventions involved a programme of film screenings that were disrupted through the incorporation of a live choir, a free banquet of 'rescued food' (food that was still fit for consumption but discarded by some of the larger food retailers), a demonstration for an unknown cause, or requiring the film's audience to navigate a crowd attending a music gig in a room adjacent to the one used for the screening. As a series of disruptions, these events and activities were intended to highlight and create openings for re-imagining and re-making the city, and the kinds of leisure events that might animate urban "public" spaces. So too, alongside these re-imaginings and re-makings were questions of who may inhabit these spaces and disrupt the conception of who does or does not belong in them. Similarly, a range of re-imaginings, re-makings, and disruptive questionings were the focal points of the nine papers which were selected for inclusion in this Special Issue.

About this Special Issue

In their own ways, the nine papers that comprise this Special Issue address the thematic areas raised by Mair (2002) in her call for further research on activism and civil leisure. To recap, these include: (1) who is out there?; (2) what are they doing?; (3) where are they doing it?; (4) why?; and (5) have their activities changed? To this frame, we add that the contributions cut across the conceptual areas and ideas we have introduced above (e.g., leisure and politics, critical events, public spaces, arts, and disruption) while also expanding upon them and offering further theorisations. The papers also differ, with some foregrounding overtly activist leisure practices, whereas some centralise leisure activities (such as bicycling) rather than activism. Similarly, some of the papers focus on animated public spaces such as a skatepark, whereas others view the spatiality of activist leisure from more oblique angles, such as homelessness. Nonetheless, all of the papers raise critical questions that relate to the three core Special Issue themes of leisure, activism, and the animation of the urban environment.

The Special Issue opens with papers that centralise questions of leisure and urban public spaces. Leading off, Troy Glover, Sarah Munro, Immony Men, Wes Loates, and Ilana Altman (2019) present a case study of CITE, a celebration of skateboarding, arts and culture, located in a new public space created beneath an elevated highway in Toronto, Canada. Featuring art installations and a pop-up skate park alongside skateable sculptures, Glover et al., ask

how skateboarding at CITE served as a form of “gentle activism”, providing creative ways to provoke the public to think about public spaces and inviting passers-by to imagine cities differently. Through a range of qualitative materials and fieldwork, including interviews, video and social media, promotional materials, press releases, and observational analysis, Glover et al., argued that, as a meaningful way to animate the city, skateboarding could be engaged and *designed into* city spaces, rather than deterred and bracketed out in isolated skateparks. They also highlighted the need for a mix of arts programming to complement skating. This helps to make public spaces that are more inclusive and welcoming, not only animating the urban environment but also transforming it.

Several papers question the relations of leisure and public spaces as “civil leisure” (Mair 2002) and what this may “mean for the development of leisure theory more generally” (2002, p. 214). The second paper by Rasul Mowatt (2019) asks “where the White Nationalists are” and issues a direct call for leisure scholars to confront the discomfort of leisure spaces used for ideologically racist events. Mowatt traces four historical cases linked to White Nationalist and White Separatist activities staged in public spaces, parks and national monuments in the USA. These include mass Ku Klux Klan marches in Washington DC in 1925; tens of thousands of White Nationalists gathered at the 1939 German-American Bund rally in Madison Square Gardens in New York City; a series of demonstrations by the American Neo-Nazi movement, the National Socialist Party of America (NSPA), in public parks in Skokie, Illinois; and the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville (Virginia), a response to plans for the removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee in Emancipation Park. By adopting a longer historical overview, these gatherings can be seen not as isolated anomalies but as common, and frequent, occurrences. As such they also sharply show that hateful political ideologies such as White Nationalism also animate urban environments, offering a kind of malign “activism” in public leisure spaces.

Addressing Johnson and Glover’s call for researchers “to consider who is excluded from ‘public’ space (2013, p. 195), in the third paper of the collection Justin Harmon (2019) explores questions of leisure, public space and homelessness. Through a duoethnographic combination of the researcher’s stories with those of “Dancing Bear”, a person experiencing

long-term homelessness, the paper focuses on tensions between the right to the city and the right to leisure. Harmon also frames conflicts between leisure and increasingly privatised and sanitised public spaces, and the homeless who are stigmatised and viewed as 'out of place' and made to feel that they do not belong in public leisure spaces. In sharing these entwined accounts, Harmon presents a portrait of public leisure spaces that, especially for Dancing Bear, are neither public nor animated with leisure. In doing so, Harmon identifies the need to recognise leisure's absences or silences, and to do so with critical humility and ethical care. In this, Harmon demonstrates a kind of scholar-activism that begins, perhaps, from what the sociologist Les Back (2007) referred to as the art of listening.

The collection of papers next turns more fully toward questions of the animation of public spaces. Taking urban bicycling as their focus, Rudy Dunlap, Jeff Rose, Sarah Standridge, and Courtney Pruitt (2020) raise questions of "emotional geographies" to better understand cyclist's movements through urban landscapes as affective leisure experiences. Rather than position cycling as an overtly activist or transgressive leisure practice, they present pragmatic, physical, restorative, and emotional rationales for urban cycling practices. Through interviews with sixteen residents, Dunlap, et al, trace participants' journeys (in Nashville, USA) toward "becoming a cyclist" through a process of ideation and experimentation that developed into routine practice. As a consequence of their growing commitment to cycling, participants articulated the desire to confront the hostility of urban environments, to reclaim spaces (i.e., bike lanes), and to contest the automobile-centrism of the city more broadly.

In contrast to Dunlap et al., the next paper, by Carlo Genova (2020), raises overt considerations of leisure and activism through a focus on young people's political engagement in Italian cities. Against a perceived lack of youth participation in political groups, Genova re-frames political participation as a leisure activity by exploring the context of young people living in "political squats", i.e., the intentional occupation of abandoned public buildings. Through interviews with activist squatters, Genova identified the challenges of partial alignments, fragmented worldviews, weakly-shared values and a lack of trust in political institutions among young Italians. The paper argues that the complex facets

of political engagement made more sense when understood not as formal politics, but instead as a mix of leisure and activism. For the participants in Genova's research, this mix takes into consideration individuals' tastes, lifestyle choices and personal satisfactions, as young citizens attempt to (re)position themselves, vis-à-vis leisure and activism, within Italian civil society.

Turning to critical events and festivals as sites of resistance and social change, Kirsty Jamieson and Louise Todd (2019) explore the festival and activist processes of "reversal." Such festive forms challenge widely held instrumental views (e.g., within events and creative industries) of festivals as consumeristic and touristic (pseudo-)public celebrations. Exploring festivals at intersections "of both revolution and consumerism" (2019, p. 2), Jamieson and Todd seek to develop a conceptual framework for analysis of a transgressive festival imagination. Drawing together Bakhtin's conceptualisation of the carnivalesque (as authorised transgression) and the notion of play, as developed by the developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott (as central to establishing a sense of being-in-the-world), they challenge mainstream formulations of the festival experience. With play as a space of rebellious exploration they develop a more transgressive perspective on the transformative potential of the festival, one that can provide tools and routines -- the *techné* -- of resistance. Through the processes of reversal, and their novel conceptual framework, events and leisure practices are able to manifest an imagery of playgrounds for dissent.

While all of the papers connect questions of leisure and activism, the final three papers in the collection do so in ways that illustrate the complex relations between leisure and public protest, particularly in view of policy and governance. David McGillivray, John Lauermann and Daniel Turner offer critical case studies of protests against bids to host Summer Olympic Games in three American cities. In the context of mega sports events (MSEs), protesters often share concerns where MSEs are seen to violate human rights, distort fiscal spending, sanction corruption and exacerbate social inequities. Like several contributions to this collection, the paper draws from interviews with activists and analyses of social media campaigns in opposition to MSE boosterism. It differs, however, in questioning the role of new media, particularly where it intersects with mainstream media (i.e., broadcast and print

media) and physical protests in cities including Chicago, Boston and Los Angeles. In their analyses, McGillivray, et al highlight where protest campaigners were adept in using new media in ways that promoted the core messages of opposition activists. Nevertheless, anti-Olympic protests appeared more effective where campaigners were able to also influence legacy media, and most successful when engaged with broader urban debates, working within political parties and social movements, and by amplifying wider concerns about social equity. The paper shows the potency of leisure activism, especially when connected to debates about broader urban politics.

In the penultimate paper, a richly detailed and fascinating account of civil society in the “NoLo” (North of Piazzale Loreto) area of Milan (Italy), Sebastiano Citroni and Alessandro Coppola (2020) investigate leisure and activism in local public policy-making processes. They focus on a range of arts, leisure and cultural initiatives, originating from grassroots neighbourhood activism, as these initiatives encountered and became part of the neoliberal governance of the city. Through participant observation during local events, interviews with residents and key stakeholders and analyses of social media, the authors develop two in-depth case studies that trace subtle forms of power in neighbourhood events, not as protest, but as part of transforming local policies toward uses of NoLo’s public spaces. In echoes of Mair (2002), Citroni and Coppola (2020) consider leisure, activism and the animation of urban environments as vital components in an “emerging civil society” in Milan.

Finally, exploring the theme of whose voices are excluded from “public” space, the paper by Ian Lamond, Esther Solano and Vitor Blotta (2020) sets out to develop a research approach that can embrace the diversity of voices associated with leisure activism, and the animating of the city. Acknowledging the challenges that researchers face when trying to grasp the multiplicity of voices associated with leisure activism, the authors confront some of the many difficulties in investigating events of dissent within the city. Pursuing Latour’s (2007) call to seek out the controversy, and drawing on prior research on activism in the UK and Brazil, they propose an approach that brings contested voices together. In doing so they consider how such a multivocal and polyphonic research approach creates both opportunities for dialogue between voices more commonly raised in opposition, whilst also

challenging the researchers' presuppositions and pre-conceptions around how leisure activism animates the city.

Concluding thoughts and future directions: Leisure, activism, and the animation of the urban environment

This special issue has been co-edited by two colleagues (Lamond and Lashua) who worked on the previously mentioned *disrupt!* project. In concluding we return, briefly, to where we opened, and the disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has drawn our attention, from extraordinary absences and silences to the importance of leisure in the animation of urban environments. For one of the guest editors, an enduring impression has been the stillness and emptiness of the public leisure spaces of his home town (a popular visitor destination in the UK); for the other, what stood out were the acts of collective music-making that took place in cities around the world, from residents' balconies and across rooftops (and also laptops). These creative interventions – forms of disrupting the disruption of Covid-19 and enforced lockdowns – showcased not only the “musicality” of the city, but also the creation of new social rhythms and public connections (Lefebvre, 1992). Also, against the backcloth of overbearing silences and stillnesses, came the mass public outcries for social justice following the death of George Floyd, and so many others, due to racism, systemic violence, and enduring institutional inequalities. In this moment, the importance of leisure as activism, protest, dissent and resistance – that is, *civil leisure* (Mair, 2002) – and the role of public spaces (and subsequent closures of them) have resonated through Black Lives Matter rallies and marches around the world. Other movements, such as anti-climate change protests, and anti-war activism (e.g., against ongoing conflict in Yemen), have also shown that, even in an age of “social” distancing and worrying silences, collective voices can make wonderfully disruptive and much-needed noises.

These voices and noises, moments and movements, and absences and silences are resonant across the nine papers included in this collection. Yet, with only nine papers, there are of course numerous gaps and many further absences: for instance, we did not receive submissions regarding protest and gender politics, or activism against sexual violence, or in regard to leisure and LGBTQIA+ activist spaces. So too, we did not receive papers in other crucial areas such as disability rights campaigns. We recognise that these activist concerns,

and many others, will appear in the “regular” course of *Leisure Studies*’ (and other leisure journals’) published research articles. In this, we acknowledge the growing body of activist scholarship, and social justice research in particular, within the field. Yet, as often noted in other introductions for special issues (e.g., Sharpe & Lashua, 2008), there is always more work to do, and research gaps remain at the interstices of leisure, activism, and the animation of urban environments. We welcome and look forward to seeing, and hearing, more scholarly *noise* in these important spaces.

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Notes on the guest co-editors

Ian Lamond is a senior lecturer in event studies at Leeds Beckett University (UK). His primary research interests are in events of dissent, leisure activism and creative forms of protest, though he has also worked in the fields of fandom studies, death studies and political communication. His most recent book, *Liminality and Critical Event Studies: Borders Boundaries and Contestation* (Palgrave, 2020) considers the intersection between event studies and cultural anthropology, and he was a guest editor, with Karl Spracklen, of a recent issue of the *Journal of Fandom Studies* (2020). He is currently completing the editing of *Death and Events: International perspectives on events associated with death* (Routledge), scheduled for publication in June 2021.

Brett Lashua teaches sociology at the Institute of Education, University College London (UK). His scholarship is concerned primarily with youth leisure, popular music, cultural heritage and urban geographies. Brett is an Associate Editor for the journals *Leisure Sciences*, *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, and *Leisure/Loisir*. His most recent book is *Popular Music, Popular Myth and Cultural Heritage in Cleveland: The Moondog, The Buzzard and the Battle for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame* (Emerald, 2019), and he was co-editor of *Sounds and the City: Popular Music, Globalization and Place* (Palgrave, 2014), *Sounds and the City: Volume 2* (Palgrave, 2019), and the *Palgrave Handbook of Leisure Theory* (Palgrave, 2017). With Stephen Wagg, Brett coordinates two book series with Liverpool University Press (Liverpool Studies in the Politics of Popular Culture; Liverpool Studies in Popular Music and Place).

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