

Lockdown Cartographies: Active Bodies, Public Spaces and Pandemic Atmospheres in Italy

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During the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Italy, conceptualisations of sport and physical activity as contested (bio)political domains acquired new layers of meaning and intensity. As the country became the pandemic epicentre in Europe and put in place restrictive lockdown measures, *already-existing* concerns and processes related to the government of practices and bodies deemed illegitimate in public spaces swiftly extended to the entire population. This chapter takes cue from the intensified and *spectacular* processes of surveillance of (active) bodies in public spaces during the first lockdown to interrogate how the body/space/health/security nexus has been experienced, understood and (re)assembled within and beyond this timeframe in Italy. Our discussion contends that the first responses to the pandemic in Italy intensified and exposed the shortcomings of existing, individualised health imperatives and priorities. Consequently, we address how public debates informed by neoliberal understandings of (un)healthy, autonomous, and self-responsible subjects made *invisible* other bodies-spaces-health-security entanglements: those of workers *having to* operate in Covid-unsafe conditions, those for whom “home” was dangerous or non-existent, and those of prisoners and (forced) migrants *stuck* in overcrowded penitentiaries, detention and reception centres. Articulating the different physical, spatial and health domains that the public and political focus foregrounded or made inaccessible, we reflect on how the pandemic event contributed to exacerbate existing boundaries of deservingness and worth in Italy. Finally, we consider how addressing the pandemic as a bio-social event constitutes a necessary starting point to approach the entanglement of (active) bodies, spaces and health in ways that can register the “intrusion of Gaia” (Stengers, 2015 [2009]) as a political subjectivity in the late-capitalist world-order.

Keywords: atmospheres; decorum/decay; intrusion of Gaia; ruination; physical culture

Introduction

Towards the end of March 2020, at the height of the devastating first wave of the Sars-Cov2 epidemic in Italy, a *meme* appeared on one of the authors' social media timeline. The meme had been posted by a friend, a young man born in Morocco who have been living in Italy for most of his life, and stated:

“people are suspicious of you at the markets, the police control you every day.

Calm down, it's just two weeks that you are an Arab”.

The spatial and temporal context to which the meme hinted was the draconian lockdown put in place in Italy in early March 2020 until mid-May 2020. The lockdown measures saw the implementation of curfews and the prohibition of any non-essential activities and movement of people between and within cities and towns. These measures were enforced by a pervasive military and police presence which heightened and materialised a widespread *feeling* of an invisible, yet ever-present enemy that made *any body* a suspect in the public health catastrophe that was unfolding. In this scenario, existing conceptualisations of sport and physical activity as contested (bio)political domains in urban spaces arguably acquired new and unexpected layers and implications; particularly so, as between March and May 2020 the figure of the recreational runner/jogger became associated with widespread narratives of disruptive, illegitimate, *polluting* bodies contributing to the diffusion of the virus. Yet, as the Italian government applied pervasive processes of surveillance to scrutinise and question individuals' presence and practices in public spaces across the national territory, the meme above reminded something important and widely disavowed. What was now being applied to the entire Italian population constituted the extension and intensification of *already existing* concerns and processes related to the control of practices and bodies deemed dangerous, suspicious and/or illegitimate in public spaces in Italy (see Palmas, 2009; De Martini Ugolotti & Moyer, 2016; Tulumello & Bertoni, 2019).

Taking cue from this *apparently* casual, yet emblematic observation (“*calm down, it's just two weeks that you are an Arab*”), this chapter interrogates the extensive and spectacular processes of surveillance of (active) bodies in public spaces during the first lockdown. From this starting point, we advance some considerations on how the body/space/health/(in)security nexus has been understood, narrated, and re-assembled within and beyond this timeframe in Italy. In doing this, we outline a cartography of some of the *lines and folds* that characterised the events and processes that took place between late February and end of May 2020. We engage with a cartographic approach as “a theoretically based and politically informed reading of the present” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 164) that accounts for our location in terms of both space (political, and ecological dimensions), and time (historical and genealogical dimensions).

Our aim in focusing on the Italian context during the first wave of the pandemic is to tease out the multiple processes, contingencies and agencies that continue to shape the “history of the present” (Garland, 2014). In this sense, and following Roth (1981, p. 43) we contend that “writing a history of the present means to write history *in* the present; consciously writing in a field of power relations and political struggles” (emphasis added) as they link to, manifest in, and emerge with physical cultural spaces and practices.

In advancing this perspective, we address the body, and more specifically, the reciprocally constitutive domains of body, space and place, as key sites of articulation where different political scales, domains and registers overlapped and (e)merged during the pandemic, often exacerbating existing inequalities and social fault-lines, but also opening possibilities of critical interrogation and praxis. This ontological, epistemological, and political positioning compels us to articulate the multifaceted and entangled relationalities and political registers that underpinned *and shaped* the unfolding of the pandemic event in Italy: from (neoliberal) State policies and infrastructures to individualising discourses on (un)healthy bodies, from pervasive concerns surrounding urban decorum/decay, to more-than-human agencies and planetary transitions.

Following these premises and after an overview of the first wave of the pandemic in Italy, this chapter broadly explores two main lines of discussion. We start by examining how public debates informed by neoliberal understandings of (un)healthy, autonomous, and self-responsible subjects made *(in)visible* specific bodies-spaces-health entanglements and contributed to exacerbate existing hierarchies of deservingness and worth in Italy. We then expand this focus by advancing a discussion of *pandemic atmospheres* to address the multiple sites, scales, registers, and agencies through which the events that have marked the first lockdown unfolded and are still unfolding. We conclude by considering how such approach can contribute to register the “intrusion of Gaia” (Stengers, 2015 [2009]) as a political subjectivity in the late-capitalist world-order. In doing this, we draw on Isabelle Stengers’ engagement with conceptualisations of the Earth as a dynamic system whose life-sustaining, biotic/abiotic couplings can elude, displace, and subvert human knowledge and agency and are “capable of assemblages that are very different from the ones on which we depend” (Stengers, 2011 [2002]: 163; see also Clarke, 2017).

The first Sars-Cov2 wave in Italy

The Sars-Cov2 virus was first detected in Italy when its diffusion was still widely perceived as a distant issue, whose origin and spreading was mostly related to the “backward” cultural and health practices of the “Orient” and could be managed by tighter controls on incoming travellers from China. A week after the first case of Covid-19 emerged in the small town of Codogno on the 28th February 2020 the governor of the Veneto region, Luca Zaia, argued that Italians' health, hygiene, and food standards had successfully contained the spread of the virus. This had not been the case in China, Mr. Zaia added, because “everybody knows that people eat live rats there” (Laganà, 2020). On the 8th March 2020, among soaring cases, hospitalisations and deaths, the Italian government put the whole Italian territory and population in a lockdown to control the spread of the virus. The nation-wide lockdown closed schools and universities, prohibited all commercial activities except for

supermarkets and pharmacies and restricted the movement of people for non-essential purposes. On the night between the 18th and the 19th March, the Italian Army was deployed to Bergamo, the city worst hit by the pandemic, as the local authorities could no longer process the number of bodies in the city's mortuaries. Army trucks transported coffins to crematoriums in several other towns, as the dedicated city's structures were unable to cope with the number of deceased arriving from local hospitals, care and private homes. On the 20th March, with the health services under immense strain nation-wide and close to collapsing in the Lombardy region (Nacoti et al., 2020), lockdown regulations were further tightened. New measures included closing parks and playgrounds and banning open-air sports and running, except individually and in “close proximity”¹ of one's residence. The Army was from then deployed to assist the police forces in strictly enforcing the lockdown on the national territory. This was at the time the largest lockdown in Europe as well as the most aggressive response taken in any region beyond China. Despite these measures, between mid-March and mid-April 2020 Italy became the world epicentre of the pandemic, with Covid-related deaths higher than anywhere else in the world (WHO, 2020). In 2021 National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT) recorded 2020 as the year with the highest number of deaths (including non-Covid related) since 1945, when Italy was fighting World War Two on its soil (ISTAT, 2021).

The unfolding of these events was marked by a succession of images that became worldwide symbols of a nation at the verge of collapse and of the individual and community efforts made in the “fight against the virus”. These included health workers' faces bruised by wearing protective equipment for long hours or sleeping exhausted on their desks; people coming together on their balconies to sing, play music and clap to show support to health workers and each other; the widespread presence of the Italian Army in the streets enforcing the “stay at home” mandate for the population.

¹ The Decree Law did not define what constituted “close proximity”, leaving local authorities the powers to decide on that. This brought to restrictive interpretations of the Decree delimiting the proximity to one's residence to a distance between 100 and 300 meters.

As it would soon happen also in other countries, these images, affective registers, and the public messages exhorting everyone to “play their part” to support those on the *frontlines* in the fight against the virus, shaped cultural and public narratives and feelings of a nation at war against an invisible enemy (De Martini Ugolotti, 2020). While fitting to an extent the catastrophic scenarios and consequences of the epidemic, these widespread narratives had nevertheless several significant implications. As we discuss in the sections below, while continuously claiming that “we are all on the same boat”, these processes made *visible* the moral boundaries between (un)healthy and (ir)responsible bodies in the nation-at-war. At the same time, they also defined and made *invisible* the processes and infrastructures that facilitated the virus' diffusion, and the lives deemed to be “worth less” amid the pandemic. Relatedly, as the meme with which we started this discussion hinted to, the processes, narratives and interventions just outlined did not constitute the inevitable and *unprecedented* responses to a catastrophic health crisis. Rather, we can understand what happened between (and beyond) March and May 2020 in Italy as the extension and intensification of prevailing and overlapping political processes, cultural narratives and “affective regimes” (Gilbert, 2008) that marked Italian public life and polity in the last three decades. In this sense, the controversial figure of the runner/jogger in urban spaces constituted a significant site from where to unpack how these overlapping registers surrounding health, (in)security, nationhood and responsibility re-assembled in and through bodies and spaces during the first lockdown.

Pandemic genealogies

Seen from the perspective of scholarly works that underlined the affinities between contemporary physical cultures and neoliberal political, economic, and cultural sensibilities, the pervasive concerns surrounding active bodies in public spaces, (in)security and responsibility during the first lockdown in Italy should not come as a *complete* surprise. The national obsession with individual behaviours and practices in urban spaces during a public health catastrophe could be arguably seen as the other-

side-of-the-coin of long consolidated neoliberal narratives that regularly framed systemic health issues and inequalities as individual responsibilities (Andrews & Silk, 2018; Donato et al., 2019; Fullagar et al., 2019). Concurrently, these narratives converged during the first lockdown with other neoliberal rationales regarding the management of urban and national (in)security that have increasingly blurred the distinction between military interventions, risk prevention, surveillance, and public order to preserve economic flows and growth (Graham, 2010; Tulumello and Bertoni, 2019). In this sense, in the context of the first Italian lockdown, existing cultural articulations around health, responsibility, physical activity and (in)security simultaneously converged and changed in scope and intensity in two significant and related ways. The first regarded the spectacular extension of individual health responsibilities from one's body to the national body politic. As individual bodies became increasingly aligned with the national collective body, the concept of *responsibility* strengthened its double grip in relation to the *capacity to control* one's behaviours and as the *culpability* associated to the violation of a (moral) prohibition (Moretti, 2020). The second related to how the individualised, therapeutic perspectives that widely prescribed the health benefits of an active lifestyle were turned around by definitions of physical activity in public spaces as dangerous, irresponsible, and immoral. In fact, extending well beyond the domain of moral judgements, widely shared public narratives between March and May 2020 ascribed a direct correlation between a run, or a walk, and the spread of the virus on the national territory. Within this timeframe, a discursive constellation of politicians' declarations, "instructional" videos, advertising, and local/national by-laws composed a widely shared focus on what and whose bodies were supposedly to surveil and blame for the catastrophic spreading of the virus. Now widely identified as the enemy-within-the-nation-at-war, joggers and "non-essential" walkers would be pro-actively chased by police and media drones in live-TV pursuits, and when attacked in public spaces, politicians would implicitly justify their aggressions based on what they did (not) wear (e.g., a facemask).

At the same time, what remained constantly concealed by a pervasive focus on physical practices

such as jogging or walking was the fact that throughout the first lockdown the main drivers of contagion in Italy remained hospitals and workplaces (Nava, 2020; De Mosto et al., 2020; Nacoti et al., 2020). In this sense, the tragic paradox of health services acting as drivers of contagion while trying to cure the ill could be arguably linked to three decades of neoliberal welfare “reforms” which cut 100.000 hospital beds, one-third of general practitioners, and suppressed 759 hospital wards from the late 1990s (CLAP, 2021). The most significant of these "new public management" reforms took place in Lombardy, the region that would be worst hit by the pandemic; under the aegis of a “more efficient” health provision, these included the erasure of general health practitioners and prevention services in the community and the *privatisation and centralisation of health services* in hospitals focused on state-of-the-art, patient-centred therapeutic activities (Nava, 2020). While not directly citing these processes, the doctors of the Giovanni XXIII hospital in Bergamo clearly outlined their implications in an open letter on the 21st March 2020 as they detailed the role of centralised care in hospitals in the spread of the Covid-19, called for community-based health services and warned that “the more medicalized and centralized the society, the more widespread the virus.” (Nacoti et al., 2020, p. 3).

Relatedly, while the *un-detailed* definition of “essential activity” in the Decree Laws implemented between March and May 2020 enabled police forces and local authorities to capillary scrutinise activities like jogging or walking, it also provided significant leeway for businesses to qualify as “essential” and require employees to go to work in warehouses and factories (Nava, 2020). In this sense, the framing of national “stay at home” orders as a moral gesture of solidarity for the frontline heroes and heroines fighting against the virus disavowed the precarious conditions of workers who *had to* go to work in often Covid-unsafe environments. Simultaneously, these responsabilising narratives also concealed how often workers *felt compelled to go to work* because without any substantial welfare support, any closure of economic production raised the spectre of crisis, unemployment, and social disaster (Nava, 2020). The neoliberal imperatives and affective regimes

which placed concerns over economic productivity and competitiveness *ahead of anything else*, even in the epicentre of a catastrophic health crisis were captured by Nava (2020) who argued that “[during the first lockdown] in Lombardy it was impossible to stop the production, in Lombardy it was only possible to die” (Nava, 2020, p. 184).

Yet, political, and public debates informed by neoliberal understandings of (un)healthy, autonomous, and self-responsible subjects did not only conceal how economic imperatives, political reforms, and the *infrastructures of circulation that they shaped* drove the spreading of the virus. They also intensified the distinction between what Judith Butler (2004) defined *grievable and ungrievable lives* in the context of the pandemic. When between 8th and 12th March 2020 detainees in Italian penitentiaries revolted against containment measures and the health risk posed by systemic overcrowding, the response was the military-enforced isolation of the rioters: 14 people, 12 inmates and 2 prison guards would die by the end of the revolt. Amid countless episodes of covid-outbreaks in informal camps and buildings occupied by (forced) migrants (many working in essential sectors like agriculture and food delivery), in April 2020 asylum seekers in Rome set fire to the reception centre in which they were confined. They did so to protest the lack of health responses to a covid-outbreak among the 130 people in the overcrowded building. Until then, the main public response to the outbreak had been the heightening of the perimeter walls of the building to avoid escapes (Mellino, 2020). Overall, the lockdown implementation resulted in the widespread, yet publicly disregarded exacerbation of health issues and social exclusion (including sheer hunger) for hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers, undocumented migrants and people experiencing homelessness² as the operations of community organisations supporting them were forced to stop without any relevant alternatives in their place (Da Mosto et al, 2020). While the Italian government took “unprecedented”

² At the start of the pandemic, there were about 600.000 undocumented migrants in Italy, soon to become about 800.000 because of legal restrictions introduced with the 2018 Salvini Security Decree-Law. The number of people experiencing homelessness in 2020 have been estimated between 49.000 and 52.000 (MEDU, 2020).

economic measures to assuage the socio-economic impacts of the epidemic on "Italian families" and the nation seemed to re-discover a sense of shared solidarity and purpose, conditions of destitution, hunger and endangerment continued to be considered more tolerable for some than for others.

Cartographies of Differential Vulnerability and pandemic atmospheres

Recent commentaries on the pandemic responses enacted in Italy and elsewhere meaningfully highlighted how the bio-political processes of “nationalization of the biological” (Foucault, 1990 [1978], p. 244) (not exclusively) evoked by lockdown measures imply a politics of *differential vulnerability* (Lorenzini, 2021); a politics that structurally relies on the establishment of hierarchies in the value of lives that produces, and multiplies vulnerability to death and illness *as a means of governing people* (Lorenzini, 2021, p. 44). Roberto Esposito (2011, 2013) has argued that the consolidation of these (already existing) hierarchies of the value of life accompanied the contemporary expansion of an *immunity paradigm* which seamlessly applied bio-medical models of prevention, isolation, and immunisation to a wide range of political issues (from terrorism to migration flows, from digital security to epidemics). Operating “at the intersection of law and biology, medical and legal procedure” (Esposito, 2013, p. 85) an immunity paradigm understands both individual and collective bodies (e.g., nations) as sites whose boundaries/borders must be protected from the invasion of (in)visible foreign entities. Yet, Newman and colleagues (2016) underlined the paradox of biopolitical/immunitary understandings of (active) bodies as at once bounded and fluid, as entities whose boundaries need to be secured from “any external element that threatens” (Esposito, 2013, p. 85) and as “leaky” sites of transmission of such threats. This paradox arguably emerged in the first lockdown in Italy, during which pervasive surveillance and security measures have been justified to protect the nation’s collective body from individuals’ “leaky bodies” (Newman et al., 2016). However, the increasingly pervasive application of “immunitary” rationales during the first lockdown did not only reinforce and redrew the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the

nation. Nor it simply legitimised the increased *surveillance of anyone* as a potential “living pathological vessel” (Newman et al., 2016, p. 155) *for the sake of everyone*. Rather, it exacerbated and legitimated the differential definition of *what and who is worth preserving* within the collective body of the nation.

Following these considerations and what discussed in the previous section, we could see a politics of differential vulnerability being applied during the first lockdown in Italy through (at least) two simultaneous and intersecting processes. The first saw the enactment of pandemic responses that aimed to protect the nation from the virus, but in ways that arguably defended the nation by prioritising “its markets, not its people” (Butler, 2020; see also Nava, 2020). The second related to the intensification of an already existing public and political consensus regarding whose lives are worth less amid recurring “crises” (De Martini Ugolotti and Caudwell, 2022). This was made evident by the fact that the framing of the “household” as a space of protection in the government's “stay at home” restrictions completely ignored the circumstances of those for whom “home” was overcrowded, dangerous or non-existent.

The analyses mentioned so far have insightfully articulated the links between bio-, and necropolitical forms of pandemic management and the affective politics that centred on responsabilising subjects to “do their part” in the war against the virus; this, all the while concealing other processes and infrastructures of circulation that enabled and accelerated its spread. These discussions have been fundamental to pose critical questions on the pandemic responses and their implications. Yet, they also implicitly privileged the relationships between the *corporeal subjectivities* (Newman et al., 2016) of citizens, denizens, patients, workers, (recreational) runners and the state as the only agents shaping the nexus of health, space and (in)security in pandemic times. In doing so, these perspectives reproduced a distinction between nature and culture, the human and non-human, and between agents and non-agents that the pandemic event arguably complicated (see Latour, 2020). To address how bodies in urban spaces became so central in the affective politics of the pandemic we explore and

engage with the idea of (pandemic) *atmospheres*. More specifically, through the notion of atmosphere we attend to and articulate two issues that we consider fundamental to address the entanglement of bodies, health, (in)security and (urban) spaces during the first pandemic wave in Italy: moral and aesthetic concerns surrounding urban decorum (and indecorous bodies and spaces) and Gaia's intrusion in late-capitalist social and spatial order.

Atmospheres of decorum/decay and (infectious) urban bodies

In the frame of the “preventive turn” that marked global trends in the securitisation of urban spaces, the Italian context was specifically characterised in the last three decades by the emergence and consolidation of the notion of “decorum” (and its discursive opposite “decay”) as a keyword and a tool for urban governance (Pitch, 2013).

Scholars (Tulumello & Bertoni, 2019; Barchetta, 2021) have highlighted that while wider politics of urban securitisation focused on preventing urban practices and behaviours as potential sources of threat (e.g., crime, terrorism, disorder, violence, etc.), the politics of decorum operate and intervene specifically on *urban bodies*. In this sense, although focusing on the same urban groups (the urban poor and the homeless, undocumented migrants, Roma minorities, racialised youth, street vendors, drug addicts, etc.) the politics of security and decorum differ as the latter focus and intervene directly on specific bodies *as causes* of urban decay. This, because of such bodies' supposed lack of adherence to never clearly defined, but always assumed as “common-sense” moral and aesthetic criteria (Tulumello & Bertoni, 2019). Importantly, these “common-sense” moral and aesthetic criteria tend to inevitably embody the classed, racialised and gendered characteristics of economically independent, “healthy”, and (conspicuously) consuming urban subjects (De Martini Ugolotti & Silk, 2018). In other words, within the frame of the politics of decorum, the bodies of specific “indecorous” urban dwellers are assumed to inherently carry with themselves *impressions of disorder and feelings of insecurity* that contribute to produce landscapes and sensations of urban decay (Tulumello and

Bertoni, 2019). Expanding on Sarah Ahmed's (2004) work, Barchetta (2021) addressed through the notion of atmosphere the intensities of evoked or visceral feelings of decay that *stick* on bodies and urban spaces/surfaces, and the ideas, narratives and practices (e.g. media depictions, urban by-laws and interventions, Decree Laws etc.) that simultaneously address and produce them.

In this sense, with Brighenti (2016) an atmosphere can be thought as the air that is breathed, at the same time a subjective perception and an ecological element that is constantly *shared with* and *defined by* human and non-human forces. For this reason, while it may at first seem encompassing and enveloping, an atmosphere always also has an interstitial character to it; like, air, an atmosphere's capacity to connect and stick-on things, spaces and bodies is intimately linked to its constant *infiltration* through barriers such as doors, walls, and other infrastructures. According to Brighenti (2016), the notion of atmosphere can thus contribute to understand cities as *spaces of respiration*, and to understand respiration as the *rhythmic component of every atmosphere*. Notably enough, as a floating signifier the concept of decorum can be arguably understood as a perception that is at the same time subjective and ecological; one that has enveloped and infiltrated the political narratives, urban policies and everyday practices and rhythms of Italian cities (Pitch, 2013). The idea of decorum is indefinable, only perceivable through its opposite, decay (Tulumello & Bertoni, 2019). As a result, the city can never be understood, experienced, or *felt* as “decorous”, as decorum emerges only from the absence of decay. The idea and politics of urban decorum thus implies a process of ever-expanding surveillance, containment, deterrence on specific “indecorous” urban bodies, and infiltration in apparently mundane domains of urban life (e.g., the regulation of dress-codes and informal social gatherings in Italian cities, see O'Sullivan, 2017). Further, in line with the wider preventive turn analysed in the literature, atmospheres of decorum imply a pervasive and compelling dimension of responsibility that is at the same time individual (“avoid contributing to, or being the victim of urban decay”) and collective; the latter implying the mobilisation of the “community” to enact social surveillance and draw the boundaries between decorous and indecorous bodies/spaces. In this sense,

through the notion of atmosphere we can grasp and articulate the intersection of visceral, discursive, material, and political registers through which rhetoric, feelings and practices of decorum/decay could be impressed on specific bodies and urban spaces.

Following these considerations, the pervasive and specific focus on (active) bodies in urban spaces during the first lockdown can be understood as the re-assembling of intensities, narratives and practices of prevailing urban politics and atmospheres with the socio-political and ecological shifts impressed by the Sars-Cov2 epidemic. During the first lockdown, perceptions of health and security thus converged and aligned with existing affective, moral, and aesthetic judgements that associated specific bodies with the infection of urban spaces, cities, and the nation at large (Barchetta, 2021). The focus of public concerns moved from “aesthetically displeasing” and “morally indecorous” bodies to the irresponsible and selfish bodies of runners and walkers. The latter “non-essential” presence in urban spaces was pervasively perceived as undermining the *moral conduct* and *aesthetics* of the nation-at-home (and at war), and *as such* a threat to the collective body of the nation. In other words, while interpellating health-related rationales, the visceral, discursive, and practical perception of bodies in urban spaces during the first pandemic wave implied the intensification of urban atmospheres in which contagion was already understood, lived, and felt³ as much a *moral and aesthetic process* as a physical and molecular one (see also Moretti, 2020).

It is here that the notion of atmosphere can contribute and expand insights focused on the bio-, and necro-political rationales that underpinned the pandemic responses. These analyses have importantly focused on bodies as political, sensual, and biological sites through which it is possible to illuminate the irreconcilable tensions and hierarchies in the value of life that underpin contemporary understandings of health, responsibility and (in)security. However, the notion of atmosphere as a field

³ Moretti (2020) has provided insightful analogies between the systematic search and harassment of individuals as supposed plague-spreaders during the first lockdown with the cosmologies of witchcraft.

of forces in which different bio-social bodies actively participate in assembling specific intensities, meanings, and processes expands a specific focus on bodies and corporeal subjectivities (Newman et al., 2016) by addressing and repositioning them as part of wider ecological registers and relationalities. An atmospheric reading of the first lockdown in Italy can thus illuminate and keep together the entrenched forms of differential vulnerabilities intensified by the pandemic responses *and* the non-human forces that exercised their agency independently of human priorities and intentions. Agreeing with Barchetta (2021), we contend that illuminating these socio-ecological connections is fundamental to understand the pandemic event as the combination of historical phenomena and the agencies of unexpected political subjectivities. In this sense, the notion of atmosphere as a sensorial register of bio-social life invites us to extend our focus to other relationalities, forces and agencies that contributed to shape the spatial, temporal, and physical cultural sites explored in this work.

From bio-politics to cosmopolitics? Pandemic atmospheres and the intrusion of Gaia

“Bacteria and viruses can also call the shots” (Lundi-Matin, 16th May, 2020)

Following Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (2017, p. 15) we could argue that if the Euro-American *Weltanschauung* posed that the social structure of modernity stands on its ground floor, the economy, the pandemic event has reminded that such vision has forgotten the foundations: the Earth (System). In this sense, some scholars have argued that the term Anthropocene, notwithstanding the important critiques directed to its use to define the current geological era⁴, carries the significance of a

⁴ As posed through the notions of Capitalocene (Moore, 2012) and Plantationocene (Haraway, 2015). Assessing the content of these critiques is beyond the remit of this chapter, but we contend that all these terms in different ways enable us to (re)think ecological relations at the scale of the planetary.

meaningful *reminder*. According to these perspectives, the meaningfulness of this formulation stems from the explicit acknowledgement that the transformation of our species from a mere biological agent “into a geological force” (Chakrabarty, 2009) tangibly questions the dichotomies between environment and society, ecology and economy, nature and culture that have started to be problematised from the second half of the XXth century. It could be argued that the implosion of these dichotomies has been made even more evident by the diffusion of a virus that has not attacked or made ill the (late)capitalist social order, but has *hacked* it, literally using highly networked global infrastructures (e.g., transportation, health, economy) *as an exoskeleton* to fulfil its main biological function: reproduce itself. Relatedly, acknowledging that the acceleration of time and the related compression of space are not anymore exclusively an *existential prerogative* of Western modernity but are *bio-social features* of a pandemic phenomenon, makes increasingly *real* the brusque, abrupt, and relentless “intrusion of Gaia” (Stengers, 2015) into the horizon of human history.

With the figure of Gaia, Isabelle Stengers drew on Lovelock and Margulis' notion of an Earth System arising from biotic/abiotic couplings and co-productions that sustain the biosphere (Clarke, 2017). From this starting point, Isabelle Stengers suggested ‘the new figure of Gaia indicates that it is becoming urgent to create a contrast between the earth valorized as a set of resources and the earth considered as a set of interdependent processes, *capable of assemblages that are very different from the ones on which we depend*’ (2011 [2002]: 163, emphasis added). In other words, according to Stengers (2015), the figure of Gaia encapsulates the paradox of a present and inconvenient truth; that one way or another the time is over for “us” (read, the Western/modern *anthropos*) to consider ourselves the true actors of our history, freely discussing if the Earth is available for our use or should be protected. In this sense, as the Euro-American incarnation of humanity transformed itself in a “geological force”, the notion of Gaia's intrusion has given the Earth System the menacing form of a *historical subject and a political agent* (Latour, 2013; Denowski & Viveiros de Castro, 2017). In fact, as Stengers (2015 [2009]) argued, the brutality of the intrusion of Gaia corresponds to the brutality

of what has provoked her, that of a “development” (or progress, modernity, etc.) that is blind to its consequences, or which, more precisely, only takes its consequences into account from the point of view of the new sources of profit they can bring about. If the pandemic event can be arguably seen as the latest manifestation of Gaia's intrusion in the horizon of Western modernity, we contend that the notion of atmosphere can constitute a useful analytical lens to address the planetary transformations that we are witnessing. The concept can help us to situate our perspectives between different scales by articulating the spatial, temporal, and visceral manifestations of entangled ecological, socio-political, and biological change (see Barchetta, 2021). In other words, the notion of atmosphere contributes to address how the inconvenient truth of Gaia's intrusion, as manifested through the pandemic event, tangibly materialises *in and as* the air we can(not) breathe, the spaces we can(not) inhabit, the temporalities that we can(not) control, and the intensities we can(not) feel.

To come back at the focus of this chapter, the notion of atmosphere as an *ecological feeling* (Barchetta, 2021) that displaces any separation between the visceral, the social and the ecological, can be useful to start (re)thinking the reciprocal constitution of bodies and spaces during the first wave of the pandemic in Italy. From such a perspective, observing how bodies, spaces, health, and (in)security have been re-assembled during the pandemic implies recognising, keeping together, and making visible the political dynamics, affective regimes, and bio-social processes that operate at different but entangled speeds and scales and converge in and through the same physical cultural sites (e.g., the city, its public spaces and infrastructures, running/walking, un/healthy bodies, intimate, yet ecological feelings). Such a perspective can allow for a political reading of pandemic processes of surveillance, containment and control that underlines the “radical ecological interdependency” (Escobar, 2019) between scales, registers, temporalities and knowledges generally assumed and interpreted as separated.

Put it differently, acknowledging the intrusion of Gaia in understanding how the body/space/health/security nexus has been (re)assembled during the first lockdown in Italy can

produce different folds to the binary understandings and narratives that emerged in this timeframe (active bodies in public spaces as pathological vessels of contagion *or* as means of individualised health and resilience). In this sense, this perspective highlighted how runners/walkers' bodies and urban landscapes impressed and carried ecological feelings of fear and contagion that could not *exclusively* be ascribed to the widespread imposition and acceptance of bio-political discourses and interventions of “protective negation of life” (Esposito, 2011). Acknowledging the intrusion of Gaia expanded these perspectives by registering how the “cold panic” (Stengers, 2015) of these ecological feelings *also* re-assembled and intensified existing concerns over *morally and aesthetically* polluting bodies and spaces, and the forgotten and inconvenient truth that “viruses can also call the shots”. We contend that this perspective can expand fundamental socio-cultural approaches that understand sport and physical culture as sites of relation to the body that are imbued in power relations⁵ by addressing *the physical* as a domain that (literally) put in place and enable the creation of atmospheric and (political) ecological relationalities in, with, and through the body.

In this sense, an atmospheric reading of the political, cultural, and ecological changes brought to the fore by pandemic event can meaningfully contribute to important work addressing the more-than-human constitution of physical cultures (see Newman et al., 2020). It can do so by articulating the important lines of enquiry raised by this body of scholarship with the inconvenient truth that Gaia's intrusion is not yet another “crisis” to be overcome but is a transcendence that is here to stay (Stengers, 2015 [2009]). Acknowledging the intrusion of Gaia as a formidable, yet forgotten force that is shaping the future of life on earth poses what we contend is a fundamental question: what kind of physical cultures (can) emerge from the ruins left by anthropic devastations and Gaia's agencies?

⁵ We refer here to Bourdieu's evocative definition of sport as a “relation to the body” (1978, p. 833) and to Silk and Andrews' formulation of physical culture (2011, p. 6).

Is there a world to come? For a Physical Cultural (Cosmo)Politics of the Ruins

“The white people, they do not dream as far as we do. They sleep a lot but only dream of themselves.”

(Kopenawa and Albert, 2013, p. 3)

Starting from the pervasive concerns that recreational physical activities in public spaces attracted in the spatial and temporal context of the first lockdown in Italy, this chapter articulated apparently disconnected body/space/health/security entanglements that the public and political focus foregrounded or made inaccessible during the first pandemic wave in Italy. In doing so, we drew on and contributed to work on sport, leisure and physical culture that has underlined the relevance of understanding bodies and spaces as co-constituted and intra-acting with wider ecologies and socio-economic infrastructures operating at different speeds and scales (Newman et al., 2020). Firstly, our discussion reminded how the pervasive and *spectacular* processes of surveillance of (active) bodies in public spaces during the first lockdown in Italy implied the extension *to everybody* of existing processes of surveillance and control of bodies deemed dangerous, suspicious and/or illegitimate in public spaces (e.g. racialised minorities, people on the move and seeking asylum, the urban poor, political activists, etc.); all the while, an already existing public and political consensus regarding whose lives are worth less amid recurring “crises” implied the legitimization of processes of abandonment, destitution and endangerment of those for whom the association between “home” and “safety” was impossible (e.g. prisoners in penitentiaries and detention centres, people experiencing homelessness and domestic violence, etc.).

Yet, an atmospheric reading of the first lockdown in enabled us to keep together the entrenched forms of differential vulnerability intensified by bio- and necro-political (in)actions, moral and aesthetics concerns over indecorous bodies, and the non-human forces that are imposing themselves so clearly to our attention “that they can no longer treated as elements of an inert Earth” (Ghosh, 2020, p. 197). Through this perspective, we addressed the significance of registering and articulating the different

scales, speeds and intensities through which socio-ecological transformations entangle with regimes of bordering, expulsion and extraction, embodied feelings attune to planetary transitions, and the temporalities of lockdown lives merge with those of molecular reproduction.

After all, as Barchetta (2021) contended, when facing the disasters generated by centuries of accumulation by dispossession, human and non-human exploitation, and environmental devastation, what is the Anthropocene if not an *atmospheric diffusion* of toxicity, pollution and differential vulnerabilities to illness and death at a planetary scale?

The space-time tangles (Barad, 2007) that such a perspective underlines complicate many of the public and political narratives that continue to shape the pandemic phenomenon as they represent it in Italy and pretty much elsewhere: the linearity of a pre vs. post pandemic time, of crisis vs. normality or as sport and physical culture as means of contagion vs. “healthy habits”. As the sounds of clapping, balcony chants and the hopes of a more equitable “post-pandemic great reset” fade away and give space to exacerbating social divisions and unrest, political narratives keep on ensuring that the Sars-Cov2 intrusion constituted a temporary interruption of “the ways things have been”; including the ways in which sport, leisure and physical cultures have been practiced, consumed, and managed.

Disavowing the extended spatial-temporal tangles of the pandemic, the focus of political and public (including sporting) narratives fail to consider how the pandemic event constituted the manifestation of an unfolding process rather than an(other) “unprecedented” crisis: to borrow from Davi Kopenawa, the Western/modern and white-centred *anthropos* keeps dreaming only of itself.

However, the introduction of a new invisible character able to reverse the order and hierarchy of agencies (Latour, 2013) forces us to re-locate discussions surrounding the “depths and possibilities of physicality” (Newman et a., 2020, p. 7) in the context of planetary ecological transitions. We contend that it does so by placing physical cultural domains and analyses *amid the ruins* caused by ongoing regimes of extraction and private accumulation, the intensification of entrenched forms of differential vulnerabilities, *and* the intrusion of Gaia.

In this sense, with Navaro-Yashin (2009) we intend the ruins not just as the debris of socio-ecological devastation, and not as the negative counterpart ('the other') to the subjective realm or the social order, but as what is intrinsically constitutive of it. The abject, the ruin is not (only) that which is packed away in the garbage bin (or the waste management centre), the toilet, or the graveyard to maintain personal or social integrity. As Evers addressed discussing "polluted leisure" (2019), *ruination*, though not only related to pollution, is right here, in one's vicinity, environment and domestic space, in one's midst.

However, the point of placing physical cultural domains and analyses amid the ruins is not (only) about illuminating the fault-lines and consequences of ideas of progress, growth and (self)development that constitute physical cultural domains and industries. It is not, to use an oft-cited Antonio Gramsci's quote, taking stock that "the old is dying, and the new cannot be born" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 271).

Rather, to address what physical cultures (can) emerge amid the ruins we consider necessary to engage with ways of being "human" that have been subjugated and violated by modern conceptions of humanity, that have endured amid the ruins *of ending worlds*, but have nevertheless continued to live other relations with time-space-matter implied by other possible and existing forms of being-with-the-world. It is about the necessity to bear witness and support a plurality of "actually existing" ways in which the domain of *the physical* is embedded amid wider socio-ecological relations, as well as ontological and cosmological pluralities (see Fox & Dermott, 2019; McGuire-Adams, 2020).

The notion of atmosphere and the acknowledgement of Gaia's intrusion have afforded us to attune to the bio-social composition of the bodies/spaces/health/(in)security nexus during the first lockdown in Italy in ways that we see advancing some productive questions and insights to scholars and practitioners in sport, leisure, and physical culture.

Yet, while framed as "contributions" these ideas are far from new from perspectives grounded in non-

Western ontologies, and in fact could contribute to *silence them* (see Todd⁶, 2016). In this sense, placing physical cultural domains and analyses *amid the ruins* means explicitly acknowledging that “we” (Western, Euro-American and white scholars) are *only now* starting to come to terms with the instances that multiple silenced, devalued yet undocile *bodies of knowledge* have been addressing before and after the emergence of modernity. As these knowledges and worldviews are currently informing and inspiring multiple socio-ecological struggles around the world (Kopenava and Albert, 2013; Escobar, 2019; Estes, 2019), our question, and ultimately commitment is how we can connect these instances and support those who are already doing it, in the highly commodified, yet contested and “lively” domains of sport, leisure and physical culture.

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⁶ Todd's reflections on *Sila* as climate, life force and atmosphere points to our own lack of knowledge about non-Western ontologies in the specific case of our discussion.

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