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## The sociality of stillness

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## Introduction

In the hustle and bustle of urban life, stillness is peculiar. A beggar crouching on the pavement, a commuter asleep on a train, a couple sitting on a bench in a park: they are – involuntarily, exhaustedly, happily – taking ‘time out’. To practice stillness, people often set themselves apart spatially, making others eddy around them, especially in busy city streets. Stillness is the (often unwelcome) flipside of movement, enforced at traffic lights, in queues, at bus-stops. Moreover, stillness has the potential to alter people’s frame of mind. When witnessed or, even more strongly, when it is experienced, stillness affords reflection, a transposition of consciousness ‘from relation-*in*-the-world towards a relation-*to*-the-world’ (Bissell 2007: 287). In this chapter we examine practices, experiences and the frisson of stillness. We focus on the social organization and practical achievement of stillness in a particular event to exhibit the reflexivity of (im)obility and interaction in public spaces.

On May 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, a ‘freeze mission’ took place at Manchester’s Piccadilly Gardens, as part of the *Futuresonic Festival*, where some of the authors were undertaking a ‘crowd ethnography’. Organized by *Improv Everywhere*, a New York based group of artists famous for their imaginative performance art interventions, this event was part of a series of events, with precedents at New York’s Central station and London’s Trafalgar Square. Categorized as a ‘mission’, a freeze is no standard performance. There is no defined physical stage, no set, no announcement, no audience constituted in advance, no applause, no feature distinguishing the performers from other people. Instead, the freeze mission brings strangers together into a secret meeting space, recruiting them as volunteer ‘agents’ who then move as normal pedestrians in a suitable public space until a secret code signals them to freeze. Participants in a ‘freeze mission’ literally “freeze” in the middle of their walking, gesture or action, as if time had stopped, like in a video put on ‘pause’. Freeze events have mobilized large and small

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crowds in (so far) 70 cities in 34 countries and 6 continents, and through online networks such as Youtube, where the ‘Frozen Grand Central’ video has generated more than 24 million hits (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Improv Everywhere's Frozen Grand Central*.

<http://improveverywhere.com/2008/01/31/frozen-grand-central/>

Freeze events are what are currently known as smartmobs or flashmobs: seemingly spontaneous gatherings in public space, but actually organised through extensive online and mobile phone based communication between strangers (Rheingold 2002). Smartmobs enact a highly effective intersection of virtual and physical mobilities that draws crowds of strangers to secret meeting places. They can have explicit political motivations, such as the ad-hoc demonstrations of 11.4 million people in cities across Spain after the Spanish Government erroneously blamed the 2004 Madrid train bombings on ETA, the Basque separatist movement (Meso Ayeldi 2004). However, more commonly, flashmobs are playful disruptions to everyday life. After five to ten minutes, the ‘agents’ quickly disperse, leaving no trace of the event. *Improv Everywhere's* freeze events are about creating comedy for comedy’s sake; making someone laugh, smile, or stop to notice the world around them (*Improv Everywhere website*). Sometimes compared to a ‘poetic attack’, flash mobs or freeze missions aim at producing the absurd, scenes of chaos and joy in public places. They are bizarre, ephemeral gatherings of strangers for a shared ‘mission’.

For the Manchester mission, about 20 participants produced a nine minute long moment of stillness in the hustle and bustle of a busy public plaza and transport hub. They froze in the middle of a covered passageway between Piccadilly Bus Station and Piccadilly Gardens in Manchester. Like previous freeze missions, the Piccadilly event created not only an obstruction to passers-by but also a brief moment of collective gathering, surprise and joy in an otherwise mundane day in this public space.

The study at hand, based on the analysis of wide angle video recorded participant observations, allows insight into the practical achievement of this kind of extraordinary – bizarre – stillness and the concomitant brief re-organisation of public space and everyday life. Normally, mobility is the ‘default’ state in public space, characterised by a set of rights and obligations: mobility at a standard pace, civil inattention. In the situation we will be describing, these rights and obligations are disturbed and two types of immobility emerge: i) the unusual freeze, ii) passers-by modifying their pace or stopping, looking.

Walking is a total social phenomenon, a collective activity par excellence; the city dweller is a ‘human being of locomotion’ (Joseph 2000). People’s background expectations and common sense knowledge make walking the expected collective behaviour (Lofland 1981, 2008). Ryave and Schenkein (1974) who pioneered studies on mobility in public space reveal walking as a social phenomenon, practically achieved by ‘members’ – or acculturated actors. Similar to the ways in which people are ‘doing being ordinary’ (Sacks 1992), members on the move ‘do’ walking, that is, they are (precognitively) aware of the communicative power of acculturated embodied conduct and use it to ‘read’ other people’s behaviour, to dovetail their own actions into the flow, and to produce or ‘gloss’ intelligible behaviour themselves. In doing so, they rely upon ‘ethno’ or indigenous methods to avoid collisions, to move purposefully or amble through crowded spaces, including practices of ‘togethering’, ‘alone-ing’ and ‘leading’.

The ubiquity and familiarity of these methods makes the phenomenon of walking simultaneously orderly and un-noteworthy. Indeed, it is through these ethnomethods that the commonplace presents itself to us as ordinary, and the exotic as extraordinary (Ryave and Schenkein 1974). Urban space is characterised by an organised flow; passers-by usually recognize others’ activities and pace and anticipate trajectories of other walkers. The freeze in place mission constitutes a breach in the routine grounds of the ‘attitude of everyday life’ (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Due to the unusual stillness, the expected organised mobility is disturbed as passers-by have to modify their pace unexpectedly to avoid the frozen agents and

without giving accountable signs of their actions. Doing walking is no longer the unproblematic member’s accomplishment it commonsensically is, and this is particularly interesting for an analysis of the social organization of stillness.

By disrupting mobility and implementing alternative uses of public spaces, the freeze event constitutes a ‘breach’ in the social order. This breach – on the one hand – allows members’ taken-for-granted expectations and members’ methods for walking in urban space to be revealed, and – on the other hand – enables a study of everyday creativity in the production of everyday life (De Certeau 1984). This can be seen as an aesthetic political act (Molnár 2009; Keller 2009; Maffesoli 1996). In the case of the freeze mission described in this chapter, city dwellers’ expectations – about walking practices, attitude in public places, social interaction with other people present in the same space – are made visible. The analysis will focus on how participants orient differently to the unusual stillness of the frozen performers, entering new categories of membership in public space. Impeded or otherwise moved by the frozen, people react – avoiding the frozen agents, playfully taunting them, stopping to watch, talking to strangers, or moving on. By their actions, some gradually form an impromptu audience.

Thus, as we will see, in this re-organised public space, relevant rights and obligations are tied to emergent categories of membership (‘agents’, passers-by and audience). Reflexively, the participants’ categories are organised in standardised relational pairs and the activities are category-bound. Paired relational categories – husband-wife, friend-friend, stranger-stranger, performer-audience – are extremely powerful phenomena of social organisation, perceptively observed by Sacks, and here, the audience emerges in relation to performers. Drawing on these pair categorizations, the agents assume their position as performers, which emerges in interaction with, and projects, a category ‘audience’. As passers-by actively achieve *being* an audience, interacting with the frozen agents in different ways, these categories emerge reflexively in relation to this specific type of stillness in the public space, where mobility is ordinarily expected. Therefore, the show emerges *as* a show, in no small part by the orientations and actions of passers-by, who modify their own mobility in response to the agents’ frozen state.

In this chapter we will focus on four particularly intriguing aspects: i) The instructed and enacted nature of the performance – the first part of the chapter will provide insight into how the participants conceive of this particular mission as they first discuss the event and coordinate their action online, formulating place and relying on shared background knowledge, and then physically converge onto Manchester Piccadilly Gardens, walking as a

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group. This then leads into an analysis of ii) the in-situ formation of micro-audiences as passers-by orient to agents' stillness and iii) the unfolding collaborative production of puzzlement and eventually 'joy' emerging out of this breach in the expected mobility, and the different playful engagements with the performers. Finally we will describe iv) how walking is achieved in this constrained environment, revealing background expectations and common sense knowledge which make walking in public space the expected collective behaviour.

## 1. Placing the mission

Since the very nature of a freeze mission is to disrupt mobility practices in public places, "what constitutes a 'suitable' space for a mission?" is a central question. Placing the mission somewhere where there is good potential to generate an audience is just one practical challenge, as we will show in this section. This issue is topicalised in the first forum messages – the first virtual meeting – announcing the plan for a mission in Manchester and opening up written exchanges for coordinating the event. On 9<sup>th</sup> April, 'Agent Todd' of *ImprovEverywhere* posted an announcement (Figure 2):

### Official Improv Everywhere event in Manchester on May 1

Posted by [Agent Todd](#) on April 9, 2008 at 2:59pm in [Manchester UK](#)

[View Discussions](#)

Hey! I have been invited to travel to Manchester for the Futuresonic festival! That means we will be organizing an official Improv Everywhere event in Manchester on Thursday, May 1 during the day. The festival is interested in us doing a "freeze", but I'm hoping we can find a way to make it truly unique. I'm open to ideas about location of the freeze, meeting point locations, and ways to spread the word in Manchester. Also, I'm open to ideas on how to make this unique and exciting (something to set it apart from the 60 other worldwide freezes.)

I've never been to Manchester, so I'm super excited about this trip. Maybe we can organize a pub meet up the night before to work some things out? I arrive in the morning on April 30.

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### Replies to This Discussion



[Permalink](#) Reply by [Phil](#) on April 10, 2008 at 5:44pm

Figure 2. Opening on the forum

This attracted a flurry of volunteer agents and suggestions, including Phil's (Figure 3).

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### Replies to This Discussion



[Permalink](#) Reply by [Phil](#) on April 10, 2008 at 5:44pm

This is absolutely amazing mate, really looking forward to meeting you what time are you getting in to manchester?

The easiest place to meet you would probably be manchester picadilly train station, everyone knows where that is and theres a direct train from manchester airport to the train station plus its really close to market street which is the main shopping street in manchester, theres a grassy area with alot of statues and water fountains and lots of people meet there (theres also alot of big business's so on lunch theres alot of people out and about).

As for the freeze itself, we could have something happen that either makes us freeze or something that un freezes us, something really un expected.

[▶ Reply to This](#)

Figure 3. Formulating place

This provides a first orientation for prospective Improv Everywhere volunteer agents, as well as festival visitors who are unfamiliar with Manchester. It also begins the formation of a collective of agents. Apart from its practical goal, this planning of actions and agenda both mobilizes and reveals knowledge that is shared in common between the forum participants. Locals, a category Phil documents being part of, by referring to some places by their names ('Piccadilly train station', 'Manchester airport', 'Market Street') and with descriptions, including descriptions of typical activities in the space. It is 'a grassy area', really close to the main shopping *street* where 'lots of people meet', that is, a place of sociability, where people converge. Phil's description shows his understanding of social interaction and urban mobility as key issues underlying the accomplishment of the freeze.

Agent Todd speaks of "freeze". A more descriptive reference would be "freeze-in-place mission", but he assumes that "freeze" will be understood by the people who share the same background and tacit knowledge of what he is referring to. The term is never explained neither by him nor by Phil, who uses the same category, demonstrating interactional alignment in this digital discourse and co-membership within the wider flash-mob community. The term "freeze" is therefore recipient-designed for members, or cultural insiders, who understand the challenges around the choice of place for the mission. To fit the requirements, places must be public, afford mobility and documentation. As we saw already, Phil shows his understanding of some of the issues at stake in formulating different places, highlighting, amongst other things, the presence of "a lot of people". First of all, "lots of people" implies 'a lot of urban mobility': in order to meet at that specific place, people have to walk there. The more people there are walking, the more their mobility will be hindered, the greater the breach. Second, "lots of people" will emerge as part of *audience* making, a categorial achievement necessary to the volunteer agents' becoming *performers* of an *event*. An event is not a natural outcome of the plan but rather a contingent, assembled product whose properties are cooperatively achieved. A freeze becomes an event by the mutually

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conditionally relevant interactions between the performers' actions and the emergent audience's orientations. Without people noticing and producing some kind of orientation to the frozen's inaction, freezing in place could pass unnoticed and nothing special would be happening. Therefore, "lots of people" does not automatically correspond to "(big) audience", as, we will argue, people actively do being an audience, or not.

The passageway where the mission takes place is the covered area that connects the centre of the city with a busy bus station (Figure 4), where people pass through in all directions. It is therefore characterised by *walkability* – it has been designed and constructed to allow people to move – a characteristic which is topicalised in Phil's description of place. In Figure 4 below, we can see the usual flux permitted by the passage as people walk through in different possible directions. However, actual walking is always accomplished in context, in concrete and precise conditions and configurations that make it possible, creating a *walking situation* (Thibaud 2008). The freeze performance rests on the playful modification of ordinary behaviours and mobilities. It is expected to creatively disrupt a place's usual characteristics and flows, as the agents will "go over there" and then freeze in the middle of the passageway. We are going to see how this conceived space is actually perceived and lived by passers-by, in Parts Two and Three of this chapter, as the usual mobility is disrupted.

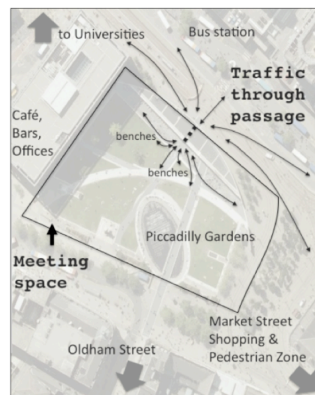


Figure 4. Map of the location of the mission

A month and a series of online exchanges later, Improv Everywhere Agents Todd (Charlie) and Cody have travelled to Manchester and have called their fellow agents to

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Piccadilly Gardens. After having coordinated the event through the exchange of written messages, the whole group meets physically, at one end of Piccadilly Gardens, at the opposite side of the location of the mission, a few minutes before the event. Charlie opens the briefing event. He describes the performance to come, and what participants are expected to do, explaining that he and Cody will be 'in the lead', and be other participants' cue: "when we freeze, you guys freeze, and when we unfreeze, everyone else unfreeze as well". The posture that each participant adopts when freezing should be "creative" but "natural", "unconventional" yet "not silly", anything that looks a "little more striking than just standing". The instructions that are given draw on common sense competencies around the aesthetics of everyday life and art for the purposes at hand. They also demonstrate a strong comprehension of human bodily movements, as Charlie suggests a freeze in mid walk or bending to pick up a dropped bag, and of the overall impression of the performance when Drew, overall festival director and volunteer agent, asks people to 'spread out sideways as well as longways' before they freeze.

As festival director, Drew has a vested interest in aesthetically appealing documentation of the event, but this instruction is also designed to ensure that there is enough space between the 'frozen ones' for people to pass through. The organizers orient to that condition as an essential element of the aesthetic experience of a freeze mission; 'spreading out' makes for attractive photographic visual documentation that plays on the contrast between stillness and movement (Figure 5).





Figure 5. *ImprovEveryWhere* at Manchester (still from ethnographic video) and photo from andthewardrobe's photostream <http://www.flickr.com/photos/7803849@N04/><sup>1</sup>

The reasons are therefore aesthetic as well as practical and tightly linked to the very characteristics underlying the mission. As opposed to a line or cluster of people blocking the passageway, 'spreading out' means that mobility remains possible. This placement allows the performance to emerge as a modification of expected or usual mobility where ordinary pedestrians are not usually compelled to systematically orient to non mobility. The stillness of the frozen ones becomes a mystery; passers-by modifying their pace or direction, or voluntarily stopping to look at what emerges as an *event* actively become an audience. In Part Three, we will see that sometimes passers-by orient to the agents' stillness by their embodied behaviour. And when they do, interesting phenomena about mobility in public space appear.

## 2. Mobility and walking practices

Interestingly, following the brief, as the participants walk round Picadilly Gardens to come through the covered area, they achieve exactly the ordinary mobility that is expected from any member of the urban space. In order to reach the place of the mission, like any

passer-by, they have to walk there. The transportation of our bodies is a commonplace feature of our everyday experience of the world, where the body itself is regularly used for its own self-transportation. Town planning defines mobility as physically changing location in space. But urban mobility cannot be reducible to its strictly physical dimension. Mobility constitutes a complex system of action which generates both displacement and encountering, or at least co-presence between people in a social milieu (Thomas 2003).

In order to get to the passageway on the other side of Picadilly Gardens, the participants achieve *walking in a group*, walking at a relatively slow pace, and orienting to others. In Figure 6 below, a participant turns back, at different moments of the walking. These are some observable productions of several visual orientations that occur during the three and a half minutes' duration of the walk to the location of the freeze. In (1), as the group gets started, we can see Charlie achieving 'leading', positioned at the head of the group. Being in the lead implies checking upon whether the other members are (still) following, and deciding upon the pace, which should allow a certain degree of coordination between the members walking together as a group. *Walking as a group* is a concerted activity (Joseph 1998). In (4), Charlie turns back one last time as the group is a few metres away from the covered area. By turning round – much longer than his previous glance twelve seconds earlier – he probably checks whether everyone is present, thus orienting to the necessity of coordinating, not only the walking, but also everyone's action in view of the freeze.



Figure 6. Participants walking in a group to the passageway

However, they do not achieve walking very tightly as a large group, but break up into smaller 'vehicular units' (Goffman 1963). First, maintaining a large group walking-together is a classic street challenge (Ryave and Schenkein 1974). Second, a large group would be identifiable from a distance. Though they are close and orienting visually to each other, the participants featuring in the video record achieve either *two by two* formations – like Charlie and Cody (1), and the couple at the centre (2) – or *alone* – the woman wearing the dark dress

(2), the long-haired man in black pull-over (4). Interestingly, their ‘togetherness’ or ‘aloning’ as they walk corresponds to the posture they will adopt for the performance.

In Figure 7 below, the two couples are doing more than expected walking-together-bound-activities (Ryave and Schenkein 1974) like conversing: They can be seen rehearsing their freeze positions. Though their respective conversations are not audible, it is possible to see and hear in the video that the two couples walking-together are talking to each other. In (1), walking side-by-side, Charlie is on the left. In (2), he shifts, passes behind Cody, continuing to walk at her height. Four seconds later in (3), as she looks at her watch worn on the left hand, he seizes her right hand, accelerates the pace to walk ahead of her, outstretching their arms and maintaining briefly their holding hands position, looks at her, while continuing walking. The posture in (3) that they produce during their walking, we understand later, is the frozen position that they are going to hold during the nine minutes’ freeze (4).

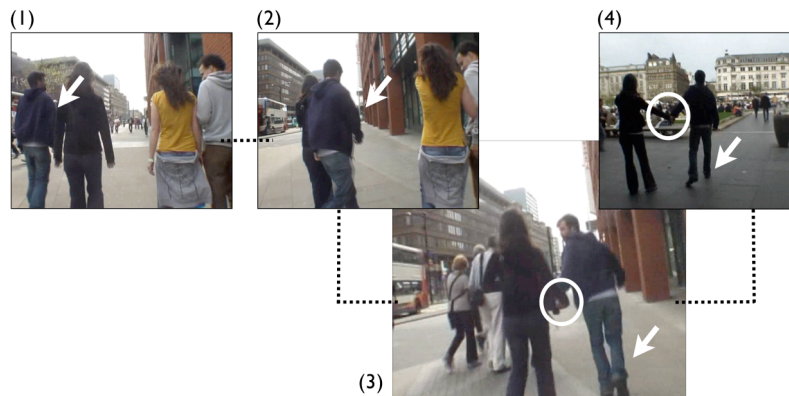


Figure 7. Rehearsing while walking

This ‘rehearsal’ takes place while they walk to the location of the mission. Walking is a social activity that unfolds in time. Whether on foot or by public transportation, getting from one place to another takes time. In the case at hand, the agents who appear in the video use this walking time to organise and coordinate their future action. As they enter the passageway, no one is seen turning back or giving any visible clue of their being a group or that something is going to happen. Ordinarity is at the heart of the performance in order to progressively generate surprise. They continue walking normally – giving clues about their next actions and

orienting to other passers-by – until the signal to freeze is given. Picture (4) above is the exact moment when Charlie and Cody, who are in the lead and serve as other participants’ cue, freeze. The way stillness is achieved is interesting: Charlie and Cody do not stop walking and then take a pose; they freeze in the course of their bodily movement which appears as a natural posture. The specific characteristic of the freeze-in-place mission emerges out of this very contrast between their arriving to the covered area as ‘normal people’ walking, and their freezing-in-place in the middle of a passageway – a place of mobility. In a passageway, people usually assume that others should be walking, or otherwise ‘do’ stopping, that is, stand or wait in a way that is recognizable and understandable by other members in this ‘public arena’ – for example, demonstratively waiting to one side of the flow, as the agents did when they assembled on the pavement on edge of the public space for the brief (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Waiting on the edge

In contrast, immobile, ‘frozen’ people constitute a departure from these expectations, a breach that draws the usually invisible, taken-for-granted moral order of mobility and people’s common understandings to the fore (Garfinkel 1967). Thus, on one level, the participants – stopped in the middle of the walking area – constitute obstacles, creating constrained ‘navigational problems’ for walkers (Ryave and Schenkein 1974). Avoiding collision, suddenly, is no longer the concerted, collaborative effort it commonsensically is, but the responsibility of passers-by. Normally, not respecting these unspoken rules – when walking faster or slower than the average speed, or when stopping unexpectedly – turns bodies into ‘inference-making machines’ in Sacks’ terms, which enables others to work out reasons and likely next actions (Sacks 1992; Lee and Watson 1993). A person might visibly and audibly be in a hurry or stop to pick up a dropped item. The material, lived and embodied nature of people’s actions, mobility or stillness, provides other participants with continuous

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'instructions' for orienting themselves to their environment and making appropriate inferences for their own courses of action (Cicourel 1968). The contrast between their ordinary walking and their now frozen postures is important: While their former activity did provide clues for projecting next actions, their frozen postures are composed in a way that prevent from providing such clues.

Consequently, the participants in the mission are not simply immobile, explicitly 'doing' not walking in an orderly, recognizable and understandable way. Their stillness is 'striking' in the postures they have adopted: mid walk, looking at their wrist watches, about to shake hands, tying shoelaces (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Frozen positions

Charlie had asked the participants to freeze in the very *process* of producing everyday activity. Usually, glances, looks and postural shifts carry all kinds of implications and meanings (Goffman 1981: 1). Freezing is a particular – peculiar – achievement of immobility.

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Its stillness constitutes a violation of the commonplace flux. Unlike a waiting, stopping or standing person, the participants' frozen body does not provide clues about their reason for stopping or their likely next action. The result is a mystery, a suspension of the attitude of everyday life, ordinary reality, the taken-for-granted world (Lofland 2008). In the inexplicable frozen ordinariness, passers-by recognise that 'something *unusual* is happening' (Emerson 1970). Indeed, in the Youtube video of the Frozen Grand Central Station event, passers-by jokingly suspect "Aliens!"

### 3. The emergence of orientations and audience making

In our data, a range of various actions are produced by passers-by as they orient differently to the freeze. This specific breach of the social order interestingly reveals issues about mobility in urban space: Both members' methods for walking and members' expectations about normal behaviour. As the rights and obligations characterising public space are disturbed, passers-by either modify their pace or stop. Analysis is interested in the way these modifications of pace or trajectory are finely achieved, and how people progressively orient to the frozen and become – voluntarily or not – an emerging audience. People's orientation to non mobility is an important dimension for the analysis as it reveals the collaborative, situated, reflexive production of the event *as* an event. Public space is not predefined once and for all; it is, on the contrary, the object of a social construction, that is ongoingly and situatedly accomplished. How does immobility give rise to an urban public situation where the usual co-presence of passers-by is disturbed? How is mobility ordinarily accomplished? The way navigational problems emerge, when the mobility of walkers is hindered or altered, and how they finely manage to negotiate-coordinate their walking in this constrained environment, or constitute themselves into audiences, will be described below.

#### 3.1 Becoming an audience

When the participants first freeze, there are already people sitting on the benches or standing around. There are also people arriving from the station or the Gardens and using the passageway. Figure 10 below shows the progressive orientation of two members of the public space. In (1), the participants have just spread across the passageway at the very beginning of the performance. The two men on the left of the picture, the older one sitting and the younger one standing, are talking to each other in a *vis-à-vis* arrangement (Kendon 1990). The public



route between the bench and the restaurant adjoining the passageway is clear except for a couple visibly waiting on the corner. It takes a full minute for the two men to visibly take note of the performance (between 1 and 2). Now both men are orienting to the frozen in place participants (4).

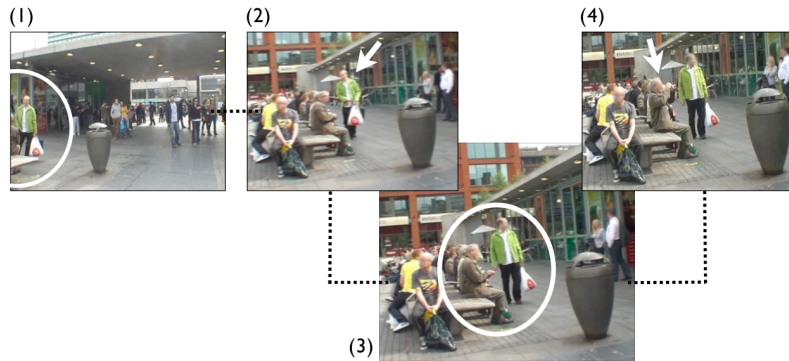


Figure 10. Progressive orientation to 'something happening'

By taking a picture, the seated man publicly documents his understanding that something extraordinary has happened, contributing to the surprising, amusing aspect of the performance: Something is happening that deserves a picture to be taken. Similar shifts in orientation are observable all around. Through these actions, the people already present become an emerging audience. They cannot be categorised as a 'ready-made' audience, because it is only by their changing orientation from individual conversations and unconnected focused encounters, or by altering or stopping their walking, that they progressively become a *gathering* oriented towards a shared focus (Goffman 1963) or an audience. Thus, we see in the progressive emerging of an audience, once more, how the participation framework and engagement with the performance is characterised by a flexible and changing dynamics, which also characterises mobility in urban space.

As they become an audience, people are seen documenting and broadcasting their experience, like the man above. It is possible to see a young man taking a picture, while a girl is talking about the performance to a friend on her mobile and a young man is texting. In Figure 11, the two passers-by's emerging orientation towards documentation is captured. After passing through the 'frozen ones' (1), the pedestrian looks back (2), and then starts video-recording the scene, while stepping back and joining the audience (3). His actions are

visibly seen by another person, who comes closer (4), raises his camera (5), and rapidly takes a picture (6) before resuming walking.

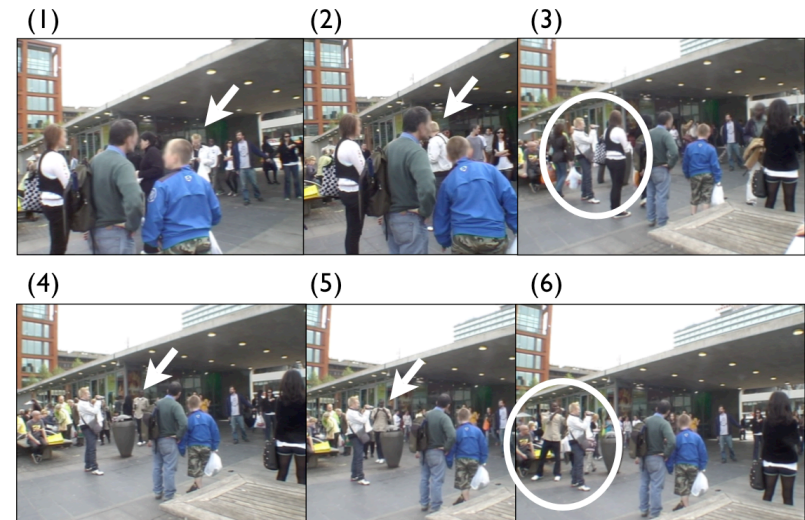


Figure 11. Video recording and picture taking

It is interesting to note that once he has positioned himself as part of the 'audience', the pedestrian recording in Figure 11 does not move again for a long time. The second participant's actions seem to "copy" parts of his doings: first in deciding to take a picture, second by positioning himself to do so next to him. These actions make visible the participants' common sense understanding of 'something *unusual* happening' that deserves recording and of a 'good angle' for capturing it. A face-to-face positioning is the commonsensically expected arrangement of audience to performers (Goffman 1981). At this point, it is important to examine how the audience formation is accomplished in relation to the way the agents positioned their bodies – both in terms of their pose and their distribution 'spread out' in space – in relation to the ecology of this specific environment and the new mobilities it brings to the place. On their way to the bus station or through the Gardens into the city centre, pedestrians using the passageway are channelled together and the passageway is characterized by two-way walking traffic typical of many public pedestrian routes (Relieu 1999). Having entered the passageway from the bus station, the performers' bodies are directed towards the Gardens – an open area with grass and benches, what Mondada (2002)

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has described as a 'natural' stage. People interrupt their walking and look back, increasingly orienting towards the area of the performance, arranging their bodies to face it. Therefore, the unfolding walking, noticing, turning or stopping flow is very much linked to the spatial characteristics of the passageway and the performers' appropriation of it.

We have already seen how the frozen performers occupy and obstruct the flow in the central area. However, pedestrians moving from several directions into the narrow passageway towards the Gardens often do not realize anything unusual or, at least do not respond, until they encounter what appears as a growing audience. Those approaching from the Gardens, increasingly have to weave their way through passers-by, inexplicably slowing down or stopping to orient towards the performance. As they come face to face with the frozen participants, many either stop to join the audience, or hesitate but continue walking. The frozen performers disturb the usual flow as walking leaders and their followers (Lee and Watson 1993) evade the frozen agents. As they orient to the event by interrupting their walking and joining the group, walkers coming from different directions and noticing the frozen participants – ongoingly and collectively – construct a semi-circle around the participants, visibly *doing* standing and watching as members of the *audience*. The audience is seen growing as pedestrians encounter turbulence.

It is possible to distinguish several levels of mobility / immobility here: i) freezing in place in the midst of unfolding everyday activity, ii) moving on with or without noticing something unusual, iii) noticing, stopping and staring, doing standing and watching instead of walking, and iv) *doing* sitting down and watching after having oriented as in (iii). This is how this freeze in place mission as a whole – including performers and audience – emerges as an event that generates surprise and joy. It disturbs common sense expectations about the default passageway flux and creates a visual performance to be looked at.

The extraordinariness of the situation is further defined by the fact that it is not usually socially appropriate to take pictures of strangers in public places (Urry, 1990). The frozen participants therefore emerge as part of a category of people that can be gazed at and photographed. The recording and photographing actions (Figure 11) also make visible people's understanding of the best angle view relative to the practical issue of how to orient corporally to the event. Therefore, even before the participants have made sense of the exact nature of the activity, they identify the performers as a *group* engaged in a collective activity, with another group watching. Some recognize the performers as an ensemble, and avoid the whole group by circumnavigating around them, which makes the emergent audience another point of friction. Members' common understanding of social situations makes it inappropriate

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to cut across invisible lines of social engagement, be it a conversation, people walking together, or the categorical pairing of performers and audience. The audience can be considered as an 'occasional' crowd (Blumer 1951), an 'overpopulated' *encounter* in Goffman's terms, in the sense that it presents an exceedingly complex array of mutual monitoring possibilities and constraints (Lofland 2008). The street's occasional crowd is civilised and, usually without engaging in focused interactions, its members coordinate their respective actions.

This is most likely based on the visibility of the social connection between them (Lee and Watson 1993). Rather than only considering their individual trajectory and navigational space in front of them, people constantly take others into account, with peripheral vision of near to 180 degrees. People consider others' categorical incumbency, their spatial positioning, their projected trajectories, etc. In effect, the visual order of things is an omnipresent and potent characteristic of public spaces (Goffman 1963, 1983); visibility represents a critical operational resource for the joint orientation of participants to these dynamic forms of organisation (Lee and Watson 1993). Indeed, in this 'public arena' characterised by mutual accessibility to one another's doings, actions and gazes, members orienting to the frozen-in-place participants are themselves visible to others. Therefore, visibility arrangements appear to be relevant in two ways. First, the deictic gaze contributes to collective concerted action. Members' visual orientations deictically point out the object worthy of attention, showing other members where to look. Second, constraints linked to the impropriety of gazing at strangers, are collectively lifted, suspending the principle of *civil inattention* in public places (Goffman 1963). Therefore, the freeze stillness is visibly treated by members of the public space as a special kind of non-mobility.

Surprised at first, sometimes visibly enchanted or disorientated, pedestrians make sense of the situation. They cumulatively align their understanding of the situation and, though they may engage to varying degrees, they collectively constitute an audience. This is how, from people's doings, the frozen-in-place emerge as performers, their doing stillness as part of a show. One of the main desired consequence of the freeze is the production of joy as some members of the public space engage with the freezing and try to initiate interaction with the frozen participants. Joy and surprise are analysable as visibly manifested by the members in their orientations, in a way that is publicly demonstrated to other members, and is available for analysis. Surprise demonstrations will be described below as people walk through and orient differently to this unusual immobility and impromptu show, and analysis will show how joy is produced in the teenagers' playful engagements with the performance.

### 3.2 Playful engagements with the performance

The first playful engagements with the performance are produced less than a minute after it has started. Two groups of teenagers – one on left and one at the rear – can be seen in the video. The group of eight at the rear are laughing, turning round the frozen participants, and making wide gestures, running while waving arms. They progressively come forward and taunt other frozen participants before leaving the passageway, walking-together as a large group. About the same moment, three teenage girls on the left side come forward amongst the frozen. One of them swings her arms, slightly bending her body and maintains this ballet-like position for a second. She recovers a straight position and takes a step back, as the group stays in between the frozen for one and a half minute, talking amongst themselves. They then go to different areas of the passageway, surrounding other frozen participants, where they taunt the frozen agents, exaggeratedly waving their arms and laughing. This playing with the frozen lasts several minutes.

The two male teenagers in Figure 12 below arrive from the station about four minutes after the beginning of the freeze. They pass very slowly in between the frozen, turning back several times as they come forward, both walking nonchalantly with their hands in their jeans' pockets. When they pass in front of the camera, both are laughing. T1 laughs out loud and covers his mouth with his left hand. They go to the right side of the passageway and stand at the edge for about a minute before they engage with the performance, shown in Figure 12.



Figure 12. “What time is it?”

They both come back (1), walking-together, but T2 hesitates in his walking as he says something to his mate, and stops mid-way. T1 arrives face-to-face with Cody, raises his left hand, looking at his watch and says something to Cody. As T1 tries initiating interaction, T2 turns his gaze and body away, and laughs heartily (2). He continues laughing, while he turns round, pretends to go (3), stops again, turns back and stands still to look at the scene (4). After the ‘interaction initiation’ fails (of course Cody does not produce any second turn or movement), T1 comes close behind her and looks at her watch over her shoulder (5). Touching his own watch at his wrist, he asks “what time is it?”. Then he quickly straightens his body, directs his gaze in front of him and walks towards his mate, smiling (6). The other playful engagement is produced by another group of teenagers. We present a transcript below.

#### “Replay” extract: Index of participants

Boy 1 = with cap, Girl = Girl using her mobile, Boy 2 = with black jacket

1 Boy 1 ((looks at the show))



2 Boy 1 REPLAY↑  
 3 Girl ((turns over to Boy 1))  
 4 Boy 1 ((looks at Boy 2))  
 5 Boy 1 [ahah  
 6 Cohort [ah ahah::: hihiii eupp  
 7 Girl ((going to the cohort))



8 Boy 2 what the hell↑ °is tha°



Like T1 looking at the watch, Boy 1 interacts with the event with a personal performance; He points and noisily enunciates 'replay'. This is audible beyond his peer group. The Girl turns to look at Boy 1 (line 2), and then walks across to join the rest of the group (line 7, pictures 1-4). A first question that arises at this juncture is what makes this a 'peer group'? How do they achieve *being* a group in public? Apart from being readily recognized as members of the same categories of age, sex, and dressing (they are all male – except for the Girl – teenagers dressed in a hip hop style, Mondada (2002) their common orientation to the freeze, their laughing at Boy 1's performance, their nested F-formation arrangement (Kendon 1990) at the end of the excerpt documented in the visual transcript above, all contribute to their identification as a group.

By shouting 'replay', Boy 1 temporarily becomes an object of attention, and in this way a 'performer' whose action is oriented to, though to different degrees. Thus, there exist different participation frameworks between categories of 'performer' and 'spectator', and limits are not given *a priori*, they are negotiated. Members can become one or the other, as the categories are achieved in an emergent and situated way, by the actors' *doings*, in a way that is characteristic of the dynamics underlying public urban places. Indeed, the performance format emerges as semi-permeable, where different participation frameworks, and where different orientations and understandings of what is happening, are allowed to mix. This type of orientation is quite playful with regards to the freeze, which emerges as a 'performance' by the type of orientations produced. Boy 1 making a spectacle of himself is not considered as inappropriate; his orientation seems to be considered as a relevant participation, as achieving spectatorship. In effect, it is socially tolerated that, when watching a 'show', a participant's production may take the form of a noisy manifestation, like clapping hands, hissing, etc.

In view of this public / publicized playing with the freeze, the semantic content of 'replay' is quite interesting. First of all, the term 'replay' points to the very specific characteristic of the performance, that is, its unusual stillness. Boy 1's understanding of this specific immobility is made visible. The term metaphorically compares the performance to a recording seen on a DVD player that has been put on 'pause'. Indeed, the frozen performers look like they have been 'paused', as if time had stopped, definitely not like ordinary people stopping in the middle of ordinary passageway proceedings (which would require visibly performed reasons and repair actions, such as a retreat to the edges). This brings us back to the core idea of the freeze-in-place mission, and the very characteristics underlying it. By his physical placement, which is 'outside' the passageway which now emerges as a stage, and by his pointing, Boy 1 reflexively positions himself as being exterior to the event, and thus to the performance. He points to this performance as being a show, not a real-life one, but one taken from the TV screen, and that could ideally be manipulated using a distant remote control. The 'pause' function / button allows this passage from movement to immobility and back to movement again, by simply pressing a button. In that sense, the practical achievement of stillness constitutes a kind of real-life movie stop, inviting people to play with the divisibility and indivisibility of movement.

'Replay', accompanied by the pointing gesture, constitutes an instruction, or a command. It makes a second pair part conditionally relevant, that is, the execution of that instruction. 'Replay' aims at unfreezing the performers but it fails. T1's attempt to initiate interaction, and his asking "what time is it?" also failed. Neither the teenagers T1 and T2, nor the other people

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around see this failure, of getting the frozen back to mobility, as problematic. The brazen attempt to interact with the frozen participants or to control the performance provokes laughter. Laughing is a joint synchronised activity, federating the members *doing* laughing together as an identifiable cohort. It attracts attention and facilitates some embodied flirtation between Boy1, Girl, and Boy2. The laughing reveals Boy1 did not expect the performers to actually start moving again on his cue (that would have been a surprise!). It was a playful, humorous exploitation of the show, a document to the creative potential inherent in 'doing being' performers, members of the audience and passers-by. Surprise is also revealed by Boy2's commentary-question: 'what the hell↑ °is tha°' – without doubt voicing the thoughts of many witnesses of the event.

### 3.3 Making sense of something happening

We observed that most people, after stopping, sought to understand the emergent situation and organise their actions accordingly. Indeed, the first phase of the Manchester freeze mission resembled catastrophe situations that have been described by collective behaviour researchers (Blumer 1951; Quarantelli 1999), occasioning a collective labour of defining the situation and the focus of attention. Micro-audiences constitute themselves and engage in evaluating, and contextualizing available information, as the attitude of everyday life is suspended; the frame of ordinary reality, the taken-for-granted world, is made consciously problematic (Lofland, 2008). In these studies, actions are seen as being coloured by emotions, among which figure joy and surprise which are of interest for our discussion. Lofland's description of the way dominant emotions are publicly communicated and socially shared productively sharpens analytical sensitivities for observing actions collectively produced by people here. We observe that what psychologists often describe as 'psychic mechanisms' of 'contagion' and 'convergence' (Smelser 1963; Kendra and Wachtendorf 2003) are actually actively and practically achieved social phenomena – at least as well, if not predominantly. What appears in the analysis of the unfolding of the event, is a collaborative achievement of understanding that something is happening and a collective orientation to it, though to varying degrees.

We are aware of the fact that the cameras and the activity of filming and taking pictures has surely contributed to the reflexive establishment of the scene, especially at the beginning of the freeze. By their visible orientations and doings, the ethnographers and the Festival photographers contribute to the pedestrians' emergent sense of something

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extraordinary happening. They demonstrate for the future *audience* the importance of the freeze event and offer them the possibility to coordinate their behaviour in the same way. However, it is impossible to know exactly to what degree. Thirty seconds only after the freeze has started, two groups of teenagers (whose action we have described at the beginning of the previous section), one at the back and one on the left towards the middle – where the cameras are not very visible – are already playfully taunting the frozen. Therefore members of this public space rapidly recognize that something is happening and produce orientations to the frozen, engaging with them at different degrees. Some passers-by also orient to the video ethnographer. More specifically, we have evidence that they orient to the fact that there is a camera filming and that, by passing through, they are in the view.

A young man maintains his gaze in direction of the camera as he comes forward. Coming from the station, he navigates in between the frozen bodies and crosses five other persons who are going in the opposite direction. He turns his head around several times. After he has crossed the last passerby, he is surrounded by the frozen bodies only, and probably perceives the absence of movement. He looks left, then right – visibly puzzled – while producing a very slow and hesitant step, as if he were going to stop, and resumes walking. He makes three quick steps before he notices and looks at the camera. He raises his hand, orienting to the video ethnographer, as he changes direction 'away' from the field of the camera, speeding up his pace. He continues looking at the camera as he maintains his gesture, before looking down in front of him, 'watching where he is walking'. Vision is an essential element of walking, as it allows passers-by to make sense of the environment, to orient towards their own trajectory but also to detect other persons' presence and to anticipate their trajectories from a distance. It is therefore possible to consider gaze direction and walking direction as being reflexively linked, mutually elaborating each other, and as being part of trajectory constitution (Lee and Watson 1993).

A minute earlier, just after the beginning of the freeze, an old man walking with a cane came face to face with the camera as he moved forward. Arriving from the station, he walked between the frozen participants, looked on the right, crossed the first photographer, then the second, and continued walking while looking down in front of him. When he raises his head, he sees the camera, looks in its direction and quickly changes walking trajectory, pace and gaze direction. This changing is both visible and audible: the sound of his leaning on his cane is louder and irregular as he shifts direction and crosses in front of the camera. The navigational problem he is encountering is more linked to his orientation of his crossing the field than to the physical obstacle constituted by the ethnographer's body. Despite visible

anticipation work on the man's part, the ethnographer is still at a distance when the man changes direction and pace.

In figure 13 below, the young woman also orients to the cameras. She looks at the ethnographer (1), at the photographer (2) and then at the frozen (3). Therefore, we have evidence that the presence of cameras, and the photographers' mobile and active picture-taking activity reflexively contribute to people's making sense of something happening.



Figure 13. Visual orientations to participants around and of the freeze

Apart from the joy and surprise produced, or how people progressively make sense of something happening and orient to it, the central issue of interest for this chapter is how walking is achieved in this constrained environment, and what this reveals about ordinary walking practices. How do walkers adapt their pace and trajectory as navigational problems emerge and their mobility is hindered or altered?

### 3.4 Walking in a constrained environment

As the normal flux of the passageway is modified by the frozen bodies and the activities surrounding and emerging from the freeze, passers-by have to manage their mobility in this constrained environment. They need to find their way between the frozen and navigate in order to avoid collision with other co-present members of this public space. The way mobility is negotiated in a contingent and situated way makes visible the way in which the freeze performance rests on the playful modification of the place's usual characteristics and flows. While the passerby in Figure 13 visually orients to the cameras and to what is being filmed / photographed, she also orients to the necessity of avoiding collision with the photographer. In Figure 14, we can see how she changes direction (2) to get around the photographer and pass *behind* her (3) and continues her way.



Figure 14. Navigational problems

Due to their mobility and non-linear trajectories as they move in between participants or step backwards, the photographers' bodies constitute physical obstacles that passers-by need to avoid. The avoidance of collision is a basic index to the accomplished character of walking (Ryave and Schenkein 1974). Visually orienting to the freeze and looking into the lens of their cameras, they give priority to the contingencies of what is happening around the frozen – people walking, engaging with the freeze, etc. – and move in order to capture the action from the appropriate angle. Engaged in their activity of taking pictures – in a way that is visible and accountable for others – they actively accomplish the category 'photographer'. The expected behaviour of *doing being* a professional photographer exempts them of the 'set of rights and obligations' expected from members of the category 'passer-by' or other members of the public space. Though they achieve the work of managing not to collide, the photographers do not make visible their projected action and trajectory to other people who cannot anticipate what will be their path or pace.

In figure 15 below, the two young women are walking-together, at the same pace when the one leading abruptly stops (1). At this precise moment, the young woman following her is denied indication of this sudden change of rhythm, and does not recognise the projected stopping. Anticipation work is not achieved and she narrowly avoids collision (2). Usually, avoiding collision is a collaborative and concerted effort; here it is the sole achievement of the follower. As she bypasses the one that suddenly stopped, she progressively slows down her pace and orients to 'what the other is looking at' (3) and stops in turn (4). The temporality of the passer-by's transition from walking to standing (Mondada 2009) is linked to her progressive understanding that something is happening. By stopping and looking, she aligns with the action of the other people around, and organises her conduct accordingly to the audience formation.



Figure 15. ‘Managing’ not to collide

Once again, it is possible to see the mixing format: The limit between the category ‘passerby’ and ‘spectator’ is not fixed, and can change at any moment. Categories progressively and situatedly emerge by the ongoing actions of members as they make urban space theirs.

Adjustment in avoiding collision occurs also in the example below, as the two passers-by achieve a different type of walking-together by avoiding collision with another person (Figure 16). Coming from the central aisle of the Gardens, two young men are walking towards the bus area and are going to pass in between the frozen. In (2), the one on the right turns his head as they arrive at the same height as Cody, whereas the one on the left gives no sign of having noticed anything unusual. They come face-to-face with a man – let us call him Jack – who, at that moment, is accountably walking in the opposite direction as them (2). According to the *continuity maxim* (Relieu 1996), a passer-by moves forward in a specific direction, following a displacement lane that is being drawn beyond the position he is occupying at a given moment. Mobility rests on passers-by’s mutual trust: each one is going to respect the displacement lane, or is going to give clues of adjustment when changing trajectory. But Jack is not ‘ordinarily’ circulating in the passageway, even if one minute earlier, he was. Coming from the right through the passageway, he walked in between the frozen until he arrived towards the middle. He slowed down, stopped completely, turned around, made a few steps, stopped again with his right fist on his hip.

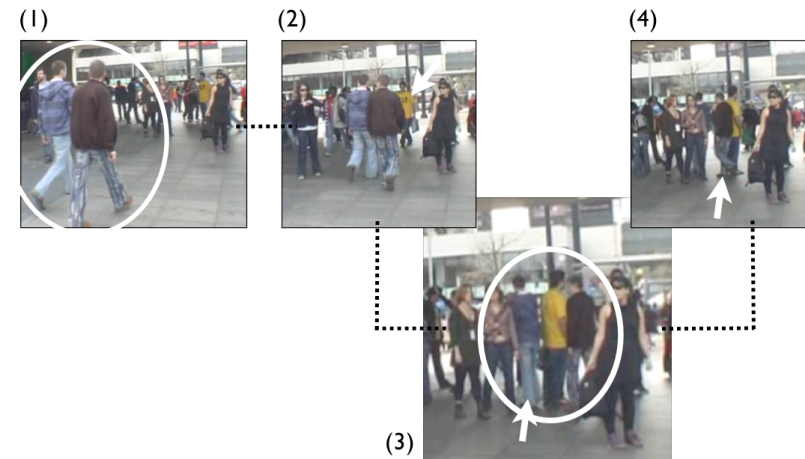


Figure 16. ‘Managing’ not to collide and walking-together

A minute later, when the two young men are approaching, Jack is still in the middle of the passageway, visibly wondering and looking around in trying to make sense. He makes a few steps forward (2), like he did previously in between the frozen, and therefore projects a walking path. Anticipating his trajectory, the two young men head forward, preparing to cross him on his left. But he suddenly changes his trajectory, taking a 90° turn on his left, and stops after one footstep (3). By not giving attention to his navigational responsibilities, Jack makes visible that he is orienting to something else. His abrupt and unaccountable change of trajectory and stopping blocks the way of the two young men. They avoid collision by stopping and rapidly continuing their way by going round him. The way they do bypassing – passing both on the left – is interesting in two ways. First, they continue doing *togethering*, maintaining their walking side by side despite the natural boundary constituted by Jack’s body. Second, they show preference for passing *behind* him. By his corporal orientation, it is more likely that Jack will move right, that is forward. By passing behind him, they show their real-time reasoning of his predictable path, and accomplish the anticipation work of ‘managing’ not to collide.

Two other walkers’ orientation to this situation documents the extraordinary production of walking in a passageway designed for walking as infringing (Figure 17). Coming from the bus area, both can be seen slaloming between the frozen-in-place performers. In (1) below, the projected trajectory of the walker on the left (W1) is directed



towards the right part of the screen: the legs, trunk and head orient forward. The walker on the right (W2) is orienting towards the middle. As they come forward, W1's upward glance is an indication that he has noticed something. He modifies his trajectory. W2, too, changes his intended direction at exactly the same moment. In (2), the position of each walker's legs and feet clearly shows the modification of their respective initial trajectories, which would have put them on collision course. W2 makes a sharp swivel of the leg, slows down slightly and walks through passing behind W1 (3). It is not possible to know exactly what these two walkers are orienting to in changing their trajectory so strongly as they come forward (possibly noticing a gap allowing access to the path ahead). But they both achieve an artful modification of their trajectories, and succeed in avoiding collision. In (3), W1 casts a quick glance behind him. Note also how the frozen in place participants' stillness is made visible in the contrast to the walkers' mobility and changes in direction.



Figure 17. Artful modification of trajectories

They achieve *doing walking* around a navigational problem made up first, of several frozen performers, and then other people looking in their direction identifying them as breaking the rules. We already know that the nature of the performance rests on the breach of routines, expectations, and culturally methodic practices of walking (Ryave and Schenkein

1974). The participants do not strongly orient to the still participants as hindering the normal and identifiable walking flux characterising dynamic public spaces (Lee and Watson 1993). Rather, they orient to *their* crossing through the participants as a departure from the expected action. Their breach of the area of performance reflexively breaches civil inattention that is expected for themselves; their movement and corporal positioning (facing the audience) makes of them relevantly ratified members of a category of people that can be looked at.

Our observation of people's trajectories, especially during the first minutes of the performance, suggest that people's visual access to the faces and front bodies of the frozen agents is crucial to their understanding of the performance. We have shown in section 3.1 how people taking pictures or video recording then event oriented to the face-to-face position. This becomes clear as we change direction. While most walkers coming from the Gardens and facing the performers either stop short or bypass the group, people coming from the bus station, cross through the area where the participants have frozen in place, seemingly only mildly disturbed. Passers-by do not readily recognise the performance, or at least the group's common activity, and walk through. As they come forward, they come face to face with the audience. Contrary to the performers whose action they visibly had not recognised, the audience can be identified at a glance. And, by following the audience's orientation, the passers-by reflexively recognize that something is happening and at the same time, that they must have just crossed the area and activity taking place there, which have emerged as worth the audience's attention and gaze. Being gazed at with curiosity turns their cutting across the group of performers into an infraction. We can see here the importance of practices – and shared orientation to practices – in creating order and how interactional breaches cause immediate trouble. As they violate the local order, they become the Accountable Other (Rawls and David 2006), *strangers* in this peculiar urban space, where conformity is the moral obligation to conform to situated interactional expectations that sets one free from traditional conformity. They are achieving neither of the two categories – *performers* and *audience* – that have emerged. Having pointed out unwritten rules of avoiding to cut across invisible lines of social engagement, can this crossing of the area of the performance, walking in between a group of participants be considered an *infraction*? Maybe. If so, passers-by are drawn into the breaching experiment as unwitting performers, which may contribute to the joy of experiencing the freeze missions.

Anyway, in these descriptions of the work accomplished to avoid collision, it is possible to examine how surprise emerges. Jack (Figure 16) stops in the middle of the passageway and walks around for a whole minute, looking at the frozen agents, looking

dramatically puzzled by this strange situation. The young woman in Figure 15 abruptly stops, forcing the woman following her to orient to the freeze, too. As she avoids a collision, the follower looks towards the frozen, looks at the young woman who made her stop, looks at the camera and looks around. The woman who first stopped dead in her tracks also looks around, turning her head in all directions. Both are noticeably surprised and are looking around, trying to make sense of the situation. Arranged *side-by-side*, like other people around orienting to a common object and focus of attention, they achieve their *becoming an* audience. After looking all around, the first woman rummages through her bag, takes out her camera and takes a picture before leaving.

The actions we have been analyzing are empirical descriptions of some reactions occasioned by this moment of stillness. We have described how passers-by orient to the navigational problems occasioned by the event and adapt their walking to the mobility contingencies in the passageway. Before that, analysis has focused on how people achieve 'being an audience' in a recognisable way, after having made sense of something happening; some members document the event by taking pictures or filming. Other members, like the groups of teenagers, go beyond 'audienicing' and engage with the performance in a playful manner. In this way, they express the joyful and playful character of the breaching of common sense expectations. They engage with the performance, either mimicking the participants' stillness, dancing in an exaggerated way just beside them, or taunting them by coming very close to them and trying to disrupt their stillness.

#### 4. Back to mobility

The playful instruction 'Replay' did not restore the proper order of flow and counterflow mobility in the passageway, but Charlie's and Cody's unfreezing does. Nine minutes after the participants froze in place, they resume normality. They had agreed upon the fact that everyone should keep an eye on Charlie and Cody, who, like for the freezing, would serve as the cue. Finely coordinating their action, the performers all unfreeze at about the same moment. No prior indication is given to the audience; the performers slip away, dissipate into the crowd, simply by doing walking again, in a visible and recognizable way. Once again, visual accessibility to each other's action in this public space proves to be essential; first, for the performers to coordinate their action; and second, for the audience to grasp that the event has ended.

This is, again, a delayed recognition. Members of the audience do recognise that the performers are resuming moving. In Figure 18, a girl's pointing gesture keeps on looking and pointing and then loses one of the performers walking away (2 - 4).



Figure 18. Pointing gesture towards the performer

She and other members can be seen to be puzzled by the dissipating performers. But not for long. Not unlike the performers, many audience members join in the re-creation of a mobile state of passage-way order. The man turning towards the visual performance simply keeps walking and the young women captured standing still at the edge in (1) resume walking, like the performer *doing* 'back to mobility'.

No applause is produced as the performers disappear. This absence attests to the audience's puzzlement, over the end of what has been oriented-to as a performance, its precise intention and what was / is expected from them. As we have shown, people have displayed surprise, enchantment, incomprehension throughout the event. Though some people orient to the end of the stillness, they do not visibly recognise it as marking the end of the / a performance. In effect, the codes of a show are, once more, missing. Performances are generally properly delimited, characterised by an identifiable 'closing', often with the artists bowing or saluting. Here, the audience is denied the resources for making sense of the situation, as the ending is not introduced or marked by an account. Their practical reasoning as competent 'spectators' cannot align fast enough with the performers' competence in *doing* and now dissolving the freeze. It is another source of aesthetic enjoyment to note how this process reverses roles: As the Improv Everywhere freeze agents walk away, they pass through an assembly of audience members 'frozen' with intrigued curiosity.



This 'natural', 'common sense', 'normal' aspect of the event constitutes its very specificity and attraction. The performance oscillates with normality, making what is being done ambiguous in an intriguing, pleasing, entertaining and humorous way, not easily recognizable and categorizable as a performance. It is the extra-ordinary nature, but ordinary appearance of activities achieved by 'normal' looking people, acting 'naturally', which makes of this performance a surprise and an occasion for joy and wonder. The juxtaposition of the subtly extra-ordinary with the ordinary modifies members' common sense expectations, breaching their expectations of both the public space and the codes of a performance.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed the unfolding of a naturally occurring artistic achievement, which is based on the playful modification of expected mobility and behaviour in public places. The experience and the way the categories of performance and audience emerge sheds light on taken for granted aspects of the mobile social order. Members' expectations about ordinary walking pace and flows in public places are made visible. What is at stake is the mobile social order in urban places, and the ethnomethods resorted to understand and participate in producing it, as well as the emergent conformity with the situation. The 'freeze mission' raises questions about how we ordinarily behave in the public arena, how we walk in public spaces, how public spaces are achieved by people in a continuous flux in a socially acceptable and expectable way. Mobility is restored after nine minutes of peculiar, 'frozen' stillness progressively oriented-to as a performance in a public space where mobility is expected. The frozen performers' doings disrupt expectancies about mobility and everyday life; their bodies form natural obstacles in the public space – navigational problems for pedestrians. Friction emerges between the 'frozen ones' and walkers, and it is this friction that makes for the 'spectacle'.

The 'mission' also rests on the ambivalent character of freezing the ordinary practices of collective mobility production. The performance emerges as a social fact and exists through people's orientations, their surprise and joy. Although passers-by are denied a physically well-delimited stage, the codes of a show, clearly identified performers, and clues for recognizing beginning and ending – they gradually, reflexively co-produce the event *as an event*. Not unlike conversational turns, the mobile social order is reflexively constituted, that is, each move defines the shape and status of the other, one prospectively, the other

retrospectively. This makes analysable the other-oriented character of the performance. Thus a gaze is a recognisable unit that can express an orientation, which through its timing and shape can confirm the status of the object of attention as worthy of attention, even recording in a photograph or video. But when taking place in ambiguous circumstances, a person's first 'turn' (e.g. a gaze at the performers) may only become a noticeable 'unit' by virtue of the fact that someone else imitates it. Mobile, embodied interactional moves have far less definition, implicative force and 'direction' in terms of a next move than turns in talk. Extremely subtle interpretations of possibly physiologically or socially automatic embodied conduct as meaningful become visible in our analysis, especially in the emergent shift in the mobile social order of the passageway. The high degree of reflexivity, or mutually determining character, of such subtle movements, decisions to linger or join others in *doing being* an audience requires heightened sensitivity to others' bodies in relation to the environment. As such, reflexive production of sociability around the event may well contribute to the pleasure derived from it. Indeed, one might speculate whether it also opens up public space for a new aesthetic, gently political sociability in public (Keller 2009, Maffesoli 1996, Molnar 2009).

Reflexivity generates space for everyday creativity – as passers-by make sense of events, they draw upon physical as well as social resources, including the increasing 'intertextuality' of activities in public space – recorded and 'replayed' in multiple media – to create new meanings. From their own recordings using mobile phones, their experience of cameras, TV and DVD, members are familiar with notions of 'pause' and 'play', that is 'freeze' and 'unfreeze'. This familiarity is played with by the artists regarding the issue of mobility in public places, and which creates opportunities for playful audience participation.

Finally, the reflexive production provides 'time-out' from the ordinary hustle and bustle of urban public space. It affords a shift of orientation 'from [a] relation-*in*-the-world towards a relation-*to*-the-world' (Bissell 2007: 287). Literally, as passers-by stop to gaze, they transpose their attention from getting on with the job of getting from A to B to gaze at and puzzle over 'something *unusual* happening' (Emerson 1970). More speculatively, this collective joyful achievement of time-out may constitute a breach of the anonymity of urban people, who live in the city and criss-cross it daily (Mondada 2002), generating opportunities for emotionally rewarding citizen encounters.

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## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Participants in the flashmob have given verbal informed consent to being filmed for this research. Members of the public could not possibly be given this opportunity. However, recording in public is a common element of the FutureEverything Festival. And the images shown in this paper take all possible care to respect people’s privacy through blurring detail and by not giving any personal detail.

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