

# **L'autre \***

## **In dialogue with Michele Lancione**

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### *L'autre*

#### In dialogo con Michele Lancione

[SC-SM] For those who seek to study the rationale of urban identities and their impacts within the built environment, urban ethnography has increasingly become an appropriate mode of exploring and addressing the entanglements between the material world and the human beings. From a methodological point of view, how do you reflect on these issues and how do you express your intellectual commitment?

[ML] To tackle the methodological points of your question, we need to take a step back and ask: “what is an identity?” In times of identity-politics, this is a tricky question to ask and a trickier one to answer. The critical point seems to be, to me, around what lies beneath and within processes of identity-formation, or enunciation. And a thing that is always found in there, within those makings, is “violence”. We live at times in which historical violence perpetrated at the expenditure of black people is made visible and virulently contested, continuing on a long tradition of struggles that span across pan-African internationalism to urban revolt in the USA and elsewhere. Thanks to this original work – and of similarly incisive politics from feminist to queer organising – we cannot avoid a re-centring of the question of identity as one of bodily struggles. In other words, the question of identity cannot be confronted without addressing the question of how violence is instrumentalised and then embodied through history, and the latter cannot be dealt with without questioning the urban as a machine able to channelling these processes, articulating its own assemblage of repressions, its own production of wasted lives.

So, to me, the real matter is not really around how we study “identities” – and I say this with full respect to the ones invested in the concept. Methodologically, I believe we should rather focus on “processes of subject-formation”, and in finding ways to account for their complex unfolding without reducing them to categorical fixities. This kind of thinking takes stock of the anti-Freudian work around the “self”, enriching it with a post-human understanding of how a subject is made and re-made in everyday (urban) life. Brought down to the urban level, this is work inviting to take the agentic power of those things that we call “cities” seriously – to trace the ways in which urban devices, plans, designs, governmentalities shape and re-shape both social categories and the violence channelled through them to control and extract value.

\*\_The interview was not included in the peer-review process.