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Atmospheres of the Inhospitable in Staged Kidnappings

Abstract

This article explores the paradoxical staging of experiences of 'inhospitality', taking shape as commercialized opportunities for individuals, willing to be voluntarily subjected to kidnapping. Such 'extreme' leisure is facilitated by companies specialising in simulated captivities of clients. These simulations, which blend forms of performance with practices of violence, are situated theoretically within a revised iteration of Benjamin Barber's thesis about 'Jihad vs McWorld'. Barber's original thesis would locate such stagings within a broader tendency of contemporary capitalism to co-opt and commoditise experiences associated with 'terror' and suffering. Unlike Barber, we focus on the aesthetics and atmospheres of such experiences. We aim to comprehend the ways artistic 'violence experts' articulate the meaning of such leisure for subjects striving to confront and manage the risks and uncertainties of a conflict-ridden lifeworld. Resembling the schadenfreude of dark tourism and the art of performance, kidnapping packages promote a form of aesthetic education into uncertainty.

Keywords: Atmosphere, consumption, edgework, hospitality, simulation, grobalisation

Our *problématique's* introductory manual

If death is the ultimate form of consumption (of life, human sentience and sociality), as purported in a recent issue of this journal (Dobscha and Podoshen, 2017, 383), then its streamlining into intentionally horrific forms of consumption simulating terrorism, rape and physical abuse marks a new era for leisure. Established notions of deviance and transgression in leisure (Rojek, 1999) may be revised, and alongside those, old normative boundaries defining criminogenic (rather than 'criminal') and deviant (socially transgressive) behaviour per se are challenged, inviting scholars to re-evaluate what is abject, ethically acceptable, but also pleasurable and consensual in a world wishing to preserve freedom of choice against stringent moralism and capitalist rationalisation. The present article makes a start, by focusing on the aesthetic-theoretical basis of marketing staged kidnappings, a particularly controversial but highly organised activity that toys with the ultimate human fear of physical and cognitive annihilation in simulated contexts of unfreedom. Such staged kidnappings are provided by independent companies mostly based in Western and European countries (US, UK, France, and Eastern Europe), but also increasingly in developing countries with turbulent political records. They are a form of organised leisure, in which experts who run companies, are hired to simulate the experience of being kidnapped under various circumstances.

We hold that marketing styles produce the simulated praxis of kidnapping, so separating their atmospheric staging from the customers' activities may endorse a problematic positivist distinction between experience and perception. However, our gateway to analysis is the marketing styles, not the experience of kidnapping. We think of digital spheres in an auxiliary theoretical manner, so instead of focusing on the vicissitudes of digital representation, we think about representations of kidnapping simulation, thus focusing on their conceptual

meanings. Indeed, what is artistically simulated has to match its digital-commercial representation, so that the two form a single hyperreality for the consumers. The slide from the spectacle to the event of terror produces a perfect discursive matrix on which thinkers such as Baudrillard based their discussion of simulacra. It can be even argued that staged kidnapping partakes of civilising processes originating in the institution of organised leisure: following this organisation, even 'criminal spectacles' acquired a consumable aura (Korstanje, 2017, 3, 175). Perversely, however, nowadays such spectacles, commonly conceptualised as visions of destruction of multiple mobility systems, and hence our postmodern way of life (Hannam et al., 2016, 6), become mobility nodes in their own right: a 'kidnapping industry' that stimulates movements of professionals, customers, leisure practices, technologies and ideas.

It is not coincidental that the new 'sport' might puzzle, amuse, or infuriate onlookers, because of its covert or overt associations with some of the darkest forms of tourism (Stone, 2006). Broadly defined as physical visits to sites of real disaster, such as concentration camps, natural or nuclear disaster sites, slave torture and labour sites and 'heritage that hurts' (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011), such as sites of terrorist tragedy, dark tourism thrives on the generation of emotional experiences for visitors and pride in community custodians. But even pride is threatened by the lack of boundaries, including those defining what is acceptable, praiseworthy and beneficial for one's wellbeing in terms of leisure. Because these dark places today serve as ways to experience the macabre (Halgreen, 2004; Stone, 2006), they resemble staged kidnappings' refence to particular events that occurred in particular sites of tragedy: they are often framed by scenarios reminiscent of real terrorist events that consumers pay to experience on their own terms in borderline secure/insecure situations. To do so, customers agree to being abducted, detained, and subjected by professional teams to various forms of

psychological and emotional abuse, including: privation of food, water, light and warmth; being roped, handcuffed, chained or gagged; and being 'tortured' by way of techniques such as waterboarding, the administration of electric shocks, slapping or whipping. Such experiences may last anything from a few hours to days or weeks, and borrow fulsomely from the popular representation of those sufferings associated with crime, warfare and terrorism. However, as *simulations* of violence and death, they prioritise experience or the phenomenal realm over *physical* places/sites of death and terror or its material signature – a significant difference from 'light' dark tourism rituals.

The difference is constitutive of staged kidnappings' morally ambivalent place in any established theory of 'serious leisure' involving the participant's full commitment to the activity (Stebbins, 1999), or dark tourism associated with death and dying, such as heritage and genealogy tourism. Also, despite the activity's capacity to introduce harm such as the reinforcement of racist or gendered stereotyping in late modern social structures (Pemberton, 2015), adopting an 'ultra-realist' criminological approach to understand it is confusing and absolutist. In short, as much as we cannot fully adopt a harmless tourism-leisure-consumption nexus approach, we refuse to accept realist criminological frameworks that are highly normative in uncompromising terms. Their overriding context involves the ways highly specific, local events are subsumed by globalised patterns of consumption that intentionally enhance, rather alleviate feelings of insecurity and unfreedom. Although we have some objections to Ritzer's conception of 'grobalisation' as the 'imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations, and the like and their desire, indeed need, to impose themselves on various geographic areas' (Ritzer, 2007, 15), we find that removing place-specificity from staged kidnappings chimes with his corrective to the theory of glocalization. Staged kidnappings are more like movie scenarios, and, if they cause harm, we must trace the

damage at the level of experience that went wrong. However, doing so would form the focus of a separate article, looking at the experience of such simulations.

Blending Jihad with McWorld in staged kidnappings

In considering the experience's representational staging, the 'grobalisation of nothing' (Ritzer, 2007) proves useful. We see in grobalisation a special version of the human attraction to nihilism that goes hand in hand with the elimination of place – and this has both political-materialist and experiential dimensions. Experientially, one of grobalisation's distinctive characteristics is the imposition of global cultural forms that meet the definition of 'nothing': everything is flattened. Where glocalization may suggest a harmonious relationship between the global and the local, grobalisation emphasises the unilateral and aggressive mobilisation or elimination of the local by organisations that seek ways to grow their profits. Because, like McDonaldisation – Ritzer's main contribution to globalisation theory – it thrives on efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control, grobalisation favours the staging of reality for leisure purposes at the expense of a sense of place.

The ideological-materialist dimension of this nihilism is equally problematic. Let us begin our exploration at the most serious end of the dark spectrum: just imagine a post-apocalyptic world based on an all-consuming tribalism, upholding venomous Jihads 'in the name of a hundred narrowly conceived faiths against every kind of interdependence, every kind of artificial social cooperation and mutuality' (Barber, 2003, 4). Then shift perspective volte-face, onto a McWorld future, defined by 'onrushing economic, technological and ecological forces' (ibid.), racing towards universal uniformity, seducing humans into 'a willed but corrosive secular materialism' (Barber, 2010, 302). This McWorld is an even more undemocratic clone of 'the McDonaldization of society' (Ritzer, 2008), the key metaphor for

en masse rationalization of consumption, leading to global cultural homogenisation. Finally, consider these two Manichean bulls butting heads in perpetuity, producing never-ending tensions that originate in a place but spread across the world to generate crises increasingly difficult to manage. For Barber (1995, 2003, 2010), the latter scenario has been a globalised reality for decades, enveloping events such as 9/11 and technological democratisation limited to the developed few, under corporate control no less. This world is dark, insecure and inhospitable for all of us: consumers, migrants, refugees, tourists and even the powerful elites.

'Kidnapping packages' introduce a twist in Barber's Manichean hypothesis: based on simulations of Jihadist-like terror, but managed by professional networks on behalf of thrill-seeking clients who are not averse to a bit of abuse, they also adhere to the power structures of McWorld. In other words, rather than a polar juxtaposition of two antithetical logics - that of risk, insecurity and pain on the one hand (Ritzer's grobalisation of something), and the domesticated and predictable pleasures of consumption on the other (the nothing) - we see instead a collusion between them, yielding a commercialised dynamic, in which the experience of suffering and inhospitality are recuperated into the circuits of commodified leisure. The resulting fusion of two erstwhile ideological opposites suggests that we re-evaluate Barber's argument through our case study of simulated kidnappings. We do not aspire to 'prove' that his vision of modernity (as a battle between Enlightenment's commercialised cosmopolitanism and fundamental tribalism) is now outdated, but to examine the *socio-cultural conditions* under which terror is sold as pleasure/leisure, by scrutinizing its commercial presentations. Nor will we provide an assessment of risk management strategies, which can connect to Beck's overused 'risk society' thesis – this task is taken up in a separate study (see Yar and Tzanelli, 2019).

Our collection of online data on such kidnapping scenarios is not meant to contribute to media analysis. Our study is not based on conventional ethnographic techniques of interviewing, participant observation or on-site data collection, but upon purposive digital ethnographic sampling of advertising minutiae recovered from Google searches (Lugosi et al., 2012). We have collected (textual and audio-visual) advertising data and testimonies from eight open access business websites, two of which are specifically designed for stag parties and stand on the fringes of our research on staged kidnappings drawing on histories of terrorism. These two websites were included in our analysis because they promise experiential similarities with the other six, while highlighting some significant gendered differences between experience and perception. Our cyber-fieldwork was designed to recover relevant and (inter)active threads on websites that could provide us with data-rich results (Kozinets, 2010). To improve the credibility of our recovered data, we also used a series of critical press articles (n.10) from the Anglophone world, which discussed the thrills, complexities and problems posited by the phenomenon, mostly published in the last decade. Much like the atmospheres they generate, digitised and audio-visual data such as videos and photos were read as materialised texts adhering to particular embodied experiences for clients and consumers (Degen et al., 2017, 5). Notably, our small-scale study aims to produce transferable, rather than generalizable knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln, 1988, 22): as an emergent industry, simulated kidnapping is at least comparable to other, established urban knowledge economies known as 'dark tourism' and 'heritage tourism', so our study can further research in these fields.

Our article's core *problématique* concerns the complexity of consumption based on the fantasy of self-elimination through terror and pain turned into safe pleasure. Thus, internet

'windows' of staged kidnapping companies are taken as advertising examples for experiencing the 'real thing', which is trivialised. Much ink has been spent on understanding how people averse to crimes against humanity, such as mass murder, torture and terrorism, experience pleasure when consuming the spectacle of terror on the screen. Among these, Slavoj Žižek, used Lacanian theory in the study of American popular culture after 9/11 to conclude that movie scenarios about terrorism regularly fed into collective American fantasies of death by nebulous enemies/others (Žižek, 2002) – a tendency that survived the onset of the 'War on Terror' and the censorship imposed thereafter on movies hinting at the ethno-racial basis of 9/11 (O'Brien et al., 2005). The practice of filtering a horrific world event through the anomic nature of leisure (Žižek, 2014, 103) comprises a textbook case of how the 'eye of horror' communicates with our death drive in creative ways (Clover, 1994). To support our argument that Jihad and McWorld have collapsed into one thing, which mobilises real terrorist events to generate fantastic situations for consumption, we borrow from the theory of atmospheres and hospitality.

Atmosphere

By 'atmospheres' we refer to the subjective experience of environments in which kidnappings take place and which involve both the material world (Bőhme, 2006, 15) and the affects that events in them induce. Atmospheres transcend climatic and physical conditions, thus communicating with the affects and emotions we find in organised (in)hospitable situations. Encountered in everyday parlance as 'ambience' or 'mood', and in philosophical discourse as *Stimmung* or subject-object boundedness (Heidegger, 1962), atmospheres are constellations of people and things, or 'ecstasies of the thing': the way the thing (or event) qualitatively and sensuously stands out from itself (Bőhme, 1993, 121). This definition necessitates the bodily presence of human beings who feel and experience the 'thing' or

'event' that brings atmospheres to life (Bőhme, 1995). Neither things such as material structures (buildings) nor events are atmospheres, but whereas the former are embedded in the natural environment, the latter are socially organised occurrences that make people feel this or that way about the world, thus generating atmospheres. Marx used the term for the fourth anniversary of the Chartist *People's Paper*, to describe a 'revolutionary atmosphere' of crisis, danger and hope, thus positing it as part of an 'epicurean material imagination' enveloped by emotion and 'pressing upon life' (Marx, 1978, 577 cited in Anderson, 2009, 77). All atmospheres hinge on 'a truly concrete and human subject' through which experience comes to life, so they sit between phenomenology and materialism (Dufrenne, 1987, 8).

Significantly, staged kidnappings amplify some feelings that humans experience in contemporary modernity, such as being unwelcome and insecure, so they draw on specific affective constellations that scholars place within theories of hospitality. As we explain below, the professional production of staged kidnappings draws on fundamental Western fears rooted in xenophobic invasions into intimate domains and 'home' – the opposite of organised hospitable giving to guests. Hence, a 'kidnapping atmosphere' involves a blend of unpleasant affects (scare, surprise, humiliation, or grief), induced in the context of a situation enacted between kidnappers and kidnapped subjects in a particular location – a perfect translation of the 'ecstasy' of materiality (geographical and architectural settings, as well as human bodies) to the phenomenal sphere (of affects, emotions and fantasy). Bőhme, Dufrenne, Heidegger and Marx's approaches to atmosphere equip us with an epistemological framework in which materialism and phenomenology coexist. This theoretical blend is already present in Barber, who draws on Frankfurt School thinkers, such as Theodor Adorno, to critique McWorld's infotainment industries, and Hannah Arendt (1958), who enhanced Barber's analysis of politically disengaged spectatorship and undemocratic action in modern

societies. The addition of Bőhme's Frankfurt School-inspired analysis and Dufrenne's aesthetic approach to art strengthen our argument's phenomenological angle, problematizing Arendt's prioritisation of politics over aesthetics. For us, the aesthetic dimension of experiencing a staged kidnapping adheres to its own politics of aesthetics that separate experience from reality, as is the case with any form of simulation: from the outset we trust that, at the end of the ordeal, all will be well.

We argue that kidnapping atmospheres are equipped with three key components: first, they rely on the mediation of terror (texts/scripts written by the 'victim/client' or professionals, but also new and older media to sell, record and enhance the experience) in such ways that the medium itself is removed from the experience altogether, to make space for simulation (what we call the *scriptural basis*). The second component involves the spatialization of the horrific experience, which has to take place in appropriately 'scary' sites, such as dark rooms, abandoned buildings, and interrogation chambers (we term this the *architectonics of terror*). The third ensures that the first two contribute to inducing unprocessed, spontaneous affects in the kidnapped, such as fear, terror, or stress, which consolidate in embodied performances (we explore this as the *kinesfield*). Together, these three components create an atmospheric product that mobilises retrogressive notions of securitisation and irredentism in order to market tragedy and fear as pleasure – a scheme employed elsewhere (Tzanelli, 2019, 46-53) to study the atmospheric staging of cinematically-inspired tourism. The apparent militarisation of staged kidnapping rituals and experiences, as well as their virulent hyper-masculine character, fall beyond the scope of this paper, but are worth highlighting, given Barber's warnings about what markets do and do not do in terms of justice. The same applies to feminist debates on sadomasochism (SM) – these deviate from our focus on the ambivalent nature of inhospitality informing such staged terror. In terms of situated consumption, we

note that the staged kidnappings of our study are not identical to forms of extreme leisure enacted in countries such as Israel, where military-trained 'experts' sell short anti-terrorist courses to international heritage tourist visitors, in which the latter can enjoy killing fantastic Palestinian terrorists (Tzanelli and Korstanje, 2019). It can be suggested that staged kidnappings and fantasy terror camps sit on a continuum, especially in terms of market and client motivations, given the explicitly virulent racist nature of the emergence of fantasy terror camps in Israel. However, this theme would also necessitate a thorough analysis of racist discourse in leisure, which can be the focus of another study.

Hospitality/inhospitality

Conceptions of (in)hospitality strengthen our argument that Jihad and McWorld do not serve as polar opposites in staged kidnappings, but contribute to a theatre of terror, in which reality is staged by 'experts' by means of historical de-contextualisation. In this reality, to be cared for, to be welcome, becomes destabilised in fantastic scenarios that dissolve when 'victims/hostages' return to everyday life activities. The predicament of hosting/abusing a prospective kidnapping victim matches the collapse of the primary oppositional bloc (Jihad versus McWorld), with a secondary one (inhospitality versus hospitality). Normally, both the utopian ('absolute hospitality' as in the provision of asylum without expectation of return – Derrida, 2000) and the realist ('conditional hospitality' as in leisure industry catering – Tefler, 2000) moral basis of acting as a host reside in caring for the guest's comfort and welfare. However, staged kidnappings base care on the practice of abusing clients' welfare. Both these utopian and real models of moral action are rejected within the event's spatio-temporal frame, in favour of tailor-made forms of pleasure-inducement, entertainment and thrill-seeking. As we explain later, proponents of the Jihad versus McWorld Arendtian thesis would hold that such entertainment forgets the source of inspiration, which is real collective

violence delivered by and against forms of ethno-racial otherness. However, by the same token, we note that such an antithesis forgets how such violence makes 'the world' *feel and act* – that is, how it produces the very conditions under which market niches such as those of staged kidnappings reflexively emerge. Placing this study's contribution against Barber's analysis, we stress that any kind of performative consumption that blends the boundaries between spectatorship and action, non-care and care, and terror and pleasure, needs proper contextualisation. To us there is (or should be) a gap between watching a movie or even becoming a real actor in it, and being *actually* tortured - that is, affording for multiple interpretations of fantastic events and abusing human sociality and life respectively. Rejecting both trivialisation of the moral sphere of spectatorship/action and hypodermic reactions to media impacts on popular culture, we opt for a critical middle ground, which makes space for an analysis of aesthetic experience in late modernity. Where Barber's uses of Arendt (1958) focuses on the political nature of action, we argue that there is an aesthetic, performative dimension in the ways humans strive to make sense of the contemporary Leviathans of terror and consumption (Lyng, 1990).

In the following section, we examine from a classical critical stance staged kidnappings as enactments of 'kitschification' and trivialisation of terrorist tragedies. Such arguments cover, and indeed overlap with critical observations on practices of commercialisation we find in the popular-cultural context of dark tourism. The third section presents an alternative form of criticality, by unpacking in detail the ways atmospheres of terror are staged for clients. There, priority is not given to normative assessments, but a categorically-richer analysis of how these experiences are designed. This helps us consider how staged kidnappings alter commonplace understandings of hospitality we find in the academic fields of hospitality studies and tourism. As perverted 'exercises in resilience', valour or self-making and

education, staged kidnappings rely on inhospitable acts and situations 'for a laugh' or the production of an educated aesthetic self. We conclude by situating our study within a broader discussion of the ideological, aesthetic and experiential coordinates that give meaning to such 'extreme' consumption and leisure practices.

Hospitality, kitschification and commercialised sentiment

Let us recall our main thesis: in staged kidnappings we observe a collapse in the primary architectonics of ideology as laid out by Barber, because Jihads and McWorlds blend and collaborate in terms of experience and performance design. This collapse is followed by the introduction of other de-structuring processes, including 'ironic' hybridisations of clearly-defined conduct that used to regulate commercial and private hospitality rules and norms (i.e. kindness, helpfulness and pleasantness towards guests). The nothing (disinterested leisure for leisure) is hybridised with the something (collapse of security and happiness) of grobalisation, to produce a staged dystopian experience. As others have noted (Germann Molz and Gibson, 2007, 3), 'hospitality regulates, negotiates and celebrates the social relations between inside and outside, home and away, private and public, self and other'. Yet, all these secondary binarisms collapse in staged kidnapping situations too. Indeed, hospitality's most basic meaning as the giving of food, drink and sometimes accommodation to people, or the host's accepting of responsibility for their welfare (Telfer, 2000, 39), ceases to exist.

Whether designed by the customer or a professional team, the script and its execution alter the very idea of 'having a good time', by ensuring that the guest remains distressed at all times. A team of what we call 'violence specialists' (Tilly, 2003, 35) in theories of collective violence or worldmakers (Hollinshead, 2007) and tourism professionals (Urry, 2002b) in

tourism analysis, puts in place the stage and the situation, as a package on the web (with videos, images and texts) and on site (by assisting in kidnapping and abusing the 'victim'). The term 'violence specialists' is borrowed from Tilly's (2003, 233) sociological investigations into real political violence, in which groups of entrepreneurs may work both with(in) and outside the institutional apparatuses of the state, to 'manage' terror. However, staged kidnappings do not focus on institutionalised policy-making. Our violence entrepreneurs specialise in simulations of terror to produce versions of reality, thus contributing to the 'worldmaking' powers of this tourism-like leisure (Hollinshead, 2007). To stress this point, we note that there are kidnapping service providers who advertise their business as a tourism paradox run by 'travel experts'– on this, we point to Red7 (2, 2017) that explicitly mobilises this term. The only important differentiation that is preserved from set understandings of hospitality involves a decisive division between guest entertainment and hospitality provision (Telfer, 2000, 40-41): whereas the latter would be associated with the meeting of real guest needs, the former takes precedence in kidnapping packages, as their aim is to induce pleasure through fabricated uncertainties and risks (Beck, 1999). Abusive entertainment as a professional skill becomes synonymous with customer welfare in such cases, because a collapse between the product and the experience 'will largely depend on what [the customer] is paying for and what makes him [sic] happy' (Telfer, 2000, 42).

Consequently, our answer to the question of whether staged kidnappings should be placed within a formal economy of hospitality is positive. This is not just because there are clear 'hosts' (read: 'violence specialists', 'worldmakers' or the 'kidnappers') and 'guests' (read: 'victims' or 'hostages') in the exchange, but because the interaction between these parties reiterates the psycho-social dimensions of Freud's (1966) *das Umheimliche*: the 'uncanny'. This is not merely a negation of homeliness – what would correspond to the absence of

hospitality known as hostility (Derrida, 2000) – but a disturbance within the homely: of course staged kidnappings are unsettling experiences, but, unlike conventional hospitality situations, such as those we find in tourism (see for comparison commercial homes in tourist resorts – Lynch at al., 2007), they are meant to unsettle guest subjects within rules and regulations *set by the them*, thus also taking the host outside homely comfort. Simultaneously, hosts/kidnappers remain in control of certain provisions (e.g. frugal meals, no light or sanitation), as is the case with conventional commercialised (ibid., 235) and informal (Lashley, 2000, 5-12) hospitality alike.

Here our analysis follows closely classical critical theory, thus taking a darker turn: kidnappings have a very particular history in (post) modern Western societies, where we find today's phenomenon of staging such crimes for consumption. Their most notorious 20th and 21st-century appearance is associated with the increasing securitisation of public spaces and their injection with xenophobic discourses, following events such as the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (known as '9/11') and the London Bombings in July 2005 (known as '7/7'). Especially in the United States, where staged kidnappings are popular, soon after 9/11, official strategies of securitisation and suspect detention were coupled with discursive frameworks of morality that promoted 'distance' from the suffering of subjects apprehended for terrorism. For some theorists, the link between formal securitisation strategies and advertising consumption strategies should make us worry: where once upon a time we spoke about societies of surveillance, involving tracking down and apprehending criminal(ised) suspects ('terrorists'), today we speak about societies of control, involving monitoring all citizens, who can then also monitor themselves (i.e. how and what they consume and to what ends) (Urry, 2002a, 2005; Bauman and Lyon, 2013).

But classical critical theorists also worry about the commercialisation of spectatorship and the withdrawal of political participation in societies of control. They argue that personalised self-control does not extend to compassion for the suffering of others – present in questions of detention of suspected 'terrorists' and 'enemies of the state'. Prominent theorists, such as Bauman, would note that the accommodation of torture in audio-visual popular registers has resulted in the anaesthetisation of viewers, who now consume it as just another spectacle (Bauman, 2007, 2008; Korstanje, 2016, 2017). Sturken (2011) identifies a growing interrelationship between torture and comfort as key feature of the United States' project of 'American Empire'. She notes that this is achieved via visual popular and journalistic cultural strategies of domesticating (making it look familiar), trivialising (making it look inconsequential), kitschifying (incorporating it into mass culture in a cynical way) and regarding torture with a degree of irony, thus deducting from the gaze the 'duty of care for others' (ibid., 225). One may recognise as the resulting effect of this attitude a complete withdrawal of hospitality (as care for others) and a total state of amnesia that torture itself is a form of terrorism – a situation both feeding and negating the *Unheimlich* within home(land). It is understandable that, if those labelled 'terrorists' are seen as matter out of place, law and home, the popular xenophobic eye can easily identify other guests (migrants and diasporic communities) 'who arrive today and remain tomorrow' (Friese, 2004, 68) as hostile strangers.

Mediated images have the capacity to bring distant suffering closer to the viewer only under certain conditions of concerted contextualisation (Chouliaraki, 2006). As the original Arendtian argument goes, when the aesthetics of distance are dissociated from the politics of compassion, onlookers can engage in a mode of 'touring histories of terror and pain' (Sturken, 2011, 234). Under certain conditions, there is indeed danger that this dystopian vision will envelop social realities, especially where democratisation has suffered by the

global re-emergence of retrogressive cultures, jingoism and xenophobia.. Potts (2012, 233) sees in the emergence of a Ground Zero souvenir and tourist industry the endorsement of a voyeuristic visitor economy, which now stands alongside rituals of mourning the loss of loved ones in the terrorist event (Sharpley and Stone, 2009, 8-9). The ensuing trivialisation of collective mourning in '9/11 teddy-bears' and 'Osama Bin-Shot' T-shirts parallels Nazi uses of kitsch to create a sense of shared national sentiment - a 'key element in superficial symbols of national unity' (Sturken, 2007, 22). However, it is a mistake to not make space for a discussion of aesthetic pleasure as a categorically different experience and let this dystopian avalanche smother everything.

If we follow the argument proffered by classical theorists without modification, we should view staged kidnappings as exercises in collective amnesia: irrevocably now linked to terrorist irredentism of the Islamist type and other similar streams of perverted 'social movements', widely televised kidnappings and murders of businesspeople and politicians are amongst the most traumatic blows dealt to democratic societies that should not be trivialised as pastime. Customised abductions are also becoming very popular in Europe, where companies such as Spy Games and niche organisation VideoGames Adventure Services (VAS) (set up by two New York artists) cover an entire spectrum of adventurous-cum-perverse activities: corporate entertainment, stag and hen weekends, family challenges and kidnappings – which should apparently 'be thought of quite loosely', even when men in balaclavas abduct you and scream obscenities at you (Metro, 3 February 2009). There is public outcry over such simulated experiences as risky and irresponsible, because they present psychological risks that can cause great suffering and irrevocable traumatic experiences, according to both private and FBI experts (Minerva, 30 May 2017). Here, the condemnation of the act of consumption is not because of its aestheticized nature ('kidnapped

consumers' on a journey to self-discovery), but its complete disconnection from ethical practice (Ranciére, 2006). The assumption is that consumers of kidnapping packages never manage to establish effective connections between perceptions of them as 'events' or discourses with a history and their own decision to enact/perform them. Such connections would effectively demonstrate the presence of a particular form of common-sense 'defining what can be seen, said and done' (Ranciére, 2009, 120), which separates consumers/performers as indifferent viewers from interested citizens as active agents while still classifying them as 'civilised' human beings vis-à-vis the real perpetrators of terrorism.

Such arguments are powerful and topical. However, on their own, they reproduce the discursive dualisms upon which classical understandings of hospitality provision are based – a conceptual structure evidently collapsing in staged kidnapping situations (on dualisms informing political (un)awareness in academia see Latour, 2011). To reiterate the power of digitised images first as analytical, rather than normative tools, we must suspend critiques of ideology until we consider their role in the production of contemporary subjectivities: how 'hosts' and 'guests' emerge in such staged inhospitable situations (their ontological conditions). Once this priority is in place, those adhering to a critique of ideology would find it difficult to explain why they are the legitimate guardians of a 'hidden truth' (the epistemological condition) that positions them as actors, with consumers automatically positioned as mere spectators of a world of spectacles they venerate (Ranciére, 2006, 86): kidnapping enjoyed via images, bought online and simulated on site. Though critiques of ideology provide valuable insight into the cultural context in which staged kidnappings emerged as a 'hospitality paradox' (so we return to them in the conclusion equipped with more situated knowledge), they do not consider their co-production as experiences; the particular textures, soundscapes, sites, colours and embodied performances that bring them to

life as ‘events’; or the intrinsic connections between embodied experience and subjective image-making, which sociologies of intimacy term ‘aesthetic reflexivity’ (Lash and Urry, 1994, 49-50; Giddens, 1990, 1991). To these we turn our attention now from a marketing-representational perspective.

Kidnapping events as atmospheric simulations

Anderson notes that for Marx atmospheres have an ambivalent status, as their material dimensions make them real phenomena, when they are not necessarily sensible ones (‘Marx has to ask if his audience feels [them]’ (Anderson, 2009, 78)). At the same time, however, for Marx atmospheres are not merely embodied and affective ‘becomings’ (Massumi, 2002), but transpersonal, collective experiences – what Stewart (2011) calls ‘force fields’, to which subjects are attracted and attuned. The psychic dimensions of atmospheres of kidnapping, which are communicated through the spatio-temporal dimensions onto which the art of staging kidnappings is imprinted, and through which it is made visible/audible, involve both (a) unprocessed affects, such as shock or surprise, and (b) historically situated (hence anticipated, predictable) emotions such as those induced by terrorism in the West (fear). In their commercialised staging of kidnapping, predictable emotions induced by lived-before events supersede affects, allowing for consumption processes to become ‘pleasurable’ (Bille et al., 2015, 34). The thrill and pleasure of the staged event often acquires valuable educational extensions for some ‘hostages’. In this respect, kidnapping-for-fun involves the enactment of what Lyng (1990) calls ‘edgework’ – a voluntary engagement in risk-taking practices through which participants seek to both experience the excitement and ‘adrenalin rush’ of dangerous situations, and to reclaim their sense of agency over a risky lifeworld through the exercise of survival skills and feats of physical and psychological endurance. The aestheticization of such staging adheres to the principles of popular-cultural artwork, because

it allows the embodied hostage/performer to enact an event as a situation bridging the everyday (Stewart 2007) with the extraordinary (Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Bærenholdt and Haldrup, 2006). Notably, this bridging also defines the affective and embodied dimensions of tourism mobilities, which promise the betterment of the self through encounters with different cultures and enactments of novel experiences in alien physical and social settings (Urry and Larsen, 2011).

We may then argue that in staged kidnappings atmospheres of inhospitality emerge in what Dufrenne (1973) calls the 'expressed world', a perceived world of popular culture that provides the contours of kidnapping re-enactment. Real kidnappings involve all the components of terrorisation mentioned in the introduction, with the exception of (absence) the perpetrators' issuing of threats and ransom ultimatums, and the occasional tragic conclusion of the captivity in death (Tzanelli, 2006). The removal of this ultimate threat is filled by the cultivation of the artistic aspects of the death drive that we find in artistic staging. This 'expressed world' is scripted and digitised so as to eventually be connected to the embodied subject/hostage through physical performances in specific architectural settings. For Bőhme (1993, 121), this process would create the 'atmospheric ecstasy' of kidnapping: a connection between subject, situation and object. We outline the ways the 'uncanny' of staged kidnappings (Heidegger's *Stimmung*) is used in this new (in)hospitality industry, by identifying the necessary components comprising the kidnapping package through examples from different companies' websites.

The scriptural basis

To achieve customer satisfaction, staged kidnappings rely on a distant backdrop of traditional ethnic and religious divisions, many of which are today recreated by 'McWorld's

infotainment industries and technological innovations' (Barber, 2003). Note that for clients there is the opportunity for erotic amplification of the experience in being allowed, for example, to include their partner in the kidnapping, but the service will only be '[carried out] on men' by 'ex-army or ex-government officials' (Kidnapme, 2017). Although this exceeds the parameters of our analysis, it is noteworthy that all erotically-enhanced activities in such kidnapping advertising, contradict essentially masculinist perspectives of risk-taking and skill that privilege physical experience over other experiential modes, while emphasising individualistic, independent negotiation of boundaries. Instead, the introduction of sadomasochistic pleasure rituals turns the commercial presentation of simulated kidnapping into an interpersonal event, which suggests that negotiations of the boundaries between chaos and order are phenomenal in nature (Newmahr, 2011, 689-690). Such feminist-inspired plots reveal, through the promise of performative iterations, the death drive for what it really is: a pathway to scopic pleasure, turn inwards, with the victim-gazer as their own protagonist. As Buda (2016, 11) notes in her ethnography of tourism in conflict zones harbouring terrorist violence, danger-zone subjectivities disrupt some prevailing binaries in tourism studies such as safety/danger, peace/war, fun/fear and even life/death in predominantly affective ways. Much like the introduction of SM in kidnapping packages, it places scenarios of pleasure and self-elimination on a continuum. The representational technique is reminiscent of thanatopsis, the gazing upon other people's death with a mix of relief, pleasure and fear, in the twin understanding that perhaps this is not real death, or the victim's death, but, ultimately, nobody escapes death (Seaton, 1996; Korstanje, 2016). An even more extreme scenario is played by Ultime Réalité (2017) specialists, which truly milks the Freudian macabre. It allows clients to 'wake up in a morgue, lying on an autopsy table, surrounded by corpses and death bags, an identifying tag attached to your big toe ... Maybe you will look at death differently'. In reality, nobody knows one's death. However, these scenarios are locked into a

'scriptural economy' (De Certeau, 1984, 134) of staged kidnapping aiming to eliminate the totally unexpected, without detracting from the adventure itself.

Scriptural economies vary, but all play on ambivalences (between forced and voluntary, real and fake, and painful and erotic/pleasurable) cast on the simulated meta-scenario of terror-consumption, so they distance themselves from the 'desert of the real' Žižek (2002) identifies as the destruction of pleasure/fantasy. Kidnap Solutions LLC, Extreme Kidnapping (Minerva, 30 May 2013) and Kidnapme (2017) agree kidnapping scenarios with clients 'with prior notice', suggesting that they 'take a note of what they want from the day'. KidnApp offers clients the opportunity to create and schedule their own experience from one to 72 hours long. It splits participants into 'waiters' (prospective 'victims') and 'takers' (professionals working the request once the 'waiter' submits it online) and allows waiters to complete an online form with preference on methods (e.g. ropes, handcuffs or tape), personal 'special skills' and descriptions 'of their perfect waiter' (KidnApp, 2017). Red7 (1, 2017), which is more orientated towards stags in Eastern Europe, has two fixed scenarios in which either the stag group is ambushed by soldiers, 'dragged away and bundled into a van at gunpoint (fake of course)' or 'the stag' is kidnapped, handcuffed, blindfolded and 'taken to a venue, where he finds himself in a lap dance club surrounded by the boys and getting special attention from a dancer' (Red7 1, 2017). The website includes a form in which prospective clients provide information about themselves and the party, with preferred travel dates, destination and duration of the event, followed by ideas about 'what they want, including [their budget]' (ibid.). Although the service seems to not communicate with Western terror, its obvious reference to Eastern Europe is both reminiscent of Cold War conspiracy scenarios and contemporary kidnappings of Western executives in countries of the former Soviet Bloc as a form of political pressure (Tzanelli, 2006).

The architectonics of terror

For Bőhme (2006) atmospheres are enhanced, intensified or even shaped not just by scripts but also by spatialized aesthetic arrangements (colours, sounds, and generally architectural design). Whole countries (e.g. Libya, Mexico, Venezuela or Nigeria) are now even advertised online as risk 'hotspots' for adventure junkies who desire to be captured, whereas activities in particular locations (e.g. to travel alone, go looking for a drug dealer and sex workers at night) also appear to be popular suggestions (McCann, 5 May 2017). Such 'design mobilities' (Jensen, 2014) connect figuratively, geographically, and materially, to the emergence of non-places of commercialised interaction and consumption in the liquid city (Augé, 2008). As Bauman ([2007] 2013, 72, 78) notes, although cities are today spaces of fear and uncertainty, the logic of their emergence was to shield humans from uncertainty and risks. Staged kidnappings are framed by material structures that signify the alien-ness and alienation of urban non-places and stand outside hospitable social spheres and affective lifeworlds (Anderson, 2009, 80). Their digital marketing produces a third-order simulation of atmosphere through an 'architectonics of terror': a technical creation of terror that appears natural like childbirth – 'tectonic' from *tíkto*, to give birth - in the eye of the beholder, despite being fake.

The architectonics of terror are relayed digitally in two distinctive ways: as minimalist dark interiors and as hazy locales. We already mentioned Red7's (1, 2017) geopolitical linkages between scenarios, locales and political terrorism. Kidnapme (2017) offers a service where fantasies 'are played out in a safe and secure environment'. However, experiencing 'the idea of been kidnapped, tortured, abused or just been scared shitless' with 'bootlicking, mock executions, interrogations, strip searches, house invasions, forced imprisonment' and the like

(ibid.) is architecturally, visually and spatially situated. Several photos of army characters with weaponry 'stage props' are connected to scenarios (e.g. pointing guns at victims, or hooded and facing the camera) that can happen 'outdoors or at a location in South London'. Clients are warned that they should expect to be moved between areas and locations by hired drivers, to get dirty and in some cases covered in mud as [they] may be pushed around the fields or countryside. Standing for the other of the civilised urban world, the countryside signifies terror. Home kidnappings are also catered for, as the photos on the company's website suggest. The certainty of intrusion into the hostage's intimate territory (the home or emotional world) counters all hospitality rules of what should be seen and respected as private, selfhood, or the inside (Germann Molz and Gibson, 2007, 3-4). Portland Escape Rooms' (2017) service (Cedar Hills Location) plays more on psychological strain that both transcends 9/11 scenarios ('You have been kidnapped and locked in a room by a serial killer!') and reiterates American narratives of politicised torture (via images of handcuffs hanging on bare walls, with the graffiti 'Kidnapped!'). Likewise, Ultime Réalité's photos (2017) of the dark and unadorned room in which interrogations take place forms a perfect atmospheric antithesis to commercialised homely spaces. Reminiscent of the *schadenfreude* 'of societal misfortune', such abandoned, unadorned or half-derelict buildings, share 'common ground' with dark tourist rituals and narratives of loss. Indeed, ethnographies of derelict buildings suggest that people 'associate the physical death of buildings with the intrusion of nature, which reclaims places through the processes of decay' (Anderson et al., 2017, 391). The same study reveals metaphorical connections between the quality and causality of human death and that of buildings, with the latter suffering 'bad deaths' by vandalism or human-induced destructions connected to cosmogonic events of global proportions, such as the World Trade Towers bombing (ibid., 396). By the same token, buildings where staged kidnapping events unfold, should not be conceived of as bounded and

singular forms but open and porous networks of hospitality in which security against foreign presence is negotiated through set norms of conduct between hosts and guests (Lynch et al., 2007). Their ruinous or abandoned form signals 'bad deaths' that comply with the kidnapping script.

The architectonics of terror can also assume the form of dreaming almost shapeless nightmares with only few recognisable signs from the cinematography on terrorism. 'Bored of EVERYDAY MONOTONY of WORK and RESPONSIBILITY? Let kidnApp take you to places you've only dreamed about', proclaims an advert of a GPS-enabled app and social network for those interested in being kidnapped (KidnApp, 2017). The grey ambiance of the short video on the start page serves to picturise blurred everyday activities inducing boredom in a cityscape, which switch abruptly to speedy images and a pair of handcuffs. Such all-around spatialized vagueness does not weaken the event's atmospheric coordinates, it sharpens them – indeed 'vagueness' is a distinctive atmosphere of uncertainty (Bille et al., 2015, 33). KidnApp's video soundscape (a tick-tock of a clock or a bomb), further enhances a sense of hostility and urgency we associate with terrorism. As Bőhme (1995, 22) notes, the uncertainty material structures and places generate opens up possibilities for ambivalent reactions, contestation or even lack of compliance.

To turn one's social world into a risky stage in simulated events, the company needs scenographers, not just ex-army staff. California-based Kidnap Solutions LLC's owner, Raymond T. Moody, has a background in theatre performance for good reasons: 'these clients have snoozed through every roller coaster', he says 'breezed through every haunted house and horror movie known to man…They're looking for something more immersive, more visceral' (Minerva, 30 May 2017). Combinations of speed and claustrophobia, the

darkness of the interrogation room and the brightness of the lights turned on the hostage propose varied mergers of *Realität* ('factual factness' involving the materials, sounds, colours and narratives of the stage) with *Wirklichtkeit* ('actual factness' involving the states and effects these induce in the perceiver) (Bőhme, 2001, 57). Both factuality and actuality are quintessential components of *phantastikés téchnes*: the arts that allow imagination (*phantasía*) to modify pure imitations of a reality (as is the case with *eikastikés téchnes*), thus introducing alternative narrative and performative pathways into the subject's life (Bőhme, 2013). The art of staged kidnapping thus emerges as a constellation of possibilities to dissociate what is real or staged from what is authentic or artificial.

The kinesfield

The idea of catering for staged kidnappings goes at least as far back as the beginning of the 21st century, when the BBC published an article on 25-year old artist Brock Enright's creation of a business from it (Wells, 1 August 2002). Therefore, artistic acting – an 'inculcated' form of civilised movement in aesthetically stimulating, 'sublime' domains (Witzgall and Vogl, 2016) – has always been at the core of this contentious pastime. How 'victims' move or stay physically and emotionally immobile during the event are crucial components of the simulated event. Both forms of mobility figure in creative combinations in kidnapping services, so as to turn online *eikasía* (iconic speculation) into *phantasía.* As a travel article on Ultime Réalité's abduction design states, clients must 'lay off the Lifetime made-for-tv movies', for 'a bit of psychological shock': 'this one-of-a-kind adventure travel experience allows you to create your own signature adrenaline-heavy scenario that is only limited to your imagination' (Watkins, 6 August 2013; Buffery, 22 February 2010). Kidnap Solutions' (2017) long list of featured ways to experience (im)mobile situations:

Restraints

Gags

Loud Music

Verbal Abuse

NO BATHROOM BREAKS!

Sensory Deprivation

Waterboarding (upon request)

Tasers (upon request)

The list includes instantly recognisable torture methods from a long list of practices used to interrogate terrorism suspects in the US (Sturken, 2011, 429). Much like ex-convict Adam Thicke's Detroit-run Extreme Kidnapping, which stuns, waterboards and coerces 'victims' to repeatedly listen to Eurythmics' 'Sweet Dreams' (Abdessadok, 15 April 2013), it turns the whole ordeal into a network of movements of things, tools humans and emotions. The website features a video in which a masked man in black clothes kidnaps a woman, binds, gags and places her in the back of the van. The scene, which replicates gendered stereotypes of inhospitable intrusion into one's intimate domain we find in political commentary on terrorism, also connects to Ultime Réalité's (2017) photos of scared and gagged young women. Much like Red7's (1 and 2, 2017) list of means, they all share various combinations of excessive and unwanted sensory mobilities (noise, waterboarding, tasers) and imposed immobilities (restraints, gags, no bathroom breaks) that outline the event's kinesfield.

Schiller's (2008) pioneering of the term 'kinesfield', which places the sphere of bodily movement and the perception of the spatio-temporal conditions of the environment in which the body moves on a continuum, helps us consider staged kidnappings as both tangible and

dynamic events. Much like Ultime Réalité's practices (Mademan, 16 March 2010), Spy Games Guantanamo-style 'workover' has incorporated a pre-challenge surveillance system to collect the captive's 'press buttons' for the scriptural basis of the challenge. The 'event's' peak point is reached with the complete kinaesthetic manipulation of the 'captive/victim', 'which could be on a street where it just so happens anyone is an actor or…a basement' (Metro News, 3 February 2009). The kinesfield begins to act as a connector between script, space, time, place and 'event'. Reminiscent of Laban's (1966) elaborations on embodied movement in dancing or 'kinesphere', and Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology of perception, the kinesfield connects script to architectonics in staged kidnappings in dynamic ways. Part of kidnapping's imaginative staging, the kinesfield is both material and phenomenological. In the former case, it involves ecstatic orchestrations, whereby bodies and inanimate materialities organise performances. In the latter, it involves nearly amorphous movements between and across affects, feelings and socio-culturally recognisable forms we know as 'emotions' (Bille et al., 2015, 35) – and on this, we may point to KidnApp's affect-inducing sensory stimulants. Together, amorphous movement and vagueness suggest that we must appreciate the physiology and psychology generating the atmosphere (Brennan, 2004; Navaro-Yashin, 2012). In this respect, we deal with an 'art of kidnapping', rather than vicious reproductions of violent events: an interpersonal art of communication, which bases its efficacy on 'ordinary affects' of insecurity (Stewart, 2007).

Not only do script, architectonics and the kinesfield restore a spatio-temporal order to events of terror at a material level, they also bestow a structure upon an insecure lifeworld at an experiential one. This ordering is communicated to clients through a processual transformation of *eikasía* (watching a film about kidnapping) into performed *fantasia* (acting and thus making decisions in it). In other words, the 'edgework' (Lyng, 1990) of staged

kidnapping aims to restore the affective and psycho-social harmony of the real (as in Žižek, 2002) through embodied performance of the ultimate dystopian event: pain and death. The recuperative nature of such performance is reminiscent of Latour's (2011) observation that the history of modern art should be considered as a critique of ideological image-breaking ('iconoclasm') – the very act that terrorists perform every time they deal a blow to the ideologies and lifeworlds of their 'enemies'. Borrowing from Jihad's perspectival foundations, staged kidnappings prompt clients to suspend their inclination to follow Jihad's suit, destroy its image/ideology, thus taking time instead to examine what it does to them and why. The act of suspension allows not just for self-interpretation, but also a wider search of the individual's place in grand social and cultural narratives of modernity. In this 'game' of make-believe, the self-interpellated 'victims' take their philosophical cues not from Marx's cultures of the revolution, but from Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Man*, in which we learn that natural necessity can be reconciled with sensuality and understanding only through play – an aesthetic state, through which humans can be made whole again (Marcuse, 1955, 149-150).

Towards a materialist phenomenology of (in)hospitality

Earlier, we promised to revisit, by way of a conclusion, debates about the ideological contexts that inform the staged kidnappings as a consumer experience, using the situated knowledge generated by our study. It is reasonable to argue that the staging of such scenarios as a source of pleasure or leisure partakes of McWorld's broader appropriation of the signs and symbols associated with 'Jihad' and 'terror', thereby turning them into a commodity that can be experienced in sanitised forms. This may be seen as an extreme, first-person and participatory version of a familiar popular-cultural dynamic in which conflict, suffering and political violence are rendered anodyne and mobilised as yet another locus for McWorld's

relentless dynamic of capital accumulation. Following this logic, one may even ask if staged kidnappings are a form of terrorism of the West (Barber's take on market fundamentalism as Jihad's alter ego) or by the West, of itself (as Žižek claims in his cinematic fantasmatics of self-destruction). Nevertheless, both arguments occupy an Arendtian perspectival dualism, which replicates the iconoclastic paradigm of realism, thus recycling the inevitability of a dystopian future.

Contrariwise, if equally controversially, we suggest that, at the subjective or experiential level of the consumer/'victim', participation in such practices can activate a sense of agency as individuals struggle to manage life in conditions of increasing risk and uncertainty, a world of growing ethnic and religious tribalism, political instability and eruptions of violence into the fabric of everyday existence. The staged atmospherics of these managed (in)hospitalities – as revealed through phenomenological inquiry - offer avenues through which participants can confront, in a tolerable manner, the conditions of existential uncertainty that threaten to otherwise overwhelm their capacities for autonomous action and social survival. In this sense, the performance of terror is an aesthetic education into an uncertain world, in which erstwhile decontextualized constants such as the proposition of upholding 'Western ethics-as-aesthetics' should be questioned beyond the usual modalities of 'pornoviolence' suggested in mainstream theories of consumption.

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