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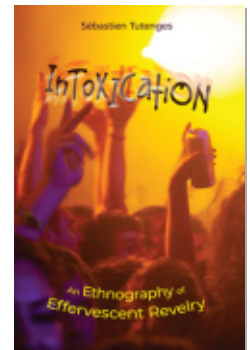
2. Ways to Effervescence

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WAYS TO EFFERVESCENCE

The Ringsted Town Festival is one of those rare occasions when the entire Ringsted community comes together for celebration. The young and the old, the rich and the poor, all show up to eat, drink, and see what is going on. This annual event, sponsored by a local branch of the Lions Club, features a wide variety of entertainment, such as beer tents, street parades, concerts, a funfair area, singing in the church, and much more. I attended the festival on a beautiful spring night. The event proved a valuable window into the conditions that lead up to and cause effervescence, and it is with these conditions that this chapter is concerned.¹

I arrived by train in the early evening but quickly realized that I was late. The streets were already littered with bottles and fast-food wrappers. Yelling and singing resounded from all directions. And people that I had never seen before greeted me cheerfully, which is unusual in buttoned-down Denmark. Clearly, the festivities had already been going on for a while. I walked toward a park that, I had been told, was the center of the fun. Here, I found a range of beer tents with adults and old folks lined up, drinking and people-watching. The kids and young people were livelier, racing about and infusing the scene with restless energy. In the middle of it all, there was a so-called Booster, an amusement ride resembling a gigantic windmill that sends people spinning round and round with tremendous speed.

A crowd had formed in front of a big stage. A man appeared on the stage and announced, “DJ Alligator is coming soon.” The man tried to make the crowd jump in sync but was obviously not satisfied with the result. “You look like a sack of potatoes!” he shouted and walked off. Then the bass started thumping in a deep tone that was felt more than heard. In came DJ Alligator. He walked slowly to the center of the stage with a menacing look on his face. By his side were two petite women dressed in military-style clothes that exposed their stomachs and lower backs. They danced frenziedly as DJ Alligator calmly and ceremoniously

raised his arms above his head and began clapping. The crowd followed suit. The dancers waved their hands in an upward movement, beckoning us to jump, reach up, take it higher. In a guttural voice, DJ Alligator commanded, "Get physical! Stomp with me!" People started moving. Some people nodded their heads, while others jumped around with their arms up in the air. A group of teenagers was dancing wildly in front of the stage, their eyes wide open and glassy. "Come on!" shouted the dancers. "I like to move it, move it. I like to move it, move it. You like to move it," sang DJ Alligator, although he stood completely still. The sound was so massive that it made my breath quicken and ears ring. It all climaxed at the end of the concert with a big, loud bang as a gigantic party popper exploded onstage. The dancers threw handfuls of plastic whistles into the crowd, and a blast of whistling blared all around. DJ Alligator, a devilish look on his face, shouted something that may have been "Long live tinnitus!"

DJ Alligator and his crew certainly knew how to rev up a crowd. In just an hour or so, they had raised the excitement level at the festival by several degrees, skillfully using techniques that ritual leaders have made use of since time immemorial: loud, repetitive music, synchronized body movements, smoke, lights, and shock effects. These ingredients, in combination with alcohol, create a strong cocktail that can help individuals loosen the grip of self-control and yield to collective emotions. However, this transition does not come easily. As many revelers have told me, it can be difficult to act cheerful, open up to strangers, show sexual interest, laugh passionately, let go on the dance floor, break out in song, get joyfully drunk (but not too drunk), and become fully immersed in the here and now.

In other words, effervescence does not come out of the blue. For most people, it requires determination, effort, and support to get there.

An explanation of the difficulties in reaching effervescence is provided in Norbert Elias's masterpiece *The Civilizing Process* (2000), a historical treatise describing how the affective life of people in the West gradually changed after the Middle Ages. Elias describes how "refined manners" emerged in the courts of the feudal lords and rulers and gradually spread to the rest of society. Strong emotions were withdrawn from public view, bodily fluids hidden, and sexual impulses repressed. People began suppressing everything that they determined to be of an "animalic character." Importantly, Elias argues that such restraint "is enforced less and less by direct physical force. It is cultivated in individuals from an early age as habitual self-restraint by the structure of social life, by the pressure of social institutions in general, and by certain executive organs of society (above all, the family)" (2000, 158). Self-restraint becomes "an automatism, a self-compulsion" that the individual "cannot resist even if he or she consciously wishes to" (2000, 367). Indeed, there is much to suggest that contemporary Western societies like Denmark are marked by a historically high degree of control

and self-censorship (Deleuze 1992). I believe that these social circumstances are part of the reason that so many people are drawn to the high-intensity rituals offered by the likes of DJ Alligator.

However, effervescence is never simply a matter of “letting go of restraints,” “escapism,” or taking a “time out.” It is always both an escape *and* an engagement with life, a movement away from limiting conditions and toward moments of heightened intersubjectivity.

Rituals are experienced differently by different people based on their personal preferences and cultural background (Heider and Warner 2010). A tightly orchestrated ritual like the DJ Alligator concert, for example, does not necessarily transport all attendees into states of effervescence. Those who really want to may achieve such a state, whereas others, like myself, will feel less affected due to obstacles such as different musical preferences or annoying ringing in the ears. Six basic conditions are essential for effervescence to take place in the context of nightlife settings. Here I only sketch these conditions but will elaborate and illustrate them throughout this chapter.

First, it is important that the participants in an effervescent ritual come prepared for the turbulent forces that they are about to engage with. If they have been to a similar ritual before—or if they have been informed about, trained in, or otherwise prepared for it—it will be much easier for them to tune into one another and work together according to the ritual protocol, thereby collectively pumping up the energy.

Second, it is important to have a sense of security; otherwise, the body will be tense, the mind will be on guard, and self-censorship will reign. Effervescence, after all, can be frightening and easily goes awry. Intense emotions can lead to confrontations. Drug use can induce “bad trips” full of paranoia and distorted visions. And heavy drinking can end in “blackouts,” poor decision-making, and other forms of trouble. The transition from ordinary to extraordinary states of consciousness is thus fraught with difficulties. Many people, therefore, prefer to experiment with their consciousness in a safe environment accompanied by friends who can provide help and support if the experience gets out of hand.

Third, participants have to be willing to let go. One must “resist resisting” and willingly “surrender to body, crowd and sound,” as religious studies scholar François Gauthier puts it in a study of rave parties (2004, 76). Even potent drugs might not induce altered states of mind if the user attempts to withstand their effects. Similarly, the effects of large doses of alcohol may be experienced as bodily discomfort more than cheerful drunkenness, such as in situations when drinkers leave a party and struggle to stagger back home. Of course, attempts to sober up or stay calm are not always successful, but resistance can put a serious damper on aroused states of mind.

Fourth, it is crucial that people be close physically. Too much distance will prevent them from being fully able to sense one another and efficiently receive, transmit, and contribute to the affective flows in the group. These flows tend to grow in strength, up to a certain limit, in proportion to the number of people assembled (Wellman, Corcoran, and Stockly-Meyerdirk 2014).

Fifth, those assembled have to focus their attention on the same object or activity and become aware that everyone else is doing likewise (Collins 2004). Focusing on the same thing makes it easier for people to tune into one another and synchronize their bodily and mental rhythms, eventually causing them to move and feel as one—as when dancers move in harmony to the same beat or lovers become so caught up in each other that their breathing and heartbeats sync together. In the words of Collins, rituals are successful when the “nervous systems” of the participants “become mutually attuned in rhythms and anticipations of each other, and the physiological substratum that produces emotions in one individual’s body becomes stimulated in feedback loops that run through the other person’s body” (2004, xix).

Sixth, physiological stimulants are useful for people to surpass the confines of their habitual ways of behaving and experiencing. In the context of nightlife settings, the stimulants that generate effervescence generally include a whole range of arousing agents that gradually release the body and mind to the affective flows that run through the ritual assembly. As these flows intensify, a growing sense of unity and an attunement of experiences eventually enable everyone to share the same aroused mood. The most popular physiological stimulants in nightlife are alcohol and other drugs, light and laser shows, and rhythmic stimulation by loud music.

Back at the Ringsted Town Festival, the clock had passed midnight, and most people appeared to be in a pleasant state of drunken, compassionate effervescence. The beer tents were still occupied by middle-aged adults and older patrons, but the rest of the park was slowly being drained of life as the young people dispersed toward Crazy Daisy, the only nightclub in town. I tagged along and found the queue a long and chaotic trail of yelling, singing, pushing, and line-cutting. A group of women performed a giggly version of “California Dreaming.” A guy randomly screamed “BIF! BIF! BIF!” which makes little sense, even in Danish, and another guy went around with a worried expression, whispering “Hush! Mafia boss! Hush! Mafia boss!”

Eventually, I got inside and was immediately wrapped in a lush carpet of sound. It was soothing after the cacophony outside. One song led to another, the bass line weaving it all together and prompting us to move our bodies. The bartenders also did their part to raise our spirits. They juggled with bottles, turned on the strobe light behind the bar, and shouted “Cheers!” As I would later discover, this was all designed, rehearsed, and performed to entertain the customers and increase sales.

The dance floor was nearly full, giving people an excuse to bump into and touch one another. I watched Ali, a short and energetic eighteen-year-old man with parents from the Middle East. He was generally well liked but also feared because of his taste for brawls and close ties with local drug dealers. He scanned the room with his eyes screwed up and arms extended from his sides at forty-five-degree angles, like a cowboy or gangster ready for a gunfight. A group of women were doing Madonna's "Vogue" dance with graceful movements and theatrical poses. They played around, experimenting with different personas and bodily poses. The scene recalled Jackson's assertion that role-play is "based upon a bodily awareness of the other in oneself" and that it may assist "in bringing into relief a reciprocity of viewpoints" (1989, 130). From this perspective, the tendency among revelers for role-playing may be understood as a way to explore their own inner diversity and experience the world from new perspectives (see also Grazian 2005). So, for example, when a man moves like a woman, he may get a glimpse of what it feels like to be inside a woman's body or in the body of a feminine man. "Je est un autre" (I is another), wrote Arthur Rimbaud to express a realization that I suspect is common in festive crowds. Alternatively, "I are many others" might be a more apt formulation, since revelers tend to take on multiple personas over the course of a night.

Ali mounted a platform and performed a sexy dance but with ironic distance, exaggerating his movements and putting on funny faces. The staff let him do this, although it was against regulations to climb on things. Perhaps they figured that he was still sober enough to avoid falling down. Perhaps they also appreciated his show and its effect on the crowd. His performance attracted the attention of the crowd and encouraged everyone to focus on the same thing—a vital component for raising the energy of a group and fostering a sense of unity (Collins 2004, 48).

By 5:00 a.m., the party was drawing to a close. The remaining guests were clearly under the influence of more than just dancing, music, and feelings of fellowship. Two guys stood swaying silently, face-to-face, looking deeply into each other's eyes with looks that revealed little brain activity. Thoughts and words had evaporated and yielded to reflexes and feelings. The guys fell into each other's arms, clutching each other and swaying for several minutes before letting go and staggering off separately. The drunken, compassionate effervescence was fast approaching the stage of collapse.

THE DESIRE FOR ALTERED STATES

I conducted a series of interviews with Ali in order to better understand the criminal milieu that he was involved with. In particular, I was interested in a hash club called "Klub Imperator," which he and his friends had established to get a place of their own and to "smoke weed," "have fun," and "go crazy." "We

don't have anywhere else to go," Ali would often say, calling himself "a criminal" and arguing that people like him were constantly met with disapproval and rejection everywhere they went. Good jobs, he said, were unavailable to young men of Middle Eastern heritage. Parents would not let their daughters date "bad boys." Teachers were prejudiced. The list went on. He was frustrated by these circumstances, but at the same time, he obviously took pride in belonging to a criminal group. I also suspect that he took pride in having me, a member of a research team, ask him so many questions about crime and deviance.

Klub Emperor was located in the very center of Ringsted. The windows were shaded, and a sign stating "Members Only" hung by the entrance. Inside, there was a vivarium that held a snake and a poisonous spider. The space also contained two decrepit sofas, a PlayStation, a stash of cannabis, and sometimes weapons. The place reeked of crime, quite literally: the door was often left open so that the sweet scent of cannabis wafted into the street.

Ali's preferred drugs were cannabis and alcohol, but he often expressed that drugs were merely one of many ways to get high. He mentioned, for instance, that the Booster at the town festival had given him a tremendous "kick" that made him feel almost as if he were on drugs. And then there were the fights, which also gave him a drug-like rush. When confronting an opponent and spectators encircling them, the adrenaline would start pumping and his head would spin, he said.

I once witnessed one of Ali's fights. It took place outside of a bar and started with a long string of insults exchanged between Ali and a muscular man in his late twenties. Both smiled and laughed as they spewed their abuse, and it seemed to me that they were interacting with the assembled crowd as much as they were with each other. Ali had a whole crew of his teenage friends around, whereas his opponent only had one friend present. I had not seen the opponent or his friend before and guessed that they were new in town. I pulled the friend aside and warned him that Ali was no one to mess with. But it was too late. The place was already flooded with the tension and confusion of violent effervescence, making reasoning very difficult. Ali said with a grin, "This is my hood. You f-ck off." The opponent laughingly reciprocated, "You f-ck off, f-cking cousin." (In Denmark, "cousin" [*fætter*] is sometimes used to denote males with a Middle Eastern background. In this case, the term was probably used as an insult.)

The exchanges went on for several minutes before Ali pushed his opponent hard in the chest. In a swift movement that seemed rehearsed, Ali pulled off his leather belt—which sported a large metallic buckle—to use as a whip. Even with this weapon, however, Ali was no match for his opponent, who was much bigger and stronger. The opponent obviously did not want to hurt Ali. He just grabbed him firmly by the neck and brought him to the ground, holding him and looking into his eyes with a smile, as if to indicate that this was all just play.

But Ali's friends did not smile. They were fuming with anger and soon jumped in, kicking the opponent all over his body until somebody yelled for someone to call the police.

Did Ali look in my direction as he ran off? I walked away with the feeling that my presence had worsened the situation, since it gave Ali an opportunity to prove what he had so eagerly expressed during all our interviews: that he was a tough guy, a criminal, someone out of the ordinary.

Numerous studies show that individuals may engage in violence because they find it emotionally and socially rewarding. The literature on hooliganism, for instance, is full of testimonies that violence can be “fun,” that it creates a “buzz” and an “adrenalin rush,” and that it can become “like a drug” (e.g., Spaaij 2006). There are, of course, numerous other reasons behind violent behavior, but one is that it provides experiences that demand such focus that they momentarily divert the mind from its ordinary moods and preoccupations. Depression, angst, sadness, adolescent ennui—such unpleasant states can be temporarily sidelined when stepping into the heat of a fight. This is not to suggest that Ali's life was filled with violent effervescence or that nightlife environments are dangerous. Rather, it is to exemplify that effervescence can be generated in many different ways and can take many different forms.

Ali explained that the best way to stir up effervescence—or “to run amok,” as he called it—is to take drugs at a party with a lot of people who are living it up. “It's only possible to run amok when you are on drugs,” he told me. “You cannot reach that point in a normal frame of mind. You have to be together with a lot of people to run amok. The attention of the others is necessary. You have to think, ‘Hey, I will make the others feel great.’ You cannot create that mood on your own.”

Ali confessed that he would sometimes get so high that he lost hold of himself. This happened one time at Crazy Daisy after drinking “too much” and doing “some drugs.” Everybody was having fun and partying with full force. At some point, Ali was dancing to a song called “Nasty.” Without thinking, he jumped onto a table and stripped off all his clothes except for his flashy red underpants. Ali had never done anything like that before. His friends were shocked and tried in vain to bring him back to his senses. They yelled, “What are you doing?” and grabbed him. However, everyone else in the nightclub was cheering and whistling, and even the DJ reacted and made fun of Ali over the microphone. That had been a really good night, Ali concluded.

To come down after a big night out can be difficult, so Ali would often smoke cannabis on his way home. The practice was like a little after-party ritual in his circle of friends. The soothing effects of cannabis helped put a damper on the effervescence. “We sit outside or in our cars and make a mix,” Ali related. “It makes you calm down. You can't sleep when your heart is pounding and

everything is all wild. That's impossible. Then better smoke some joints. We sit together." He continued with a whisper, "Then everything gets all quiet in the car. It gets totally silent."

My conversations with Ali provided me with many examples of how moods can be changed and consciousness altered. Our conversations also strengthened my conviction that health expert Andrew Weil, MD, is right in his famous statement that "the desire to alter consciousness periodically is an innate, normal drive analogous to hunger or the sexual drive" (1998, 19). There is great cultural variation in how people pursue altered forms of consciousness and what altered states they prefer. In some cultural contexts, like the ones described in this book, alcohol and other drugs play a pivotal role in almost all intoxicating rituals. In other contexts, however, the mechanism might be listening to music, chanting, screaming, dancing, swinging, shaking, overbreathing, overloading the senses, whirling around, or responding to rhythmic stimulation by light (Lindholm 2003).² Some techniques for altering consciousness are greatly beneficial while other techniques can do severe harm.

For some months, Ali and his friends were able to meet at Klub Imperator to smoke weed and deepen their sense of being different. "Who wants to be normal?" Ali once asked. To be normal, he said, is "just the same, and the same, and the same." So he sought criminal action and experimented with drugs. However, the police soon became aware of the club and began to search members as they entered and exited. The police were building up a case, and they got the necessary evidence one day, as one of the club members beat a man with an iron pipe and then sought refuge in the club, refusing to come out when the police ordered him to do so. This "mistake," as Ali called it, gave the police an excuse to raid the club. Inside they found guns, knives, and cannabis. Two more police raids followed, and the club was closed down. It did not take long, however, for the members to find a new location where they could meet, smoke, scheme, and relish their outsider status.

DRUGS AND MUSIC

Klub Imperator was a space for the cultivation of laid-back states of mind more than effervescent ones. Club members would sit on the couch and "get stoned" on cannabis while talking, listening to music, and playing video games, often for hours on end. There would be little bodily movement and few transgressive acts. One visit resembled another and rarely left any particular impression. Perhaps someone might get agitated about a game, but otherwise, the atmosphere was relaxed. Nonetheless, there were episodes where the mood intensified, possibly to the level of effervescence—or violent effervescence, to be more exact, since the excited episodes in the club often included elements of tension, fear, and

destructive behavior. For example, Ali told me that the club members sometimes had fun fighting and shooting one another with splatter guns. Feeding the snake with mice was also a recurrent thrill. And once, when someone brought a dog to the club, the snake was let out of its cage. This time it was the animals who, as Ali put it, ran “totally amok,” an event that really left an impression.

Violent effervescence is not common among the people I have studied, but the combined use of drugs and music certainly is. People generally use alcohol or other drugs to the accompaniment of music. One reason for this is that music helps activate, tune into, and give shape to the effects of drugs. The cannabis high, for example, will be very different for someone sitting on a couch with rap music playing in the background than it will be for the same person listening to loud techno music while a dog and a snake are fighting for their lives just a few yards away. Music can thus serve as a powerful mood modifier. In group settings, it can create a “sonic bond” between people (Vandenberg, Berghman, and Schaap 2020, 2), a sort of “hotline to the collective conscious” (Horsfall 2016).

Indeed, music is one of the most important stimulants affecting the experience of effervescence today. Eighteen-year-old Ditte from Ringsted explained in an interview, “It’s impossible to go out without music. There has to be music. Music gives a certain feel to the night.” Like those of so many other youths, Ditte’s nights out usually followed the same tripartite structure that, I note in passing, corresponds to the three phases in ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep’s (1960) ritual theory: separation, liminality, and incorporation. Ditte would normally meet up in a private home with some friends at dinnertime or a little later. Already at this point, music was played but at a low volume so as to allow for conversations and the gradual buildup of effervescence.

The intake of alcohol at these sessions helped accelerate the interactions and energies. This “warming up,” as Danes call it, is about ridding the body and mind of the restraints and rigidity of daily life and gradually working toward a common mood. Later, Ditte and her friends would go to a bar or a nightclub. To a large extent, their choice of destination was based on the style of music being played. If they were in the mood for a cozy atmosphere with a medium level of intensity, they generally opted for a local bar called Løven, whose jukebox featured a selection of pop and rock music. If they sought a higher level of intensity, they headed for Crazy Daisy. There the music was loud and fast, played by a DJ who used the bass line to mix successive songs into one continuous stream. Finally, Ditte and her friends would enter what Gauthier calls the “comedown period.” Ideally, this is “a soft, pleasant and safe landing” from the emotional heights of the night out (2005, 250). However, for Ditte and so many others whose preferred intoxicant is alcohol, the comedown is often something of a crash: the arduous journey home, the fitful sleep, and eventually, the day of hangover symptoms and anxiety from not knowing exactly what happened the night before. For Ditte, there

was usually little or no music during the comedown period, though other revelers strategically make use of mellow music, such as “chill-out music,” to gently decompress and return to normal equilibrium.

Within nightlife venues, one role of music is to unite people and make them move in unison. Cultural geographer Ben Malbon writes about this in a study of clubbing: “Through imposing sonic orderings and spacings upon the social gathering, music can affect emotional responses and can in certain instances effect a coincidence of emotional arousal at the same moment” (1999, 102). When the music reaches a climax, the crowd erupts in jumping, cheering, and whistling. It can all happen so quickly that it seems simultaneous, as if carefully instructed, rehearsed, and triggered by a command. But at large dance events, many people have never met before, and there is rarely anyone giving them (verbal) commands on how to behave. To a large extent, it is the music that synchronizes the bodies and minds. And as Collins points out, only when a crowd focuses on the same thing, such as music or coordinated movements, can the emotional exchanges speed up and create strong feelings of unity. This process, when it succeeds, is a feedback system in which the dancing both cues and is cued by the collective feelings. The experience can be so powerful that it makes the dancers tune into the music, the movements, and the mood to such a degree that they forget all else. After successful music events, audience members as well as musicians frequently comment that they got carried away, that they forgot themselves, that time flew by, that they felt truly alive. Such remarks, and the experiences to which they attest, come from people of every cultural and subcultural background, suggesting that we are here touching upon a universal quality of music. In the words of Malbon, “Participation in producing, reproducing and consuming music can act to re-state our sense of vitality, our thirst and enthusiasm for living, despite other aspects outside of the musical experience being sources of anxiety or uncertainty” (1999, 79). It is no wonder that people so often turn to music in times of personal or social crisis, such as a global pandemic (Vandenberg, Berghman, and Schaap 2020).

Unlike eyes, ears have no lids, so those who are exposed to music have to take it in and adjust to it, whether they like it or not. Music is therefore an intrusive stimulant. It demands attention. And when it is very loud, rhythmic, and uninterrupted, as in nightlife venues, it distracts the mind from its inner dialogue and fills the entire organism with restless energy that almost commands a reaction—whether movement, singing, or shouting—thus contributing to the interactive rhythmic entrainment that is effervescence.

THE PUB CRAWL

Some of the most affectively charged rituals I have participated in were pub crawls, also known as beer crawls, bar tours, and circuit drinking.³ This type of ritual is popular among students in college towns and tourists at nightlife resorts. It basically consists of a group of people visiting multiple drinking venues over the course of one night and having one or more alcoholic beverages at each of them.

It was during my fieldwork in Sunny Beach that I took an interest in pub crawls. I had attended a few before, but I had found them rather boring and considered them as little more than an excuse to get drunk. However, the pub crawls in Sunny Beach were different. First of all, they were big, with up to six hundred dedicated participants. And they were well organized, with large teams of trained guides who escorted the participants from venue to venue, organized drinking games, and encouraged everyone to dance and sing. Eventually, if someone got hurt, the guides provided consolation, administered first aid, or called an ambulance. I was informed that annual surveys conducted by one of the Danish travel agencies consistently showed that tourists value pub crawls higher than any of the other parties offered at resorts, including the legendary booze cruises, beach parties, barbecue parties, and foam parties. So I decided to pay special attention to pub crawls and started interviewing people about them.

The foundation for pub crawl effervescence is established before the actual event. Often, participants see pictures and hear stories that associate pub crawls with excitement, fun, and danger. The media play an important role in producing such associations through their sensationalist depictions of young tourists going wild. Travel agencies also contribute by presenting advertisements on the internet and in brochures that feature pictures of elated pub crawlers alongside texts full of praise. A sampling taken from the web pages of Danish tour organizers declares that pub crawls are the “climax of the week,” “a must,” and “highly addictive” and that they “CANNOT BE EXPLAINED, MUST BE EXPERIENCED!!” Travel agencies that specialize in youth tours host “warm-up parties” prior to the vacation, where people can meet some of their future guides and fellow travelers while trying some of the classic pub crawl activities. Consider the following field notes from a “warm-up party” held in Denmark:

A guide takes the microphone and calls for some of his colleagues to come up to the DJ booth, and for the guests to assemble on the dance floor. . . . “This will make your vacation more fun,” a guide says. The guests are divided into competing couples. The men get balloons strapped to their crotches and are instructed to burst the balloons with the help of their female partners and without anyone using their hands. A winning couple quickly emerges when the woman bites their balloon. Bang! That’s it. The whole thing was a little

tame, feigned, and awkward. An older, more experienced male guide yells “copulation exercise” and storms up to the DJ booth. He begins to furiously dry hump another male guide who has a balloon strapped to him. It takes a little time before they burst it. That’s how it’s supposed to be done: in a spectacular and unrestrained manner. (Tutenges 2015, 289)⁴

I find it useful to think of effervescent rituals such as pub crawls as having four stages rather than just the three stages described in van Gennep’s classical model (1960). Before the onset of the ritual as such, there tends to be what may be termed a *preparation stage*. During this stage, the participants are introduced to symbols and other collective representations of the activities and energies that lie ahead.⁵ Participants might be informed about what will happen, how they are supposed to act, or how they are meant to feel. They might also be invited to events like the “warm-up party,” where they can try out some of the activities that will take place at the main event. Importantly, the participants themselves often play a proactive role during the preparation stage by hyping the ritual through shared rumors, encouragement, stories, photos, and videos.

Hospitality and tourism researcher Bharath M. Josiam and his colleagues (1998) observed something similar to the preparation stage in what appears to be the very first empirical study of American college students on “spring break” vacations. They write, “For students going on spring break, there is often a great sense of anticipation of the vacation” (1998, 502). This anticipation is expressed on many platforms, including chat forums on the internet. The following messages are two decades old and written by university students from the United States, but they are almost identical to messages being shared today among far-flung international tourists who are preparing for vacations at nightlife destinations:

All goin’ down to Panama City Beach between March 8–17 beware!! We will drink all your beer!!! The parties WILL be the best ever. The Ramada Inn/ Days Inn will never be the same. And they thought the hurricane made a mess. Where is everyone stay’n?? Let me know. You’ll probably want to party with us. If your not in Panama, watch for us on MTV.

Joe, Canisius College

As of approximately 8am on Saturday March 2nd, Penn State University will descend upon South Padre! We’re looking for warm skies and warmer women with little regard for morals. It’s –30 degree in State College, and our brains are fried! Look out Texas, here comes the number one party school in the nation!

Patrick, Pennsylvania State University⁶

Indeed, messages like these convey a great deal of anticipation. They are an important part of the preparations that will eventually enable the tourists to

succeed in the difficult task of overcoming their habits of self-control and indulging in states of effervescence.

For some years, I have been following exchanges on chat forums hosted by two of the leading Danish youth tour operators. Both tourists and guides contribute to these forums. The guides often take on the role of nightlife experts. They give advice about nightclubs, suitable clothing, hotel facilities, and beer costs while reminding everyone to buy tickets for the pub crawl. The tone is almost unanimously enthusiastic (e.g., “BEST PARTY EVER”). Critical messages are not tolerated. When one tourist made disparaging remarks about a nightclub, his message was swiftly removed. “Party poopers” should “get their shit together,” a guide replied, or use another tour organizer. Negative attitudes are not welcome because they are bad for business and disturb the sense of solidarity among like-minded peers seeking an unforgettable blast of a vacation.

In the context of nightlife, effervescence is generally the culmination of a long process that involves collaboration, an alignment of expectations, and finally, a physical merging at a ritual event where physiological stimulants will be used to pump up the energies.⁷

The following field notes from Sunny Beach convey some of my impressions at a pub crawl:

A flyer informs me that the pub crawl will start out at the Sunset Bar. I am late and the place is already swarming with people as I arrive. I count ten guides in the crowd. Two are carrying a banner saying [name of tour operator] and there is also one with a megaphone. . . . The megaphone guy tells us to get going and to follow the banner. I estimate that we are at least 500 people. The mood is still relatively calm, but there are drunken shouts and occasional outbreaks of song. We snake our way up Flower Street and cross the main road, forcing the cars and pedestrians to stop and wait. Other tourists look at us, point their fingers, and take photos. We arrive at a nightclub called Inferno. A group of guides greets us and hands out free shots to everyone. We are ushered inside and onto the dance floor. A tall, suntanned guide [whom I will later refer to as “Oliver”] is standing on a podium with a microphone in his hand. “Get in quick,” he says. Everyone is standing really close. The music starts pumping. “Yeah, that’s the way I like it,” says the guide with the microphone: “I think this is going to be the wildest night of our entire lives.” Now he speaks louder: “GET THOSE HANDS UP IN THE AIR. WE ARE GOING TO DESTROY THIS CITY. THAT’S IT. UP WITH THOSE HANDS!” He continues shouting commands at us, but pauses as the music reaches a climax. He is in control now and looks at us triumphantly. He then yells aggressively, imperiously, in time with the beat: “JUMP. SWEAT FOR ME.” People all around start jumping up and down. It’s an inferno of noise, stroboscopic lights, artificial smoke, and dancing bodies. (Tutenges 2015, 288)

It is difficult to find the right words to describe what it feels like to be in the middle of a tightly packed dance floor with everybody doing their best to pump up the energy. I personally like metaphors that connote heated fluids, such as to foam, bubble, boil, steam, sizzle, and of course, effervesce. At the pub crawl described above, the participants were bubbling with enthusiasm just minutes after entering the second venue of the night. Many were still relatively sober, but other ritual mechanisms—including the preparations that had taken place before the pub crawl—ensured that the party was in full swing right from the start.

After leaving the Inferno nightclub, the level of effervescence dropped a few notches as the participants walked to the next venue. Of course, there was still some singing, shouting, and jumping around, much to the entertainment of other tourists in the vicinity. Many stopped to watch, wave, take photos, film, and so on. Nevertheless, the effervescence had definitely mellowed into a kind of low-key, drunken, compassionate effervescence. People were able to carry on conversations, and I was able to jot down a few field notes.

There are many reasons why the effervescence tends to abate when pub crawl crowds are in transit between venues. One reason is that collective effervescence is a peak experience that most people prefer in short time intervals. Though some individuals like long spells of effervescence—“party animals” who are often praised for their debauchorous stamina—most people need pauses to tone down their activities, especially after bursts like our forty-five intense minutes at Inferno. Leaving the venue, the pub crawl participants and guides were less invested in raising the collective energies, and their attentions scattered. The rhythmic entrainment ended once we left the club and was replaced by leisurely walks outside, conversations within separate groups, and occasional shouting and singing by the liveliest of the participants.

This dissolution of physical and psychic unity—or “group mind,” as Durkheim sometimes calls it—also has to do with the physical environment. The streets of Sunny Beach do not have the same destabilizing technologies as nightclubs. There are no smoke machines, sound systems, or stroboscopic lights. Moreover, in the streets, the participants were no longer forced to be as close to one another as they were inside the nightclub. This distance makes a huge difference. For as Collins makes clear, something exceptional can happen when multitudes are thronged together in the same place: there is mutual bodily awareness, strong emotions arise, and the boundaries between self and other become blurred (2004, 34).

Some have argued that individuals can turn into an excited crowd without being in physical contact with one another (see, e.g., Le Bon 2001). A contemporary example of this could be an internet-based group that never meets face-to-face but nevertheless fervently unites in a common political struggle. But will

the group that never meets be able to reach the same emotional heights as the group that gets physically together? I think not. Consider the difference between watching a football match on television and at a stadium. Or think of the difference between studying a course over the internet versus in a classroom. When humans gather in the same place, they can sense and affect one another with their entire bodies—not only through sight and hearing but also through touch, smell, and taste (as when people kiss). At present, digital technologies cannot replace or compete with this kind of corporeal interaction. Copresence is crucial for fueling high levels of effervescence (Collins 2004).⁸

THE ENERGY STAR

I asked Oliver for an interview in order to hear about his job as a tour guide and his experience with organizing parties. We met for lunch at a place called Viking Bar, one of the venues on the itinerary for his weekly pub crawls. The waiters nearly stumbled over themselves to serve us, and the manager came several times to ask if everything was to our satisfaction. Oliver explained that six hundred excited pub crawlers shell out huge amounts of money at each of the venues they visit, so he often ate for free and got good service in Sunny Beach.

Oliver lived up to his reputation of being charming and bright. He also had a certain aristocratic air about him, though it disappeared completely when he broke out in tirades of swearing or hoarse laughter. Oliver was a true twenty-first-century libertine. He was thirty-seven years old at the time of the interview and had been working with tourists since he was a teenager: “Back in the day, this business was completely unstructured, which was perfect for someone like me: a young, completely egoistic boy. I could just have this summer job, party full on, and do all the things that today are considered mortal sins in this line of work. But because there was no structure, I was able to develop, and as the years went by I found my feet. I worked like that for six years, six seasons. Like a summer job, alongside my studies.”

Oliver liked the job so much that one day he teamed up with some friends to start their own travel agency. They changed the concept. Their agency catered exclusively to young tourists and tried to avoid “cheap hotels” with minuscule rooms that “look like shitholes”—the kinds of establishments where people were piled up in bunk beds and forced to lie there with no air conditioning, “sweating like pigs,” as he put it.

“That doesn’t fly today,” he went on. “These days, goddamn, if you promise them thirty-two TV channels and it turns out there are only thirty-one, they’ll start a riot. They are so focused on these things. [. . .] As long as things are nicely packaged, then they don’t give a f-ck about the contents. [. . .] The hotels down here are made of cardboard but look nice, so people are happy.”

“The kinds of parties that people like, has that changed too?” I probed.

“Yeah, for sure. I can tell how they are influenced by the mass media. It’s like MTV all over. What they see in the music videos, that’s what they want for themselves. When you have these musicians or R & B artists sitting there on a big leather sofa with sexy ladies all around them and the champagne flowing, that’s what they want. They want to be high rollers [. . .] throwing around money even though they don’t have any. Of course, everyone wants a cheap vacation. Like here [in Bulgaria] where things don’t cost anything. Here they can be high rollers, right? It’s like a fantasy, right? Here they can live the dream.”

Oliver’s company offered cheap but nicely packaged vacations. They were for “the beautiful people” who wanted a week or two of sunshine, sea, sand, sex, and lots of partying. Six days a week, Oliver’s company hosted a party that the tourists could buy into, and many went for the whole shebang. At the time I interviewed Oliver, the weekly activity program was as follows: On Sundays, planes arrived with a new crowd of tourists, so there was a welcome meeting followed by a welcome party. Mondays started early with mingling and drinking at a bar on the beach followed by a pub crawl in the evening. Tuesdays heralded the booze cruise, which Oliver described in these words: “You hang out on the deck with a cold beer in your hand, right there in the middle of the Black Sea, and the sun is shining and everything is perfect.” Wednesdays featured a barbecue party with lots of food served at long tables and a show performed by the guides with lots of dirty dance moves and naked skin. Thursdays were for the beach party, where people “choose whether they would prefer to just relax and soak up the sun or dance in front of the loudspeakers.” Fridays ushered in a foam party at one of the biggest nightclubs in town. And Saturdays were dedicated to nursing the hangovers and sending home some of the tourists.

Indeed, as one tourist put it, you do not go to Sunny Beach to “play with Lego.” Some party away most of their waking hours throughout the week. The level of alcohol consumption among the tourists was made clear by some surveys my colleagues and I conducted at the local airport. Before boarding their plane back to Denmark, the tourists (1011 in total) filled out a questionnaire. The results revealed that 41 percent reported drinking twelve or more units of alcohol per day, six or seven days per week. Moreover, the results showed that 5 percent reported drug use and 9 percent reported that they had been involved in a fight during their stay (Tutenges and Hesse 2008). The most alcohol was consumed by tourists traveling with “party package companies” like Oliver’s. Of this group, 59 percent reported consuming twelve or more units per day six or seven days per week (Hesse et al. 2008). We defined a “unit,” according to the Danish standards, to be twelve grams of alcohol. Expressed in more common terms, most of the tourists traveling with party-package companies consumed at least twelve beers (of 4.6 percent alcohol) per day of their vacation. The mean

age of the tourists we surveyed was twenty years old, but a substantial proportion was no more than sixteen to seventeen years old. (In Bulgaria and Denmark, the minimum legal age to buy alcohol is eighteen.)

Obviously, with all the drinking—plus the heat, junk food, lack of sleep, crowds, and so on—the tourists and guides became increasingly disconnected as the days passed. Many reported feeling “dizzy” and as if they were “in a haze,” “in a bubble,” or like “a different person.” These reactions corroborate Durkheim’s observation that sustained celebrations can significantly destabilize people. He writes that “a very intense social life always does a sort of violence to the individual’s body and mind and disrupts their normal functioning. This is why it can last for only a limited time” (1995, 228). In Sunny Beach, many people accepted the strong reactions they were having as part of the package, but for some they became unbearable. For example, I talked with a tourist who woke up one morning with a massive panic attack, something she had never experienced before. And I observed at least two tourists who, it seemed, were suffering from psychotic fits. One of them claimed that he had wrecked his hotel room, which led to the confiscation of his passport. He believed that the police and the mafia were after him, so he had gone underground and was sleeping on the beach. He asked me if I, by any chance, knew of an apartment he could buy.

Effervescence is a state of psychophysical disequilibrium that many people find pleasurable, but only as long as they retain a certain degree of control and are able to avoid a complete collapse.

The vacations offered by Oliver’s company were much the same as those offered by the larger, better-known companies such as the British “Club 18–30” and the American “Sun Splash Tours.” Typically, these vacations take place over several days in an affectively charged environment full of youths who are far away from the restraints of school, work, and family life. These factors all contribute to the production of collective effervescence. As Oliver pointed out, many of the tourists have hardly ever been away from their parents before, so the vacations have a strong effect on them. Some “go nuts,” wreck their hotel rooms, or even jump off their balconies. Oliver therefore emphasized the importance of having a team of skilled guides capable of everything from receiving tourists at the airport to creating good parties: “Some think that you can do the job without using your brain, but [being a guide] is a highly responsible task involving a multitude of roles and situations in a constant flux. You have to be a parent, a best friend, a teacher, a psychologist, and a medic—all at the same time.”

I asked Oliver what he did to create good parties. He mentioned the case of pub crawls and said that he always prepared the tourists mentally before this “party marathon” of their lives:

“We make them understand that this is different from an average night out where you dance for twenty minutes and then go take a break,” he explained.

“The point is to build up the mood from place to place to place to place. Maybe they think that they really lived it up at the first nightclub, but they have to take it higher. They have to sweat. We tell them that they’re not supposed to wear high heels. They’re told that in their hotels so that they have a chance to go to their rooms and change. They’re also not supposed to cover their faces with makeup, because they’re going to sweat. We want the venues covered in sweat. You know, this is a marathon! We have this goal we have to reach. No one can quit. [. . .] The other companies, they just walk with people to different bars and say, ‘Welcome. Here you can buy this and that in the bar. Have fun.’ That’s it. Then they go to the next place after an hour. We don’t do that. We actively kick things off, right? Get people out on the dance floor, just using a few tricks. You know, full speed.”

“What kinds of buttons do you push to kick things off like that?” I asked.

“We tell them how it’s all structured so that they feel they are with people who have things under control. Then they think, ‘Hey, if these guys say so, then that’s how it is.’ They come into a club with six hundred people, and you get them going with just a few manipulative words. You tell them some story. You invent a story about how the manager [in the nightclub] has said that Danes don’t know how to party. Then this sense of competitiveness wells up in them. They want to prove that they know how to do this shit. [. . .] You know, it has to be wilder than anything they have ever experienced before. So here we are, six hundred people, and then it’s got to be wild, right? Controlled, but wild. And then we kick it off and people start jumping all around. Maybe some will start climbing up on tables and chairs. They shouldn’t do that, so our night guards [guides in charge of the security] go and take them down and grab the microphone [to inform them of the rules]. We have things under control, and at the same time we are constantly building it up.”

Oliver and his team made an effort to give their customers the impression that they were in good hands. If someone fell, there would be a night guard to catch them, eliminating any need to hold back. Parties that are safe, or appear safe, make it easier for people to alter their minds.

I attended several parties in Sunny Beach that were marked by a sense of insecurity, primarily due to the presence of intimidating men who appeared to be members of the Bulgarian mafia. Almost uniformly, they had muscular bodies, black clothes, golden jewelry, shaved heads, and cold eyes. Their presence put a serious damper on things. The Bulgarian mafia more or less controls the venues in Sunny Beach, and Oliver had several thug stories to relate. One time he was at the Inferno nightclub dancing when, suddenly, the music was turned off. This happened several times, so he finally asked the manager for an explanation. The manager pointed with a sigh toward an older man who was flanked by what seemed to be a team of bodyguards. When the old man’s cell phone rang, he would signal to

the DJ with a lackadaisical wave, and the music in the club would go silent until the phone call was over. Talk about party poopers.

I pressed Oliver to tell me more about how he made people live it up during his pub crawls.

“People need to be encouraged, right? [We get them] to dance around and do the same dances and things together. They have to concentrate on initiating something. It’s really simple. These are things kids do in kindergarten, things like ‘Let’s touch our knees,’ ‘touch our shoulders,’ ‘touch our feet.’ Stuff like that. And they do it all together. It’s really fun when six hundred people are doing the same thing at once.”

Of course, such simple exercises hardly produce high levels of effervescence, but they help people loosen up. They encourage physical interaction and make deep conversations difficult. Bodies tune into one another, which may eventually lead to the large-scale rhythmic entrainment of collective effervescence. The silly-looking movements also serve as icebreakers that puncture any reserved attitudes. It is hard to remain serious when surrounded by six hundred young adults moving like children at their first gym class. At times, however, the guides instructed the tourists to move in more demanding ways. The following field notes were taken at a beach party:

The beer relay race begins after dinner. Three teams are formed, and each participant is supposed to run sixteen yards to a waiting guide who is holding a large draft beer. The participant must down the beer, run around the guide five times, do a summersault, run back, and give way to the next in line. Everyone must take two turns and drink two beers. The participants are overwhelmingly male. The guide says into the microphone: “Now we’re gonna play a game we learned in Spain. We’re gonna dig holes, so grab a shovel.” He laughs into the microphone. There are four teams, each with three players. They are told to dig for 10 minutes. The guide with the microphone tells those not participating to come close and cheer. Some of the other guides encourage others nearby to “Come watch. This is cool as hell.” The diggers are given small shovels, and they really get to work. Some discuss tactics while digging. Others just give it their all. A female guide runs up to the bar: “Beer, beer, lots of beer.” She walks around with a tray and serves the diggers, who are laboring under the relentless sun.

Oliver and his team of guides always opted for the road of excess to generate effervescence. They did not employ ascetic body techniques such as silent group meditation or respiratory exercises, which can arguably also generate experiences akin to effervescence (Pagis 2015). The tourists were instructed to move and shout, to wiggle and roar. “The sweat has to flow!” Oliver often shouted into his microphone. Also, the chosen activities generally had strong

elements of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “degradation,” meaning “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (1984, 19–20). When people dig holes on the beach and compete in drinking games, they inevitably become soiled with sand, sweat, and beer. This has the effect of pulling them down to the same earthy or subearthy level, regardless of their everyday status. The distinguishing signs that normally separate them are washed away. The beautiful and the ugly, the rich and the poor, females and males—everyone is urged to lower himself or herself and partake in collective acts of cheerful indecency. The following notes describe another classic pub crawl game, which also illustrates how acts of degradation can bring people closer:

When we are about to leave, the guide tells us to stand in line. We are supposed to reach one of our arms through our legs and lock hands with the person behind us, so that we’re all standing together, with our arms more or less in each other’s laps. We get to know each other well during these group games! The guy in front of me smiles and tells me that he’s in a great spot. His partner in front of him is a woman wearing a miniskirt and his head is only a few centimeters from her ass, and his arm is between her legs. I suggest to the guy that if I pull my arm as hard as I can, he will do a somersault. He declines the offer. Then we begin to walk. We move away from [the bar] and out onto the crowded beach promenade.

People certainly make fools of themselves by waddling along in a human chain like the one described above or by doing “nasty body tequilas,” a drinking activity in which pairs lick salt from each other’s feet or buttocks, down a shot of tequila, and suck on a piece of lemon. But the laughter that erupts in situations like these is generally inclusive and directed at the entirety of ritual participants. The degradation is collective. The guides also readily put themselves in awkward situations, performing in strip shows, participating in drinking contests, or dressing up in silly costumes. They thus expose themselves to laughter and show with their bodies that there are myriad forms of degradation—many of them fun. This willingness may help others win their inner battles against self-censorship.

The degradation performed by revelers tends to be a deeply social mechanism that undermines hierarchies and brings people close by revealing some of the basic traits that we humans share—most notably, our endless capacity to make fools of ourselves.

However, in some cases, attempts at joyous degradation become perverted or harmful. For example, one of the travel agencies once hosted a party that, according to the official announcement, would feature a world-famous band to be flown in by helicopter. The band turned out to be two unknown, tone-deaf individuals with dwarfism. The concert did generate a lot of laughter, but it was

the two people on stage who were being laughed at, not the ritual gathering as a whole.

The “Buffalo Rule” is another example of how degradation can lead to divisions. This game is named after the alleged Wild West practice of drinking with one’s left hand so that the right hand is always ready to grab one’s gun. Tourists as well as guides who are caught drinking with their right hand have to chug all the alcohol still in their glasses. Offenders are quickly surrounded by a pack of people who unremittingly yell, “Buffalo, Buffalo, Buffalo!” until the glass is empty. Sometimes the rule is used strategically and repeatedly against weak, unpopular, or drunken individuals to deepen their state of inebriation and, eventually, cause them to vomit. The targeted individuals might not necessarily have broken the rule by drinking with their right hand, but it can be difficult to explain this when surrounded by a group of people yelling “Buffalo!” at the top of their lungs.

I asked Oliver about when and how he would speak to the pub crawlers, and how he timed this with the music.

“It has to peak,” he said. “This, oh, this is an art form! I discovered this when training my staff how to do it. We do training sessions for those who want to learn. We talk about how to find the flow. You should know what you want to say before you begin talking. Then people will listen. You need to control people. You need to make sure that the volume on the microphone is loud enough and the music turned down. You have to indicate with your tone of voice what is coming: when they are supposed to respond and when they have to listen. You activate them by talking in a voice that goes up and peaks; that will make them respond. Then you make a pause; move the microphone away from your face and give them a few seconds to get attentive again. If they don’t listen, you tell them, ‘Hey, listen up.’ It’s simple. And then you should talk in a consistent tone of voice, and they’ll listen. And then talk in a relatively slow tempo after that. Firm and determined. You don’t need to yell and scream. You should be clear and precise. When you are there and you want them to respond again, then full power. You pull it, you pull the bow back, all the way, you pull it with all you’ve got, and when you can’t hold it anymore, that’s when you let go. The DJ will know that now is the time to set in. He can feel it too. He punches the play button to start the music, right then.”

Oliver’s words, indeed his whole personality, bring to mind Elias Canetti’s description of how to spellbind a crowd: “The art of a speaker consists in compressing all his aims into slogans. By hammering them home he then engenders a crowd and helps to keep it in existence. He creates the crowd and keeps it alive by a comprehensive command from above” (1978, 311). Oliver was a charismatic speaker who had perfected his art through many years of practice. Importantly, however, the masses of people he spoke to were very keen on coalescing into a crowd—that primeval creature with multiple limbs and heads—and the youths

actively contributed to the metamorphosis by cheering one another on, shouting out commands, and initiating drinking games.

Effervescence may be orchestrated by a single individual, but it always comes to fruition through collaborative efforts. A person who addresses an energized crowd—whether a guide at a pub crawl, a DJ in a nightclub, or a musician at a concert—should be understood as a social medium and conductor rather than the actual genesis of affective flows. Crowd members may have the impression that it is a lone individual or a sacred object that possesses the energies and passes them on, but this is not the case. From this Durkheimian perspective, God is not a singular being or an illusory construction. Rather, God is a force—a very real force—that emanates from a communion of humans. God and society are one (Durkheim 1995, 208).

I find it useful to think of Oliver and his kin as *energy stars*, a term coined by Collins (2004) to designate individuals with high levels of emotional energy (EE) who are able to draw attention to themselves and boost the emotional energies in other people. Collins writes that “energy stars” have “an EE-halo that makes them easy to admire” (2004, 132). Correspondingly, I have often heard guides being referred to as “rock stars,” “superstars,” and “Gods.” Some of them even have groupie-like followers who do their best to be as close as possible to their preferred “star.” Again, it is not that the energy star has effervescence and transmits it to other people. Rather, the energy star is a magnetic person who is good at attracting attention and helping other people go beyond themselves so as to “form an interdependent system in which all parts are linked and vibrate sympathetically” (Durkheim 1995; quoted in Duffett 2015, 187).

The leaders of effervescent rituals are expected to generate high energy. When they do not, disappointment often follows. This was made crystal clear to me in Sunny Beach by a team of guides who remained calm and reserved throughout most of the week. A tourist complained that the guides had bored her from day one. On the thirty-minute bus ride from the airport to her hotel, for example, the guides had not sung any songs or shouted, “Let’s drink!” even once, she lamented. The guides made only one comment en route: “Now we are in Sunny Beach.”

Another female tourist made the following comments about the same group of guides: “They’re supposed to make sure that people are in a good mood and stay with us. They’re supposed to kick things off and yell ‘Cheers!’ and make us do the same. But they’re not doing it this year, not at all. These are the worst guides I have ever seen. They just walk around and do nothing. These guides have no training whatsoever and don’t know the place at all.”

“Why is it so important for them to lead the party?” I wanted to know.

“Because that’s what they are here for. That’s why we pay them. They’re supposed to make sure that people have a great time. I mean, if they’re only interested in practical things, then I don’t think they should be guides.”

A male tourist echoed these opinions, emphasizing that guides should be festive and help others become festive as well. He said the guides from his previous vacations were great because they “went totally crazy, just didn’t give a damn. We had one last year [who . . .] just went crazy: painted himself and yelled and was really fun and just didn’t care what he looked like. He actually appeared on the front page [of a newspaper] when we came home because he had sold Viagra to the guests. He didn’t sell any to us. But he just didn’t care, and he showed so much energy. [. . . He] stripped off his clothes up at the bar all the time, showed people the path they could follow and act just as dumb as he was. He was totally full of energy.”

“And what was so fun about that? Another dumb question.”

“It’s just that he shows that there are no limits for what you can do down here—how dumb you can act. Just be as crazy as you want and totally ignore what people think about you. And it worked. People really let down their guard when they see a guide stand up there and do that. If you have guides who take the lead, then that’s the way it is. They are the ones who have to kick off the party.”