



LESSONS FROM AN
INFECTION: TEMPORAL
FORMS FOR ELUSIVE
AND INDETERMINATE
FUTURES IN THE
INFECTING THE CITY
PUBLIC ART FESTIVAL

JAY
PATHER

Cape Town

Where Strangers Meet: Art and the Public Realm

Foreword/Preface by Jo Beall

‘I’m not saying I told you so but rappers have been reporting from the front for years.’¹

Why is the British Council interested in the public realm? ‘The public realm can be simply defined as a place where strangers meet’. So says the eminent urbanist, Richard Sennett.² If this is the case then the British Council, a cultural relations organisation that brings people together from different cultures, countries and continents, works squarely in the public realm. For around eighty years, through promoting the English language, the Arts and educational links, the Council has fulfilled its Royal Charter mandate to ‘promote cultural relationships and the understanding of different cultures between people and peoples of the United Kingdom and other countries’,³ bringing strangers together from all corners of the globe to encounter each other. While formal or mainstream diplomacy primarily involves bilateral relations between national governments, the pursuit of cultural relations happens largely among people – in and through educational institutions, cultural organisations, communities and cities.

Unlike the private realm, such as the family where we know each other well and close up, the public realm is characterised by incomplete knowledge and, significantly, by place:

‘Traditionally, this place could be defined in terms of physical ground, which is why discussions of the public realm have been... linked to cities; the public realm could be identified by the squares, major streets, theatres, cafés, lecture halls, government assemblies, or stock exchanges where strangers would be likely to meet. Today, communications technologies have radically altered the sense of place; the public realm can be found in cyberspace as much as physically on the ground.’⁴

While much of the literature on the public realm focuses on politics and citizenship, class and social identity,⁵ the so-called ‘performative school’ offers a more cultural approach, derived from anthropology, focusing on ‘how people express themselves to strangers’.⁶ Taking this as our starting point our interest was in how arts professionals and performers, policy makers, and citizens, connect through the arts in different public realms.

Cities exhibit a critical mass of social, educational and cultural organisations, concentrations of actual and virtual communities, public spaces, and physical and digital connections. As such, they present a unique opportunity to use the power of arts, culture, education and the creative industries to power city and regional economies, catalyse urban renewal and to promote and share our cultural assets. The British Council has a presence in five cities in the UK and over 180 cities around the world, with its work extending far beyond this to several hundred cities and their rural hinterlands. From this base we are working to support cities in the UK and abroad to be internationally inspired and globally connected.

By using our knowledge, experience and connections we can support cities to achieve their international ambitions, working in partnership to create more livable, inclusive and vibrant urban spaces and places and to improve the quality of life for their citizens through exchange of knowledge, people, ideas, insight, culture and experiences. Our cultural relations approach is built on a spirit of

mutuality and co-creation, which inform this collection and how we engage with art and the public realm.

Most would agree that a good city is one where people's basic needs are met, where public services are delivered affordably and efficiently, where the economy thrives, the environment is protected and where public spaces are not only safe, accessible and affordable but also interesting and inspiring – alive places in which people can engage with each other and where creativity can flourish. Contemporary urban planners adhere to the view that beautiful cities are more liveable cities and culture-led development has become *de rigueur* for urban planners in many places around the world. Within the arts the concepts of public art and public space are intertwined and as Geoffrey Crossick writes in *Understanding the value of arts and culture*, the cultural force of the city and its built environment plays a significant role in this. Yet as Crossick acknowledges, the tangible role that the arts play has been largely untested.⁷

This is a contested area with some seeing the harnessing of the arts to promote creative cities and urban economies as the instrumentalisation of culture.⁸ Conventional public art can also be viewed as exclusionary, foregrounding the interests of elites over ordinary urban dwellers and artist-led gentrification.⁹ The conversation surrounding cultural value is engaging with such challenges and the need to develop appropriate means of engagement and participation in the arts. Cities, with their vast and growing populations, their density and networks of public services, spaces and institutions are central to this wider discussion.

Underpinning our approach and captured in the spirit of this collection is that cities are about people and the character of a city itself and expressions of its attractiveness and liveability is generated as much by those who live in it as by its built environment and infrastructure, its governing body or political leadership. Cities are the sum expression of all their people, civil societies and the institutions that define the experience of being in the city.

Where there is an inconsistency between political rhetoric and local reality then city diplomacy efforts will likely be undermined. We cannot project an image of a city as the 'greatest place on earth to live' if the reality is only that for some of our citizens.¹⁰

This collection focuses on what happens to both identity formation and place making when people engage in the public realm through the arts. Its starting point is to recognise artists less as individual producers of *objet d'art* and more as collaborators, participants or producers of situations, shifting the focus from 'production to reception, and emphasises the importance of a direct, apparently unmediated engagement with particular audience groups'.¹¹ It explores facilitating participation in the arts in everyday and extraordinary spaces and shares ideas and experience of the public realm internationally.

The collection shows public artists grappling with often complex, social dynamics and relationships as they play themselves out in and through public space. Because art operates beyond the rational and the functional, it often challenges urban planners who by definition are Cartesian in their approach. Yet planners do recognise that cities are social spaces and that social spaces continually change and in the process, that cities are constantly made and remade. Amin and Thrift see the city, 'as everyday process, mobilised by flesh and stone in interaction',¹² growing and morphing around the actions and engagement of ordinary people. This is at the heart of the British Council's cultural relations approach, sharing international experience in the hope of inspiring understanding and opportunity.

Footnotes

- ¹ Ice T, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 7th May, 1992 at the time of the Los Angeles riots. Cited in Edward W. Soja (2000) *Postmetropolis, Critical studies of cities and regions*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. 374
- ² Richard Sennett (2016) 'The Public Realm', *Quant*, www.richardsennett.com/site/senn/templates/general2.aspx?pageid=16&cc=gb
- ³ British Council (1993) *Royal Charter and Bye-laws*, London: British Council
- ⁴ Richard Sennett, 2016
- ⁵ See for example, Arendt, Hannah, 'Public Rights and Private Interests.' In M. Mooney and F. Stuber, eds., *Small Comforts for Hard Times: Humanists on Public Policy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977; Noel O'Sullivan, 'The Concept of the Public Realm', 2010, Routledge; and Douglas Kelbaugh, 'Three Urbanisms and the Public Realm', *Proceedings. 3rd International Space Syntax Symposium Atlanta 2001*, www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/3sss/papers_pdf/14_kelbaugh.pdf; and Richard Sennett, 'Quant: The Public Realm', 2016, www.richardsennett.com/site/senn/templates/general2.aspx?pageid=16&cc=gb
- ⁶ Richard Sennett, 2016
- ⁷ Crossick, Geoffrey and Kasynska, P, (2016) 'Understanding the value of arts and culture', AHRC Cultural Value project
- ⁸ See for example, R. Florida (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class*, New York: Basic Books and C. Landry (2008) *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*, London: Earthscan
- ⁹ See for example Miles (2005) 'Interruptions: Testing the rhetoric of culturally led urban development' *Urban Studies*, 43(2) pp. 421-440; J. Peck (2005) 'Struggling with the creative class' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 29(4), pp. 740-770; and S. Zukin (2010) *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- ¹⁰ Jo Beall and David Adam (2017) *Cities, Prosperity and Influence: The role of city diplomacy in shaping soft power in the 21st century*, London: British Council, p. 23 www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/g229_cities_paper.pdf
- ¹¹ M. Kwon (2004) *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity*, Massachusetts: MIT Press
- ¹² A. Amin and N. Thrift (2002) *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 10

Where Strangers Meet

Introduction by Claire Doherty

I am making my way along a train station platform in my home town of Bristol in the west of England. It's early summer, a time in which this harbour city reawakens, its public character more extrovert and social for a few short months before hibernating come October. But this morning, most of those around me are moving with the speed of a ritual commute – already mentally occupied with the day. Though physically moving through the concourse of a railway station, these people are already somewhere else – their knees locked under a desk, their faces buried in a screen. There are very few bodies at leisure – unlike the lingering space of the public square, or, for some, the lingering time of the lunch-hour. This is a public space in which bodies are propelled onwards; this is not a place of looking, agitation or agency, nor unexpected encounter. And then something changes...

In amongst the moving crowd are two stationary figures – in worn, khaki soldiers' uniforms. They are standing by the platform edge, waiting, occasionally catching the eye of a stranger. Incongruous due to the anachronistic nature of their historic costumes, they are all the more startling because of their stillness. They're not drawing attention to themselves through any words or movements. They are not exactly theatrical, but they're performing precisely because they should not be here. They are out of time and out of place.

On approaching them, I am handed a card in silence. It bears the name of a Lance Corporal who died on the first day of the Somme in the First World War – 1 July 1916 – and his age, 17. This is a memorial of sorts, but one that understands the public realm not as a stable site, but as a place and a time in a constant state of becoming; a place in which we are all implicated as actors and in which past, present and future are colliding. This is the progressive sense of place that geographer Doreen Massey once evoked as she described ‘place’ as a collision of events and times, memories, fictions, material culture and meeting points.¹

My encounter that morning in Bristol was later revealed to be one of over two million uncanny encounters of First World War soldiers in public spaces across the UK on 1st July 2016. Though it felt intimate and specific – it was an artwork of immense scale, disbursed through multiples times and places throughout that single day, accumulating online as a mass public encounter and public memorial.

A project by artist Jeremy Deller in collaboration with Rufus Norris, Director of the National Theatre for 14-18NOW, the UK’s arts programme for the First World War centenary, *we’re here because we’re here* became one of the most celebrated public artworks in the UK of recent years (explored in detail by Kate Tyndall in this collection), and it was a catalyst for my interest in working with the British Council on this new collection of essays: *Where Strangers Meet*.

We’re here because we’re here is representative of a diverse network of artistic interventions, projects, gatherings and actions globally that are challenging the way in which we think about ourselves, our pasts and our future potential, by changing our experience of the urban public realm. But even within the 12 months since Deller’s performers infiltrated my consciousness and changed my perception of the temporal limits of public space, the title given by the British Council to this collection – ‘Where Strangers Meet’ – seems all the more provocative, all the more politicized than the phrase used by Richard Sennett in 2009 to describe the anthropological character of public space.²

Within the past year, as a culture of fear has built around the fault-lines of intolerance, strangers have become the silhouetted figures of potential violence lurking in the shadows of public space. Sennett's promotion of the 'unfinished' city plan, which allows for its inhabitants to adapt and change the public realm, seems all the more fragile.

"In a 'post-truth' world," UCLAN's Professor Lynn Froggett suggests in this collection, "the meeting of strangers in civic space demands ever more effort, reaching across gaps in recognition and understanding, and in urban environments beset by division and discrimination the need arises again and again. It impels the citizen to take a critical and self-reflexive perspective on their relations with civil society and the body politic. One of the key services that art can perform in urban environments is to change the conditions under which 'strangers meet' so that we can know each other better and imagine other ways to live together."

Where Strangers Meet considers the recent artistic, technological and political shifts determining emergent new forms of cultural experience in the public realm and in turn, what is at stake in the emergent forms of our cities' cultures. The voices included in this collection speak from disparate locations across the globe, distinguished from one another by their own set of conditions, and in some cases, distinct political positions. There are, however, some significant shared concerns which emerge globally. These include:

- The encroachment of privatisation on public space and the implications for freedom of movement or cultural expression and new cultural forms;
- The risks of 'artwashing' urban development, thereby disguising social implications and speeding the rate of gentrification at the expense of urgent community needs;³

- The growth of a culture of fear which threatens to infringe civil liberties, stalling the potential for individuals to freely adapt public spaces for personal or collective cultural activities, whether that be through exclusions due to political or environmental upheaval or the imposition of state forces of control;
- The rapid development of mobile technology and significant changes to the way in which people are authoring, co-creating and participating in culture and the emergence of simulated experiences and their ramifications for our understanding of what 'public' space might be and how it is constructed;
- A tension between self-initiated, self-directed cultural activity and organised programmatic approaches to city-wide cultural programmes for economic growth.

The collection embraces a broad definition of 'art' in the public realm which encompasses unexpected and unannounced artistic interventions, immersive, dispersed and networked performances and simulated experienced, direct actions and collective, grass-roots resistance through imaginative cultural activities. The collection gives insight into the concerns of architects and planners, but focuses less on form and design, than on the social, political and environmental implications of those creative practices in public spaces. It recognises residents, visitors, commuters and passers-by and new arrivals as active respondents – protagonists in, rather than just witnesses to, the stories unfolding in the public realm.

The meaning of 'public realm' itself is stretched and redefined through these essays by contributors who are concerned less with the theoretical discourse around the terms 'public space' and 'public realm' (see Habermas, Arendt, Mouffe and Sennett) than with the lived experience of publicness. There are clearly defined cultural differences of course in the conditions of public space across these distinct localities: for example, the provisional nature of public realm

from Mexico City to Rio to Cairo and Lagos contrasts starkly from one other, each with its own particular set of political and social conditions, ritualised public practices, architectures and topographies; furthermore the formal character of interior public space evolving through the privatised urban development explored by architect Diba Salam in Dubai contrasts significantly to that described by Karolin Tampere in her consideration of Oslo's harbour area and the work of artist collective Futurefarmers or Dave Haslam's exploration of the club scenes of Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham.

What does emerge are a common set of tactics that use degrees of subversion and collective action as a means to work as artists and cultural producers in the gaps between planning and lived experience. In his description of two consecutive forms of exclusion which emerged in Cairene public space following the momentous events of the spring of 2011, for example, Omar Nagati describes the revolutionary reclamation of public space by the public which led to exclusion through fragmentation, and the securitisation of public space by state control. "Art intervention in public space", he suggests, "work[s] through the cracks of the system, both geographically and politically, using design as a negotiating tool, and subversive tactics to mediate the different forms of exclusion resultant from the periods of flux and of securitisation." This responsive and agile mode of operating by artists, designers and creative practitioners is a common thread to emerge particularly where a city is in flux.

As this collection unfolded in 2017, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake hit Mexico City, rendering contributor Gabriella Gomez-Mont's words all the more resonant, as she spoke of cities who are in the process of imagining themselves out loud. Yet equally, whilst some are becoming acutely attuned to the need to adapt to environmental shifts and changes, so for others the public realm is increasingly mediated and filtered; this is a disbursed and connected public, largely occupying a virtual public space. Rather than explore specifically the internet as a form of public space, however, three writers have considered the implications of creative technology on our experience of physical spaces.

Professors Lynn Froggett and Jill Stein explore how ‘play’ through digital interaction in this shifting landscape holds out the promise of integration and connection. Stein surveys the digital platforms for collectively authoring spaces, such as location-based and location-specific mobile ambient storytelling; location-based mobile games; augmented reality experiences; and social location tagging/sharing, all of which, she suggests, “blur the lines between the digital and physical public realms by engaging city dwellers with a persistent layer of ambient information.”

Froggett asks: “What is the impact on the public consciousness of this repetitive simulation, widespread engagement in flow states... and the ‘Disneyesque’ aesthetic of much game design? How does it affect human interaction in public space?”

Both authors look at critical, creative practices which are emerging as a form of resistance to a simulated, anodyne public realm to enable what Froggett refers to as a kind of ‘deep play’ whereby critical reflection and individual agency is triggered, rather than repressed. Furthermore, Tony White offers an insight into a live-streamed takeover of libraries by young people in the West Midlands of the UK as a means of considering the library as a public place free from judgement and catalyst for co-created content and unregulated behaviour. This chimes with Dave Haslam’s assertion of the need for self-organised, uncontrolled spaces. “The fact is,” he suggests, “great ideas come from the margins.”

There is no shortage of future forecasting against which to set these reflections on arts and the public realm, but as William Gibson suggested, “the future is here, it’s just not very evenly distributed.”

Froggett suggests, “The capacity to affect and be affected by the needs and claims of others – who are not of one’s friendship group, community or kin – is a neglected aspect of civic life. Affect flows in public space, as it does in private lives, informing how we act into the public realm as embodied and emotional subjects.”

In a recent research inquiry into the civic role of arts organisations, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation identified common characteristics and operating principles shared by arts organisations committed to a strong civic role, namely they are rooted in local needs; develop community agency and build capability and social capital; as well as championing artistic quality and diversity and provide challenge.⁴ Such principles are shared by the artistic projects gathered here which work upon the public realm, modelling new civic acts of tolerance, of resolution, resistance and challenge.

This collection tracks starkly different approaches to addressing the inequities of the present – through direct action, through collaborative exchange and by modelling potential new behaviours or processes. In his study of Utopia, Richard Noble suggested that, ‘for artworks to be utopian, they need to offer two things which seem to pull in rather different directions: on one hand a vision or intimation of a better place than the here and now we inhabit; and on the other some insight into what Ernst Bloch terms the “darkness, so near”, the contradictions and limitations that drive our will to escape the here and now in the first place’.

Former Queens Museum Director, Laura Raicovich spoke, when spearheading a new vision for the museum in 2017, of the importance of the civic role cultural institutions play with reference to the museum’s Immigrant Movement International, a community space in Queens that provides free educational, health and legal services. IM is a partnership between the museum and Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, who is interviewed by Gal-dem editor, Liv Little for the collection. Bruguera describes her notion of *arte util* (useful art) as art which is “the elaboration of a proposal that does not yet exist in the real world and because it is made with the hope and belief that something may be done better, even when the conditions for it to happen may not be there yet. Art is the space in which you behave as if conditions existed for making things you want to happen, happen, and as if everyone agreed with what we suggest, although it may not be like that yet:

art is living the future in the present. Art is also making people believe, although we know we may have not much more than the belief itself. Art is to start practicing the future.”⁵

The approaches considered in this collection can be seen to embody this contradictory pull: between the dream of an ideal society and the circumstances of the world in which we live. Some, such as Tania Bruguera’s *Arte Util* and the work of *Futurefarmers* here explored by Karolin Tampere, draw upon the aesthetic strategy of ‘modelling’, as a process through which ideals are tested as types of micro-utopia, whilst others are more assertively direct actions. This difference is often determined by the ways in which the artworks have emerged: some are the result of commissioning processes, outreach programmes or as part of larger-scale urban developments, others are self-initiated and/or the result of collective action.

A consideration of these provisional, unfolding set of works and movements reveals the potential of art in public to expose and respond to the encroachment of corporate interests on public space, to the diminishing opportunities for social cohesion and to the invisibility of the displaced and dispossessed in public life. The significant risk, however, as outlined in the recent discourse on ‘artwashing’ and critiques of the ‘creative city’⁶ is “the deliberate use of arts and culture to secure future profitable gain rather than social inclusion or commentary.”

But what emerges from this collection is a more subtle set of arguments for the involvement of artists and artistic practices in the development of our cities through collaborative action, resistance, creative invention and by offering productive alternatives through the occupation of the centre to reassert the periphery. *Futurefarmers*’ proposition for a public bakehouse in Oslo for example operates as the means by which radical approaches in food production enter the space of corporate urban redevelopment.



Rhodes must fall © Schalk van Zuydam

Alongside this utopic modelling of potential futures are the equally resonant issues of grappling with a city's contested past. It is worth remembering that Jeremy Deller's soldier performers disruption of the temporal limits of public space in Bristol last year also occurred in a centre promenade in Bristol overlooked by a statue of slave-owner Edward Colston – a site of consistent and increasingly urgent debate in a city built on the slave trade. Historian David Olusoga explores the implications of public monuments as sites of contested histories through the protest movement for the removal of the Cecil Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town and the subsequent violent rallies which erupted around the confederate statue in Charlottesville this August.

The act of commemoration has always been closely aligned to strategies of storytelling, by which a particular history of the past is sanctioned by those in the present to bring about a particular future. As Boris Groys suggests, 'The future is ever newly planned – the permanent change of cultural trends and fashions makes any promise of a stable future for an artwork or a political project improbable. And the past is also permanently rewritten – names and

events appear, disappear, reappear, and disappear again. The present has ceased to be a point of transition from the past to the future, becoming instead a site of the permanent rewriting of both past and future – of constant proliferations of historical narratives beyond any individual grasp or control.”

As Deller’s significant work of art in the public realm indicated on 1 July 2016, the potential of art in the public realm is to assist us with rewriting and reimagining how we live together in the future, but essentially by revisiting the past with new eyes, lifted from our screens, to feel the materiality of being in the physical environment and to look the stranger in the eye.

Footnotes

- ¹ Doreen Massey, ‘Landscape as Provocation: Reflections on Moving Mountains’, 2006 republished and downloadable at oro.open.ac.uk/7227/1/Journal_of_material_culture_pdf_version.pdf
- ² Richard Sennett, ‘Quant: The Public Realm’, available to read and download at www.richardsennett.com/site/senn/templates/general2
- ³ See journalist Jack Shenker’s recent article in *The Guardian* who characterised the threat of privatisation as the “insidious creep of pseudo-public space” where the control of ‘acceptable behaviour’ ranges from covert policing and surveillance to the less obvious ‘planning-out’ of free movement
- ⁴ Gulbenkian Foundation, *Rethinking Relationships*, downloadable from civicleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk
- ⁵ Tania Bruguera, ‘Reflexions on Arte Útil (Useful Art)’, available to read or download at www.taniabruquera.com
- ⁶ See Oli Mould, ‘Why culture competitions and ‘artwashing’ drive urban inequality’, *Open Democracy*, Sept 2017. Download at www.opendemocracy.net/uk/oli-mould/why-culture-competitions-and-artwashing-drive-urban-inequality and Alexander Nazaryan, ‘The ‘Artwashing’ Of America: The Battle For The Soul Of Los Angeles Against Gentrification’, read at www.newsweek.com/2017/06/02/los-angeles-gentrification-california-developers-art-galleries-la-art-scene-608558.html

Lessons from an infection: Temporal forms for elusive and indeterminate futures in the *Infecting the City* Public Art Festival

Text by Jay Pather

Introduction

Urban public art within the context of a postcolonial city like Cape Town is a multi-layered and complex monster. The differences in what South Africans perceive as the public, as art, and as urban continue to grow, and are emblematic of deepening polarisation across race and class. Most global cities are characterised as transitional, but inside of a South African city this transitional ebb and flow is not covert, gradual, nor metaphoric. It is material, palpable and deeply inscribed in the daily workings of a new country, whose dreams at the dawn of democracy 22 years ago struggle to be realised.

Outside the comfort, relative homogeneity and controlled machinations of the gallery or theatre, public art in any city takes on the constantly shifting meanings ascribed to it in our increasingly heterogeneous societies. The conception of public art comes with a range of critique from several players – the artist together with the capital, the commissioning agency, the structures that allow it to happen under conditions that may alter the original conception, the critical community, and the numerous publics – those who don't know and do not participate, and those who do. This is an extraordinary number of gatekeeping eyes in the genesis of one work.

As a result, most cities boast brash, generic examples of public art that have tried to please too many of these players and the works have ended up being monsters that no-one wants to claim. Processes of commissioning and making public art toe a fine line between

creating an enduring, universally loved work, and creating a work that is of the moment, of its time, which paradoxically changes.

A case in point is the shift in context around a bronze sculpture that stands in the Financial District in Manhattan, Charging Bull. The work was originally erected as a symbol of resilience in the face of the stock market crash of 1987, by New York artist Arturo Di Modica using his own resources. Then in February 2017, the asset manager State Street Global Advisors had a sculpture of a young girl erected in front of it. Hands on her hips and chest puffed out, this attempt at an evocation of a David and Goliath tension foregrounded some of the more pressing concerns of our time. Besides State Street's contention that it was a comment on the dominance of males on boards – the pinnacle of corporate power – the introduction of a vulnerable yet powerful counter to bullishness seemed to echo the sentiments for a return to the human in the wake of corporate corruption and the Donald Trump victory. Several twists have followed with Di Modica, an immigrant, calling foul that he has unjustly been cast as villain, and a revelation by the Huffington Post that women made up less than one third of State Street's own board. And so the counter claims go. I am interested here in the countless ironies that the permanent public art sculpture presents to a dynamic, contemporary, self-reflexive world.

South Africa has had its own share of concrete sculptural anomalies in the midst of spaces of turbulent change. Chumani Maxwele, a student at the University of Cape Town – in a performative gesture that has reverberated globally – threw excrement at a statue of Cecil John Rhodes in early 2015. The statue depicted Rhodes sitting on a chair, looking into the distance at Cape Town, regal yet covetous, unshakeable and unmovable. Maxwele's action seemed impotent in force and scale in the face of the concrete statue sitting on a large plinth: he was quickly stopped by university security personnel and the statue cleaned up. But, as a metaphor, the action was so powerful that wide-scale student protests followed, the statue was finally removed and an entire movement – #Rhodesmustfall – was born, and continues to exist.

The remaining empty plinth continues to be re-imagined in a variety of ways, shifting meaning and symbol periodically. In one evocation, the long shadow of the absent sculpture was drawn, the silhouette bringing attention to both the absence of the offending form, and a continued abiding presence of colonial tropes and systemic violence in our society. In another evocation a plastic chair with green fabric and a cross appeared on the plinth commemorating the death of Mgcineni Noki who was shot in a hail of bullets during the Marikana Massacre of 2012. The plinth has also been a stage for several performances, as well as a range of speakers during student gatherings. This inversion of form and function has in itself become a metaphor for the arduous process of undoing colonial influences in a society that remains untransformed for the majority of its peoples. South Africa is continually ranked at the top of the most unequal countries in the world.

Sethembile Msezane, an artist living in Cape Town, has created several endurance performances that take the form of a sculpture, very often referencing an iconic black woman. She poses on her own plinth and remains still for several hours. The works are performed in close proximity to Cape Town's many sculptures of dead white men. In doing so, Msezane draws attention to the lack of any public sculpture of, or by, a black woman in the city.

Msezane's work is nevertheless emblematic of the value of the temporal public art work. Transition, idiosyncrasy, entropy and migration are all notions we associate with a city like Cape Town. Tokolos Stencils, an art collective based in Cape Town, includes as one of their works a perversion of the city's slogan 'This city works for you'. Using their trademark stencil, they have marked several spaces throughout the city with the slogan 'This city works for a few'. Of late as with cities throughout the world, South African cities such as Cape Town have been characterised by rapid growth as well as gentrification. Inner city property prices have skyrocketed effectively keeping out the majority of the city's population. This has seen an

attendant increase in attempts at policing and trafficking city dwellers' and city users' movements by the City of Cape Town's managements. The presence of overt control and regimentation and an obsession with visible efficiency and delivery pervades. The rambling creative city based on impulse and improvisation has faded. When the experience of a city is so well policed a kind of anesthesia sets in. The growing and more and more, demonstrative challenge to the anesthetic by a rebellious citizenry, most of whom are made to feel unwelcome in the city centre, is an impulse that underlies the increasing instances of public art that is temporal and disruptive.

Cape Town

Cape Town, one of the best-known cities in South Africa, was ranked the International Winner of Trip Advisor's Travellers' Choice Awards, the Fourth Top City in the World by the prestigious Travel+Leisure Awards, the Best Destination in Africa by the World Tourism Award, and in 2014 both the New York Times' and the Guardian's top travel destination. It is also the city where apartheid was born. The spatial remnants of apartheid continue to be reflected prominently.

The majority of the city's black population resides in far-flung townships known collectively as the Cape Flats. These were holding grounds for migrant workers brought in from rural areas to work in the city during apartheid. The centre has historically been a Central Business District (CBD) surrounded by a number of predominantly white suburbs. The once-vibrant District Six, located close to the CBD, was home to workers who could commute easily. Notorious for the forced removals that occurred in 1966, this derelict and sparsely populated tract of land that hugs the CBD has come to symbolise the intensity of the apartheid government's systemised efforts to keep black people outside the centre, pushed further and further into the periphery.

This topography continues to demonstrate how racial segregation affected the distribution and ownership of land. In 1994 South Africa was imbued with a change in political power but without significant shifts in economic power or land distribution. In Cape Town this deeply segregated landscape, in which the spatial demarcations of the city remain largely intact and unaltered, is the site of much contestation. Its tensions are material, tangible and spatial.

Alex Boraine, director of the Cape Town Partnership, an entity designed to aid business enterprises in the city, admitted:

One of the prerequisites for a successful city's development strategy is a common or shared vision of the future. Cape Town, as a historically divided city – spatially, racially, politically – has had great difficulty in arriving at a common vision. Our dualities are reflected in polarised discourses – one person's characterisation of Cape Town as a city with a 'good quality of life' is another person's 'city of slums and informal settlements'; one person's city of 'creativity and innovation' is another person's 'racist city'; one person's city of 'breathtaking natural beauty' is another person's 'treeless, windswept, sandy wasteland, often flooded during winter, the Cape Flats'. (2007)

Cape Town, then, has maintained its status as an epicentre of wilful capital and forced migrant labour. Characterised nevertheless by the constant ebb and flow between the desire for cohesion and the realities of material difference, this particular meeting ground for strangers remains contested and uneven. It is with these lenses that I want to look at the *Infecting the City* festival, a temporary, annual public art festival in this contested city.

Infecting the City

Infecting the City started ten years ago. Produced by the Africa Centre and the Institute for Creative Arts at the University of Cape Town, the festival takes place in the middle of autumn,



Ilulwane, Athi-Patra Ruga, Infecting the City 2012, Produced by Africa Centre, © Sydelle Willow Smith



Dancenation, 2014, © Sydelle Willow Smith

during the relatively dry month of March. Beginning with a general call-out for applications, the final programme is drawn from this pool of applications as well as invited and commissioned works. The programme features artworks from the disciplines of visual and performance art, as well as interdisciplinary interventions. The works take on several forms, including ephemeral performances, temporary installations, projections, sound tours, and moving exhibitions. The range of work from the contemporary and conceptual to the traditional and classical echo the evolution of a society grappling with issues of race, class and gender identity, globalisation and modernity.

South Africa has a limited tradition of public art. Much of the work is comprised of static sculptures at places of significance, places of public transit or public squares. It is noteworthy that *Infecting the City*, one of the largest public art initiatives in the country, is performative and temporal. Performing and visual artists, architects, urban planners and theorists collaborate or produce work as individuals. While the idea of ‘making place’ the intention of much public art, is pervasive and relevant to the work that will be discussed in this essay, the theme is imbued with a quintessential temporariness, as if the making of place in South Africa is still very much a work in progress. The works are characterised by the processes of experimentation, of interventions with ill-fitting dimensions, of deconstructing, and temporary reconstruction.

Achille Mbembe points to this indeterminacy:

When it comes to scholarship on Africa, the encounter with what we cannot yet determine because it has not yet become or will never be definite – an encounter with indeterminacy, provisionality and the contingent – assumes the proportions of an epistemological abyss. (Mbembe 2008, p349)

The temporal nature of these works by artists attempting to make sense of this contested city both reflects, and is derived from, this ‘indeterminacy’. Some argue that it is also testament to

the pervasive force of the colonial and apartheid projects that are impossible to be undone substantively or swiftly. The recent shift in thinking in South Africa from the 'postcolonial' to the 'decolonial' marks this recognition of the enduring impact of colonialism and the instability of the reconciliation project – that there is nothing 'post' about the colonial; its workings remain deeply inscribed. There is also growing scepticism of the rainbow nation discourse of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, of attempts at forging national unity and the making of a home for all – dominant tropes in government-led imaginaries.

Infection

Infection, a recurring motif in the contemporary moment, is not used lightly here – especially with regards to an arts festival – as the word is loaded with negativity and anxiety about South Africa. As a metaphor for land and country, the use of the body as a sacrosanct yet contested space, intact yet porous, inviolate yet vulnerable, is a recurrent trope in South African contemporary art across disciplines. The body and the city as metaphors for constitution, order and the status quo recur. Within the context of a public art festival in South Africa, the active and wilful infection of a city is as much a playful intervention on etymology as it is a conscious, virulent act of unmaking and re-forming place.

In spite of the choice to create a festival without a set theme (in order to open possibilities for application), themes do surface as a result of the curation and juxtaposition of works. I discuss some of the works over the years of my curatorship, under these emerging thematics. These are: land; memory; inertia; body; resilience; and dream.

Land

Rootlessness, dispossession and the tensions that come with spatial inequalities play out quite regularly in works at the festival. Transgression etched against the monolithic structures



19 Born 79 Rebels, Mamela Nyamza, Faniswa Yisa, 2014, © Sydelle Willow Smith



ConTatto, DaMotus, 2014, © Sydelle Willow Smith

of the manicured public spaces of Cape Town was graphically demonstrated in performance artist Mandla Mbothwe's work, *Uvuko! The Resurrection*. Culled from classical Xhosa ritual and integrated with contemporary performance paradigms, the performance centred around access to water, especially in rural parts of South Africa. Placing this inscription in the middle of an unlikely space – on a concrete surface, under a burning sun outside Cape Town's central train station – the work had particular resonance and power.

Mbothwe used almost the entire forecourt of the station – a sprawling area of about 60 square metres – as a playing field. His cast comprised young performers from the Steve Biko Centre, a centre for arts and culture in the Eastern Cape, as well as the professional Remix Dance Company, a company of mixed-ability performers. Deaf dancers and disabled performers blended seamlessly with the young performers. The result was a semiotically rich text: isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans as well as South African sign language were declaimed over the large space, combined with chants, song, large gesture, ritual and dance. The work demonstrated the potential for site-responsive performance to cut across a range of cultures by virtue of its forms, where it takes place, and its spectators, who together play a part in making meaning, marking and re-mapping the city.

The 'festival audience' who had followed the *Infecting the City* programme and arrived at the performance at the designated time as they would for a theatre performance, melded with the informal commuter crowds on their way to catch a train. The latter, predominantly Xhosa-speaking and unaware of the event, quickly found their place inside of it at the onset of the encounter. In those moments this audience emerged as the dominant comprehending force – of symbol and language – in a city where their presence is hardly acknowledged. Moreover, the dense performance sparked interactions between Xhosa-speaking people and those who did not speak the language, and for a few, fleeting moments these shifts in power relations and civic dynamics allowed for an unforgiving space to be remade.

Mbothwe's use of the space was all-encompassing and bold. His performers asserted their presence forcefully – they seemed to make indelible tracks on a cemented ground that allowed no give. The choreography and direction may best be described as merciless: dancer Malcolm Black, confined in the main to his wheelchair, used his upper body to create sharp, assertive movement phrases resulting in a physical presence that was uncompromising and 'loud' under the hot midday sun. Dancers ran as if possessed, voraciously eating up the space of the vast concourse while actor Chuma Sopotela confronted audiences with a voice that pierced the air, reaching the hundreds of people that had gathered. Out of nowhere a dancer with no lower limbs arrived in a wheelchair, propelling himself using his strong hands on the hot cement and stone, an urgency in his presence and unwavering focus in his eyes.

As the performance ended, the cast and technicians quickly gathered their props and packed up sound cables – as was demanded by the city in exchange for granting permission. The measured, controlled movement of people entering and leaving the station took over. The realisation slowly dawned that for all its aesthetic power and visual allure, the work foregrounded a very temporary taking-over of land. The continued lack of agency and voice that was brilliantly evoked by the performance nevertheless hovered in the foetid, humid air.

In another work that foregrounded the remaking of place, choreographer Tebogo Munyai erected five shacks, removed from their original spaces in the township of Khayelitsha, and brought them into the city. He had created and rehearsed intimate works (solos and duets) that spoke to the experiences of shack-dwellers and staged them inside of these completely closed, tiny structures. Munyai then constructed holes in the walls of these structures (reminiscent of bullet holes) through which the public was invited to look. Like voyeurs, the public could take a peek at what was happening behind the temporary walls of a shack. Incomplete, frustratingly



Processional Walkway, Katie Urban, *Infecting the City*, 2014, © Sydelle Willow Smith

fudged readings of what was happening made the audience more curious as they moved from hole to hole to get a better view. There was another audience that stood back and watched the actions of this audience in turn. Going beyond simply remaking place (the act of turning the central city into a home), layer upon layer of displacement, alienation and abjection emerged in this unsettling performance.

Xolile Mazibuko also referenced notions of land and remaking. The subject of her work, *Sacred Stone*, was the Shembe religion, which originated in KwaZulu Natal. Although the religion is based on Christianity, worshippers were ostracised and driven out of the churches because it embraced traditional Zulu ritual in worship. Subsequently, Shembe worshippers became renowned for their rituals of worship in open spaces. They created 'temples' demarcated with boulders and stones, painted white and placed in circular formations on abandoned pieces of land, or along the sides of roads. Mazibuko set about creating these temporary spaces of worship all over Cape Town – a city that does not really hold Shembe worshippers – on the city's pavements, on a traffic island, under a tree. She made a particularly wry comment by creating these white-stoned temples around the still-existing statues of Jan van Riebeeck and his wife Maria de la Quellerie, amongst the first Dutch settlers who colonised the country in 1652.

In yet another subtle remaking of place, South African composer Neo Muyanga created an operetta, *Thoriso le Morusu*, for the grand Groote Kerk in the middle of the city. The Groote Kerk is a large, impeccably constructed Afrikaans church, and was considered a bastion of Afrikanerdom during South Africa's apartheid years. *Thoriso le Morusu* was inspired by 'Country of Grief and Grace', a poem by Antjie Krog, an Afrikaner who wrote extensively about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the process of confession and healing established soon after democracy. According to Muyanga, the work read 'like an intimate and harrowingly candid conversation between two people, perhaps siblings or even lovers, about the pain they have caused one another'. Performances of this work for *Infecting the City*, to packed audiences seated in the pews of this historic space,

provided several counterpoints for irony and profoundly moving commentary; remaking a place that was an integral part of a violent, repressive history, yet nevertheless one that was also a space where the spiritual was pursued.

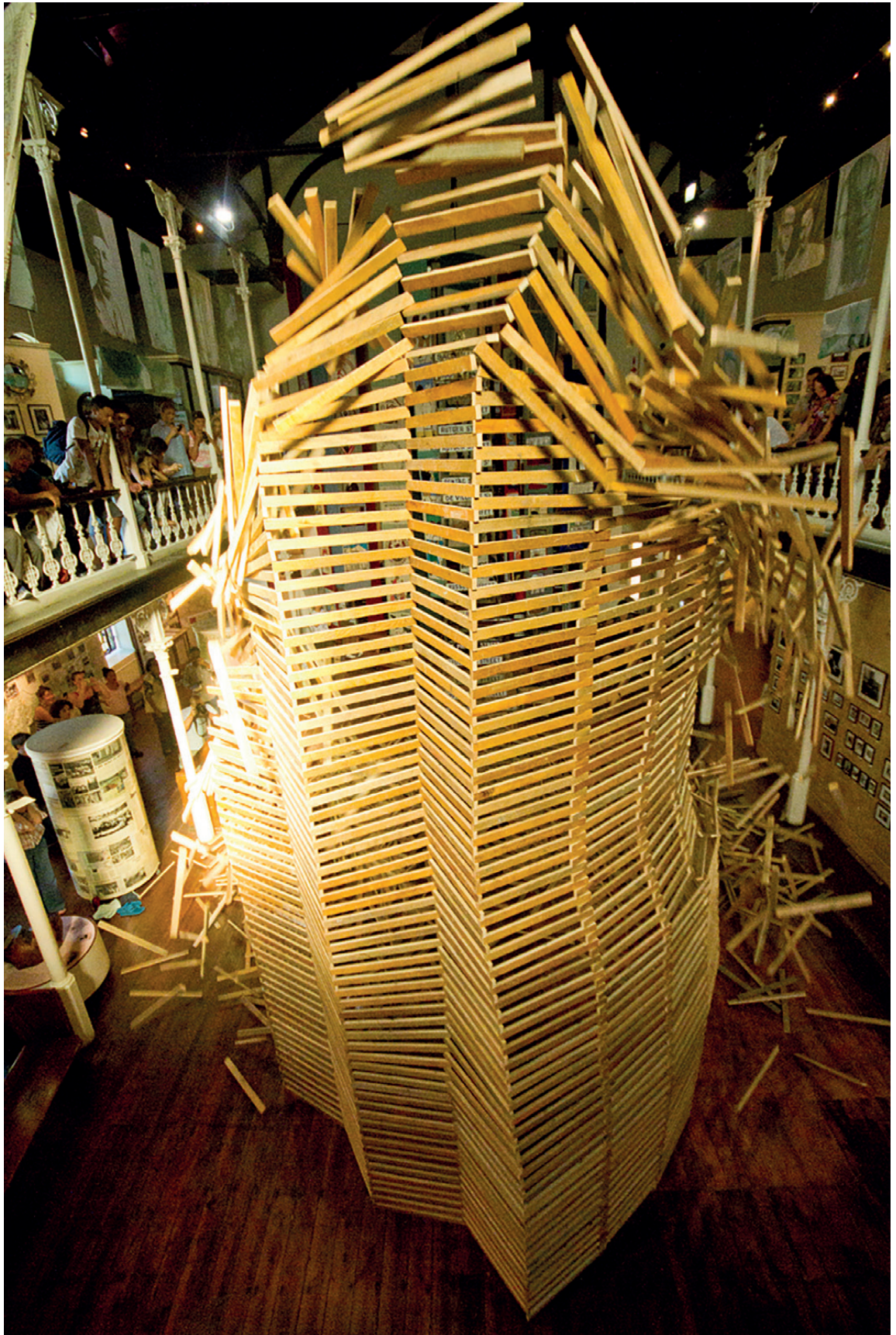
Memory

After catastrophe, the pressing need to remember is often articulated in societies that have experienced such upheaval – so that similar catastrophes do not occur once more. In South Africa, due to the lack of change in material circumstances for the majority of the country's people, the need to remember has another layer of intensity. Remembering becomes not so much about the past but about the present; as if current extremities need context and points of reference so that some logic can explain the continued systemic abnegation. Moreover, the erasure and the inscription of oppression, in ways that were so deeply entrenched that its mechanisms remained invisible to those that gained from it, were significant features of the apartheid regime. This is of course evident in Cape Town's racially divided topography. So heritage, history and the fear of erasure recur as themes in much of the work in *Infecting the City*, and provide this recourse as a vision for how the city could possibly be developed to include the participation of all its citizens.

Amongst the many examples, perhaps the most direct was *Memory Biwa*, Nicole Sarmiento and Tazneem Wentzel's *The Callings*. In this work, the artists identified sites throughout Cape Town where the bones of slaves were buried. They then created a diverse series of performances at these sites, taking audiences on a moving journey of exploration and remembering. One of the most evocative was a performance by Mawande Zenzile at the University of Cape Town. Zenzile dressed in flowing hessian robes and lit large mounds of imphepo, a traditional medicinal herb used in cleansing rituals. At the same time the Cape Doctor, Cape Town's incessant wind, both encouraged the flames as well as blew the pungent smoke around the campus. It was a moment of great electricity with Zenzile



Under Construction, Aenas Wilder, *Infecting the City*, 2013, Produced by Africa Centre, © Sydelle Willow Smith



Under Construction, Aenas Wilder, *Infecting the City*, 2013, Produced by Africa Centre, © Sydelle Willow Smith

himself being in danger of being burnt, the constant battle with erasure as epitomised by the flames, and the persistent strong fragrance of the imphepo.

Taking an ironic look at memorialisation, Selo Pesa and Vaughn Sadie's *Inhabitant* explored erasure, limbo and lack of agency. The two artists created a moving sculptural performance called *teka munyika* (meaning to give and take in the southern African Bantu language Xitsonga) at the Prestwich Memorial. The history of the memorial is layered and fraught. During an attempt at constructing upscale apartment blocks in 2003 on Prestwich Street, many skeletons were uncovered that were found to be from the unmarked graves of slaves killed by Dutch settlers in the 17th and 18th centuries. Bones from 2,500 graves were exhumed and a decision was taken by the city to create the Prestwich Memorial Building and park, which included an ossuary – a place where the exhumed bones were stored. It was envisaged that the experience of remembering (through the ossuary) and then reflecting (the little park) would be complete spatially and conceptually.

In front of the memorial is a coffee shop, which sells an exclusive brand of coffee called Truth. The coffee shop is frequented in the main by young American and European tourists because of its good Wi-Fi access and good java. Xolelwa Kashe-Katiya, Deputy Director of the Archival Platform, writes:

Ordinary South Africans drive or walk past the memorial without understanding what the true meaning of this conspicuous structure is. Those who do understand the meaning tend to not know that human remains are housed within the structure. (2010)

Drawing from this startling yet covert juxtaposition of a sacred memorial with a commercial venture, Pesa and Sadie created a subtle work which involved three performers committing inane acts such as hairdressing, having a picnic and having a barbecue in and around the site.

The combination of elements – the public space, the memorial, the presence of the remains of slaves in the vicinity, the wafting smells of burnt flesh from the barbecued remains of freshly slaughtered sheep, as well as the slowly festering performances that implied a perpetually disaffected witnessing – was an uncompromising indictment of a society that has submerged and obfuscated access to its contentious past. The combination of an existential meaninglessness in performance style with the ‘übernarrative’ of the unattended-to history of Cape Town, a history many wish would quietly go away, was disturbing and numbing at the same time.

The Body

In this suspended malaise there is an overwhelming representation in the performative work, from dance to vocal soundscapes, of the human as vulnerable, expendable and disposable. The performing body itself has been at the forefront as a site for visibilities, invisibilities and resilience. Several prominent artists have incorporated this into their work, such as Jelili Atiku, Chuma Sopotela, Gavin Krastin and Gabrielle Goliath. One example of a work that evocatively referenced this without the actual presence of a body is Asanda Kaka and Valentina Argiro’s *3600 a day*. This startling installation of 360 sculptures constructed of wooden frames and dresses evoked the 360 reported cases of rape per day in South Africa. The title’s supposed exaggeration references authoritative studies that maintain that a staggering number go unreported. Inside the fragile sculptures were little broken mirrors offering fractured glimpses of one’s face.

In the wake of xenophobia and violence perpetrated against immigrants, the alien and vulnerable body was evoked by artists such as Olaniyi Rasheed Akindiya from Nigeria and Maurice Mbikayi and Philippe Kayumba-wa-Yafolo from the Democratic Republic of Congo. These artists coincidentally all worked with the covering of the body in various ways. Akindiya invited conversations with local

people while tied to a pole and covered in bright orange hazard tape. Mbikayi covered himself from head to foot in white bandages while slowly riding a horse through peak traffic on the streets of Cape Town. Kayumba-wa-Yafolo, covered from head to toe in newspapers, performed acts of domesticity with similarly covered tables and chairs that occasionally erupted into short bursts of hysterical and highly charged acts of extreme fear.

Resilience

One can also interpret these singular acts purporting to demonstrate and project vulnerability as acts of defiance and resilience in their hypervisibility. Artist Athi Patra Ruga often uses his own body in his work as a site for contested power. In a work called *Illulwane* (translated as 'bat' in isiXhosa) he performed an initiation ritual in a public swimming pool. 'Illulwane' is a derogatory reference to men who are circumcised in a hospital as opposed to going through the proper traditional initiation ceremony in the 'bush', an open and possibly unclaimed stretch of land that tries the survival capabilities of the young men. Replete with red high heels and a bevy of 12 synchronised swimmers below, Ruga's body, clad in white lace, was hoisted high with a pulley and rope after being dunked in the pool. In this ironic yet spectacular performance, performed with an audience of 600 people to a soaring sound track by composer Spoek Mathambo, the spectre of Ruga's drenched, floating body was a profound vision of the body's resilience, reclaiming tradition, sexuality and public space.

The artists Hasan and Husain Essop often use their own bodies in their practice, which comprises performance and photography. For *Infecting the City* they resurrected an ancient performance and restaged the *Gadat* with hundreds of participants. The *Ratib-al-Haddad* (*Gadat*) is a set of Quranic verses and prayers compiled by the scholar Sheikh Abdullah Ibn Alawi al-Haddad. The *Gadat's* melodious sound and tune was the result of slaves not being allowed to pray. They thus pretended to be singing. Restaged in the middle of the city with such

an overwhelming presence of devotees was a triumphant display of the power of voice and agency, connecting past and present threats of erasure.

This transformation through sound and music reverberated in the highly respected Nigerian artist Emeka Ogboh's *Verbal Mapping II*. Ogboh explains in his programme notes: 'Verbal maps' are comprised of calls made by Lagos bus conductors, melodically shouting out their bus routes to potential passengers or notifying passengers of the next stop. The noisy bus conductor is an icon of the Lagos sonic map, a lyrical wordsmith dishing out Lagos bus routes like freestyle rap. These organic sound marks come together as a chart composed of audio spins to form the verbal maps. Their documentation over time has produced a corpus of work entitled 'Lagos Soundscapes', which has been installed in Cologne, Helsinki and Manchester.

In Cape Town, Ogboh installed these calls along Adderley, the central main street, which also houses South African taxi drivers with their own calls to the local commuters. This medley (or cacophony) of several kinds of calling and sound, re-made an atmosphere inside a city and a country still reeling from its xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals from other parts of Africa. The integration of soundscape was a subtle shifting of space and ambience.

Dream

There is of course great propensity for play and whimsy within the *Infecting the City* festival, creating dreamy and surreal spaces amongst the harsh materialities of the city. In an obvious example, Leila Anderson and Stan Wannet took up residence inside a small shop for two weeks. By night the artists would set off to various parts of Cape Town and stage performances with no-one watching and document these meticulously on camera. By day, the artists would sleep in view of the storefront window, attracting curious passers-by to their shop. Inside the shop was a myriad of artefacts concerned with archive and archival practice. In a small room at the back of the shop,

projectors and television monitors quietly replayed the activities they had been up to the night before.

Jason Potgieter aimed and put to flight 1,000 paper jets (made from biodegradable paper) from one of Cape Town's tallest buildings. The jets were signed drawings by artists whom Potgieter had engaged with in the build-up to the festival, who gave their time to create original artworks, resulting in what he called 'a curated flying exhibition encouraging dialogue around ownership and value of the work of established and emerging artists as well as transforming an ordinary work day into something special and wondrous.'

Ultimately it was the quiet intervention by Wayne Reddiar and his collective, Vuka Ndlovu, that created a public artwork that spanned the dreamlike as well as remaking space in a subtle and moving way. This collective of artists and activists engages with informal traders who have appeared in increasing numbers in South Africa due to the unsolved economic imbalances in the country. Without access to advertising, or any larger vision of what their business might be, the spatial and conceptual reach of their business becomes very confined and circumscribed. Severe restrictions in the use of public space by informal traders make this all the more arduous. Members of Vuka Ndlovu conduct research amongst such traders, select a few and then create a large-scale billboard hoisted in full view high up a building advertising the traders' work, competing with the likes of other big name brands.

There is also bathos here, in the sense that just a few traders will be afforded this opportunity, the billboard won't be up for long, and it will ultimately fall short in competition with the big-name brands. But for a few dreamy moments, it is a valiant gesture of great impact, courage and energy. In this meeting ground between art, activism and public space the remaking of space as a space of dreams is both triumphant in making visible the informal trader and sobering that in contemporary South Africa majority of the population still struggle to survive.

The audience as flâneur

Infecting the City's format is ambulatory. Works are curated on a route, with an average of six routes that traverse the inner city in the afternoon, and at night evoking different atmospheres and possibilities for civic ownership. Audiences are led from one work to another, encountering between six and ten works. In the process, audiences that are aware of the festival and the programme are joined by an informal audience that is not. As if led by an invisible Pied Piper, the crowds swell into an amorphous group of people comprised of a wide range of individuals.

Some of the work is time-based – the audience settles down to watch and experience – while others are installations that audience members may walk through. This navigating of the city in the manner of a wanderer or flâneur, through spaces that one may not go to, but moving as a collective, creates an interesting dynamic. Watching a work alongside someone, whom you may not go to the theatre or a gallery with, and then moving on with them to the next, also layered the experience with unique opportunities for civic engagement. Much of the work also involved audience participation and touch. This, together with soundscapes, light environments and even smellscapes (in one memorable work an artist captured the scents of the forests that surround Cape Town and infused the city fountains with them), all invoke the city as a tangible, experiential sensorium. This atmosphere, in which alienation and division are momentarily suspended, also conspires to create a communal atmosphere within which the aforementioned works that speak of rupture and abjection may be absorbed and discussed.

Conclusion

The public artists I have sketched have negotiated indeterminacy through the strategic use of the temporal artwork. There is, of course, a deepening crisis around rights and economic equity. This crisis now reverberates in the reactionary and forceful

entrenchment of nationalism in the face of prejudices sparked by ignorance and fear all over the world. There is an alarming return to some dark past in the enforced insularity typified by the United States President Donald Trump's unbridled, proclamations and severe actions against migration and the human spirit to cohabit. Civic society's response to the insularity and fear many of our governments seem to thrive on needs to include some intensive civic re-organisation. And this calls on our artists to provide mechanisms, innovative languages of association, and a range of cross-disciplinary, intercultural, interactive possibilities to enable public spheres where strangers may confidently meet for the growth of an elusive, common humanity.

As yet these interventions seem overwhelmingly and in atmospheres of transition and speculation, justly temporal. Due to the systemic inflexibility and failure of the imagination embedded in the infrastructure of our cities and our institutions, they fall woefully short in meeting and facing the impact of such crises. Mechanisms for artists to debate and work with and within urban planning and municipal structures are in short supply. It is these structures that need to be developed with a robustness and resolve.

Public spheres, and the threats to rich, intercultural, layered engagement, demand visions of nuance, sensitivity, and – in response to an increasingly anaesthetised environment – an aesthetic that creates the kind of wakefulness we are clearly in need of. Public spheres as meeting grounds for strangers are filled with possibility, as the artists I have mentioned above have shown us. Right now, however, in many countries, and certainly in South African cities, that ground is temporal, uneven, shifting. Vigilant and consistent collaboration across city structures may pave the way. But that's a long road yet.



Jay Pather

Jay Pather is Associate Professor at the University of Cape Town where he directs the Institute for Creative Arts. He curates *Infecting the City* and the Live Art Festival in Cape Town, *Afrovibes* in the Netherlands, co-curates performance for *Spielart* in Munich and is Adjunct Curator for Performance at the Zeitz MOCAA. He serves as juror for the International Award for Public Art, as Board Member of the National Arts Festival of South Africa, as Fellow at Queen Mary's College, University of London and was recently made Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French Government. Recent publications include articles in *Changing Metropolis II*, *Rogue Urbanism*, *Performing Cities* and *Theatre Journal*.



Claire Doherty (Editor)

Claire Doherty is the Director of Arnolfini, Bristol.

Previously, Claire Doherty was the founding Director of Situations. Over the past decade, Situations emerged as one of the UK's most innovative and pioneering public art producers, commissioning and producing temporary and long-term public arts projects, creating public art strategies and visions for city-wide initiatives and leading publishing and research initiatives to improve the conditions for, and skills to produce, new forms of public art worldwide. Claire has developed an international reputation as a leading thinker in new approaches to public art policy and planning, and is dedicated to engaging those for whom the arts might have seemed irrelevant or inaccessible through transformative art and cultural experiences; advocating for the social value of the arts, and finding ways to catalyse positive change in specific places.

Claire was awarded a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Breakthrough Award for outstanding cultural entrepreneurs, 2009, and appointed MBE for Services to the Arts in New Years Honours List 2016.

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust.

We work with over 100 countries across the world in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society.

Each year we reach over 20 million people face-to-face and more than 500 million people online, via broadcasts and publications.

Founded in 1934, we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body.



© British Council 2018
The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.

Where Strangers Meet

An international collection of essays on arts in the public realm.

The urbanist Richard Sennett has written that ‘the public realm can simply be defined as a place where strangers meet’. As the number of us living in cities rises, the pressures on the shared spaces of a city will increase; the places in which our future relationships to one another are negotiated. This is particularly resonant for the British Council, an international organisation that brings people together from different cultures, countries and continents through arts, education, science and the English language. Building on its multifocal work in cities, the British Council commissioned a collection of essays to explore different perspectives on how artistic and cultural experiences affect individual and collective participation and action in the public realm.

For 80 years the British Council has worked in cities in over 100 countries worldwide. The British Council is now responding through research and programmes to the changing urban dynamics affecting citizens and institutions globally, including the impact of globalisation and technological and political change. Work in cities also forms part of our response to some of the world’s current challenges including migration and security. This collection is intended to strengthen our global offer to collaborators and audiences by demonstrating how the power of the arts and creative exchange can be harnessed to make cities more open, dynamic, inclusive and fit for the future.

www.britishcouncil.org