AFRICAN CITY
cape town in pieces /

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AFRICAN CITY / CAPE TOWN IN PIECES
Aesthetics, Theories, Narratives, Fragments

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INGALI002

A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of *Master of Media Theory and Practice.*

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With thanks to Martha Evans.

DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Date:

[ABSTRACT]

Six sections, six ways of reading African cities and, by extension, Africa. Anchored in the Cape Town metropolis – an important node in both North–South and South–South global trade networks – this project investigates the African urban as a site of knowledge production. Rather than attempt to capture a complete or panoramic vision of Cape Town, this project is instead a non-linear narrative of the city space constructed out of a combination of essays, narrative fragments, reportage, images and formal and informal interviews. Starting with what makes an African city "African" in *African City*, the investigation moves through five more thematic categories: *Built Environment*; *Renewal/ Decay*; *Everyday Urbanism*; *Nature*; and *Pattern*. Out of each section new ways of reading the city emerge – through architectural surfaces; the city as archive; pop culture; ecology; and design. This project is about curating and creating an analytical topography of a specific urban space in Africa; but it is also about engaging with the urban on an experiential level. Readers are encouraged to engage in a dialogue with the urban form, to trace the contours of the city space. The textual and visual material contained within the project is rendered into building blocks, which can be rearranged into various visions of the city, transferring agency to the reader to create their own interpretation of (this) city space. This interactive element manifests an important idea underpinning the project: there are multiple lines of flight emanating from the supposed fixed grid of the post-colonial or post-apartheid city space; the urban narrative can be rewritten; Africa can be reimagined. Ultimately, this project is an experiment in and juxtaposition of modes of analysis, advancing new ways of reading African urban forms – from Africa.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

There are six sections. Each section has a colour, indicated at the top of the page. The sections and their colours are: AFRICAN CITY; BUILT ENVIRONMENT; RENEWAL/DECAY; EVERYDAY URBANISM; NATURE; and PATTERN. Essays are typed in **Helvetica** and have a white background. Descriptive pieces are in Minion Pro and have a cream background. As far as possible, all images are credited (unless they originate from an open source where permission for use has been granted).

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[INTRODUCTION]

Urban theory in Africa has begun to move away from statistics-based analyses of urban infrastructure; economics; binaries of dependency and underdevelopment, formal and informal; and specific "conditions" such as the post-colonial or post-apartheid city.

Recently, new theories of urban space and African cities have emerged – for example, AbdouMaliq Simone's "People as Infrastructure"[1]; Achille Mbembe's theory of "Superfluity"[2] or Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall's concepts of "entanglement" and "self-stylisation".[3] The focus is shifting to urban processes, global flows and networks and conceptualisations of "worldliness",[4] as well as revisiting South African intellectual Njabulo Ndebele's 1986 call for a "return to the ordinary".[5]

In a 2011 PANGeA (Partnership for Africa's Next Generation of Academics) workshop, the apparent need for new ways of conceptualising or "reading" Africa was raised. In a session titled "Reading Africa Now", theorists Achille Mbembe and Meg Samuelson "sought to activate emergent paradigms for reading Africa differently – that is, for reading Africa outside of the paradigm of difference that has shaped its conception from imperialist to nativist imaginaries."[6]

In addition to metropolises such as Lagos, Nairobi, Kinshasa and Cairo, there has been much new scholarship on Johannesburg, investigating the topographies and topologies through which the urban is negotiated and experienced – including art, literature, music and fashion, that is, the aesthetics and narratives of the everyday – in an attempt to re-imagine city space and throw into relief what Mbembe and Nuttall have termed the "African modern". Examples of such projects include *Afropolis / City Media Art*, Bettina Malcomess and Dorothee Kreutzfeldt's *Not No Place – Johannesburg: Fragments of Spaces and Times*, and Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe's *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*. Cape Town, however, has not been afforded the same sort of analytical treatment. True, there is literary engagement with the city, in both fiction and non-fiction genres,[7] but Cape Town has largely been omitted from the theoretical debates that might position the city within global urban discourse(s).

As a port city and primary node in South–South, South–North global networks, Cape Town is entangled with overland and coastal (trade) routes. The city is an important space from which to (re)conceptualise continental Africa within discourses of networked flows and permeable borders.

Through a collection of essays, non-fiction narrative fragments, images and formal and informal interviews, this project investigates the African urban and specifically Cape Town as a site of knowledge production. Six thematic categories advance six starting points for engaging with the city: AFRICAN CITY, BUILT ENVIRONMENT, RENEWAL/DECAY, EVERYDAY URBANISM, NATURE, and PATTERN.

In AFRICAN CITY, "What Makes an African City 'African'?" investigates "worldliness", questioning what it means to think from Cape Town, the city that is often seen as apart from Africa (ironically much like Africa is seen as apart from the global); while "Littoral Zone" highlights the importance of Cape Town as a site from which to imagine continental Africa. The third piece in this section, "The African City that Isn't an African City", describes entanglements between Cape Town's inner city and aesthetics interpreted as "authentically" African.

In BUILT ENVIRONMENT, "Façade" examines urban aesthetic phenomena – Cape Town's post-apartheid mall complexes – situating the city within a late-capitalist, postmodern aesthetic context and globality from which African cities have been largely excluded.

RENEWAL/DECAY takes a different analytical approach, with a dialogue exploring vernacular architecture, gentrification and the idea of the city as a palimpsestic archive, overwriting itself while still retaining traces of the past.

Continuing the "city as archive" line of flight, EVERDAY URBANISM looks at contemporary South African pop culture's appropriation of South African urban aesthetics. An essay focusing on shock rap-rave group Die Antwoord's spectacular re-visioning of the city space shows how the urban narrative can be reinterpreted, recycled and rewritten.

The review essay in NATURE is also concerned with aesthetics. "Nature in/and the Urban" describes the work of photographers Pieter Hugo, Dillon Marsh and Daniel Naudé, as well as street artist Ricky Lee Gordon a.k.a. Freddy Sam, which exemplifies a move away from the human/animal binary and symbolic landscapes previously prevalent in South African art. Instead, these artists explore environmental tropes that simultaneously intersect with the urban. Through this, ecology emerges as a paradigm for understanding human connection in an urban environment.

In PATTERN, a formal interview with Laduma Ngxokolo, a designer who translates traditional African beadwork design into knitwear patterns for the global market, returns to the questions posed in AFRICAN CITY – what makes an African city "African"?

Within each section, non-fiction narrative fragments provide everyday illustrations for the analytical texts: ranging from construction workers in the inner city in BUILT ENVIRONMENT to the demolition of the Athlone cooling towers in RENEWAL/DECAY; car guards, tabloid newspapers and soccer matches in EVERYDAY URBANISM to cellphone towers disguised as trees and the south-easter in NATURE to the garment industry and building façades in PATTERN, these textual snapshots produce an oblique portrait of the Cape Town city space.

Like the city it illustrates, this project does not have a linear narrative. Nor is it a collation of fragments that imply a cohesive whole. Rather than attempt to capture a complete or panoptic vision of Cape Town to be perused as a definitive analytical map, this project encourages readers to engage in a dialogue with the urban form, to trace the multiple contours of the city space. The textual and visual material contained within the project is rendered into building blocks, which can be rearranged into a multitude of visions of the city, transferring agency to the reader to create their own interpretation of (this) city space. This interactive element manifests an important idea underpinning this project: there are multiple lines of flight emanating from the supposed fixed grid of the post-colonial or post-apartheid city space; the urban narrative can be rewritten; Africa can be reimagined. Ultimately, this project is an experiment in (and juxtaposition of) modes of analysis, advancing new ways of reading African urban forms – from Africa.

[1] AbdouMaliq Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg" in *Public Culture*, Volume 16, Number 3, Fall 2004, p. 407-408.

[2] Achille Mbembe, "Aesthetics of Superfluity" in *Public Culture*, Volume 16, Number 3, Fall 2004, pp. 373-405.

[3] Sarah Nuttall, "Stylizing the Self: The Y Generation in Rosebank, Johannesburg" in *Public Culture*, Volume 16, Number 3, Fall 2004, pp. 430-452; Achille Mbembe, *On The Postcolony*, University of California Press, California, 2001; Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing" in *Public Culture*, Volume 14, 2002, pp. 239-73.

[4] For example, Achille Mbembe & Sarah Nuttall (eds.), *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, S. Nuttall and A. Mbembe (eds), Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2008; Achille Mbembe & Sarah Nuttall, "Writing the World from an African Metropolis" in *Public Culture*, Volume 16, Number 3, Fall 2004, pp 347-372

[5] Njabulo S. Ndebele, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 12, Number 2, April 1986, p. 143.

[6] Transitions & Translations Research Group: "Theorising Africa in local and global imaginaries: a PANGeA workshop" in Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies, Volume 37, Number 3, September 2011, p. 430.

[7] For example, Justin Fox, *Cape Town Calling*, Tafelberg, South Africa, 2007; Stephen Watson (ed.), *A City Imagined*, Penguin Books, 2005; Paul Duncan, *Hidden Cape Town*, Random House Struik, South Africa, 2013; Alma Viviers et al, *MOLO Newspaper*, Cape Town Partnership, 2013.


AFRICAN CITY

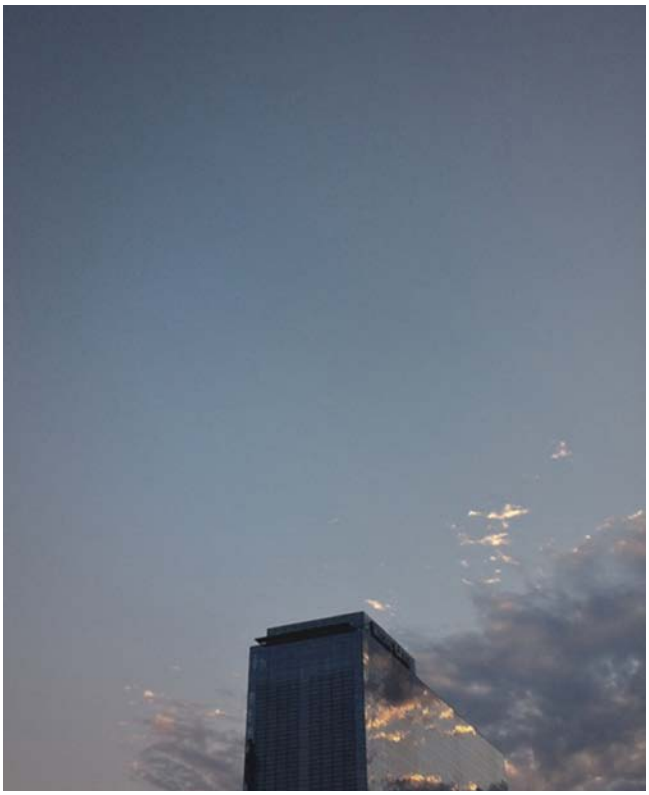
Above: Future Afrika. Photograph: Merchants. *Below*: Valentine, a tailor from Nigeria works on the Parade in Cape Town. Photograph: Alice Inggs.

[AFRICAN CITY]

Cape Town

Cape Town bears traces of African city-ness. Between the colonial stone buildings and First-World markers of the inner city, there are bright spots where Africa intersects with Cape Town: the informal traders, the market stalls, the North-East-West-and-Central African cuisine. The strict apartheid infrastructure, which worked all too well in the past in terms of ordering the city is slowly loosening, pulling apart. Filling the cracks are vendors, traffic-light hawkers (of sunglasses, flash drives, coasters, plastic bags, hangers, beadwork, wooden snakes, feather dusters and sunshields); sellers of the *Big Issue*, *Funny Money* and the local newspapers; car guards and beggars.

Streaming through the streets are people from all over Africa; all over the world. If Jo'burg is the magnet, drawing people like iron filings to a shining, metallic metropolis, then Cape Town is the catchment area – what happens when the rest of the country shrugs. The place where everyone ends up. An end point. And a starting point. A point of arrival and departure; a place of constant transit.



01. WHAT MAKES AN AFRICAN CITY "AFRICAN"?

What makes the grouping of buildings and people, that is, a city, a metaphor for the continent over which it sprawls and juts?

Tokyo, Japan's tightly built skyscraping megalopolis is an electronic dreamscape, always lit, a steely monster rising from the sea – an easy metaphor. Dubai: built in two decades, opulent, tasteless, international, air-conditioned, disintegrating into the desert, housing the tallest building in the world, but devoid of a defining aesthetic and culture. A perfect description of what the money of the oil-rich Gulf States can and can't buy.

New York, too – undoubtedly the exemplar of the 'Merican dream. "Eight million stories, out there in it naked / City is a pity, half of y'all won't make it ... Tell by my attitude I'm most definitely from / New York / Concrete jungle where dreams are made of / There's nothin' you can't do / Now you're in New York," spits its contemporary pre-eminent Hood poet, Jay-Z in "Empire State of Mind".[1] Uh huh – straight-talkin', big-dreamin', tough, individualist and all about the greenbacks, baby. That's the US of A for ya.

In Africa: Lagos – overpopulated megacity of 15 million people, slum-covered, sometime-militarily-ruled, informal, corrupt, bright, industrious. Even Johannesburg, barely a fraction the size of Lagos, can bank on being termed "African": divided, repossessed, gold-rich; a metropolis built on the back of black labour. Egoli, the "place of gold": a capital city and city of capital (home to "the richest square mile in Africa"), described by theorist Achille Mbembe as "the symbol par excellence of the 'African modern'".[2]

And Cape Town?

No, Cape Town is not seen as a metaphor for Africa. In fact, the city at the bottom edge of the great landmass is hardly seen as part of the continent at all. What makes Johannesburg or Lagos more "African" than Cape Town? What "exotic" traits are needed to be seen as an "African city", a centre of "African modernity"?

The slippage between metaphor and stereotype is dangerously easy. What is often seen as an exemplification of "Africanness" – poverty, overpopulation, failing infrastructure, corruption and stark racial divide – is negative. Or it feeds into a particular imaginary or (world) view of Africa: the exotic and the un-or-other-worldly[3]; or the as-yet-not-fully-formed, unformed and the rural.

The difficulties of reading Africa now perhaps originate in its conception as a sign, read as disconnected from rather than connected to the global. Reducing "Africanness" or "Africa" to a single idea or entity immediately situates it in a "web of difference",[4] which not only manifests the difficulties of navigating Said's West–Other binary, but also the difficulties of self-writing in Africa and navigating the theoretical conundrums of "authenticity" and belonging.

A relatively new area of study – New Thalassology[5] – seeks to understand the continental sign of Africa from an oceanic perspective, that is, as permeable, a confluence of trade and cultural routes, rather than a fixed place of roots from which a definitive identity springs, fully formed. The oceanic paradigm also situates the continent in "an emergent future in which the axes of power are perceived to be shifting from North–South to South–South or East–South",[6] highlighting the non-contingent globality or "worldliness" of cities, countries and continents previously overlooked within a paradigm of capitalism-based globalisation.

Indeed, academic literature on cities of the Global South tends now to focus on their *specific* "worldliness" – how these cities "work"[7] within global circuits of trade, whether that be socially/culturally, economically or politically; or in terms of communications, information or material goods. "Worldliness" also encompasses informal networks and flows, the translation of cultural forms and infrastructure and the way in which imaginaries conceived in the Global North are being reinterpreted and rewritten.

On the one hand, showing the "worldliness" of a city in the Global South, or rewriting the concept of a "world city", is to undermine the old binary between the "West" and the "Other", to reveal the power structures in operation between the Global North and Global South, as well as show the integration between these axes. Basically, it is globalisation written not from a Western perspective, but as originating from multiple global nodes and manifesting in various (often unexpected) ways. On the other hand, exploring the "worldliness" of a city in, for example, Africa or South America, also throws into relief its particular infrastructural, cultural, political and economic idiosyncrasies, that is, what makes it "African" or "South American". Revealing difference is unavoidable; the task rather is to avoid the problem of reducing difference to the simple binary of "here" versus "there", and by inference, "us" versus "them".

However, if French theorists Alain Badiou and Mark Augé are right and we are living in a "worldless" social space,[8] a collection of "non-places" that indicate a new "supermodernity",[9] why is the "worldliness" of African cities important, and what is the significance of "African modernity"?[10]

Perhaps one answer is the importance of theorising *from* Africa – to conceptualise knowledge frameworks and discourses that originate on the continent, that is, from the actual site, rather than draw on scholarship that has originated elsewhere and has been placed *onto* Africa in the past.

But what is "Africanness"? "Worldliness" can perhaps throw it into relief. For Africa, however, or indeed any place, the theoretical macro-level process of tracing "worldliness" through international networks cannot throw *open* "the full spectrum of meanings and implications that other places and other human experiences enjoy, provoke, and inhabit"[11] on its own. The micro-level of cities, city spaces and city subjects must be explored, too, as imaginaries distinct from, and yet connected to the global.

"To write the world from Africa or to write Africa into the world"[12] seems to be the current preoccupation for theorists, using an African city as a starting point. And here we return to the original question: just what is an "African city"? And why isn't Cape Town seen as one?
As a port city part of a major international trade route and tourism capital of South Africa, the problem is perhaps not with writing Cape Town into the world, but writing Cape Town into Africa.

[1] Jay-Z & Alicia Keys, "Empire State of Mind" from *The Blueprint 3*, Roc Nation, 2009.

[2] Achille Mbembe & Sarah Nuttall, "Introduction: Afropolis" in *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, S. Nuttall and A. Mbembe (eds), Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2008, p. 1.

[3] cf. Achille Mbembe & Sarah Nuttall, "Writing the World from an African Metropolis" in *Public Culture*, Volume 16, Number 3, Fall 2004, pp 347-372; Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing" in *Public Culture*, Volume 14, 2002, pp. 239-73.

[4] V.Y. Mudimbe quoted in A. Mbembe and S. Nuttall, "Writing the World from an African Metropolis" in *Public Culture*, Fall 2004, Volume 16, Number 3, p. 348.

[5] cf. P. M. Vink, "Indian Ocean Studies and the 'New Thalassology'" in *Journal of Global History*, Volume 2, 2007, pp. 41-62; Isobel Hofmeyer, "The Complicating Sea: The Indian Ocean as Method" in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Volume 32, Number 3, 2012, pp. 584-590.

[6] Transitions & Translations Research Group (2011): "Theorising Africa in local and global imaginaries: a PANGeA workshop" in *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, Volume 37, Number 3, 2011, p. 430.

[7] cf. AbdouMaliq Simone; Achille Mbembe & Sarah Nuttall; and Isobel Hofmeyer on African cities.

[8] cf. Alain Badiou, "The Caesura of Nihilism", lecture delivered at the University of Essex, 09 October 2003; Slavoj Zizek, "Do We Still Live in a World" available at [www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/articles/do-we-still-live-in-a-world/#_ftnref5]; Slavoj Zizek, "Shoplifters of the World Unite" in *London Review of Books*, 19 August 2011.

[9] Mark Augé, *Non-Place: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso, London, 1995, pp. 1-122.

[10] True, in speaking of "worldlessness", Badiou was specifically referring to the milieu of global (late) capitalism, but even in the context of an oceanic paradigm (which undermines a Western-based paradigm of globalisation as a framework for understanding the global South) this should be taken into account.

[11] Achille Mbembe & Sarah Nuttall, "Writing the World from an African Metropolis" in *Public Culture*, Volume 16, Number 3, Fall 2004, p. 348.

[12] Ibid.

02. LITTORAL ZONE

Cape Town as a starting point for theorising Africa

On a map, ringed by the hard edge of the coast, walled in by the hard lines of the mountains and ordered by the residual hard grid of the apartheid city, Cape Town superficially exemplifies the way in which Africa has generally been conceptualised historically. Linearity has been a primary factor in the conceptualisation of Africa within a "paradigm of difference that has shaped its conception from imperialist to nativist imaginaries".[1] Indeed, "Research on Africa," writes Achille Mbembe in *On the Postcolony*, "has hardly stood out for its attempts to integrate nonlinear phenomena into its analyses".[2] Borderlines, racial lines, the continental outline, horizon lines, skylines, city grids, economic division, class division – linearity is deeply inscribed into discourses of Africa, African cities and, perhaps especially, South Africa and South African cities.

But, as a city on the coast, Cape Town is necessarily entangled with the ocean as paradigm and metaphor. The city is a littoral zone, its sea-borders permeable, or, as Paul Gilroy describes, "fractal".[3] The city, like the sea close by, resists delineation – from the tidal pool of the City Bowl it flows out, seemingly wide and alternately turbulent and calm as the surrounding sea.

An oceanic paradigm becomes an important lens with which to view Cape Town and by extension South Africa, as the country shifts from "a terrestrially bound nationalism towards a global connectiveness".[4] Through this approach, the country is reconceptualised as a "fluid space crisscrossed by centuries of movement and encounter",[5] rather than as the static terrestrial urban topology of apartheid – determinedly divisive, controlling flows of information, flows of people, flows of ideas.

This paradigm also helps in writing South Africa in general, and Cape Town in particular, back into the narrative of continental Africa following its pre-democratic imposed exclusion. As Isabel Hofmeyr writes in "The Complicating Sea: The Indian Ocean as Method", the ocean "offers rich possibilities for working beyond the templates of the nation-state and area studies … Importantly, [it] makes visible a range of lateral networks that fall within the Third World or Global South."[6]

From a city such as Cape Town, it is thus possible to imagine the "centuries of movement and encounter" projected forward (in a sense, continuing) in the global connections and circuits of trade and tourism that emanate from its position as a port on the edge of Africa.

The "Mother City" is ironically often seen as a place of elsewheres – a "scandal of beauty in the midst of so much waste and ugliness … haunted by the secret envy of belonging anywhere except to this continent."[7] This needn't be construed as shameful, however. Rather than conceptualising the Cape as somehow separate and a place of separation, one could see it as a place of constant intersection; a threshold between First and Third Worlds; the Global North and the Global South. Like its coastline, where sea and land overlap, Cape Town is a space of social and cultural layering. Although this stratification may currently be cast in sharp relief – for example in the divide between rich and poor and the residual lines and borders of the segregated apartheid city – conceptualising Cape Town as an inherently

networked space from which multiple discursive lines of flight emanate helps to dissolve these distinctions.

Of course, the idea of harmonious inter-ethnic and international relations that seems to have attached itself to littoral cities is a fiction[8] – to which the bouts of xenophobic violence in Cape Town can attest. But the city is also "a rich, syncretic social mosaic; an astonishing tapestry of human forms, an interlocking topography of cultures, sounds".[9] It is also a place where Zygmunt Bauman's "liquid modernity"[10] plays out in shifting social patterns; the flow of migrant workers; and the continuously new-forming circuits of trade and methods of self-stylisation. The city is ever on the brink of change – although its urban topography may remain relatively static – or to employ Bauman's terminology "solid" – change runs through it like a charge. Cape Town may not be regarded as a traditional "African city" or example of "Africanity", but it is part of Africa; and its complicated narratives and multiple local cultures form part of the Afropolitan archive.

Both physically and metaphorically, Cape Town is a point of arrival and departure; a combination of fluid and solid; static and change. As a globally connected port city and place of constant trade (whether it be goods, cultures, languages or ideas), it exemplifies the discourse of circuitry and is embedded with the oceanic paradigm that together assist in (re)conceptualising continental Africa.

Right: Map of the Cape by Nicolas Bellin circa 1764.

Below left: Roggebaai circa 1930s.

[1] Transitions & Translations Research Group (2011): "Theorising Africa in local and global imaginaries: a PANGeA workshop" in *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, Volume 37, Number. 3, 2011, p. 430.

[2] Achille Mbembe, *On The Postcolony*, University of California Press, California, 2001, p. 17.

[3] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, Harvard University Press, Massachusettes, 1993, p. 236.

[4] Hermann Wittenberg, "Editorial: Coastlines and Littoral Zones in South African Ecocritical Writing" in *Alternation*, Special Edition Number 6, 2013, p. 6.

[5] Meg Samuelson, "Reading Africa Now: 'Oceanic Africa'": *Transitions & Translations workshop*, Stellenbosch University, 15 May 2011, p. 4.

[6] Isabel Hofmeyr, "The Complicating Sea: The Indian Ocean as Method" in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Volume 32, Number 3, 2011, p. 584.

[7] Achille Mbembe, Sarah Nuttall, Grace Musila & Meg Samuelson, "Scandal of Beauty: The Cape Must Embrace its Rich Mix" in *Cape Times*, 7 June 2011, p. 9.

[8] Meg Samuelson, "Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fictions of the Swahili Coast: Littoral Locations and Amphibian Aesthetics" in *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, Volume 38, Number 3, September 2012, p. 502.

[9] Mbembe, Nuttall, Musila & Samuelson, p. 9.

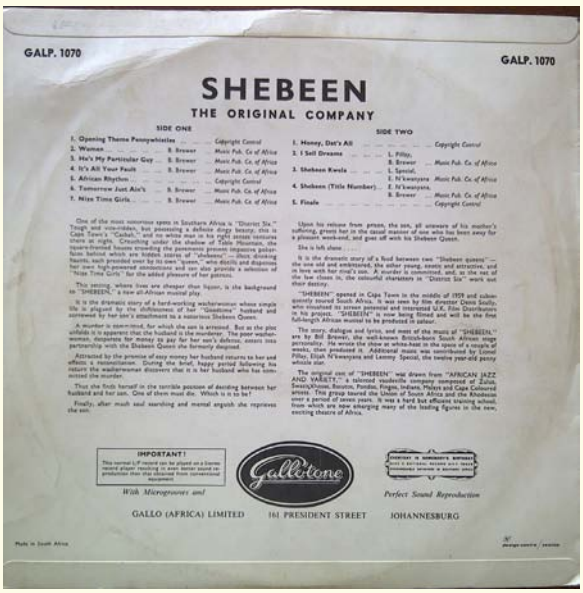
[10] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, USA, 2000.

03. THE AFRICAN CITY THAT ISN'T AN AFRICAN CITY

As of almost-yesterday there's a new novelty in inner-city Cape Town: the fake shebeen. Between the "authentic" Ethiopian restaurants sprouting plastic palms and tourists, the stores stocked with mass-produced wood carvings, Vodacom chain stockists selling cheap electronic goods and pleather handbags, *Halaal* spazas and gold-for-cash shops of lower Long Street, this new "concept cocktail bar" with its neon-pink graffiti signage is positioned like just another curio.

Patrons lounge against the shebeen's bar like extras in *Casablanca*. A documentary filmmaker from Paris drains an iced vodka-cranberry from an ostrich-egg tumbler.

Above: Merchants exterior. *Below*: Merchants shebeen. Photographs: Merchants.



Above left: Merchant's shebeen interior. Photograph: Merchants. *Above right*: Record sleeve of the 1959 African Jazz Musical "Shebeen", which was set in District 6.

The bartender – a stern, untalkative man from Langa township – methodically cleans glasses. I imagine him inwardly laughing at the criminally high prices of this inner-city "*kasi* joint" jamming "retro-cool" '90s R&B on the jukebox.

"Cape Town is not an African city," says the filmmaker, scanning the Lucky Pilchard tabletop covers, chalkboard menu, jungle wallpaper. "I've been to many places in Africa – Rwanda, Lagos. In Cape Town you could be anywhere in the world – Berlin, London..." he looks over to the foosball table, currently occupied by two hipsters – a young man with a topknot in a greatcoat and a woman in leopard-print leggings, big green cat's eyes staring out from her knees. "If you went to that place past Muizenberg – *Khaye-whatsit* – then maybe you could say *that's* African."

A drummer in springbok skins and tribal paint beats out a rhythm in a doorway across the street. Boom-ba-doom between car doors slamming and taxis hooting and car guards whistling and the imagined "*Thank you, thank you vrrry merch*" from Black Elvis – a painted statue with bouffant, microphone and a winning smile on the balcony of the Pan African Market.

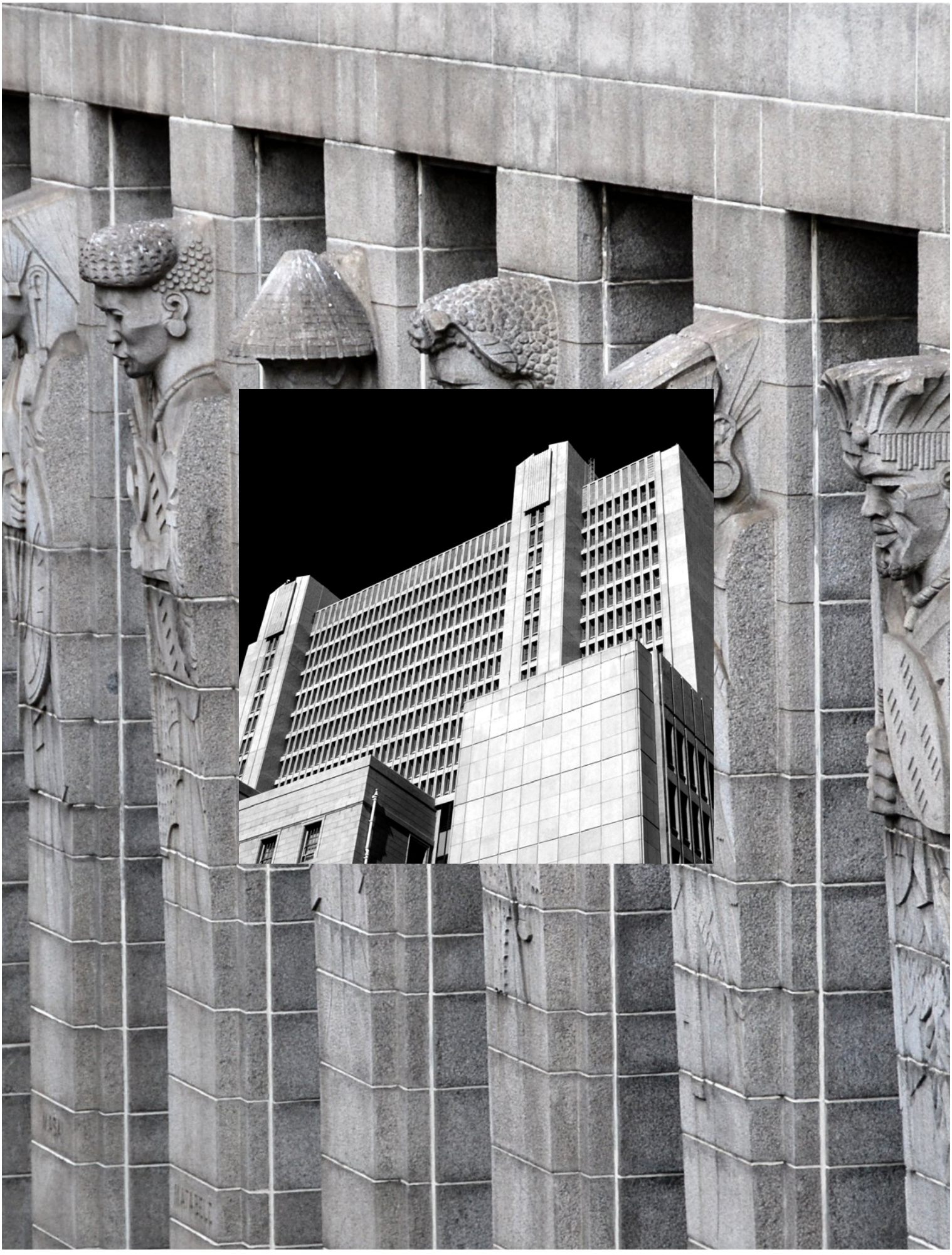
Opposite is the shebeen's parent body, Merchants. It's an old-world trading store in an Art Nouveau building (a "Roman-style bathhouse" in its first incarnation) slotted between a BEARES furniture department (the logo – three anthropomorphic bears arm in arm – hasn't changed since the 1950s) and that other example of African urbanity and worldliness, more ubiquitous even than McDonalds: a mega KFC.

Merchant's mixes high-priced luxury African goods (R5000 for a single printed silk jacket from Kenya) with Afropop: *Jungle Jim* magazines, Chappies bubblegum, Ouma Rusks tins. But which is the defining (South) African aesthetic? The colonial-exotic or the White Star sugar packets, boxes of Jungle Oats and much-perused magazines?

Inside Merchants, Didier Kalala – also French-speaking, but by way of Belgium and the DRC – glides over with Ethiopian coffee in delicate porcelain cups shaped like flowers. "Cape Town is not what people expect Africa to be like," he says decisively. "Tourists come here and immediately want to 'see Africa' and go off to the bush". He laughs into the hush of the dim store. Crocodile-skin clutches glisten in glass cases. The cups bloom on the counter.

Later, Laduma Ngxokolo, a designer from Port Elizabeth, comes to view his new knitwear exhibition. "I think each and every best element of design from Africa is pulled to the city," he says. "Cape Town is like a one-stop-shop where tourists can come and experience, to a certain degree, African culture. If they want to go deeper, they can specifically go to the Ndebele in Limpopo; they can go to the Xhosa people in the Eastern Cape; they can go to the Basotho people in Lesotho."

It's a starting point, in both senses. ❁



BUILT ENVIRONMENT

[BUILT ENVIRONMENT]

City Limits

Where does Cape Town begin and end? The outskirts of the city are unravelling: a hem come loose, or an artist who's scribbled outside the lines.

A writer writing off the page.

On the map of the land, the city is a spreading geometry drawn in mortar and asphalt. Here, walkers, drivers, bikers and cyclists, builders and business-district execs, car guards, tourists, shoppers and students alike are driven by the logic of urban planners in patterns of everyday migration. But down in the one-way labyrinth of the CBD, mathematics and imagination get tangled up together, buildings and bodies blur as people draw their own irregular lines through the precise urban cartography. The built environment has a complicated circuitry as much to do with people as infrastructure. If you were to trace every route it might spell out the code to unlock the city.

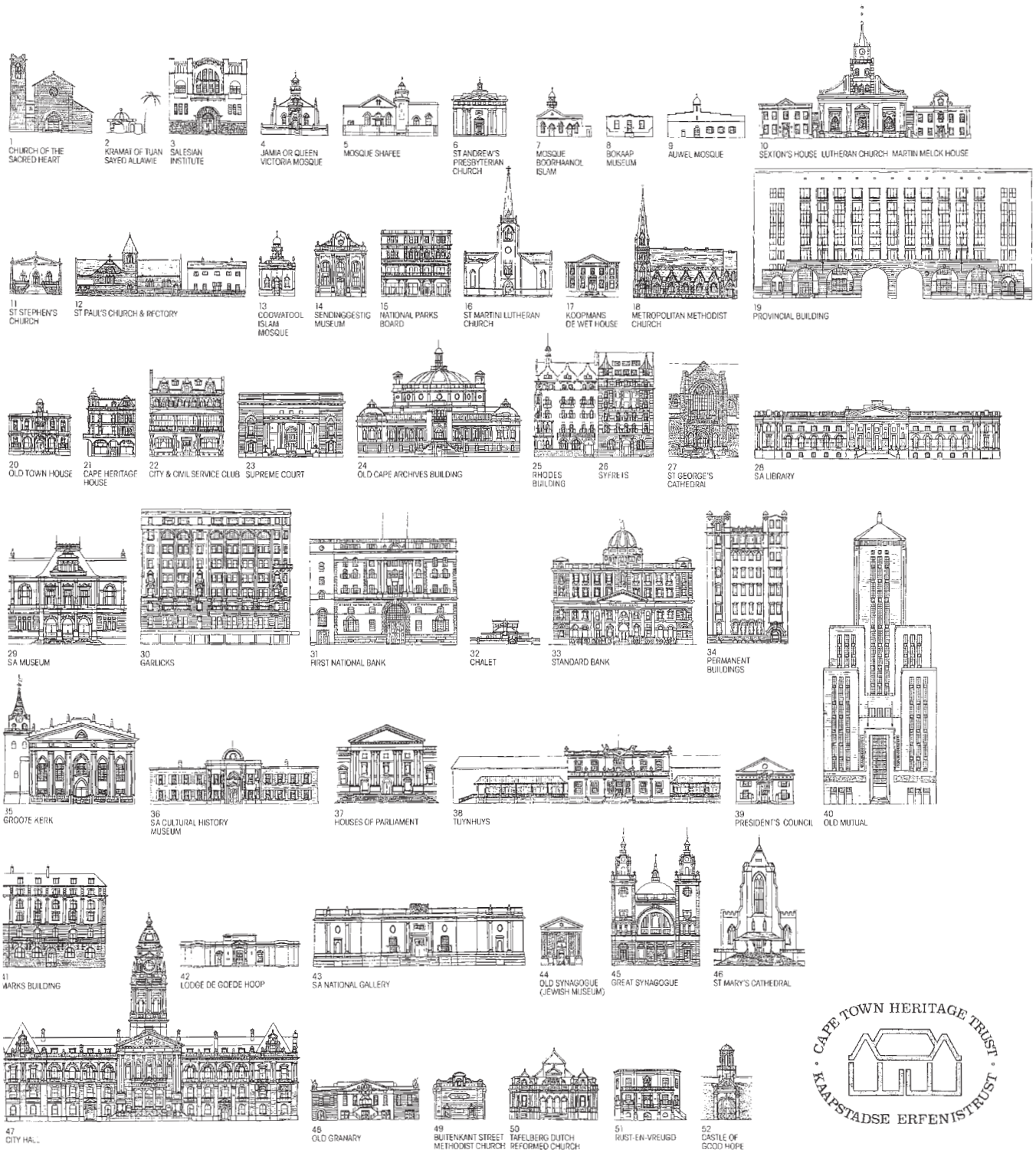
New Ruins

The metropolis is always under construction. Slowing on the incoming Eastern (now Nelson Mandela) Boulevard, you can count the mechanical cranes, graceful as giant egrets, picking cement mixers from the teeth of the city as it basks reptilian, its windows glinting like scales in the afternoon sun.
"It's not egrets you're thinking of," says my passenger, an avid bird watcher, now opening *Newman's Birds of Southern Africa*. "It's the Egyptian Plover. Crocodiles eat egrets."
"Who said anything about crocodiles?" I reply, slightly put out.
One afternoon I spot a rarity among the yellow-billed structures: a crane painted blue. A blue crane.

Builders

The men who build the city don't live in it.
Most stay in the townships – Khayelitsha, Langa, Gugulethu – which are moored to the city, as permanent and vital to the CBD as the trading ships that dock in the harbour.

Despite being in the top five of world's largest "slums" with around 400 000 residents, Khayelitsha has not become an independent "city" like the informal settlements in Bombay, Manila or São Paulo, where people lead lives divergent from the urban centre to which they were originally drawn. Khayelitsha, as well as neighbouring Gugulethu, Langa and Ndabeni remain relatively dependent on Cape Town city centre(s). But Cape Town CBD is only one of such centres. Split along transit lines, the sprawling, dispersed city is broken into discrete suburbs – satellite cities that draw migrant workers and consequently informal settlements into their orbits. Hout Bay (locally referred to as "The Republic of Hout Bay") has Mandela Park; Durbanville has Morning Star; Kommetjie has Masiphumelela.



Inner-city buildings, Cape Town Heritage Trust.

Some workers wait outside the bottle store on Strand Street. Someone in a bakkie will come past and hold up a number of thick fingers; there'll be a rush and push to get into the cab or onto the flatbed. Sometimes they wait all day, leaning against the bright blue wall, which was at some point painted the same colour as their overalls, now badly flecked and grimed by the city.

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It's foggy today, South Africa's oldest lighthouse on the Sea Point Promenade lowing like a sad bull down at the whitening sea. The mist stays hanging over the water. It's hot in the city. There are builders in blue overalls sleeping under a vivid fuchsia plant – an out-of-place mural in the plain beige, white and grey of a middle-class suburb.

The Weatherproofer, a gambler with a wife called Pearl, works in the spaces between houses. "Underneath, most houses are the same," he says. "They're there to keep the outside out."

Construction is going on in the houses to the left and right: a constant sputter and crack of the brick-breaker (exultant in its demolition), banging hammers, shouting… Alone and quiet, a painter in a Breton-stripe top and jeans leaves a gleaming white wall in his wake. He's not from here. A Zimbabwean he tells me. He used to work in the Marange diamond mines, but now he's a gardener-and-painter for hire.

Three months ago the people next door said that the builders jackhammering the neighbourhood awake every morning would be finished in no more than three days. They're still there, part of the rhythm of the cul-de-sac, singing along to an eclectic mix of tinny music sputtering from a Nokia cellphone. "*It's hard to survive in the 313 / I'm trying to be what I'm destined to be / And nigga's tryin' to take my life away,*" wails a voice in time with Detroit rapper Proof's, while they scrape away at next door's back yard, chip at paintwork, haul materials to and from the carport...

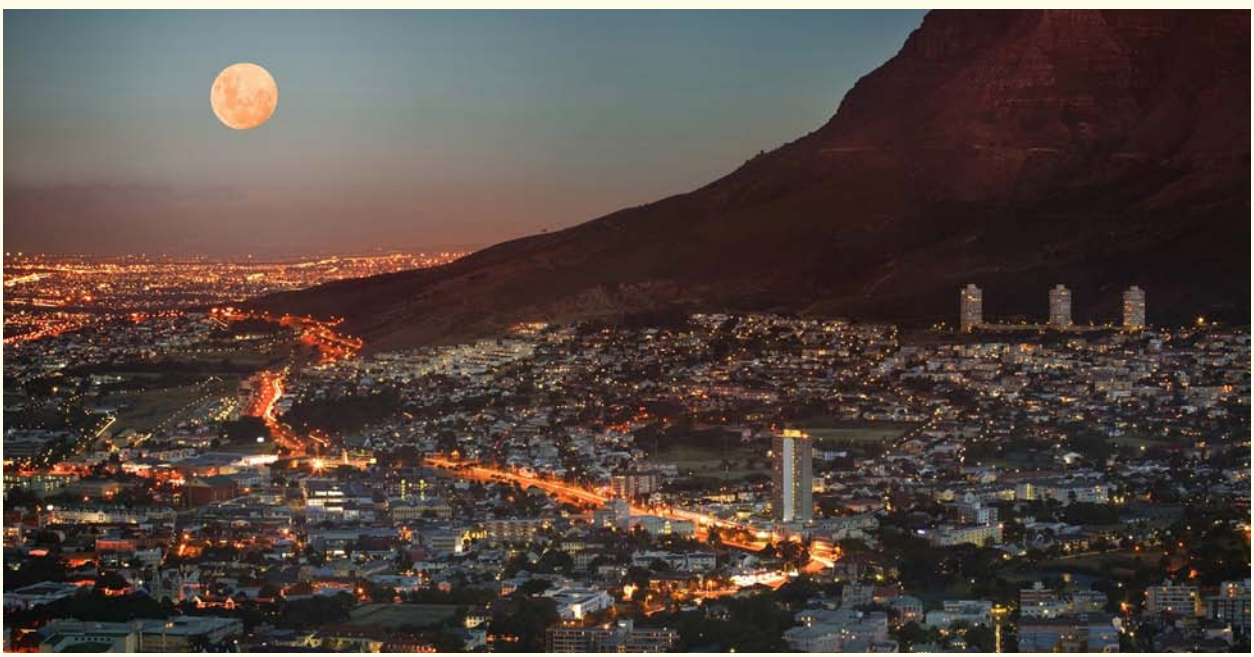
Day

As the new sun spins up like a R5 coin, the city breathes in – a long, deep breath of cars and taxis and trains, of exhaust fumes and tar and the scentless leaves of the trees on the traffic islands; a breath held right up until evening rush hour, when the sun slips back into the pocket of the sea, and the workers rush out, home to the suburbs and exurbs, and the city folk go to sleep. Now, just before the luminous pulse of Long Street, loud as the Vegas Strip, ticks the dark away, the heart of the city is cast in sharp relief, its cement skyline high-rising and falling like a steady beat.

People

Nilesh is an entrepreneur who lives in the city.
"I hung out in Durban's manholes as a teenager. Now I stay in Mandela Rhodes Place. Worked my way up, right from the bottom," he says, laughing behind D&G sunglasses bought in New York ("although you can get the same ones for fifty bucks from a guy who steals them from the optometrists in Plein Street"), whiskey on the rocks in one hand, Dunhill in the other. An almost-insomniac, at 3am he goes downstairs in pyjamas to get a Coke or a bottle of wine, or steps into his "garden of the inner city" as he calls it – the paved walkway of St George's Mall with its line of slender trees and occasional flower boxes. He watches the club-goers, while walking unobserved under the blooming stars. Nilesh says Cape Town is different because here there are "not just people from other places – the result of a port city, much like Durban or P.E. or East London – but because there are so many people from different areas of the city: the Northern suburbs, the Southern suburbs, the townships", all gathering in the fluorescent haze of the inner-city for minutes or hours of the day, but not all day. "There are relatively few people who actually *live* in the inner-city, the CBD, or even on the slopes of Table Mountain," he says.

Like revolving doors, we spin past each other in different cells, in and out of the same complex, hardly ever touching.

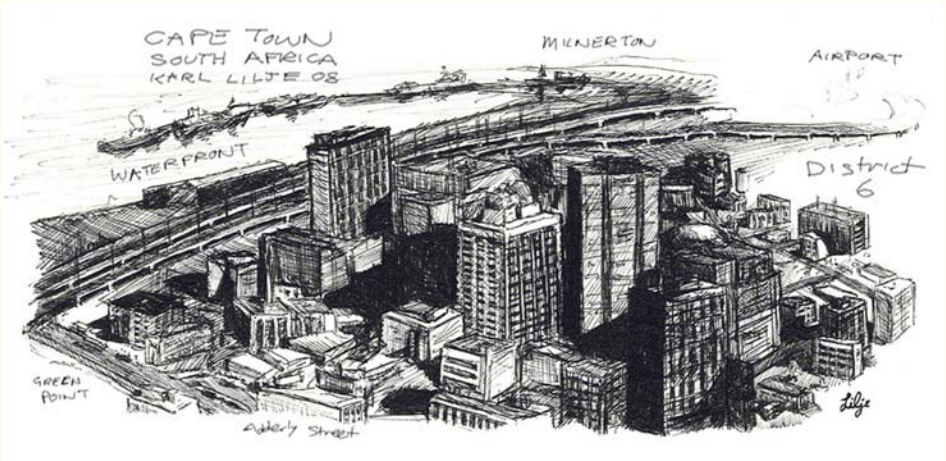


Views of Cape Town city by day and by night.

Sleepless City

What businesses never sleep? Locksmiths? The Litkem chemist in Darling Street in the city centre stays open 'til eleven. There's an all-night McDonalds in Kloof Street; the twenty-four-hour "party Engen" petrol station in Orange Street where everyone ends up after clubbing in town; the all-night vet in Kenilworth...

I wonder if in other places in the world there are malls that stay open all night. An insomniac's dream! To walk up and down the airy byways below the skylights, between the blur of shoppers and tourists, lost and confused in the press and



Cape Town. Drawing by Karl Lilje, 2008.

The unfinished overpass.

crush of advertising and consumerism until the fluorescence wavers, the shopping chaos becoming an unfocused, hazy lull. The Late Night Supermall Painkiller, samples free.

Malls

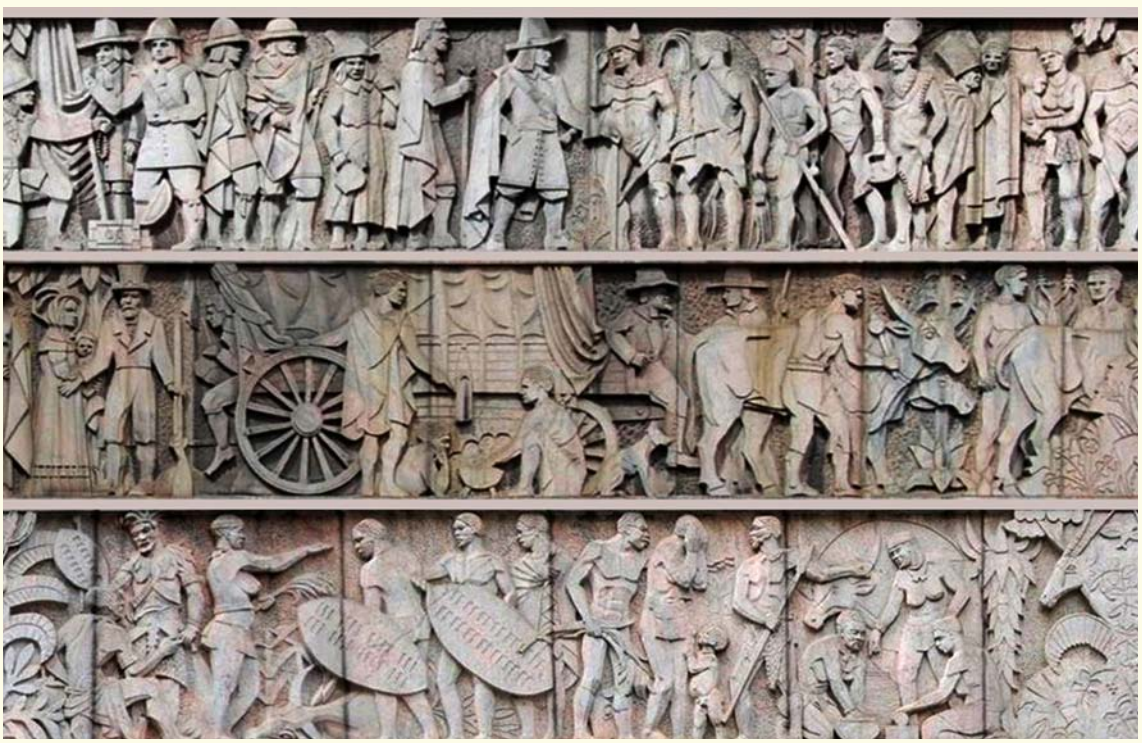
There's an advert on TV at the moment showing the (de)construction of Sandton City – "The richest square mile in Africa". I've been to Sandton City and it is impressive, dazzling even. But it still doesn't quite compare with the faux-

opulence of Century City's Canal Walk in Cape Town.

The mall, third largest in Africa, built in 2000, is a pseudo-Tuscan palace with its own adjacent amusement and office parks. It's a labyrinth of levels and exits, with walkways always full and every store hyper-sized. At night inside the walled Century City, ADT cars flash through the empty bays and private security guards on Segways ("The leaders in green transportation!") weave around booms and between parking islands. A perfect miniature city, policed more efficiently than the real one that surrounds it.

Urban Blitz

"Sprawl" doesn't quite capture the explosion of Cape Town city, its epicentre packed hot and tight with an always-roar and blur of sirens, hooters, whistles, shouting. With swinging cranes and a hammer and clang, construction stutters outward in a whirl of flying rubble. Roads unfurl like black carpets. Up goes the latest glass monolith, Portside Tower –



A section of the Mutual Building frieze.

the first skyscraper since 1992 – screaming past Art Deco façades and Modernist blocks, which collapse from altitude to altitude, down 'til the low Metrorail roof and finally the barely-head-height kiosks on the Parade.

It's fun to speculate about why certain building materials were used: mirrored glass – was it the intention of the designer or architect to mirror the surrounding city? Same with transparent glass: these flashy buildings oddly have the idea of invisibility built into them – either they reflect something else or you see through them.

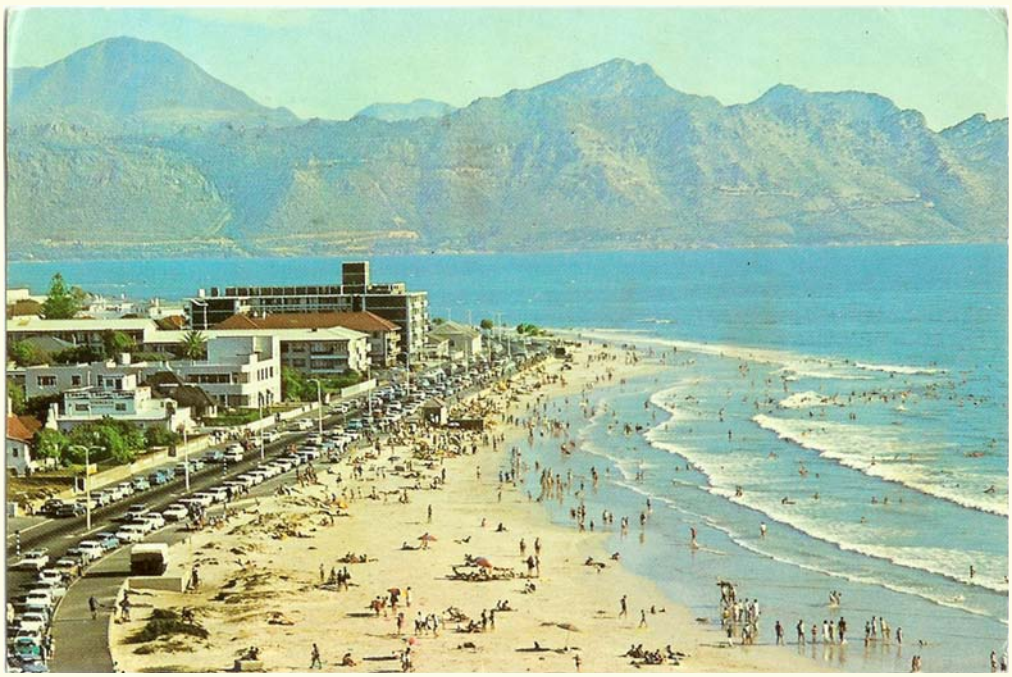
Model City

When you're elevated above the CBD, Cape Town looks like a model city, its features accumulated and assembled over the years by some earnest collector. New glass buildings (made from the latest materials!) slot in alongside older models with their gold-foil windows and cardboard-coloured stonework. Some structures look like they're from another game

entirely, like the black Jenga tower of the old BP Building (now 1 Thibault Square). Other pieces are incomplete: the unfinished overpass, the space beyond it frustrating as a missing puzzle piece.

Centre

Let's take the outbound road, past the dour stone of Cape Town city centre, friezes frozen between architrave and cornice – words as old and cold as granite – their sombre trekkers trekking on for all time, or until one day demolished and forgotten in a future too far off to imagine. The 118-metre-long frieze on the Mutual Building was apparently chiselled by Italian prisoners of war, who as Ivan Vladislavić notes, "are given credit for every decent piece of stonework in the country". There is the baroque city hall, like Big Ben fashioned for a desert harem – minareted, shaped out of honeyed limestone with a clock inset with real opal and a line of palms that once stood on the beach that's now far away, retaining only its name: Strand Street. Its bells chimed the names of soldiers long lost on the Western Front of the Great War. To the right: the domed Dromedaris – Good Hope Sentrum, like some Dolittle discovery: a huge tri-necked turtle washed up by the sea. And further on, we wave to the Victorian homes that modestly lift their slate skirts just above the lace of their always-white undergarments; and their Dutch country neighbours – scrubbed 'n' whitewashed farmhouses, ruddy as bittersweet apples, with gloomy-eyed windows peering out from under thick thatch fringes.



Postcard, The Strand circa 1960s.

Suburbs

Gordon's Bay and the Strand, remodelled as all-white "holiday resorts" after forced removals in the 1950s, are architecturally reminiscent of '60s California – the palisades, the palmy walkways and balmy sea. "Bikini Beach" is named after the Stellenbosch University students who'd come to sunbathe, its name a swirl of vanilla and strawberry in roller-diner font above a bookshop stocked to the roof with second-hand romance novels and, oddly, school textbooks.

But behind the beachfront façade, the town fades like a postcard in a window. The area is flat and suburban, but the conservative apartheid-era architecture is, here and there, being replaced with bizarreries of taste: a gate decorated with aces and clubs rather than spikes; a pale-pink house all pillars and forty-five-degree angles; a wall where, in place of a marble cherub, a lurid half-metre-high animated frog waves out of an alcove; and, further on, an over-designed apartment block – a towering architectural nautilus on the edge of the surf.

Industria

On the opposite side of the metropole, Industria contains the spare parts of the city and its motherboard: the Koeberg power station, relic of South Africa's nuclear past. It's cinematic at night: a science-fiction futurism of bright lights and silver pipes. An uninhabited, alien city. But by day it squats alongside the sea, malignant cauldrons bubbling in the sun, excruciatingly human in its imperfection and lack of foresight. When construction began in the 1970s, Koeberg was situated outside the Cape Town metropolitan area, but the city has since sprawled northward. In 2000, an emergency evacuation model by Independent Consultant Engineering (Pty) Ltd estimated that the populations of Atlantis and Melkbosstrand – within a 16km radius of the power station – could be evacuated in four and a half hours. By 2015, population growth and traffic congestion will push that time to nineteen hours. As yet, there is no official emergency plan in place, but South African Nuclear Energy Corporation (NESCA) has drawn up a list of things to do in case of a nuclear crisis. It includes tuning in to Radio Jacaranda (94.2FM) or Motsweding (89.6-91FM) for instructions. Both stations broadcast from Johannesburg.

Just out to sea, rigs in the harbour spill light onto greasy water.

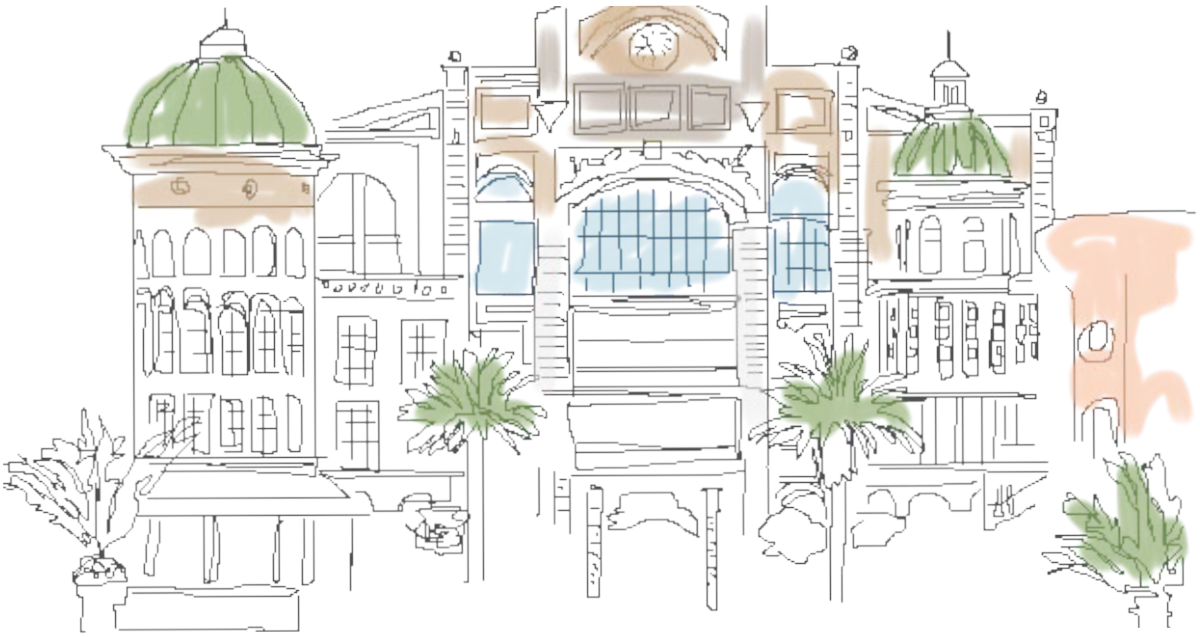
History

Alston, Allen Dale, Arun Dale, Bursledon, Bramshaw, Cotswold, Coniston, Cosham, Dawlish, Dorches (the "ter" has been painted over), Dunelm, Deenside, Fareham House, Gosport House, Highcliffe House, Picket Post, Bolde-Rings, Tip-Toe (although "toe" has mostly flaked off), Beaufort House, Alphen House, and then, surprisingly, Riebeeck. The line of flats that ring the edge of the empty fields of District Six stand in lonely formation like a lost regiment of Boer War British soldiers (and one Dutchman) that never made it home.

De Waal drive runs along the mountainside. Above is the peak where Van Hunks, a farmer, is said to have out-smoked the Devil. Both disappeared, but when the mountain is wreathed in cloud, they're supposedly at it again. From De Waal drive you can almost see the whole city, from the inner-city buildings that stand like upturned matchboxes to the plains of industry, where factory chimneystacks smoke delicately as blown-out matches.

Eventually, De Waal drive gives way to the M3 and the N2. The latter runs past the townships, their "sprawling metal roofs" described to death by international (and often local) reporters. There is a new development, however. On the outskirts of Langa a massive film set has been erected. Full-scale galleons rear out of the scrubland, along with coconut palms and pristine, white beach sand. There's a common Cape Town in-joke about telling visitors fresh from up-country that the galleons are Jan van Riebeeck's, unearthed (miraculously still intact) at the prior shoreline.

Follow the N2 and you'll eventually end up in Ermelo, Mpumalanga, at the intersection of three national highways: the N2, the N17 and the N11. The N17 will take you to Johannesburg.



Canal Walk. Image: Alice Inggs.

FAÇADE

The surfaces of Cape Town's post-apartheid malls, hotels and casinos

Century City, GrandWest and The Cullinan – these are Cape Town's late capitalist "palaces of desire"[1] – massive complexes of overlapping architectural styles. Aesthetically, these structures are nothing short of bizarre, their façades engendering an idea of European classical antiquity and grandeur, despite their design and construction originating in the late 1990s and early 2000s South Africa. At The Cullinan hotel, you can recline under colonial palms and pillars next to an azure swimming pool. Glancing up, you'll see cupolas and pediments above oddly motel-like windows. At Century City you can watch birds fly over manmade "Venetian" canals, which run parallel to the busy N1 highway. Inside, what locals refer to as "Boer baroque frescos" adorn the domed ceilings. A palace in Industria, its "aged" Tuscan-yellow surface clashes with the MAERSK shipping containers and rusty railway depot across the way. Meanwhile, GrandWest Casino and Entertainment World is a miniature Las Vegas in a concrete desert with (obligatory) palms and fountains, but it looks more like the Palace of Versailles (with an expanse of parking lot rather than a lake) than any modern American casino.

What can be extrapolated from this phenomenon? In the same decade as these "palaces of desire" were designed, South Africa experienced an economic boom: trade sanctions were lifted, international connections were re-forged, tourism soared. In a 2011 article titled "Dubai on Empty", A.A. Gill wrote: "Dubai has been built very fast. The plan was money. The architect was money. The designer was money and the builder was money. And if you ever wondered what money would look like if it were left to its own devices, it's Dubai."[2] Exactly a decade before that article was written, the same could be said of South Africa and the "palaces of desire". Is the "meaning" behind the "palaces of desire" merely that old adage: there's just no accounting for taste? Or is there something more to be understood in the surfaces and aesthetics of these architectural anachronisms?

Shopping malls, marketplaces, airports, highways and hotels, cash points, train stations, taxi ranks and Wi-Fi-enabled areas – more and more, city populations centre their lifestyles around these late-capitalist phenomena. These are "non-places" of continuous transit unconcerned with history and identity and containing their own temporalities, which are disengaged from the "base line" of ancient places and times.[3]

In South Africa, the relatively recent concept of "non-places" (Mark Augé coined the term in the early 1990s) provides a counterpoint to the residual fixity of the apartheid-era racial city. The wake of spatial delineation

and (modernist) architecture that (re)produced a particular national identity unsettles new narrativisations of South African cities and their integration into contemporary urban theory. Cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg seem to be tethered to categories of race, segregation and impending crisis. As a result, South African cities are rarely conceptualised speculatively, but rather as in limbo between a contextual past and present, imagined as eternal monuments to the apartheid regime and its consequences: economic inequality and crime.

Theorists such as Achille Mbembe have hit upon the concept of the "African modern" as a paradigm for investigating the architecture (social and economic and well as that of brick and mortar) of the post-apartheid South African city.[4] This opens up a space for speculation. It is important to note, however, that speculation should not be equated with a disregard for history, but should rather be seen as a mode for exploring the potential of the South African urban (as well as the emergence or re-emergence of cities elsewhere), raising questions about how South African urban spaces, architecture and circumstances might contribute to understanding global urban elsewheres.

Johannesburg has its definitive "downtown" – the CBD and much mythologised surrounding areas of Hillbrow and Yeoville – a confluence of formal and informal economies and living spaces; restored buildings and urban blight in which a Western, late-capitalist (post)modern collides with "the African", whether that be a particular temporality, forms of self-stylisation, diasporic aesthetic, multiple languages or modes of communication or trade. This collision or "entanglement of the modern and the African"[5] results in distinctive palimpsests, which can be read in a variety of ways – for example, as producing Mbembe's "African modern".

Cape Town's sprawling metropolitan area has no such defining centre. Rather, Cape Town's particular contemporary urban identity is derived from multiple centres and styles of architecture. Restored Victorian façades are jammed up against Modernist slabs, in turn overshadowed by towering glass office blocks squeezed between remnants of Art Deco fancies. Just outside the CBD, RDP housing gives way to shacks formed out of plastic, wood and scrap metal. In the Northern suburbs it's one-storey facebrick, while Industria is dotted with smokestacked factories. As Andrea Nagel asked in "The Best and Worst of SA Architecture" – "Does South Africa have a characteristic style of architecture? Is it Cape Dutch, mud hut, concrete slab or corrugated iron shanty? Is it retro-futuristic such as the Hillbrow Tower or modern innovation like the Constitutional Court?"[6] In Cape Town it is all of these and more.

In "Aesthetics of Superfluity", Mbembe looks at Johannesburg's transition from a racial city and uncompleted colonial project to a global metropolitan form – a place of movement and change – currently undergoing large-scale consumer-driven spatial restructuring. He writes that "in times of transition … architecture and urban design tend to become acts of repression, separation, and fantasy"[7] citing Melrose Arch and Montecasino as exemplars of both Johannesburg's "unconscious", and the transformation or commodification of the city through capital.

In Cape Town, similarly bizarre pseudo-classical complexes such as Century City, GrandWest and The Cullinan hotel – what urban theorists Rafael Marks and Marco Bezzoli term "palaces of desire"[8] and examples of Augé's "non-places" – cater specifically to consumer culture, speaking to a general global trend: the shaping of the urban through a globally connected free-market economy.

GrandWest Casino and Entertainment World is situated in Goodwood, between the Northern and Southern suburbs, bordered by industrial factories. It is the "largest entertainment destination of its kind in South Africa," boasts Sun International's website. "It offers an around-the-clock wonderland ... a never-ending world of fun, food and fabulous family entertainment".[9] On arriving from Cape Town International airport, international visitors see a massive GrandWest billboard: "Welcome to Escape Town".

Century City, a vast pseudo-Italianate complex including a shopping mall, office park, apartment blocks and a theme park is located at the intersection of the N1 and N7 highways between the Cape Town CBD and the Northern Suburbs. Stepping up from GrandWest, it does not just provide entertainment, but what Marks and Bezzoli

[1] Rafael Marks & Marco Bezzoli, "Palaces of Desire: Century City, Cape Town and the Ambiguities of Development" in *Urban Forum*, Volume 12, Issue 1, Jan-March 2001, pp 27-48.

[2] A. A. Gil, "Dubai on Empty" in *Vanity Fair*, April 2011.

[3] Mark Augé, *Non-Place: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso, London, 1995, p. 77.

[4] Achille Mbembe & Sarah Nuttall, "Introduction: Afropolis" in *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, S. Nuttall and A. Mbembe (eds), Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2008, p. 1.

[5] Achille Mbembe, "Aesthetics of Superfluity" in *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, S. Nuttall and A. Mbembe (eds.), Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2008, p. 39

[6] Andrea Nagel. "The Best and Worst of SA Architecture" in *The Times*, 19 August, 2010.

[7] Mbembe, *Aesthetics*, p. 64.

[8] Marks and Bezzoli, pp 27-48.

[9] *GrandWest website* [http://www.suninternational.com/GRANDWEST/Pages/default.aspx]

call "*shoppertainment*, where the boundaries between retail, culture and education have become irreversibly blurred".[10] Canal Walk, the mall in Century City, is not just another shopping centre, but one that produces "an exciting holistic experience in an environment that will be pleasing to everyone while catering for most lifestyle groups".[11]

"Wonderland", "Escape", "*shoppertainment*" – these are Disneylands, commodifying experience and producing a kind of hyperreality, a painstakingly constructed illusion: the specific architectural articulations of these structures – their peculiar surfaces – serve to plaster over the past, or even to replace it with something that never was. The question then is how to read such a phenomenon within the context of contemporary South Africa, where the past has generally been seen as not only illuminating the present, but also constructing it.

Again, Achille Mbembe has posited a solution: an "African time of entanglement",[12] which sees meaning in Africa not retroactively constructed, but informed by the present and future. However, the architectural concepts for structures like Century City, GrandWest and The Cullinan hotel profess to be rooted in the (cultural) history of Cape Town, in fact, GrandWest implies that it is in itself a kind of restoration; a guardian of the past. Can these structures then be read as contingent on the past and yet as simultaneously superseding it?

Architecturally, Sun International claims that the GrandWest complex "pays homage to the Cape's character and cultural heritage. External facades have been painstakingly recreated from historical city buildings, long ago banished to history. The interior décor trades on Cape Town's maritime tradition, inviting visitors to experience the beguiling old 'Tavern of the Seas'".[13]

Similarly, Tsogo Sun's towering, cupola-ed Cullinan hotel, located within the CBD, purportedly "complement[s] the rich, cultural heritage of Cape Town through timeless architecture".[14] Just what "timeless" means is left to the imagination, however; the hotel has been variously described as "colonial", "art-deco", "classic" and "opulent". Century City is more direct, labelling the palatial architectural style (situated in an area of wetlands) "Cape Venetian".[15]

What these "palaces of desire" have in common is that they represent an "urban hyperreality, of simulations and simulacra – exact replicas of originals that never existed".[16]

Perhaps a more obvious example of this hyperreality is Ratanga Junction, Century City's adjacent theme park. Ride names conjure an exotic African fantasyland: "Monkey Falls", "Congo Queen", "The Cobra" and "Crocodile Gorge". There is also a "World of Birds" show and an animal petting zoo. As Marks and Bezzoli point out, the myths Ratanga attaches to the rides – for example, that the "Diamond Devil Run" train "hurtles in and out of the old original and dilapidated mine shaft built by the Diamond Devil Mining Co. at the turn of the century" or that on Crocodile Gorge one encounters the "remnant of a stilt village belonging to an ancient tribe of hunter gatherers" – construct "a fictitious African identity and history",[17] much like the architecture of the "palaces of desire". But unlike GrandWest, Century City or the Cullinan, Ratanga Junction makes no attempt to disguise its fakery. Situated next to Century City, it is perhaps presented as a fake to make us believe that Century City is real.

Century City – a postmodern consumer complex within the façade of a pre-modern Italian city within the Cape Town peri-urban – is a struggle of contradictions, yet as a simulation it blurs the difference between the "true" and the "false", the "real" and the "imaginary". In "Simulation and Simulacra", Jean Baudrillard relates Borges' fable about a map so large and detailed it covers the territory completely and exactly. The Empire that drew the map witnesses its deterioration until, through aging, the territory and the map are indistinguishable. Today, says Baudrillard, simulations (the map) are no longer generated by a "real" original (the territory), but by other simulations – now it is "the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map".[18] As Cape Town's historical architecture is slowly eroded and replaced, it is the architecture of pseudo-historical structures like Century City, GrandWest and The Cullinan that remains. One could even imagine some sci-fi future, where architects will turn to these structures – constructions with no historical precedent – as referents…

Century City, GrandWest and the Cullinan are interesting developments in a country that places so much emphasis on the past as a resource used to make sense of the present. These "palaces of desire" profess a link to the past, their architecture apparently derived from history, and in so doing lay claim to an aesthetic, a history and

[10] Marks and Bezzoli, p. 35.

[11] Martin Wragge quoted in Marks and Bezzoli, p. 35.

[12] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, University of California Press, California, 2001, p. 16.

[13] *GrandWest website*

[14] *The Cullinan website* [http://www.tsogosunhotels.com/hotels/the-cullinan/pages/overview.aspx#.Uot6DWQY0kc]

[15] *Century City website* [http://centurycity.co.za/]

[16] Marks and Bezzoli, p. 29.

[17] Ibid, p. 35.

[18] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulation and Simulacra*, (trans.) S.F. Glaser, University of Michigan Press, USA, 1994, pp 1-3.

Century City
Size

> Century City is big. With R2 billion worth of development ranged across 250ha of relatively centrally located land, it is the third largest (private or public) development in the Western Cape and by far the biggest single commercial development in the region. The area of the land alone is almost the same size as the CBD.
>
> Combining retail, leisure, offices, residential and ecological components under one proverbial roof, Century City represents the ultimate commodification of urban space and services. There are no low cost housing projects here, nor public schools or libraries, only those aspects of urban life that can be conveniently repackaged, reprocessed and reimaged. One can live, work and shop within the same complex without having to leave the gates of the 'City' gates, inhabiting a fictitious space, insulated from the troubles beyond its borders.

– Rafael Marks & Marco Bezzoli, "Palaces of Desire: Century City, Cape Town and the Ambiguities of Development" in *Urban Forum*, Volume 12, Issue 1, Jan-March 2001, pp. 27-33.

Palaces of Desire
Architecture

> "I tried to imagine the place in a few years time," says the narrator of André Brink's 1974 novel *Looking on Darkness* of the flattened working class tenements, "With imposing white mansions in New-Cape Dutch, Pseudo-Corbusier, and Hottentot-Gothic." In fact most of the area remained undeveloped, with only the churches, mosques and temples left standing as indicators of the false piety of the social engineers. Yet the architectural hybrids Brink foresaw have appeared in the vast mall and casino complexes on the Flats, stockades of faux-Tuscan columns and exotic Africana under closed circuit surveillance.

– Hedley Twidle & Sean Christie, "Taxi on Main" in *A City Imagined*, Stephen Watson (ed.), Penguin Books, South Africa, 2005, p. 179.

Above: Canal Walk floor plan.

Left: The Cullinan Hotel, two views.

Right: An advert for GrandWest Casino.

cultural heritage that never was.

The built form becomes an empty sign, its embellishments signifiers. These signifiers, for example, the "Cape Venetian" architecture of Century City, convey meanings that are necessarily "eroded by time" – as Mbembe points out, "this architecture asks the spectator to forget that it is itself a sign of forgetting".[19] Far from trading on tradition and manifesting cultural heritage, it's possible to argue that such South African architecture "constitutes a mode of erasure all the more dramatic because it is accomplished with painstaking care against the duties to memory ritualised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission."[20] The question, however, is: Why? Older, large-scale malls in Cape Town like the V&A Waterfront, Cavendish Square and Tygervalley Centre, all designed pre-1994, don't claim to be in some way architecturally mimetic of cultural heritage or as reproducers of Cape Town's urban history, so why do the more recent "palaces of desire"?

Compared to the more anonymous architecture of malls built pre-1994, it seems as if large-scale architecture built in the years immediately following democracy was perhaps required to be culturally or historically relevant. In "Venture Kapital", Gary Wolf writes about the (re) construction of Berlin after the Wall fell in the late 1980s:

> Awakening nine years ago from its half-century trance, Berlin has struggled to decide which direction to look in. Would it model itself on the new cities of the world, with their disregard for history and their willingness to remake themselves according to exigencies of the global economy and the whims of savvy developers? Or could Berlin pick up some thread of a local identity, salvaged from its prewar past? This is hardly an innocent question, since every gap in the cityscape of Berlin today is an expression of both the city's losses and its crimes.[21]

After the dismantling of apartheid in the early 1990s, South Africa struggled with similar problems: what would be the defining aesthetic of the post-apartheid city? More pressingly, should developers focus on city centres, to which international investors were returning after trade sanctions were lifted, or on the townships, excluded from urban development until now? How should the city be (re)structured in order for it to be more inclusive without resorting to land reclamation and without disrupting the flow of commuting and migrant workers? The "palaces of desire" could have been part of this "critical reconstruction": a way of reconstructing or changing the urban aesthetic,[22] which during apartheid had favoured primarily bleak, oppressive (essentially "blank" in both senses of the word) Modernist architecture.

Mbembe sees a more sinister, psychological motive, labelling the surfaces of the palaces of desire "an architecture of hysteria",[23] a way of warding off the passage of time, attributing this kind of architecture – the architecture of hysterical forgetting – to the collapse of the apartheid city structure. For the white subject "faced with the sudden estrangement from the familiar resulting from the collapse of the racial city, this architecture aims to return to the 'archaic' as a way of freezing rapid changes in the temporal and political structures of the surrounding world".[24] This kind of architecture, he asserts, "allows the white subject to hallucinate the presence of what has been irretrievably lost".[25] In this sense, the surfaces and aesthetics of GrandWest, Century City and The Cullinan are manifestations of white nostalgia, revealing the embattled psyche of the white subject in a deracialised city. Extrapolating from this idea, one could also see this kind of architecture as a romanticisation of the colonial project.

This reading seems to rely on the "white subject" being cast exclusively as a European figure mourning the demise of colonialism and its failed attempt at reproducing the aesthetics of the Empire in Africa. Thus, structures like Century City become attempts at completing the colonial project, rewriting history through architecture. Mbembe also makes the claim that faced with radical changes to the apartheid city post-democracy, the white subject creates pseudo-classical structures as a way of returning to the past or of freezing the present.

But does this homogenous image of the white subject not just merely reproduce the (binary) logic that gave rise to the racial city via the apartheid regime? As Susan Parnell and Alan Mabin point out in "Rethinking Urban South Africa", although "implicit acceptance of 'race' as the primary category of inquiry has limited and impoverished understandings of towns and cities … race remains the ubiquitous lens through which the South African city is viewed".[26]

There is perhaps another explanation for the aesthetics of the "palaces of desire": Cape Town architecture is forced to rely on a past that never existed and/or cannot be used. Globally, the "ancient" has been equated with opulence – for example, the (literal) palaces of desire: Versailles in France, Amba Vilas and the Taj Mahal in India or the Winter Palace in Russia. Historically, there was never any need for excessive European opulence in Cape Town – the city was initially a way-station for ships, a functional port rather than a far-flung cultural centre of the Empire. In fact, the only example of a grand colonial-era structure is

the Cape Town City Hall, which was completed relatively recently – in 1905. Even the "Castle" of Good Hope is no more than a low stone fort. But opulence – great wealth and luxury – is precisely what the modern palaces of desire wish to convey, even their names allude to a longstanding grandeur: *Grand*West, *Century* City, and The *Cullinan* – named after the largest diamond ever discovered, alternatively known as the "Great Star of Africa". Without local Byzantine or rococo architectural referents, the architectural grandeur and accompanying history of the palaces of desire is fabricated.

This reading, though, is still reliant on using the past to understand present urban phenomena in South Africa. In line with Mbembe's concept of a time of entanglement, might these structures, all built circa the late 1990s and early 2000s, have meaning that can be gleaned from the present (that is, their immediate future)?

Far from being a theoretical panacea for understanding these buildings outside the category of "race", Mark Augé's theory of "non-places" nevertheless provides a way out of the cul-de-sac of history and race that often impedes theoretical speculation in South Africa. Through the lens of this concept, coupled with Mbembe's "time of entanglement", one could also see the architecture of the "palaces of desire" as potentially representing the manifestation of that particular African temporality – a non-linear, narrativised, palimpsestic concept of time. That is, "non-places" do not have the inherent definitive (stable) ideologies of "place". Indeed, as we have seen, one of the foremost traits of their surfaces is erasure. Thus, the architecture of the "palaces of desire", which are also "non-places" – figuratively constructed, originating from no specific time and yet being of the present – has the potential to encapsulate the non-linearity and "interlocking of presents, pasts and futures"[27] of a specifically African temporality.

Augé's concept, which is rooted in anthropology, also raises other lines of questioning: rather than abstractly deconstruct the surfaces of these structures, we should focus on how people interact with the aesthetics of "palaces of desire". In a sense, the "palaces" are nodes of contact, drawing people from all corners of the city (as well as other cities, other countries and other continents).

Perhaps the late-capitalist "palaces of desire" are just that: although South Africans frequent these spaces, the aesthetics are maybe not designed for them. Architecturally, these malls, hotels and casinos are embellished with a pastiche of international, ancient architectural styles, a "pseudo neo-colonial architecture, based on a cleansed and dehistoricised past",[28] a Sol Kerzner-esque kitsch exotica (incidentally, Kerzner owns both The Cullinan and GrandWest). Their surfaces construct and impart a fictitious African identity and history to be *consumed* by tourists. This is the urban outcome in a country conforming to the aesthetics and demands of a recent globality – the emerging "world city" of postmodern geographies and late-capitalist desires.

But does this fully explain these particular aesthetics in South Africa in relation to architecture immediately preceding and following the construction of the "palaces"? Perhaps not. Furthermore, these "palaces" aren't specifically tourist-centric. Their surfaces were conceived and constructed during the immediate post-apartheid milieu, a particularly self-conscious and self-reflexive time for South Africa. In this context, the "palaces" could be understood as a manifestation of both the spirit of "starting over" and the difficulty of how to include everyone; what history to invoke; what aesthetics to retain – the attempts by architects to skirt the issue of contentious history, and, in doing so, creating a fragmented, schizophrenic aesthetic that at once claims a specifically South African heritage, while simultaneously rejecting that heritage in favour of a safe, uncontested fiction.

There are various trajectories one could take when reading the surfaces of Century City, GrandWest and The Cullinan. Are the embellished façades of the "palaces of desire" part of a post-apartheid urban critical reconstruction, built in direct opposition to the minimalist architecture of the apartheid-era Modernist projects? Or are they merely kitsch exotica? Do their surfaces reproduce a colonial narrative, manifesting white nostalgia? Or do they exemplify the contradictory and multitudinous aesthetics of South Africa? Ultimately, what these surfaces "mean" is of no real consequence – it is what they signify that is important: the post-apartheid shift to conceptualising spaces and places as nodes of connection, rather than areas of disconnection and division. It is also these kinds of phenomena – collision points between history, anthropology, aesthetics, time, economics, narratives of nation, identity – that contribute to the process of articulating the elusive "African modern".

[19] Mbembe, *Aesthetics*, p. 62.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Gary Wolf, "Venture Kapital" in *Wired Magazine*, 1998.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Mbembe, *Aesthetics*, p. 62.

[24] Ibid.

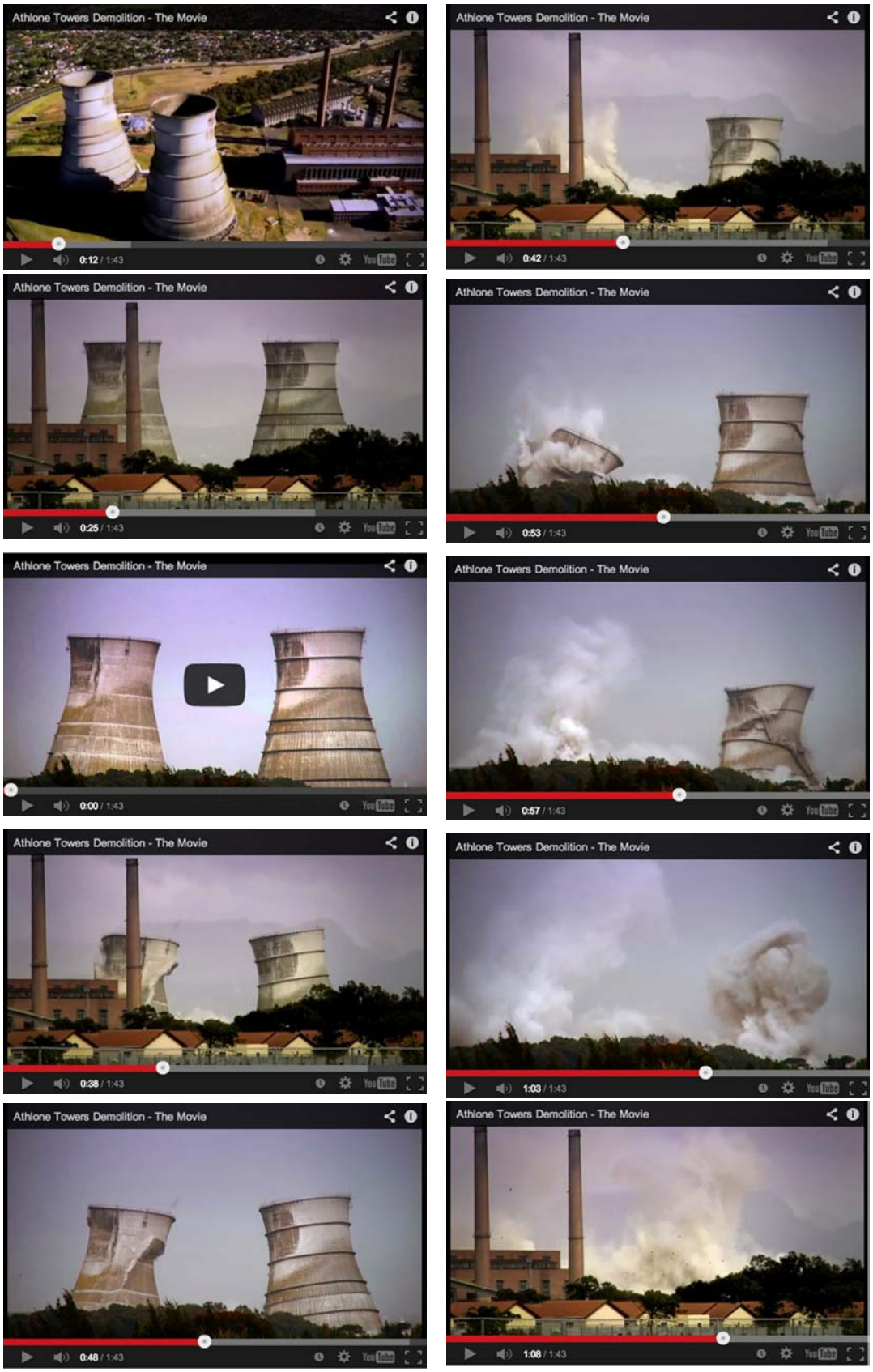
[25] Ibid.

[26] Susan Parnell and Alan Mabin, "Rethinking Urban South Africa" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 21, Number 1, March 1995, p. 39-40.

[27] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 16.

[28] Marks and Bezzoli, p. 43.


RENEWAL
/DECAY



Demolition of the Athlone Cooling Towers. Stills from *Athlone Towers Demolition – The Movie*.

[RENEWAL/DECAY]

Malevolent Architecture

They've finally changed the name of Hendrik Verwoerd Drive in Welgemoed, a suburb adjacent to Bellville. After driving up and down for several minutes, Uys Krige's new-painted name smiling benevolently from the curb, I realised what had changed. Roadside vegetation had grown up around the signage, slicked with a fresh coat of grime, as if feigning having always been there. The white paint told a different story. I drove along the stretch, looking for any trace of the old prime minister – the malevolent architect – but any hint of the road's former name had been covered up, removed. The job looked to have been done with relish.

"You don't need that," said my friend Willim, a Bellville resident, as I struggled with a Gorilla lock. "*They* won't steal your car here." In this high-walled neighbourhood, "they" were not hazy grey figures. The shadow of Verwoerd still lingers after all.

Voortrekkers

There's a Voortrekker Road in every town in South Africa, cattle-marked with old apartheid architecture. In Cape Town it starts at the Salt River circle, traversing the Liesbeek River, then wheels on past Maitland, Pinelands, Thornton, Goodwood, Elsies River, Parow; running out through Bellville and beyond. Eventually it peters out near Belgravia, becoming Strand Road, Van Riebeeck Road and then Old Main Road, ringing round to meet up with the N2 highway before climbing Sir Lowry's Pass and rolling on into the interior. Another piece of it is in Malmesbury. I wonder if you trace a line between all the Voortrekker Roads whether you'll get the old ox-wagon route running like an artery to the heart of the country. More likely most of the road names are symbolic and you'll end up with a tanged, disjointed loop on which you could imagine the ghosts of the Boer settlers *jaging* their *ossewa* along a wild goose chase.

Skeletons

The skeleton of a 17th century ship has been unearthed during construction at the harbour breakwater, near the Waterfront grain silo. Like some huge prehistoric beast, its wooden bones would be at home in the South African Museum down at the Company's Garden alongside the dinosaur dioramas and flint arrowheads.

At fifty-seven metres, the grain elevator, built in 1921, was the tallest building of its time in Cape Town. It was a marvel of construction: 17 500 bags of cement and 145 tonnes of reinforcing steel went into the structure. Thousands of men swarmed through the construction site. In 1924, a reporter for the *Cape Argus* surveyed the frantic build and tersely noted that "a stranger might well be excused for forming the impression that the Mother City of South Africa was nothing but a smoke belching congestion of factories". Long standing dormant, it was announced in 2012 that the old elevator was to be turned into a museum of modern African art. Now, again, builders swarm over the site, cement mixers churn, cranes swing with lengths of steel, while smoke belches from the adjacent shipyard.

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01 Inside the Werdmuller Centre.
02 Architecture of the Werdmuller.
03 *Number six of a series of six photomontages* by Ângela Ferreira.

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03

Now/Then

"I remember staying at the Sea Point Ritz," says my friend Jan. "In the Eighties. There was nothing like it in Bloemfontein. The Verwoerd building at five stories was the tallest building. *Yoh*, how my brother and I used to ride the lifts up and down... Then there was the Vorster building with the first escalators. That provided entertainment for a while. But the Ritz – that was something else." The Sea Point Ritz, once magnificent with its uncountable storeys and revolving sky-high restaurant, is now jokingly called The Pits, having long ago fallen into disrepair. "It's sad," says Jan. "Like a prostitute from the Seventies still trying to turn tricks. Really, it's knocking stars off its rating year by year."

Demolition

"The time has come to say goodbye to the two ladies of Athlone," said mayoral committee member Clive Justus when the decision was made to demolish the well-known cooling towers. When 7 000 explosive charges reduced the twin structures to rubble in front of an audience of Capetonians, many people literally blinked and missed the spectacle. One moment the familiar grey cones were there behind their perimeter picket fence, leaning slightly towards each other like gossiping neighbours; the next a hole was ripped into the city skyline. Driving past on the N2, it still feels odd. You check for keys, wallet, cellphone... But what's missing isn't certain.

There aren't often major demolitions in Cape Town; the cityscape remains stable. But as of last year, the Werdmuller (or "Weird-muller") Centre in Claremont faces the threat of being torn down. Like some bizarre Bilbao building, the modernist Centre, built in the mid-Seventies, twists in Escher spirals to multiple dead ends. There are stairs and inclines, alcoves and balconies… A shop a few metres away often requires navigating a circuitous maze of ramps and levels. It's so difficult to find toilets, people gave up long ago and used the alcoves. The stink of urine is now a defining memory of the building. Dark corners made for easy mugging of lost shoppers. Odd occurences were everywhere, like the evangelical church replacing floor space vacated by a BEARES furniture store. In an article about the Centre's demise in the *Mail & Guardian*, a musician said that the Werdmuller could be equated with Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*. Frankly, the structure is, well, *weird*.

Oddly, the experimental but ultimately dysfunctional architecture is equally loved and hated. A petition to save the Centre cites Werdmuller architect Roelof Uytenbogaardt's design as "heritage status-worthy … the only example of this type of architecture at this scale and in this form in South Africa". The drafters of the petition have perhaps forgotten the similarly peculiar University of Cape Town Sports Centre (also designed by Uytenbogaardt). Modernism, overall, has failed in this country. Its cold, imposing structures more a legacy of social engineering than inventive architecture.

While a panel debates the Werdmuller's fate, Ross Demolition's distinctive green bulldozers circle the slow-dying Centre.

Night

City DJ, Jon Monsoon, is telling me about his new club, Underworld. It's furnished in plush red velvet – the cinema seats and carpeting relics of some demolished bioscope (there's only one left in Cape Town, the rest exterminated to make way for Nu Metro and Ster Kinekor complexes). It's dark in the club, the lighting flickery as an old film reel. The dancefloor is a black-and-white chequerboard and the walls are exposed brick. People liken it to something out of *Interview With a Vampire*. "It used to be a bank vault," says Jon. "There is still a stairway that leads down from the ceiling." A stairway to nowhere. Or, as the song says, a "stairway to heaven": the oldest brothel in Cape Town still runs above them. Outside, to the left, Adult World's flashing red lights give everyone on Riebeeck Street a lurid neon glow. Korean sailors sink back into the shadows. A group of twenty-somethings descend into the belly of the street.

A few streets away, City Hall is lit up beyond the bus terminus like some 1960s desert film set of painted sandstone and plastic palms. A lone man in a white thawb on his way back from the nearby mosque masquerades for a moment as Lawrence of Arabia under the streetlights.

Renewal / Decay
A Dialogue

Key words: Architecture, Archive, City, Renewal/ Decay, Gentrification, Infrastructure

VOICE A: Under the Eastern and Western Boulevard bridges in Cape Town; in doorways and on stoeps; in sheltered spaces on the mountain; in abandoned buildings and then in the vast number of shacks – people have used detritus from the city, as well as its infrastructure, to construct shelters. Is using bits and pieces of the city then renewal, or part of the decaying process? Apparently only "two percent of the buildings in the world are designed by architects".[1] Does this then count as vernacular architecture?

VOICE B: Broadly, yes. It's empirical building, using local materials and has thus developed what could be seen as a "local style", even though shacks and temporary street shelters are a worldwide phenomenon. I'm interested in the idea of "vernacular" in a linguistic sense – shelters made from newspaper or newspaper headline boards as being *literally* "vernacular architecture" – a kind of architecture that can be "read" on both a superficial and aesthetic level. As a building is broken down into text, it becomes an archival document. And this way, using local newspaper boards, it's in a language phrased to be understood by South Africans.

VOICE A: I like the idea of an archive and architecture – or rather *archi-text-ure* – in a language almost everyone understands, a language that mixes street slang and straightforward facts, and that's specifically about South Africa – especially if you're using tabloid newspaper boards like those of the *Daily Voice* or *Die Son*. An alternative archive, or an *archi-text-ure*, made out of stories. The newspaper boards have dates, which could act as part of a "reference number". The stories are born on the street, the newspapers are read and discarded and then used as bedding, or part of a shelter or are recycled or thrown away. The boards have a similar lifespan. So essentially, one kind of archive – that is, newspapers – is being reconstituted in another kind of archive: the city.

VOICE B: That brings us back to the first question – about renewal and decay. I think it's important to see decay as neither "good" nor "bad" – there is no bad or good side to this argument. Both are processes and both processes involve each other. The city is a composite, a bricolage. It is at once an abstract idea and a physical entity; a multitude of texts – narratives, images, histories, financial records, city plans, street maps, newspapers – and a mass of concrete, steel, brick and stone. It is simultaneously crumbling and being rebuilt; being archived and being forgotten. There are the established or traditional archives – the museums, galleries, national monuments, heritage sites and statues – there are the alternative archives – the postcards this year and yesteryear; the newspapers of today and yesterday, the films, photographs, artworks, literature etc. – and then there's the city itself: its changing surfaces, its renewal and decay, its preservation. We have archives within archives! And the connections aren't linear. Each type of archive and each archival document follows its own temporal trajectories. The question to ask is: once all the layers have been identified, what is the image that emerges? Maybe there is no single image. Maybe to look for an image would be the same as looking for a meta-narrative – a dangerous occupation in a country where a meta-narrative of nation and place was historically used to divide the population.

VOICE A: So is this what we're aiming for theoretically with the city as archive? Something fragmented or disjointed?

VOICE B: Overlapping maybe, layered, palimpsestic – one vision of the city overlays and erases or reinterprets another. Cape Town is a good example of this: in films (or "filmic texts", if you will) the city is often used as stand-in for other places in the world, or for places in the future or past, rather than a single, coherent setting in its own right. For example, the train station and the road running around

the back of the Cape Town International Convention Centre became part of the futuristic police state in [Judge] *Dredd*. The outskirts of Langa township have been turned into a kind of Port Royal for the pirate series *Black Sails* and passed off as a version of Brazzaville in American singer Solange Knowles's music video "Losing You". In *Lord of War*, the city was used as fifty-seven different locations in the world – from Bolivia to Sierra Leone; and in *Safe House* fake shacks were built in the middle of a real informal settlement. Often, Cape Town is broken up and pieced together as something else, or somewhere else. This disrupts and complicates the idea of a single, coherent city, or a single coherent archive.

Recently, during the shooting of *Long Walk To Freedom*, Johannesburg's famous Vilakazi Street, as well as the cellblocks and prisonyard on Robben Island were also recreated on a film set. The historical detail was so accurate, a bid was made to turn the sets into heritage sites because the original sites have changed over the years. So this process of splitting up the city or recreating it is also in some ways mimetic of the archival process: freezing a moment in time, while its original context changes. In addition to re-visioning the archive, this conceptualisation of the city as layered or palimpsestic allows for alternative versions of the historical narrative of the city space.

VOICE A: But isn't this a bit complicated? Surely complexity at all costs is only helpful theoretically? An archive or narrative of place that is always under construction, that

"*Often, Cape Town is broken up and pieced together as something else, or somewhere else. This disrupts and complicates the idea of a single, coherent city, or a single coherent archive.*"

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01 A Congolese "sapeur" in South Africa. Still from Solange Knowles's "Losing You" music video.
02 Fake shacks built for the film *Safe House*.

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is completely abstract and impenetrable, is not helpful in an everyday context.

VOICE B: In one sense, yes. Perhaps it should be more of an aim than an outcome. We should aim for complexity, impenetrability even, rather than a single overarching idea. Look for connections rather than differences. To see the differences between things is often to essentialise or reduce them. To return to physical place, the built environment is a complex typology that gives rise to an idea of "place" within the wider context of "space". Structures such as buildings and monuments are often architectural reminders and enforcers of history. In a South African context, city planning (spatial mapping) and restructuring played a significant role in defining identities through allocation of "place". Cities were structured along racial lines and monuments (for example, the Taal Monument, Voortrekker Monument, NG Kerk) built as reminders of the status quo – the literal "architecture of apartheid". So, do we repurpose old buildings or demolish them to make room for a new urban topography and, as a result, a completely new psycho-geography, a new archive? But razing buildings has such a loaded history in South Africa – just think of District Six in Cape Town or Sophiatown in Johannesburg.

VOICE A: Is this perhaps why gentrification is such a contentious issue in South Africa?

VOICE B: In an article for *The Daily Maverick* discussing urban renewal in Cape Town, Laura Wenz made a significant point: "it is important to ask how exactly gentrification plays itself out in the context of our already highly segregated and unequal cities".[2]
Gentrification is too often and too easily seen as an argument with only two positions: For or Against. If you're for it then you're seen to be pro-rampant-capitalism, and if you're against it you're against development. Laura Wenz talks about "tackling gentrification", but gentrification itself tackles another issue – the deterioration and dereliction of urban areas.

The argument in South Africa is often not to do with the economics or functionality of gentrification at all, but its aesthetics. The aesthetics in question – the "hip" revamping of the Old Biscuit Mill and the Woodstock Exchange, as well as the Maboneng Precinct in Jo'burg – introduce a very particular, what could be termed "Western" or European aesthetic to areas which are, to a certain extent, seen as "typically" or "authentically" South African, or even African. Woodstock is crumbling, dilapidated. It's a labyrinth of derelict buildings, dingy stores, small kiosks, hand-painted signs, peeling paint, graffiti, *Halaal* meat markets, clothing factories, auto works, spare parts. In Maboneng, the distinction between the new precinct and the surrounding deterioration of inner-city Johannesburg is even sharper. So, during early phases of gentrification, there's a marked differentiation between the "authentic" original space and the new aesthetic. We've spoken about the role of architecture earlier – in the past in South Africa (especially) it's been used as a reminder of the status quo and as a signifier of place and therefore identity. Architecture is loaded.

VOICE A: Artist and critic Ann-Marie Tully has been quoted as saying that "Cape Town is just a dump. The whole city is a gentrified space, a 'Hipsterville'" and a "contradiction"; whereas "the divides are there in Jo'burg but they are more spliced on top of each other, layered. Perhaps at some point these divides will become less clear and will dissolve more and more."[3] This seems to illustrate what you're saying – that the argument is about aesthetics, rather than economics.

VOICE B: Yes. But during gentrification there is also the threat of displacement of low-income residents as a result of rising municipal rates, increased rent, or buildings being sold to developers. Displacement is also a historically loaded issue in South Africa because of forced removals. Also, in South Africa, lower-income is often seen as an indicator of race, so race may form part of the gentrification issue, even if not explicitly.

We mustn't forget that Cape Town, or rather cities in South Africa, are not necessarily unique. In Istanbul, for instance, a neo-liberal economy in the 1980s drew millions of migrant workers from Anatolia to the city. Most ended up living in slums. İmre Azem's documentary, *Ekümenopolis*, shows how social cohesion is lost through the process of trying to make Istanbul a "world class" or "global" city. As economist Vishnu Prasad writes in an assessment of the documentary: "This echoes … the conflict in most developing world mega-cities, including Indian cities such as Mumbai and Delhi which aspire to be global cities but at the same time struggle to provide the most basic services to large swathes of their populations."[4]

And this indirectly returns to the initial idea of using detritus of the city to construct shelters: when a city cannot fully provide for its population, there are interesting developments. Urban theorist AbdouMaliq Simone has pointed out that some of Africa's most urbanised settings are places of "ruined urbanisation".[5] When material infrastructure is not available, *people* become infrastructure. Flows of goods and information,

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> *"The argument in South Africa is often not to do with the economics or functionality of gentrification at all, but its aesthetics."*

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03 The old Woodstock Industrial Centre before renovation.
04 The redesigned Centre, now called the Woodstock Exchange.
05 Offices inside the Woodstock Exchange.
06 Exterior wall, Woodstock Exchange.

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for example, are re-directed through social, rather than institutional or infrastructural, networks. Connections between spaces, practices and people are reproduced through social interaction.[6] There are many ways of understanding and engaging with the city space that do not follow the lines of traditional urban planning. Necessity breeds invention.

VOICE A: But is this not just essentially moving the goalposts? Journalist George Packer critiques architect and urban theorist Rem Koolhaas on his re-visioning of Lagos. Koolhaas describes Lagos as "a protean organism that creatively defies constrictive Western ideas of urban order"; he is amazed by the way "the kinds of infrastructure of modernity in the city trigger off all sorts of unpredictable improvised conditions".[7] But, as Packer points out, "Lagos is fascinating only if you're able to leave it. After just a few days in the city's slums, it is hard to maintain Koolhaas's intellectual excitement. What he calls 'self-organisation' is simply collective adaptation

to extreme hardship. Traffic pileups lead to 'improvised conditions' because there is no other way for most people in Lagos to scratch out a living than to sell on the street."[8] He questions whether it would not be preferable to "have some respite from buying and selling, some separation between private and public life". Surely it's better, as Packer says, "not to have an economy in which millions of people have to invent marginal forms of employment because there are so few jobs"?[9]

VOICE B: This is a valid point, but there are several arguments at work here. "From above", as it were, it *would* be preferable to have a stable, formal economy that could provide for everyone. But Koolhaas's excitement, I think, comes from seeing that in certain situations where formal infrastructure and economies have failed, there are *possibilities*. Seeing that humans can re-adapt the city to function in a way that can support them, despite its persistence not to do so. Rather than disregard urban "disorder" we should re-examine it as non-traditional networks. Connection rather than disconnection! Ironically, it is in urban "disorder" that the most original and inventive connections take place as there is less separation between the "formal" and the "informal". In developing countries, it will take decades and infinite sums of money to achieve "world-class" or "First World" status. In the meantime, we must look at the interventions, the improvisations, the intersections and the processes that are produced out of necessity. Cities are no longer developing in similar ways. We can't read them linearly anymore. Understanding the *multiple* ways in which cities are developing across the world will enable us to read cities speculatively and ultimately help us, as inhabitants of cities, to plan for the future.

Necessity = Invention
Yenza Collective

"*Making is the most powerful way we solve problems, express ideas and shape our world, it is humanity's most precious resource. For many, the knowledge of making is critical for survival.*" – Daniel Charny

Aim:
To broaden the context of South African design through an innovative exhibition and cataloguing of self made objects found in self made homes. The goal is to create awareness of the full scope of design making in South Africa. We want to encourage South Africans to take cognizance of local innovation, skills and materials in order to strengthen our local design identity in a global context. – *yenzamake.tumblr.com*

Simon, Church Street, Cape Town

Renewal
Skurrelling

Photographer Angus MacKinnon documents people in Cape Town and Johannesburg making a living from collecting plastic, cardboard, glass and metal for recycling. The process is locally called *skurrelling* (also: waste-picking, trolley pulling or reclaiming).

[1] "On Informal Architecture: A Discussion Between David Adjaye and Finn Williams" in *Afropolis / City, Media, Art*, K. Pinther, L. Förster and C. Hanussek (eds.), Jacana Media, South Africa, 2012, p. 51.

[2] Laura A Wenz. "Woodstock's Urban Renewal: Much More at Stake Than the Loss of Parking" in *The Daily Maverick*, 15 March 2013.

[3] Ang Lloyd, "Lauren Beukes's 'Zoo City' Comes to Life in the Urban Jungle" in Mail & Guardian, 08 January 2014.

[4] Vishnu Prasad, "Ekümenopolis – Istanbul and the Making of the 'Global City'" on *Financing Small Cities*, IFMR Finance Foundation Initiative, 09 October 2013. [http://financingcities.ifmr.co.in/blog/2013/10/09/ekumenopolis-istanbul-and-the-making-of-the-global-city/]

[5] AbdouMaliq Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg" in *Public Culture*, Volume 16, Number 3, Fall 2004, p. 407-408.

[6] Ibid, p. 407.

[7] George Packer, "The Megacity" in *The New Yorker*, 13 November 2006.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

Voortrekker Road, Bellville. Photographs: Mallix.

(INTER)SECTION: TRANSPORT

Taxi rank, Cape Town.

Taxis

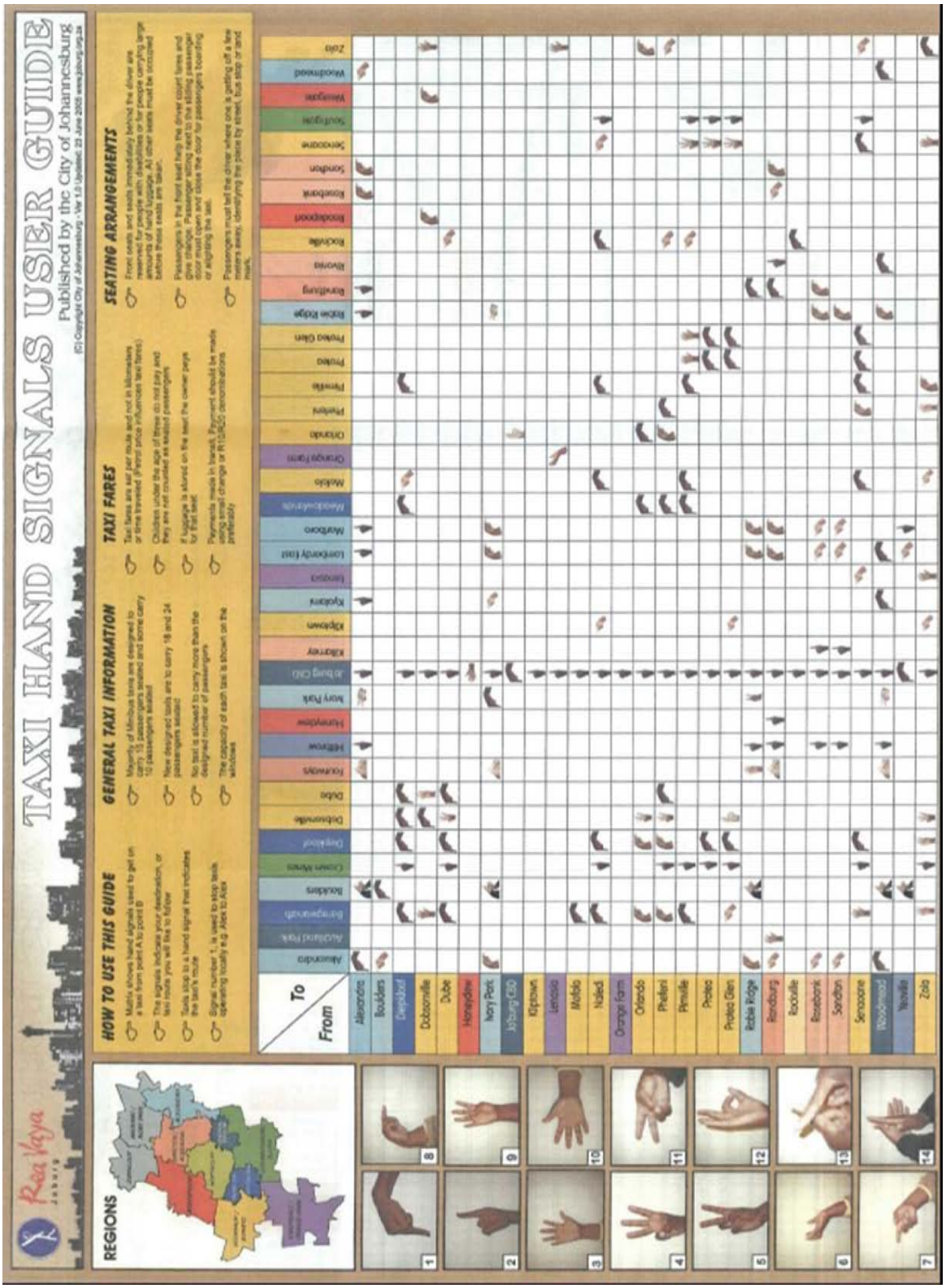
In Nigeria they're *Danfos*; in Kenya, *Matatus*; in South Africa, plain *taxis*. To be a taxi driver in Johannesburg, you need to know a range of special hand signals. In Cape Town you just need good driving skills (or "skillz" as the minibus stickers suggest).

In the Nineties, during the taxi violence, there was an urban legend that taxi drivers removed the vehicles' steering wheels and fitted spanners instead – to push the driver's seat forward and squeeze more passengers in and more coin out. South Africa's famous cartoonist Zapiro drew a scene of a "taxi spare parts" kiosk selling string, wire, glue and, of course, masking tape. It's funny to think of these most ubiquitous of transportation vehicles as fragile, put together like the bead-and-wire models sold at traffic lights. Really, they're more like indestructible toys for boisterous children, ramming their way through a Duplo city, flashy with decorative adult stickers: "Who's That Chick?", "Nasty Boyz", "Toetaz", "Boeta", "D.P.G. Style", "Lovely Stuff", "Main Hound In Da Pound", "Ah Nozinga".

On the Road

A passing taxi stopped somewhat faster than my dad's Chevrolet Kommando back in 1975 when I accidentally slipped the automatic transmission into reverse in an attempt to impress a gaggle of the Matric girls walking alongside the road one afternoon. Who would have guessed that a vehicle that size could go backwards so fast? And while travelling forwards at 60 km/hour ... [I]t's almost impossible not to admire the multitalented driver. Here is a man who can, with his right hand, use his finger as a mental gear lever, at the same time tootling his horn to attract business, and waving at his competitors. His left hand collects the money, changes tracks on the CD, and deftly alternates the gears. All while chatting happily on his mobile. I asked him to drop me off as close to the ticket office at Cape Town station as he could. He did. It turned out to be in the middle of a traffic intersection. As a passenger, and a client, I was touched. Surrounding drivers weren't.
Total time from Sea Point to Cape Town Station was a mere 97 seconds, including two red lights, and all this for just R6. Now that's value. As an impoverished taxi passenger it must be tough to feel anything for the hooting, finger-waving BMW driver inconvenienced thus. His car cost more than all the inhabitants of the taxi combined will earn this decade. What problems could he possibly have? – Jules Christison, *pricelesspetroleum.wordpress.com*, August 2013.

At night the kwaito thump and jam of the taxis gives way to muted notes spilling from bars and clubs as the minibus packs disperse. Recently, the taxi bosses have tough competition from the new Cape Town Integrated Rapid Transport (IRT) or MyCiti buses. Some say the days of taxis ruling city transport are over. But I doubt they'll ever disappear. ❁



Taxi Hand Signals User Guide for Johannesburg published by the City of Johannesburg.


EVERYDAY
URBANISM

[EVERYDAY URBANISM]

Not the glamour of Johannesburg, its golden shimmer like some Afro-jazzed-up Fitzgerald New York: the hot shine, the excruciating big-city tension rising like a high note beyond the blue slagheaps of the mines, the single-storey hostels and the veld over which thunderstorms drum a dull, sad-key rhythm. Growing up in the Cape, Egoli was the soap opera city, a world of mastermind criminals and glamorous secretaries that dressed like extras from *Dallas*.

Cape Town was always the sleepy city, lulled in cradles of mountains, hushed by the sea, lights out early, cool breeze, white tablecloth, smoggy smears of industry polished off the porcelain-blue sky by a reliable, quick-scouring wind. A seaside town. And a city of suburbs. Its defining mood is unhurried. A place of elsewheres. A city where ringing church bells blur with the muezzin; where cultures are unloaded like containers off a ship at the harbour – sent to be unpacked in disparate neighbourhoods, never to be jammed tight together again – rather than forged in the crucible of the mines and hammered out in a metropolitan smithy.

Street

It's Thursday and there are the usual group of homeless people who camp out in Sea Point on "dustbin day" sitting in the early-morning, beer-coloured sun talking about Jesus and the Devil. Just like an Athol Fugard play if they carried on, but they pack up and leave for somewhere else (so maybe it is just like a Fugard play), their voices echoing along the quiet street. Further away, on Somerset Road, the taxis are becoming more regular, distributing people through the still-almost-empty 6am CBD.

Down at the station forecourt two art students are staging an intervention of sorts: having taken the train from Woodstock, they followed the old shoreline, arriving at Strand Street and set up umbrellas, towels and bright inflatables (ironically bought at an intersection in the middle of town). It's a "reclaiming of the beach that was reclaimed by the city". Within ten minutes a security guard approaches and asks them to pack up and move along. "But it's public space," they protest weakly. "Ag, leave them, they're having fun," says a woman in a pastel headscarf and grey business suit as she walks by.

"The way people enjoy public space is becoming more and more prescriptive," writes Shaun Shelly, a previously homeless Capetonian, in an article for *City Press*. In 2010 rumours circulated that the homeless were being removed from the city and deposited in outlying areas in an attempt to "clean up" the CBD before the Soccer World Cup. A few months ago, "vertical rocks" were erected under the unfinished overpass in the city centre. "A prudent step to remove street people from a risky environment, or an undertaking that would simply make their lives more difficult?" questioned *IOL News*. Shelly adds that "taps have had the handle removed so that vagrants do not loiter at the street equivalent of the office water fountain" and that benches in the Company's Garden are being removed "with the sole motivation being so that people cannot lie on them". Public space is a commodity and everyone's trying to cash in.

***

The daily battle between the homeless and the Central City Improvement District (CCID) Protection Services is both tragic and amusing. The private-public CCID pays for security officers to police the inner-city streets, ostensibly making the Cape Town CBD safer. But the officers, armed only with batons, rarely interfere with real criminals. Even the pickpockets on Long Street go largely unmolested, laughing and shrugging if spotted: "Hey, you caught me. So what?" Rather, the CCID officers arrest "suspicious" hippies or chase down "loiterers" who don't pose much of a threat.

Around lunchtime, *Rapport* journalist Henry Cloete's Facebook status, "*Saw a bergie beat up one of those public safety guys and steal his baton in Long Street this morning*", becomes a much-commented-upon post. "*#Crackling_the_whip*" quips Henry.

A "drunk driving campaign" on Sir Lowry Road, Woodstock.

Bicycling around town in their distinctive luminous green-and-yellow vests and peaked caps, the CCID officers are very different to other private security guards. In military black or beige uniforms, bulletproof vests, firearm slung on one hip, army-issue boots gleaming, they single-handedly guard businesses. Many don't look South African. The man with tight, swirling black braids chewing a toothpick who stands outside the Three Arts Building behind the Spar on Jameson Street says he's from the Congo. He doesn't say much else; he doesn't need to.

Parking

I went looking for parking meters, but they are extinct. An out-of-date honesty device, unmoved, unmoving, killed out by the quick-running carguards in fluorescent vests. "The poles, which belong to the city council, would be uprooted and sold as scrap" reported *The Independent* in 2005.

A makeshift memorial for a homeless man, Sea Point. Photograph: Alice Inggs.

Headlines from *The Daily Voice*, 2013.

Unofficial carguards first appeared in South African cities in the early '90s, although they are not a South African phenomenon, but an African one. In Lagos they're called "Area Boys" – more protection racket than harmless street hustler. Here, there are the "Parking Marshals" – men and women employed by the City, carrying metering devices and located near marked bays. Everywhere else there are men in tattered lumo chasing swiftly accelerating cars for a couple of coins or a loose cigarette.

"My Xhosa name is Mncebisi, meaning Advisor," says the man who introduces himself first as "Chris". He's an informal carguard who operates a lot on Somerset Road near the Green Point Stadium. "Don't give me money next time, buy me Pampers for my baby," he says. As a parting remark, he advises me to marry one of Nelson Mandela's grandsons – "Not for money," he says quickly, "but for love" – before running to the next reversing car.

Loose Change

In Long Street, a woman has a sign that reads: "Husband Abducted By Aliens Need of R10 for Karate Lessons". She believes the bit about the aliens, "But the karate lessons are a joke."

News

Cape Town loves news. Cape Town loves a scandal. "*Ons skrik vir niks!*" brashly proclaims the Daily Voice's motto. Launched in 2005 and with a current readership of just under half a million, the tabloid, mainly aimed at the workers of the Cape Flats, sells about twice that of The Cape Argus (established in 1857). Although paling in comparison to the national Daily Sun's five-and-a-half million readers, *The Daily Voice* is hard to beat when it comes to shocking headlines. "Cry Me a Reeva" screamed the trademark yellow font, unabashed, over a photograph of Oscar Pistorius weeping in court. A gangster who won the lottery was branded "Scumdog Millionaire". Brett Murray's now infamous portrait of President Jacob Zuma with exposed genitals earned the headline "Shlong Walk to Freedom", while a story about the latest Cape matric results stats was titled "Dom Pass". People supposedly eating pets on the Cape Flats was shamelessly headed "I Eat Pussy to Survive", somewhat ridiculously paired with a posed photograph of a man holding a lazy-looking cat. On a slow day "Stormers Boss Puts in De Kock" found its way to the front page.

The Daily Voice doesn't specifically deal in facts, but in stories: "Snakeboy Hiss-teria", "Jesus Lives In My Toilet", "Face of Zombie Priest" and "UFO Airport In Hout Bay" have all been headlines. Vendors now wear t-shirts that read: "*Don't vloek me uit. I don't write the stories*".

More topical, more colourful, more concise than the verse of the best poets, these bizarre haikus, renewed every day, speak from the podium walls and lampposts of the city: "Taxi Knocks Cow In Its Moo", "*Kers Vrees*", "Zuma Says Sayonara to Tokyo"...

Tomorrow, yesterday's headlines will mostly be forgotten, but they don't always disappear. You'll see old boards wheeling down pavements, lining the beds and walls of the poor, stacked in trolleys, or posted online as jokes that only South Africans really understand.

Settlement

Unlike Addis Ababa in Jo'burg, named for the influx of immigrants, informal settlements in Cape Town are named after current world affairs: there is a Tsunami, an Iraq (residents claimed they were "invading the land just as George Bush had invaded Iraq"), a Barcelona, a Kosovo, a Kuwait, a Europe and a Taiwan. More recently, a Marikana has sprung up. "Initially Lusaka in Nyanga was called Milles Camp," writes Myolosi Gophe for *IOL News*, "but people questioned 'who is this white man Milles to have a camp in Nyanga?'". Gophe adds that "There is a belief that naming places after important events is an African tradition, as people used this method to record history in the absence of the wherewithal to write it down ... Future historians will be able to match the name of a settlement with the issues that engrossed people at the time they set up the shacks."

Meanwhile, just above District Six on the mountain's flank, poor Muslim families live in flaking, gabled flats with names like "Downton", "Exbury House", "Beaulieu" and "Chorley", the titles carefully repainted every few months by an unofficial hand.

Soccer

The Confederation of African Football's Orange African Nations Championship is happening down at the Cape Town (formerly Green Point) Stadium. Every time the venue is used it feels like a small victory for the city. First marked out during the Second Boer War, the old Green Point Stadium was upgraded for the FIFA World Cup in 2010 at a cost of R4.4 billion. The upkeep for the mostly unused venue, which is the wrong size for rugby or cricket matches, has been

An informal market near the Khayelitsha train station. Photograph: Christoper Bonnet.

Kaapse Klopse carnival, Bo-Kaap, 2014. Photograph: Alice Inggs.

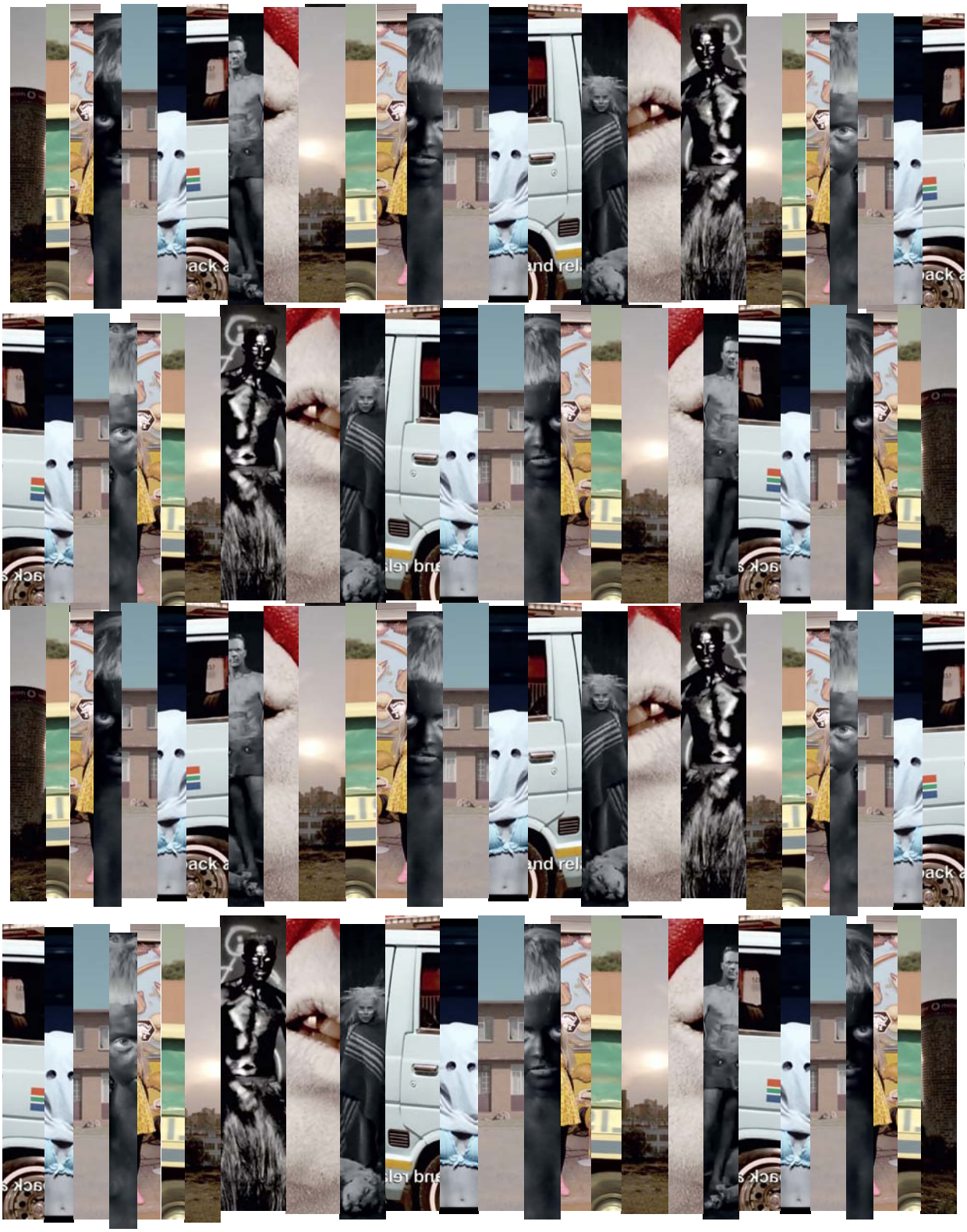
Soccer at the Sea Point promenade. Photograph: David van der Want.

astronomical, and at one point there was talk of "just demolishing the damn thing". But soccer in South Africa is a huge drawcard. Fans are bussed into the CBD from outlying suburbs and townships. Traffic light hawkers switch from selling plastic coat hangers, black bin bags, sunglasses, *The Big Issue* or *Funny Money* to vuvuzelas and South African flags, as well as dealing in black-market tickets – fake or otherwise.

Somerset Road is frenetic. A woman, dress hiked up, rushes past in a traditional Pedi outfit, everything – from headdress to shoes – patterned with the national flag. More people are running now, alongside the walls of busses jammed nose to tail as far as you can see. Cars are congested, orange cones litter the street, blue lights flash. Bizarrely, there has been no overt advertisement in the city for this massive event.

Tonight, South Africa's national team – "Bafana Bafana" – is playing Nigeria's "Super Eagles". The game starts at 7pm. The announcements boom out in a tenor that shakes the neighbourhood wide awake. SABC Live flickers through open windows: one eye on the match, one ear on the game. A ripe stadium roar punctuated by vuvuzela blasts – a cherry-sweet jazz, a swinging cheer – swirls round the stadium bowl and shoots up to the new moon, which is sharp as a sliver of glass tonight in the shook-up cocktail sky.

South Africa lose three to one. The headline in *The Daily Voice* the following day is "Baf-*Eina*". ❁



Vacuous schlock or intelligent shock? Tasteless entertainment for the uninformed; or is it avant-garde art for the discerning spectator? Cut-n-paste stereotypes; or carefully collaged identities? The irreverent rap-ravers Die Antwoord, all the way from the "motherfucking Zefside" nowhere-land of techno beats, bleach, phallic idols, zol and a roaring intersection of panel-beaten local references, never fails to provoke a response from audiences. But just what is it that they are saying? The group's quick-shifting personae and music videos intimate a contemporary South African reality of uneasy post-apartheid racial and spatial integration, and a return to a time where the theme of the absurd is construed and subsequently artistically rendered as the theme of daily living. Drawing the aesthetics of the urban periphery into the centre of pop culture, Die Antwoord reassemble an idea of the now in South Africa. The result? A fragmented spectrum – the dark side of the rainbow nation. How to read this is located in the group's postmodern collaging of everything from marginal identities to urban architecture; as well as the way the group's music videos are consumed – the ways in which YouTube (their chosen distribution platform) and the music video medium mediate consumption. Revving in the background is the question: are Die Antwoord's music videos a developing image of contemporary urban South Africa?

FUTURE SOUNDS

It's been said that the street finds its own uses for things; that users find their own uses for technology. DJs turned turntables from playback machines into machines of production; artists reimagined everyday "ready-mades" as collectables; kids with spray cans made concrete walls their canvases. The flickering megalopolis of cyberspace contains an endlessly reassembling collage of ideas, forms and frequencies, an appropriate place for "street" artists of the digital age – hybrid-genre performance artists formerly known as musicians – to gather up history, culture, imagery: the slang, the style and the stereotypes, the high and low art, the architecture and aesthetics, the would-be garbage, all the foul-mouthery, almost-pornography and dirt-of-the-underbelly, *watookal*, whatever, and (re)mix it into the most widespread and accessible popular art of the now: music videos.

Has, as Francis Fukuyama predicted in the '90s, history ended and the future begun? The advent of postmodernist theory in the mid-20th century sparked a championing of synthesis, sampling, montage, collage and bricolage in the Arts, and, later, the Internet provided the material to endlessly cut-and-paste. But, as Nicolas Bourriaud questioned in Postproduction, "how can we produce singularity and meaning from this chaotic mass of objects, names, and references...? Artists today programme forms more than they compose them: rather than transfigure a raw element … they remix available forms and make use of data".[1] And, as Jean Baudrillard noted, "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning."[2]

What better example of this than the work of irreverent South African "Zef rap-rave" group Die Antwoord? The

[1] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction / Culture As Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, Lukas and Sternberg, New York, 2002, p. 11.

[2] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulation and Simulacra*, (trans.) S.F. Glaser, University of Michigan Press, USA, 1994, p. 79.

The Many Faces of Die Antwoord

Watkin "Waddy" Tudor Jones (a.k.a. Ninja) and Anri du Toit (a.k.a. Yo-Landi Vi$$er) have been through several incarnations, including in The Constructus Corporation (2002-2004) and MaxNormal.TV (2001-2008). Die Antwoord's first album was released in 2009. Since then, the group has released several music videos, including "I Fink U Freeky" (2012), "Baby's On Fire" (2012), "Fatty Boom Boom" (2012) and "Cookie Thumper" (2013).

group is comprised of three figures – Ninja, Yo-Landi Vi$$er and the mysterious, ever-changing DJ Hi-Tek – collaged from the spectrum of racial and cultural identities of post-apartheid South Africa. Ninja, self-proclaimed "*wit kaffir*", adorned with sketchy tattoos that could easily form part of the Number Gang's indelible ciphers, rocking gold-capped teeth, "a black Glock nine millimetre" and the demeanour of one of Roger Ballen's *freeky* photographic subjects is an anomaly. Is he channelling poor white, nouveau riche Afrikaner or Cape coloured gangster? Yo-Landi Vi$$er, meanwhile, switches from semi-demonic schoolgirl ("Enter the Ninja", "Cookie Thumper") to often-abject sex symbol ("Rich Bitch", "Evil Boy", "I Fink U Freeky") to feisty, foulmouthed Afrikaner *meisie* in the space of a handful of music videos.

Such representations renewed arguments about the politics of representation in a country where one's image, identity and spatial limits had until relatively recently been delineated, designated and ultimately controlled by a white supremacist government. Critics' interpretations of Die Antwoord generally engaged with the group's supposed performative, transgressive, new conceptualisations of white identity in South Africa,[3] or their potential for creating a counter-narrative of nation that troubled the "rainbow".[4] Arguments were situated firmly within the bounds of racial identity and class struggle, stereotypes easily read into the group's image and music videos. Die Antwoord's (re)construction of the almost forgotten term "zef" (South African slang loosely translated as "common", originally specifically referring to white Afrikaners[5]), coupled with the group's personae, produced a new theoretical paradigm for the old debates about authenticity, the body and, of course, the politics of representation. The group and their music videos were autopsied and analysed, but to what end?

In the context of sampling and splicing that characterises contemporary music and music videos, as well as the deterritorialised "non-place" of cyberspace, do arguments of authenticity, origin and cultural "ownership" and representation hold any weight? Or, rather, outside of copyright (which is generally based on economic rather than theoretical or cultural concerns[6]), does definitively labelling Die Antwoord as white cultural colonisers serve to do anything more than denigrate the group and re-open circular, often hermetic discussions about white privilege and mono-directional cultural appropriation?

In a post-racial world, perhaps not. But what should not be overlooked is that in a South African context, identities have been necessarily fragmented and reconfigured as a consequence of the advent of democracy, following a time when identities were constructed in relation to racial categorisation and spatial control. Democracy allowed for subjective interpretations of identity and also a mutable understanding of national identity – a direct opposition to apartheid's defined and instituted concepts of nation and identity. Although being the most effective, indeed possibly the only way to understand and (re)construct identities and nation post-apartheid, fragmentation and mutability have given rise to a feeling of "placelessness". Thus, ideas of origin, tradition and heritage have featured significantly in the post-apartheid ideological landscape.

[3] For example, Claire Scott, "Die Antwoord and a Delegitimised South African Whiteness: a Potential Counter-Narrative?" in *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, Volume 26, Number 5, 2012, pp. 745-761; Hannelie Marx & Viola Candice Milton, "Bastardised Whiteness: 'Zef'-culture, Die Antwoord and the Reconfiguration of Contemporary Afrikaans Identities" in *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 17:6, 2011, pp. 723-745.

[4] For example, Sandra Klopper, "Art and Culture in Contemporary South Africa: The Present Future" in *Thesis Eleven*, Volume 115, Number 1, 2013, pp. 127-140.

[5] Liese Van der Watt gives an excellent overview of the origins and meaning of the term in "Ask no questions, hear no lies: Staying on Die Antwoord's surface": "As is now well known, the term derives from the name of the Ford Zephyr, a popular choice amongst the white working- and lower-middle class in South Africa in the 60s and 70s, especially on the mining towns of the East- and West Rand. Since then, and until Die Antwoord (and rapper Jack Parow before them) meddled with it, Zef was used in a derogatory way by the middle-classes to describe a certain style associated with a segment of society that was mostly, though not necessarily, poor, white, and lacking in formal or tertiary education."

[6] cf. Jonathan Lethem, "The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism" in *Harper's Magazine*, February 2007.

In this context, for some, "cultural borrowings and mixings" could, as Pnina Werbner writes in "The Limits of Cultural Hybridity", "constitute an attack on … felt subjectivity".[7]

Media theorist Adam Haupt has championed this position, labelling Die Antwoord "blackface" and asserting that Ninja (or Waddy Jones as he was previously known) "'goes native' by adopting the Cape Flats dialect of Afrikaans, by acquiring tattoos that reference Cape township gang subcultures and by employing Afrikaans expletives that are stereotypically associated with Cape 'coloured' gangsters". Waddy Jones, says Haupt, "needs to 'blacken up' to make his performance [of 'Ninja'] work. He becomes a '*wit kaffir*' in other words".[8] But, as Liese van der Watt counters, "to see Blackface is to read them in terms of race *only*, and to discount the fluid ways in which they sample race, class, accent, dialect, stereotype, and to ignore the eclecticism of Zef as their defining style".[9] Rather than urging those who wish to re-examine Die Antwoord in terms of race or identity (and the limitations that come with that particular categorisation) to just "get over" 300 years of colonialism, Van der Watt intimates another line of questioning – into Die Antwoord's process of sampling. Ultimately, it is in the group's recycling of existing urban aesthetics and identities that new images and ideas are produced.

THE SEMIONAUTS

"With music derived from sampling, the sample no longer represents anything more than a salient point in a shifting cartography," writes Nicolas Bourriaud in *Postproduction*.[10] Similarly, Die Antwoord's appropriated aesthetics – for example, Ninja's "gang" tattoos or "*tjappies*" – are merely points of reference within a broader, constantly reassembled and reimagined visual metaphor. To isolate such a point would be to ignore the sequence as a whole; like taking a single image out of a collage and inferring the meaning of the whole from the associations connected to the image. Die Antwoord are, to use Bourriaud's phrase, "'semionauts' who produce original pathways through signs".[11]

In his much-referenced article "The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism", Jonathan Lethem writes that he sees the primary motivation for collagists and satirists and digital samplers' participation in the world of culture as an attempt "to make the world larger".[12] In this sense, the role of the critic – containing, making sense of, delineating – is often reductive.

Die Antwoord, however, operate in a largely democratic space that defies such theoretical reduction. Connection to YouTube and responses to work posted on the YouTube platform is uniform. Comments are not ranked by academic merit, but by how current they are, or how popular. In cyberspace, it is no longer left to cultural critics or theorists to make connections or form an opinion or idea about contemporary art forms like music videos; it is up to the masses, who seem generally to have been held in low esteem – an uninformed horde with little or no agency or indeed inclination to question what "messages" they are being "fed".

YouTube can no longer be seen as just a repository. It has evolved. How artists such as Die Antwoord play with this space has also become far more sophisticated – just like their audience. Indeed, if cyberspace is a modern megalopolis, then YouTube is its White Cube – its premier exhibition space. But unlike the spectator in the traditional modernist White Cube, who is as Brian O'Doherty puts it, "deprived of perceptual cues",[13] the spectator on the YouTube platform is inundated with them (see: similar videos, links, tags). Thus, the YouTube spectator is afforded the tools with which to construct meaning, to curate, to comment and *directly* respond to the original material in the manner of Jacques Ranciére's "emancipated spectator".

What this means is that although Die Antwoord's members could easily be seen as performance artists and their videos as video art, they are deliberately operating within a space (YouTube) that unlike the traditional White Cube does not yet have definitive discursive boundaries. And, perhaps most importantly, it is not the critics who are left to translate and re-communicate their work, but the "masses". Will every interpretation typed into the YouTube comments section be valid, that is, rational and based in fact? More likely responses are and will be impulsive, based on an immediate emotional response to the work, and that is exactly what Die Antwoord's music videos are all about – provocation of the ordinary individual,

[7] Pnina Werbner, "The Limits of Cultural Hybridity: On Ritual Monsters, Poetic Licence and Contested Postcolonial Purifications" in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Volume 7, Number 1, 2001, p. 150.

[8] Adam Haupt, "Part IV: Is Die Antwoord Blackface?" in *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, Volume 13, Number 3-4, 2012, p. 421.

[9] Liese Van der Watt, "Part III: Ask No Questions, Hear No Lies: Staying on Die Antwoord's Surface" in *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, Volume 13, Number 3-4, 2012, p. 413.

[10] Bourriaud, p. 12.

[11] Ibid, 13.

[12] Lethem.

[13] Brian O'Doherty. Inside the White Cube. University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1986, p. 41.

Die Antwoord Music Video Guide

I FINK U FREEKY

Black-and-White is both metaphor and medium in the Roger Ballen and Die Antwoord collaboration, "I Fink U Freeky". The shady, trepidatious aesthetic established in Ballen's photographic series, *Outland*, *Fact or Fiction*, *Shadow Chamber*, *Boarding House* and *Shadow Land*, as well as a range of images from Ballen's visual lexicon are repurposed in a version of pop music's age-old "girl-likes-boy" trope, here recast as "girl-likes-freak".

01

FATTY BOOM BOOM

Set in downtown Johannesburg, "Fatty Boom Boom" follows the fate of a Lady Gaga-like figure on safari in the concrete jungle. She gets hijacked, picks up a strange disease and is finally killed by a lion, all while a group of bizarre street performers go wild.

06

02

03

04

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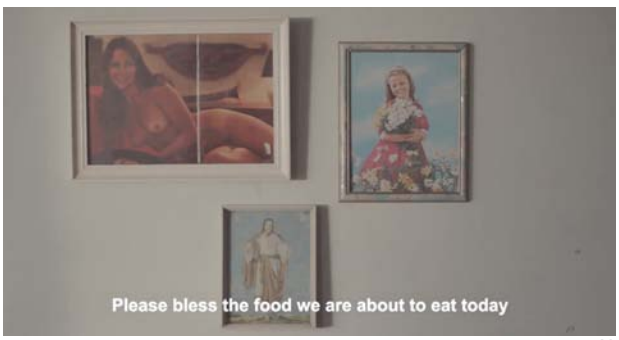


08

COOKIE THUMPER

"There once was a little girl who had a crush on a bad, bad boy. When that bad boy got out of prison, that little girl's ass was in big, big trouble." The girl-likes-boy trope is again recast, this time as girl-likes-gangster. Yo-Landi gets up to mischief in a small-town orphanage while waiting for Anies the drug-dealing gangster to call.

12

BABY'S ON FIRE

In the claustrophobic atmosphere of a conservative Afrikaner family living in a housing estate, the hypocrisies of religion and patriarchy play out to a backtrack of techno and engine revving.

09

10

11

01 Image from Roger Ballen's *Shadow Land* photographic series.
02, 03, 04 Using Roger Ballen's aesthetic interpretation of the South African psyche. Stills from "I Fink U Freeky".
05, 06 Ninja as a street performer in downtown Johannesburg. Still from "Fatty Boom Boom"; An interpretation of Anton Kannemeyer's *Bitterkomix* "Black Gynaecologist". Still from "Fatty Boom Boom"
07, 08, 09 Washed out housing estate; hypocrisy; a South African in-joke and typical Afrikaner family scene. Stills from "Baby's On Fire".
10, 11, 12 Anachronisms – the past cut together with the present; Anies's gang tattoos; girl-likes-gangster. Stills from "Cookie Thumper".

prompting him/her to take a second look at what appears to be the mundane, the unchanging or the everyday.

In light of this "agency of the masses", cultural artefacts of the now – music videos – become the texts that might illuminate how we got to this (strange) place in time and how we might understand it. Die Antwoord's music videos also operate on various communication levels: in some instances, the codes, symbols and dialects they use are likely to be misunderstood by foreign audiences. As Yo-Landi raps in "So What", "It's an African thing you wouldn't understand it".[14] Thus, on some level, there's a line of understanding reserved solely for South Africans. Retaining the trace of the American Rap genre's particular ascendancy myth, still evident in Die Antwoord's nothing-to-everything narratives, the group's music videos show that it is, as South African artist/musician (and Die Antwoord's contemporary) Spoek Mathambo explains, possible "to write [our] own versions of the future (and the past) … power to the people … to write and rewrite history … as well as the present and the future. Because if we don't/won't/can't, it'll be the same clammy old white dudes in their ivory towers".[15]

THE XXX, WHY? & ZEF OF DIE ANTWOORD'S MUSIC VIDEOS

The imagery of Die Antwoord's "Zef rap-rave" is not the airbrushed glamour of gold chains, Hennessy, redemptive religious tattoos and ascendance from the gritty Hood to the sleek private jet, synonymous with American (or Americanised) rap music.[16] Although traces of the ascendance myth remain in lyrics like "Been rappin' for twenty fuckin' years / Whole lot of fuckin' blood, sweat and tears … So what if I'm in it for the cash, money and the fame?",[17] Die Antwoord's imagery is more concerned with the multiple realities of the contemporary South African urban complex (of which ascendance is, necessarily, one). In many ways, Nicolas Bourriaud's description of his *Postproduction* artists holds true for Die Antwoord: "the city itself is the anonymous and multiple author of the images they collect and exhibit as artworks".[18]

From South African cities and townships, Die Antwoord draw and dice up images and identities, aesthetics and architectures, languages and cultures, imagining the links between the disparate pieces and (re)collaging them over a narrative baseline of the existing everyday realities of contemporary South Africa. Sometimes, the existing realities show through – in the moments where we recognise a coherent identity (the coloured gangster in "Cookie Thumper"), an unbroken urban setting (downtown Johannesburg in "Fatty Boom Boom"), a familiar turn of phrase ("*Ek's 'n laarney*" or "My crew's blowing up like Chappies Bubblegum" in "I Fink U Freeky"), a particular aesthetic. And sometimes we are repulsed by the disjointed, jarring bricolage – a (re) mix at once familiar and wholly alien. The reality in Die Antwoord's music videos is a bit like if you cut up different faces from a magazine and create a new one: the bits and pieces are recognisable – eyes, mouth, nose, ears – and the overall form is recognisable as a face, but the final image is grotesque, almost beyond recognition. The realignment has become unsettling. Our eyes and minds frantically try to reassemble the face into something less frightening, to blur and soften it. What Die Antwoord has done is reassemble the face of contemporary South Africa, keeping the edges of their cut-outs sharp and purposefully misaligned.

But just what do the multiple everyday realities of the contemporary South African urban complex as illustrated by Die Antwoord look like? Four standout videos from the group's repertoire – "I Fink U Freeky" (directed by artist Roger Ballen), "Baby's On Fire", "Cookie Thumper" and "Fatty Boom Boom" – give an idea:

In "I Fink U Freeky" it's artist Roger Ballen's clammy, trepidatious interiors; the Arbus-esque "freaks" from his *Platteland* images repositioned within grim concrete cells; an urban setting. It's "Ballen's world" – a space of disconnected signifiers, where prison tattoos are at once meaningful and merely decorative. It's walls papered with newsprint; it's going unwashed; cockroaches in the food; chickens, ducks, snakes and rats inside; pig's head for supper and no electricity – the worst imaginings of poverty and the never-ascendance of South Africa's urban poor. It's tabloids and their front-page myths: "*Sex Met Honde Keur AIDS*" [Sex With Dogs Cures AIDS]. It's the art-historical blurring of human and animal. It's the ethnographic edge, the colonial gaze on the "exotic" ritual. It's the absurd tableau – the white man and woman as Xhosa initiates standing over a taxidermy lion. It's a white child in blackface and a black child in whiteface. It's the discombobulated South African psyche clutching at straws; grasping at meanings too slippery to hold down.

More concretely, in "Baby's On Fire" it's washed-out

[14] Die Antwoord, "So What" from *Ten$ion*, Zef Recordz, 2012.

[15] Spoek Mathambo quoted in C. Robin Jones, "Spoek Mathambo – Escape From '85" on *Dazed Digital*, 2 July 2013.

[16] Of, for example, Jay-Z, 50 Cent, Lil Wayne and Drake in the U.S.A.; or AKA, Blaklez, JR, L-Tido, HHP and Professor in South Africa.

[17] Die Antwoord, "So What" from *Ten$ion*, Zef Recordz, 2012.

[18] Bourriaud, p. 20

"The city itself is the anonymous and multiple author of the images they collect and exhibit as artworks". Stills from "Fatty Boom Boom".

functionalist housing estates left over from the apartheid regime; Le Corbusier's controlled layouts separated "not by parks, but by acres of concrete and tarmac".[19] It's toneless, suffocating suburbia; patriarchy; and Die Son's tagline: *Sex, Skinner en Sport* (*Die Son Sien Alles*) [Sex, Gossip and Sport (The Sun Sees Everything)]. It's the hypocrisy of pornography alongside postcard-perfect scenes of children picking flowers, and pictures of Jesus. It's the "*Dank U Here vir Satan*" [Thank You God for Satan] in-joke – a kid earnestly thanking God for Satan (the family dog). It's overtones of incest recalling apartheid's insularity. It's pointless rebellion – hook-ups, cigarettes, *daggarook* and young men in souped-up cars ready for the Killarney racetrack. It's the South African everyday – kitsch, *zef*, *gam*, *naais*, *lekker*, *kak*, *bokkies*, braais, rave, rap and everything between. And, conversely, it's the urban periphery in the centre of pop culture.

In "Cookie Thumper" it's the splicing of the past and present in the simultaneity of a yellow police van, a Nokia cellphone and a 26s/27s gangster selling drugs in a *klein dorpie*. It's crocheted bikinis, *The Exorcist* and an orphanage all in one image. It's artist Berni Searle's *Snow White* and Klan hoods made from pillowcases. It's

[19] André van Graan. "Contested Modernism: Post Slums Act Housing in Cape Town" in *SAJAH*, Volume 24, Number 2, 2009, p. 37.

profanity with a smile. It's the corrugated iron "wendy" [backyard dwelling] decorated with an American flag – salute to the Cape Flats Americans gang. It's the twisted myths of South Africa's Numbers Gangs realised as the Boer's nightmare: a white Afrikaans teenage girl having consensual anal sex with an older Coloured gangster "*gemang vir 'n gun*" [jailed for a gun].

In "Fatty Boom Boom" it's the bright spaza shops and street performers of downtown Jo'burg. It's the aesthetic of the South African everyday reworked: a dress made from Chappies bubblegum wrappers; shorts patterned with the Lucky Star pilchards logo and speakers painted in Ndebele designs. It's Ballen's grainy interior world suddenly suffused with the gloss and technicolour of an external (hyper)reality. It's the taxi driver as safari guide and the South African accent subtitled; it's over-the-top pulp (or is it pop?) fiction and exotica, Anton Kannemeyer's *Bitterkomix* "Black Gynaecologist" and Neil Blomkamp's *District 9*-glorified Parktown prawn. It's the ubiquitous juxtaposition of Abortion and Penis Enlargement flyers. It's a hijacking at the traffic lights and the visual puns of the concrete jungle where a black panther lolls on the pavement, The Lion King eviscerates a tourist and "naughty" scavenging hyenas dig through rubbish – it's America's imagination and white South Africa's fears.

The (re)mix and juxtaposition of images within each music video, as well as the juxtaposition of the music videos themselves produce not only a de-and-reconstructed vision of contemporary South Africa, but blatant contradictions. One moment the spectator is in a dark, interior world populated by *freeky* figures; the next in a nondescript flat complex; the next a small town stuck between past and present; the next in downtown Johannesburg. At the same time, Ninja switches from one of Ballen's bizarre subjects ("I Fink U Freeky") to a Zef bleach-blonde big brother with a buzzcut and a fondness for energy drinks, girls, cash and weapons ("Baby's On Fire"). In "Fatty Boom Boom" he's a street performer, while in "Cookie Thumper" he's replaced by an "authentic" Coloured gangster sporting Numbers Gangs tattoos (26s and 27s) and a 'passion gap'. Similarly, Yo-Landi flits from abject sex symbol to teenaged little sister to schoolgirl to street performer. Is this their method – mimetic of the shifting post-apartheid milieu? Perhaps. But it also leaves the spectator with nothing much to hold on to – one gets a brief sense of something in the three or so minutes of each music video, but by the next music video, the collage has changed, the pieces reassembled.

In "Ask No Questions Tell No Lies: Staying on Die Antwoord's surface", Liese van der Watt notes that "despite Die Antwoord's certainty that they have found the answer to something, most responses to their work fall squarely in the category of incomprehension".[20] Die Antwoord are a contradiction in terms: at once claiming to be "The Answer" and painting a giant question mark as to what it is exactly they represent. "Of course, a great deal of the confusion around Die Antwoord has to do with the contradictory messages they send out," says Van der Watt. "To this, one could add the difficulties some audiences have in translating Die Antwoord's style, accent, dialect or the myriad local references in their work; or to place Yo-Landi Vi$$er or Ninja in the continuum of South African identities".[21]

But perhaps it is precisely this contradiction that speaks to and provides such apt illustration for contemporary life in South Africa. In *Resident Alien*, author Rian Malan writes:

> We live in a country where mutually annihilating truths coexist entirely amicably. We are a light unto nations. We are an abject failure. We are progressing even as we hurtle backward. The blessing of living here is that every day presents you with material whose richness beggars the imagination of those who live in saner places. The curse is that you can never, ever get it quite right, and if you come close, the results are usually unpublishable.[22]

What Malan says could easily be illustrated by "I Fink U Freeky", "Baby's On Fire", "Fatty Boom Boom" or "Cookie Thumper" – including his remark about unpublishability, which has come in the form of Die Antwoord's vilification by critics, who have variously labelled the group as "parody for its own sake",[23] "blackface minstrelsy"[24] and as being "driven not by the will to clarify [but] rather to profit off an impoverished, ersatz entertainment aware of its own unavoidable obsolescence".[25] Even those theorising Die Antwoord have come under fire; in "Die Antwoord's State of Exception", art critic Sean O'Toole dismisses the "po-faced seriousness" with which theorists engage with the group.[26] Positive reviews, too, contain a sense that even if Die Antwoord has "got it right", the result is not the kind

[20] Van der Watt, p. 409

[21] Ibid, 409.

[22] Rian Malan, *Resident Alien*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, South Africa, 2009, p. x.

[23] Anton Krueger, "Part II: Zef/Poor White Kitsch Chique: Die Antwoord's Comedy of Degradation" in *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, Volume 13, Number 3-4, 2012, p. 407.

[24] Haupt, p. 417.

[25] Sean O'Toole, "Part I: Die Antwoord's State of Exception" in in *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, Volume 13, Number 3-4, 2012, p. 398.

[26] Ibid. 398.

of image we were hoping for: "Die Antwoord launches a monstrous onslaught on our senses, they are affectively hazardous and about as thrilling as a car crash"[27] writes Amanda du Preez.

Indeed, as Anton Krueger points out, "Ninja, who fronts the freak hip-hop band Die Antwoord, might not be quite what Desmond Tutu had in mind when he described South Africans as the 'Rainbow People of God,' a happy harmonious amalgamation of different races".[28]

"Checkit," spits Ninja in the opening seconds of Die Antwoord's debut album, O. "I represent South African culture. In this place, you get a lot of different things. Blacks, whites, coloureds. English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, *watookal*. I'm like all these different things, all these different people fucked into one person".[29] Similarly, Die Antwoord's music videos contain a lot of different things – in this case, heterogeneous South African urban realities and cultural signifiers – "fucked" as it were into an overarching narrative, that of contemporary urban South Africa.

Is it significant that the majority of Die Antwoord's "different things" – images, signifiers, aesthetics – are drawn from the urban periphery? "Zef", gangs, apartheid's architectural façades, Roger Ballen's photographic subjects – these are part of the marginal, rather than meta narrative(s) of South Africa. Die Antwoord synthesise a technicolour dystopia – the dark side of the rainbow nation – from the fragments of fragments that have emerged from a segregated past and the incomplete integration of South Africa's (informal) townships and major cities and their inhabitants. Whether intentional or not, Die Antwoord's music videos make visible the difficult, often ugly, sometimes carnivalesque, yet always interesting process of post-apartheid social/racial and spatial (re)integration.

SPECTACLE

"Die Antwoord embodies – and challenges us to embrace – a present that emphasizes new, entangled connections, rather than fixates on our past estrangements".[30] Indeed, while music theorist Simon Reynolds notes that through the processes of "crate digging" and "groove robbing" contemporary pop music/culture has become obsessed with its own *past*,[31] Die Antwoord, however, seems to be obsessed with the present, the "now" and often the "next". By not sticking with one aesthetic – evidenced in the dramatic aesthetic shifts from "I Fink U Freeky" to "Baby's On Fire" to "Fatty Boom Boom" – Die Antwoord's music videos contribute to broadening a visual vocabulary with which to illustrate contemporary South African realities.

In many ways, the group's videos are the ultimate simulacrum: they represent the commodification of a South African (hyper)reality – a projected fantasy of (albeit lurid) integration. Ultimately, it is this fantasy of integrated heterogeneity that South African audiences demand. Have we not already seen comfortable, sanitised versions of Die Antwoord's pick-n-mix of urban aesthetics, identities, languages, cultural codes and the distillation of the everyday on popular *soapies* like *7de Laan*, *Egoli* and *Yizo Yizo*?

If Die Antwoord's music videos are perhaps in a way no more than hyperbolic representations of the ordinary and the everyday, is that not enough?

No, says Sean O'Toole asserting that even if "arrested, isolated, interrogated and made to speak on behalf of everyday life", Die Antwoord have little more to offer than "a temporal and spasmodic sense of South African whiteness", an idea ultimately driven by profit.[32] But despite what definitive meanings can be drawn from Die Antwoord and/or the inconsequential fact that the group may be driven by profit (as most enterprises are), surely the willingness of critics and, indeed, the viewing public to see Die Antwoord's music videos as somehow representative of "everyday life" in and of itself says a lot about the absurdity, and in fact the *spectacle*, of everyday life in South Africa.

In Njabulo Ndebele's 1987 Commonwealth Institute keynote address "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa", the author spoke about the representation of the spectacle – of apartheid's "obscene social exhibitionism" and its description by writers.[33] Have the residual social, spatial and economic effects of apartheid and unfinished post-democracy integration returned the South African urban to a scene of spectacle, or perhaps, has "obscene social exhibitionism" never truly dissipated?

[27] Amanda Du Preez, "Die Antwoord Gooi Zef Liminality: Of Monsters, Carnivals and Affects" in *Image & Text*, Volume 35, Number 17, 2011, p. 114.

[28] Krueger, p. 400.

[29] Die Antwoord, "Whatever Man" (Track 1) from *O*, Interscope Records, 2009.

[30] Van der Watt, p. 416

[31] Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past*, Faber and Faber, New York, 2011.

[32] O'Toole, 398.

[33] Njabulo S. Ndebele, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 12, Number 2, April 1986, p. 143.

EPISTEMOLOGIES OF DECEPTION:

"Th[e] notion of a "fabric of reality" splitting open is suggestive in thinking about the everyday, even as it suggests older analytics of deep structure. What, and indeed what horrors, it asks, may be revealed behind, underneath the ordinary and everyday once split open, its fabric slicing apart to give a glimpse of the behind and the beneath?

Behind and beneath the dust, all is race: subjectivities dissolved in indistinguishability and indiscernibility, in paranoia and (imagined) threat, in the impossibility of identification and the collapsing of identity. The comforts of homogeneity collapse into the seething mass of heterogeneous swirl.

Can such an expanded notion of epistemology – of epistemologies as open source incessant re-formations and re-formulations--help find the productive terms for discerning and describing emergent cultural sites and political possibilities, which more often than not tend to look derivative, inferior, false, or duplicitous – until we have learned how to read them in all their duplicity, in their warping, bending, creasing, twisting multiplicities? Looking not for alter-times and other spaces but for the resources in the multiplicitous spacetimes to negotiate the complexities and challenges of our inhabitations for which there is no constitutive outside that is not fabricated (in both senses) and from which there is no even momentary escape. At the very least, such a sense of the epistemological would encourage us to attend to rather than to ignore those elements of the social that look aberrant because they are not yet adequately symbolizable."

– David Theo Goldberg, "Epistemologies of Deception" in *The Johannesburg Salon*, Volume 5, 2012, p. 51-60.

Clockwise from top right: Still from "Fatty Boom Boom"; Still from "I Fink U Freeky"; Video remix; Still from I Fink U Freeky.

Quoting T. T. Moyana (and one should remember that this is in 1987), Ndebele noted the problematic relationship between art and objective reality in South Africa where "life itself is too fantastic to be outstripped by the creative imagination".[34] The result is art where "subtlety is deliberately unintended. What is intended is spectacular demonstration at all costs. What matters is what is seen. Thinking is secondary to seeing. Subtlety is secondary to obviousness".[35]

Sound familiar? In Anton Krueger's 2012 article, "Zef/ Poor White Kitsch Chique: Die Antwoord's Comedy of Degradation", the writer describes Die Antwoord's often "apathetic lacklustre disposition towards fixed meaning, a lack of concern for established truths, a disdain for solutions…an air of resignation, of giving over to whatever meaning might be supplied by an outsider".[36]

But it is precisely this indeterminism which makes Die Antwoord interesting, argues Liese van der Watt – that the "inability to read them clearly or locate them fully"; their "illegibility and ambivalence" and "obsession with surface and their consistent erosion of depth" which "frustrat[es] our desire to find deep meaning or consistency in their act" illustrates a "contemporary moment lived fluidly and differently, affected by the past but more importantly entangled … in a here and now".[37]

"Die Antwoord gives us surface," continues Van der Watt, "what lies beneath is not of primary importance. And, perhaps this is exactly the point, perhaps surface should be taken as a generative space, rather than being mined for repressed, deeper meanings".[38] It is the layered surfaces of Die Antwoord's collages that communicate meaning, the answer – if there is an 'answer' – is not to be found in isolating and tracing endless signification of each image the group produces. Indeed, perhaps one should question the logic behind looking for "an answer" in the (ironically named) Die Antwoord. As Ninja raps in "Fok Julle Naaiers", "Next time you ask me 'Is it real?', I'm gonna punch you in the face".[39]

Like Roger Ballen's photographic work, what you get with Die Antwoord is less a fully developed picture of contemporary South African reality, but more a *feeling* of contemporary South Africa produced by layering and collaging fragments of everyday realities – uneasy, dangerous, overwhelming, jarring, aesthetically spectacular – at once superficial and containing tremendous depth. It is in the process and deconstruction of this layering that the idea that South Africa's past, present and future can be (re)written, via the aesthetics of the everyday, is produced. The answer to how to respond to Die Antwoord (rather than how to decode them) is perhaps not about how the group or their videos are interpreted, but how viewers as individuals relate to their work. Die Antwoord's videos provoke an immediate response, generally within the realm of disbelief, shock or amazement. The (un)familiar, bizarre, monstrous, brilliant spectacle that Die Antwoord promulgates as South African culture and urban life in their music videos situates the South African spectator as a tourist in their own country – Malan's "resident alien". And spectators from "the overseas" as Ninja puts it? Well, the exotic has always been a drawcard, and the Internet an instant passport. As an exercise in artistic tourism, Die Antwoord just make their (or is it this?) destination all the more interesting, and consequently all the more valuable.

[34] T. T. Moyana quoted In Njabulo S. Ndebele. "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Apr., 1986), p. 144.

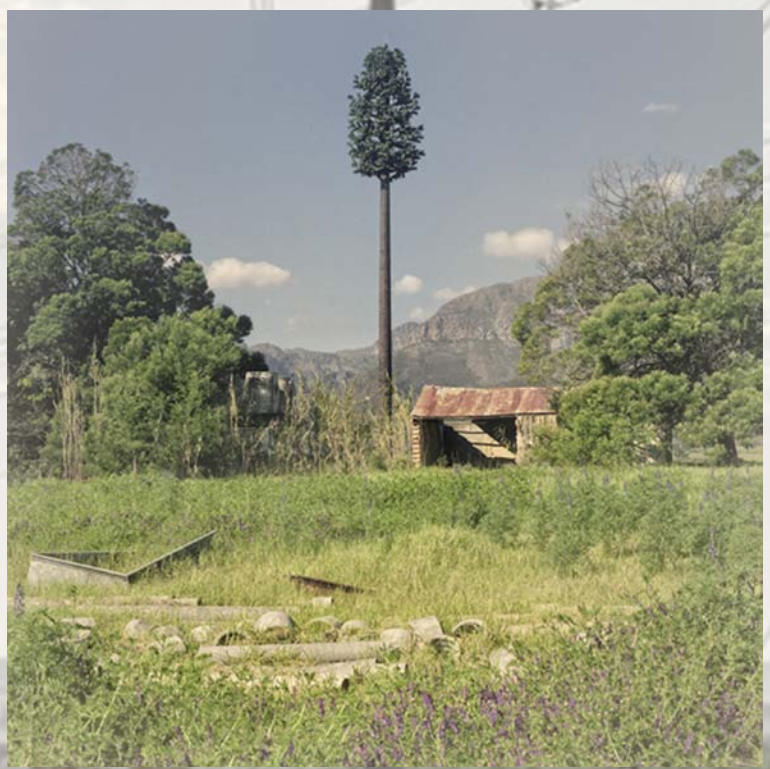
[35] Ndebele, pg 147.

[36] Krueger, p. 400.

[37] Van der Watt, p. 410

[38] Ibid. 415.

[39] Die Antwoord, "Fok Julle Naaiers" from *Ten$ion*, Zef Recordz, 2012.




NATURE

Molteno Reservoir. Photograph: *Future Cape Town.*

[NATURE]

Trees

The sky is blue-blue and cold-sharp and the summer pomegranates are split against it, bright as the Jacarandas in Pretoria. In Cape Town, cellphone towers disguised as trees have become one of the defining "invasive species". Brolaz Projects, the South African telecommunications company that first came up with the idea of disguising cell towers, have a variety of camouflage options: the Date Palm, the Queen Palm, the Foxtail Palm, the Wild Date Palm, the Pine Tree, the Cypress Tree, the Lighthouse Tower ("an excellent solution for coastal settings") and the Yellowwood (South Africa's national tree).

Water

Summer in Cape Town is both a bleached and saturated season, the "dry, white season" of André Brink's imagination and the full-colour Kodak snaps of 1990s beach holidays. The sea blue is bluer, bleeding out from the Cape coastline; the sky is scorched white at the edges; the hot air blurs the city; the mountain stands out sharp and flat, like a set piece propped up on sticks. Helicopters drone loud as angry bees. "Desertification is posing a threat to the succulent Karoo," say the experts. "Droughts are on the rise." During December, January and February, the summer months in Cape Town, this isn't hard to believe. Just a few hours out of the city, on the border of the Western Cape in the Tankwa Karoo, rock is blasted to glass by the unearthly heat. Bleached brittle, cattle bones break back into dust.

But unlike Johannesburg, where pipes must be extended down from the Lesotho Highlands, Cape Town seems to brim with water. First, the surrounding sea: eleven-times lingual, mimicking Xhosa, driving shells clicking over stones; rolling with the hushed rush of Tswana; roaring and spraying with throaty Afrikaans gutturals.

The sea is slowly being bitten into by land reclamation. Once, Adderley Street pier jutted like a tongue towards Robben Island, a round of rock and veld spit out from the curved mouth of the bay.

Adderley Street is now wholly part of the mainland, but there are fountains on its traffic islands, inverted islands of water in shallow stone pools. My brother, Alexander, says they remind him of a story about a stone lion – like the ones on the walls in the Company's Garden near the museum's turtle that swam unmoving in its glass case; or the red lions on South Africa's best matchboxes – who woke up one night and flew away. "We used to feed the fish in the ponds," he says. But I think that's from the story.

Along the ocean rim, along the Promenade, parallel to the lines of sea and sky, are the Sea Point swimming pools, with the capacity for 1 300 people. You can, as the *Guardian* notes, "swim your lengths while watching super tankers moored alongside twirl on their anchors".

Cleaning of Molteno Reservoir, Oranjezicht, Cape Town, *Cape Times* 1927.

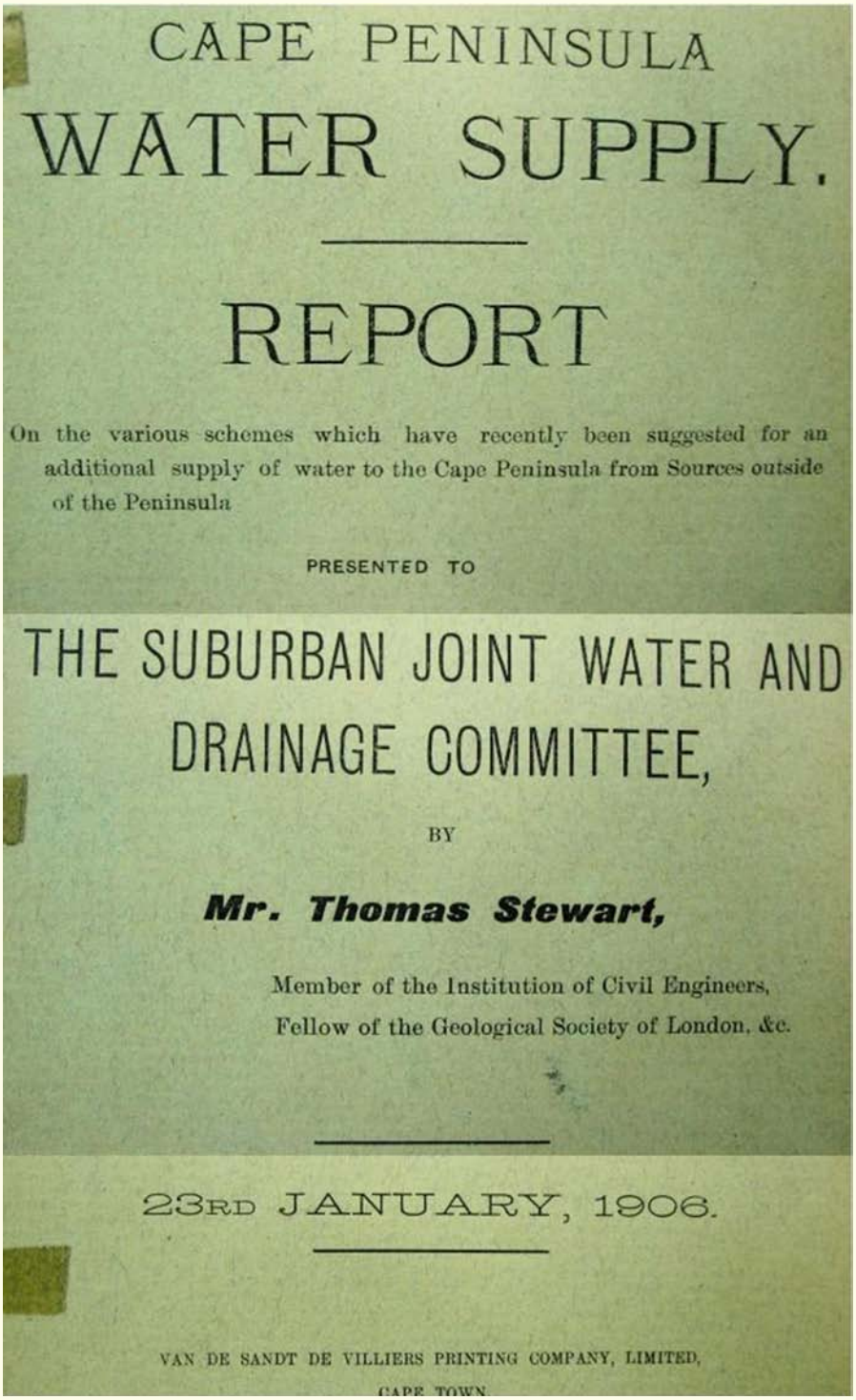
Reservoirs

But the city has an insatiable thirst.

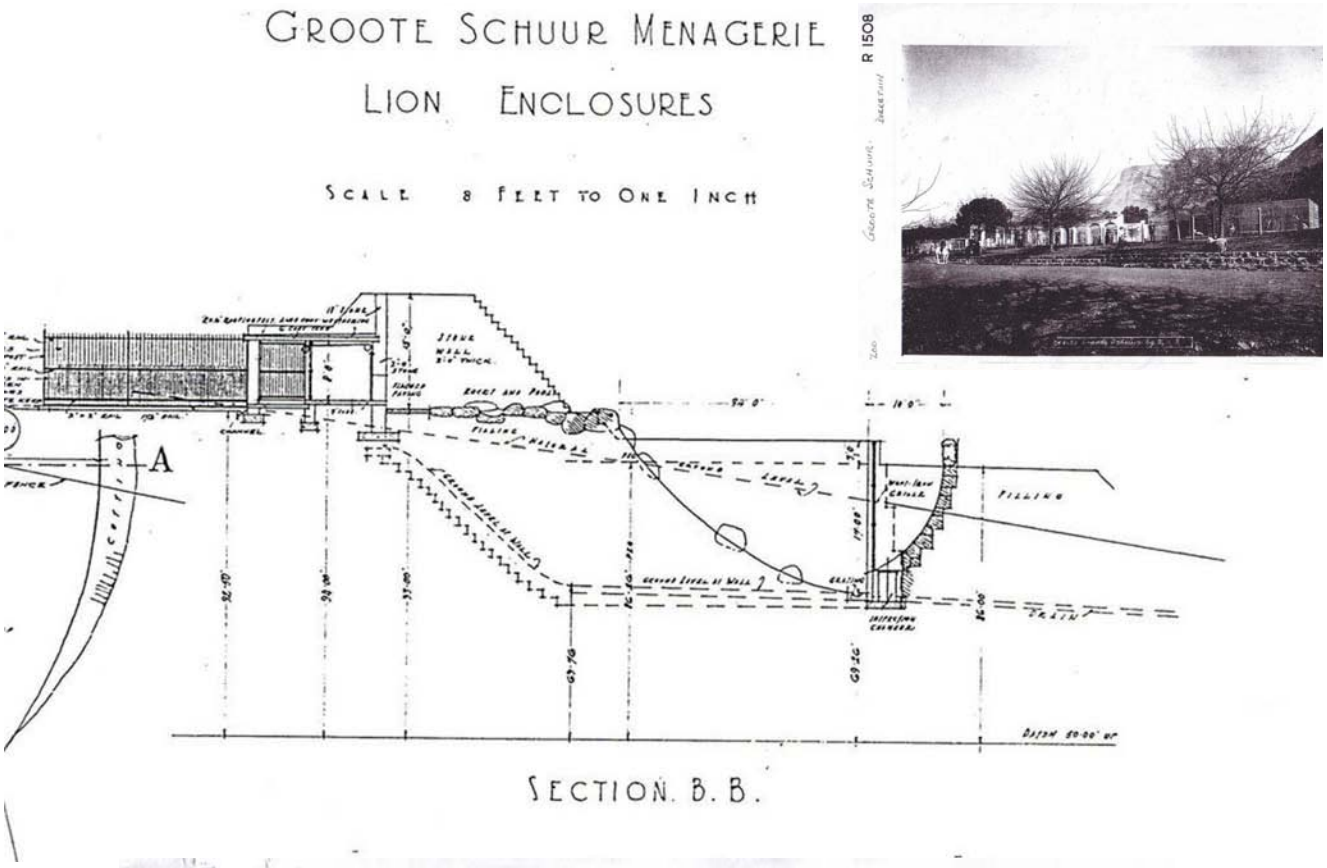
When Cape Town was still a shipping refreshment station, the small settlement got its water supply from springs and streams running down from Table Mountain. As the colony grew, the city was structured around Dutch *grachten* or city-canals. These were later deemed unsanitary by the British and mostly buried beneath roads that retain their architectural lineage in names like Heerengracht and Buitengracht.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Molteno, Helly-Hutchinson, Woodhead, Alexandria, De Villiers and Victoria reservoirs were built on the slopes of Table Mountain. Construction on the massive Steenbras Dam in its basin of blue mountains on the rim of the metropole began in 1918. By 1928, the sprawling city's demand for water was exceeding its supply. Since the 1950s, the Wemmershoek, Theewaterskloof, Voëlvlei, Palmiet and Berg River dams have been built, as well as the Tygerberg, Platteklоof and Faure reservoirs. There are currently ninety-eight listed reservoirs in Cape Town, piping water to just under four million inhabitants. The City of Cape Town's Water Services Directorate estimates the total annual consumption of clean drinking water is 300 million kilolitres. The Table Mountain springs, which first watered the colony, were removed from the national asset register in 1994 and now flow, unused, through old underground tunnels and out to sea.

The [water] supply from Stadsfontein, the main Oranjezicht spring that spouts out about 3.5 million litres of water per day (enough for every individual in the city to get a litre every 24 hours), was found to be a plentiful, economical option when it came to the construction of the Cape Town Stadium in Green Point. The year-round 40litres/second water flow is enough to meet the needs of the athletic ground, the Green Point Common, the Metropolitan Golf Course and Mouille Point Beachfront: there's irrigation for the stadium bathrooms, and a water-powered turbine generates hydro-electricity to light up the Green Point Urban Park at night.
Otherwise though, the only known building that uses water in this sustainable manner … is the Wooltru building in the city.
– Tshego Letsoalo, "Cape Town's Underground Tunnels: A Place of Sweet Water" in *Cape Town Magazine*, 2013.



Water Supply Report cover, 1906. Cape Town City Archives (Water and Sanitation).

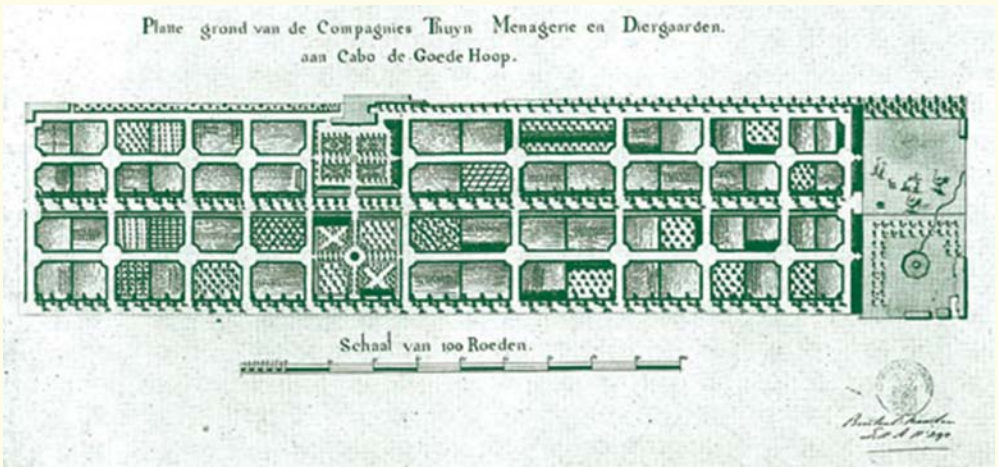


Plans and early photographs of the Groote Schuur zoo.

Zoo

Excluding the Aquarium and Butterfly World, as of 2012 there are no more zoos in Cape Town. The first in South Africa, Groote Schuur Zoo, perched on the Newlands side of Table Mountain has long ago fallen into ruin. The lion enclosures are still there though, broken down, their gates hanging mangled from old hinges. It's now where students go to make out or smoke pot or silver the walls with graffiti. Tygerberg Zoo closed at the end of 2012. "We're not a world-class zoo; we are a postage stamp collection," said owner Lorraine Spence of the decision in an article for the *Mail & Guardian*.

At its peak, the [Tygerberg] zoo had 61 mammal and 160 bird species. Frequented mostly by families, it filled a vacuum created by the demise of another local zoo.
The Groote Schuur Zoo – or the Cape Town Zoo as it was also known – was established in 1897 on the slopes of Devil's Peak by mining magnate Cecil John Rhodes. On display were lions, crocodiles, ostriches, zebras, eland, wildebeest, kangaroos, wallabies and emus. Its birdcages were stocked with nightingales, chaffinches, thrushes, blackbirds and rooks.
Famous escapees include European starlings and a pair of Himalayan tahrs, obtained from the National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria in the 1930s. Both the birds and the wild goats prospered and are now considered pests; the tahrs, though, have long outwitted rangers and specialist snipers contracted to eradicate them. – Sean O'Toole, "The Closing of Tygerberg Zoo" in *Mail & Guardian*, 21 December 2012.



Sketched plan of the Company's Garden, 1791.

Garden

In 1652 a European settlement was planted at the tip of the African continent, at the Cape of Good Hope. It was set there for a specific and limited purpose: to provide fresh produce to East Indiamen trading between the Netherlands and Asia. The Dutch East India Company, which ran the settlement, had little interest in the hinterland of the Cape, which reports said, was barren, inhospitable, and sparsely peopled by primitive Hottentots and Bushmen. Interest waned further when exploring parties failed to find any workable mineral deposits. For the next century and a half, till the colony became a pawn in the great-power rivalry of Britain and France, the Company tried, irresolutely and unsuccessfully, to discourage the spread of settlement into the interior, to hold the colony to what it had originally been planned as: a trading post, a garden.
– J.M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*, Penz Publishers (this edition), 2007, p.1.

The remnants of the Company's Garden remain as a miniature Central Park in the city centre, home to mangy pigeons, feathers askew, far-flung seagulls, Egyptian Geese and a colony of moth-eaten squirrels. Goldfish glimmer in ponds of dirty water. Reddish peanut skins, most delicate, break up into dust in the gloom of the canopy of trees that in winter scratch like inkstrokes against the paperwhite sky in time with the adjacent art school students' pens.

In the Northern suburbs, David Hockney sprinklers play across bowling-green lawns decorated with those 1960s golfball-shaped letterboxes that are still common here. The whole scene is kitschly coloured as a Tretchikoff painting.

Wind

The winds of the world howl through the hollow of the mouth and off the tongue, scouring smooth their consonants: *Abroholos*, *Calima*, *Chinook*, *Monsoon*, *Simoom*, *Karaburan*, *Vendaval*; or whistle through the teeth with sibilant shrieks: *Mistral*, *Hamsin*, *Sirocco*, *Santa Ana*; their vowels batter and blow at lettered scaffolding, like gusts in a city: *Harmattan*, *Bayamo*, *Tramontane*. In some parts of the world, winds earn names as evil-sounding as those of mythic villains: *Rashabar*, the black wind; *Fén-Fēng*, the burning wind.

Not so the prosaic name for Cape Town's well-known south-easter: the Cape Doctor. Despite its gale force, this is not a romantic wind like the storied Santa Anas, which, as Neil Peart notes in Traveling Music, "modern-day urban myths associate ... with rising crime rates, freeway gun battles, wildfires, actors entering rehab, Hollywood couples divorcing, bands breaking up, irritated sinuses, and bad tempers all around". When the Santa Anas hurtle out of the Mojave, "every booze party ends in a fight" says Raymond Chandler. But here, the wind does no more harm than make every hour an arsenic hour for mothers, nurses and creches. Hair doesn't curl, skin doesn't itch, "meek little wives" don't "feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husbands' necks" as Joan Didion dreams in Los Angeles. The Doctor, despite its blustering, is here to do good (or so it's said), clearing pollution from the airways of the city.

The !Xam-ka !ei – the San of southern Africa – believe the wind was one of the First People. The Wind, or rather the Wind's son, was formerly a man, //goo-ka-!kui – Smoke's Man – or Witbooi Tooren, told Prussian philologist William Bleek and his sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd during their recording of the remnants of the /Xam language and *kukummi* (stories) in the late 1800s.

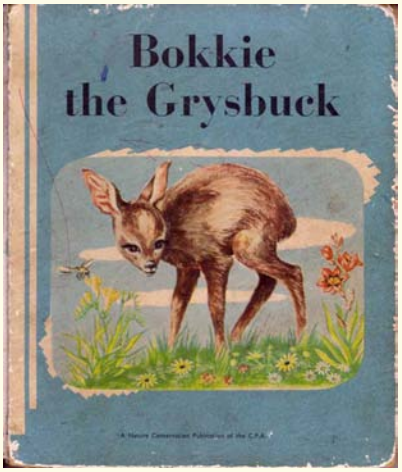
The Wind became a bird, or wore the form of a bird, tied up in the stuff and skin of birdness. He lived in the mountain at *#koaXa* – Haarfontein to the Europeans – flying in in the evening and out in the early morning, looking for food. Smoke's Man spied the wind and, believing it to be !kuerre!kuerre (a certain bird), he threw a stone at it. "And the wind burst on account of it," said Smoke's Man. "Therefore, the wind did not blow gently ... The wind raised the dust, while the wind flew away. The wind went into a mountain's hole, and the wind burst; the wind did not gently blow."

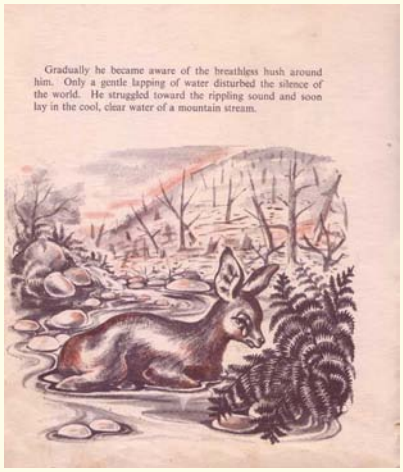
It's uncertain how the wind began practising medicine, but all the First People were familiar with */a* (a kind of magic) and established the *!gi:ten* (ancestral lines of sorcerers and healers), so perhaps it was a natural step when arriving in the swiftly-modernising city. Later on, in 1921, while convalescing in Cape Town, Lady Lucie Duff Gordon would write about the "doctor" in Letters from the Cape:

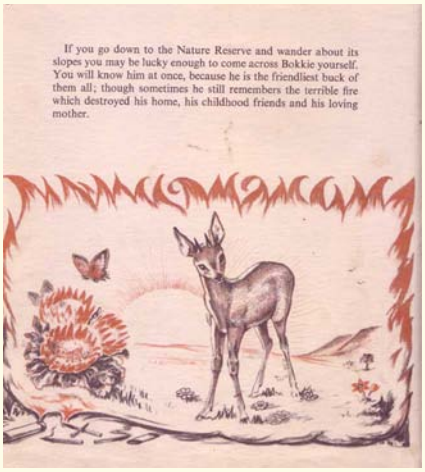
Oct. 19th. – When it is fine it is quite celestial; so clear, so dry, so light. Then comes a cloud over Table Mountain, like the sugar on a wedding-cake, which tumbles down in splendid waterfalls, and vanishes unaccountably halfway; and then you run indoors and shut doors and windows, or it portends a 'south-easter', i.e. a hurricane, and Capetown disappears in impenetrable clouds of dust. But this wind coming off the hills and fields of ice, is the Cape doctor, and keeps away cholera, fever of every sort, and all malignant or infectious diseases. Most of them are unknown here. Never was so healthy a place; but the remedy is of the heroic nature, and very disagreeable. The stones rattle against the windows, and omnibuses are blown over on the Rondebosch road.

Now, the weather reporters speak familiarly of the "*suid-oostelike wind*", running their hand along the curve of the map that isn't really there. Sunny and hot with a south-easterly. Cloudy with a north-westerly. Thundershowers expected. There are odd names for the weather here: if it's sunny and raining it's called "a monkey's wedding" or "mink and bikini weather". If it hails while the sun is shining it will be "a baboon's divorce". The Xhosa expression for unsettled weather is "*limathumb'antaka*" – the weather is like the intestines of a bird.

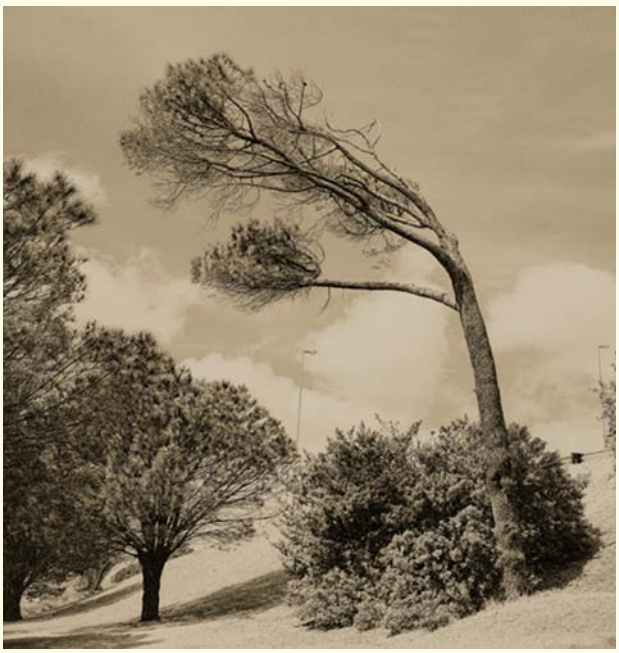
The stone pines on the slopes of Devil's Peak and the stinkwoods along the Sea Point Promenade, which bear the brunt of the south-easter, are blown into odd, geriatric shapes, their trunks bent against the bluster.

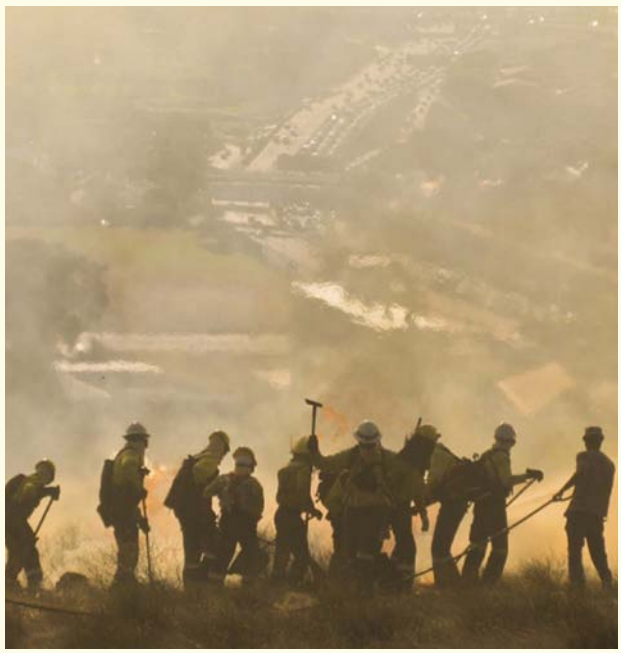






The anti-veldfire "Bokkie" posters were based on a children's book by Dorothee Gordon Bagnall published in 1956 by The Department of Nature Conservation of the Cape Provincial Administration in collaboration with the Cape Peninsula Fire Protection Committee. In the story, Bokkie's mother and friends are killed in a veldfire caused by "happy-go-lucky picnickers who had gone off leaving the ashes of their campfire smouldering dangerously".





Above right: Southeaster 09, Dillon Marsh. *Above left*: Firemen on Table Mountain. Photograph: John Murray;

Fire

Summer is fire season. First the smoke, giving a strange dull cast to the light, then the red-ringing bells of fire engines (always too few engines and never enough men), then the helicopters, often as ineffectual as birds wheeling above the wavering heat. The firebreaks fail. At night the mountain blazes bright as the city, lacerated by flames that once threatened the hideous "Tampon Towers" in Disa Park ("Almost there!" shouted Capetonians, at once horrified and ecstatic). The sun rises burnt and bloody. The Towers emerge unscathed.

The famous "Bokkie" poster – a crying Grysbok underscored with the admonishing "Look What You've Done" – has been the symbol for the anti-veldfire campaign since the 1950s. In 2008, the "Bokkie" posters were updated. According to *SA Forestry Magazine*, "the new 'bokkie' fights back and is no longer a victim of wild fires". ❁

Police operation with teargas and dogs in Soweto township near Johannesburg, 12th May 1986. Photographer unknown.

Norman Catherine, *Dog Of War*, 1988

"What makes me cry now is that these policemen, they were treating people like animals … But even a dog, you don't kill it like that. You even think that the owner of the dog loves it. Even an ant, a small ant, you think you have feelings even for an ant. But now our own children, they were not even taken as ants. If I say they were treated like dogs, that's not how it happened. I am actually honouring them. They were treated like ants." – Testimony of Eunice Miya in Antjie Krog, *Country of my Skull*, Random House Struik, South Africa, 2002, p. 193.

Daniel Naudé, *Africanis 2, Strydenburg, Northern Cape*, 2008. Post-apartheid artistic engagement with nature – particularly dogs – is changing.

Detail from Jane Alexander's *Infantry*.

NATURE IN / AND THE URBAN

Looking at Nature tropes in post-apartheid South African art.

As focus shifts away from the human/animal binary present as a defining, politically charged trope in South African art of the late 1980s and early 2000s, the question becomes: What is replacing it? From the history of Africanis – the "Dog of Africa" – to Nigerian "Hyena Men"; urban street art to typologies of urban–nature continuums, four South African artists present potential lines of flight away from the dogged return to reading animal or human-animal signification as figurative or symbolic, rather than literal. These works also raise questions unrelated to, for example, the politics of racial discrimination, which features as a defining characteristic of the symbolic human/animal binary. Rather, the questions that materialise concern the environment; potential urban-nature ecologies; the relationship between humans and animals; and the place of nature in the city.

Although "paternalistic fantasy and ethnographic distance may have gone the way of apartheid" in South African photography, allowing (black) Africans to "claim autonomy over their self-image"[1] as Sean O'Toole contends in "Not All Black and White", an essay on contemporary South African photography, another artistic trope has survived the transition to democracy: the human/animal binary.

During apartheid, the dehumanising effects of racial discrimination and violence that turned white perpetrators into "animals" and "inhuman"; black victims into "dogs" that were "treated like animals"[2] and later, after the glow of the democratic "Rainbow Nation" had dimmed somewhat, prompted the familiar phrase "this country is going to the dogs", inspired a particular analogy in South African art and literature.

While "animal" became a dualistic metonym for both victim and perpetrator, there remained the other category – "human" – for the ordinary people caught in the liminal position between retaining their humanity and becoming animal. The resulting human/animal binary was quickly appropriated and employed as a meta-analogy for the binary logic of apartheid's racial policy – a broad discrimination between those who were "white" and those who were "non-white" – which made animals of humans.

Attendant to this analogy was the reality of apartheid's environmental mismanagement, which "forced people to live in rural and urban areas unable to sustain them".[3] Land was "exploited agriculturally, mined indiscriminately",[4] or, conversely, South Africans labelled "non-white" were "forcibly removed from their ancestral lands to make way for game parks, and billions of rands were spent on preserving wildlife and protecting wild flowers while people in "townships" and "homelands" lived without adequate food, shelter, and clean water".[5] Environmentalism quickly became an "elitist concern

[1] Sean O'Toole, "Not All Black and White" in *Eye*, Issue 73, Autumn 2009, p. 68.

[2] cf, for example, Antjie Krog's 1998 work, *Country of My Skull*: much of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission testimony made use of these particular metaphors.

[3] Mamphela Ramphele & Chris McDowell (eds.), *Restoring the Land – Environment and Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Panos Publications Ltd, U.K., 1991.

[4] Isobel Sobey, "Review of Restoring the Land—Environment and Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa" in *Agenda*, Volume 8, Issue 15, 1992.

[5] David A. McDonald, "Introduction: What Is Environmental Justice?" in *Environmental Justice in South Africa*, David A. McDonald (ed.), Ohio University Press, Ohio, 2002, p. 1.

PIETER HUGO'S *HYENA MEN*

Abdullahi Mohammed with Mainasara, Lagos, Nigeria 2007 from *Gadawan Kura' – The Hyena Men series II.*

Umoru Murtala with School Boy, Asaba, Nigeria 2007 from *Gadawan Kura' – The Hyena Men series II.*

peripheral to [the] struggle for survival" of the poor.[6] The institutionalisation of geography-based racial segregation during apartheid engendered an ideological construction of the urban area as "civilised", while the rural was tended to be seen as wild, Other – the location of the animal.

On the other hand, nature as an extension of the symbolic (*Vader*)*land* [(Father)land] was mythologised by Afrikaans poets in the 1930s (for example, by N.P. Van Wyk Louw and C.M., van den Heever, who often used nature, that is the external, as a metaphor for the internal);[7] and by artists such as Jacobus Pierneef, who portrayed the South African landscape as majestic, monumental, harmonious. Even before apartheid, the aesthetics of the South African landscape had been claimed by the descendants of the European settlers. Nature was something to be "solved" through art; to be rendered into an accessible form. Even the apartheid-era national anthem ("*Die Stem*") spoke of "*vêr verlate vlaktes*" [far deserted plains], underscoring the conceptualisation of nature and the wild as a bypassed idyll, which could be remembered fondly from the urban stronghold.

After apartheid, the sidelining of environmental concerns in favour of pressing human issues ostensibly foreclosed the possibility of exploring potential ecological connections; of using ecology as a paradigm for understanding human relationships. An intensified focus on animal subject matter, however, enabled the artist, as Don Randall points out in "The Community of Sentient Beings", to work in "a zone of intersection between sociopolitical and ecological concerns".[8]

AN OUTDATED ANALOGY?

From Jane Alexander's *Butcher Boys* (1985/86), *Bom Boys* (1998) and *Harbinger* (2003/4); David Brown's *Dogs of War* (1980); David Koloane's *Mgodoyi* series (1993); Roger Ballen's human-animal interchanges in *Shadow Chamber* (2005); to the dogs populating Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf* (1994) and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) – there was a time from the late 1980s to the early 2000s when a continuum between human and animal (and especially human and dog) was perhaps the central trope of South African art and literature. As Ann-Marie Tully points out in "Becoming Animal: Liminal Rhetorical Strategies in Contemporary South African Art", "one can barely look at an image of an animal or animal/human hybrid form in the visual arts without falling into [the] mode of figurative thought".[9]

What is interesting to note, however, is that although there was symbolic use of animals to describe and often make sense of apartheid, the double process of dehumanisation and anthropomorphising that made possible a metaphoric continuum never quite allowed for humans to fully become animals. There remained a threshold, most obvious in Jane Alexander's therianthropic sculptures, where humans are not quite beasts and/or beasts are not quite human, yet retain part of each form; approaching Gilles Deleuze's concept of "Becoming Animal" – a liberated state inaccessible to subject definition, where the self is disarticulated and identity falls away. This disarticulation can either be read as the disintegration of identity as a result of violence; or as transcendence beyond the fixed subject positions and delineated identities of apartheid.

In *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*, Elizabeth Grosz lucidly describes Deleuze's line of thought as located in "the nonliving tentacles that extend themselves into the living, the provisional linkages the nonliving and the living form to enable the living to draw out the virtualities of the nonliving; that is, to enable the nonliving to have a life of their own".[10]

This hints at a space of theoretical investigation beyond the well-worn discourses of Self and Other, Race, and The Body, which often limit the analysis of works produced in South Africa, as well as the scope of their potential signification. Often it seems that works of art in South Africa incorporating nature or (especially) animal imagery are checked against a list of predetermined variables and answers. Is there anything more to be gained from tracing signification along the well-worn lines of human versus animal in South African art? Has the trope of human and animal within a particular socio-political context perhaps run its course?

[6] Farieda Khan, "The Roots of Environmental Racism and the Rise of Environmental Justice in the 1990s" in *Environmental Justice in South Africa*, David A. McDonald (ed.), Ohio University Press, Ohio, 2002, p. 15.

[7] cf. J.M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*, Penz Publishers (this edition), 2007, esp. "Chapter 7: Reading the South African Landscape", pp. 168-182.

[8] Don Randall, "The Community of Sentient Beings: J.M. Coetzee's Ecology in Disgrace and Elizabeth Costello" in *ESC*, Volume 33, Issue 1-2, March/June 2007, p. 210.

[9] Ann-Marie Tully, 'Becoming Animal: Liminal Rhetorical Strategies in Contemporary South African Art' in *Image & Text*, (eds) Leora Farber and James Sey, Issue 17, 2011, p. 67.

[10] Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*, Duke University Press, USA, 2011, p. 36.

Ann-Marie Tully asserts that the human/animal hybrid does not necessarily indicate the presence of a binary. Her reading of this particular hybridity in South African art seeks to "affirm the animality of human beings by not defaulting to a purely binary position that affirms segregation rather than complicity and inherent connections to human beings".[11] Employing Deleuze's "Becoming Animal" as well as Deleuze and Felix Guattari's rhizomatic conceptualisation of connections, Tully looks to reconceptualise the (complex) relationship between human and animal as resulting from a latticework of multiple connections, rather than occurring from the overlapping of two opposites. Tully sees the use of the human-animal hybrid (which ultimately relies on delineated notions of "human" and "animal") in South African art as not necessarily (re)producing the paradigm of difference the art in question is generally resisting. For Tully, the use of this hybrid is not even a temporary tactic – something like Gayatri Spivak's "strategic essentialism" – but a process "whereby the body becomes the site of a deviating, desirous, and actualised, rather than symbolic, event".[12]

Although veering from stridently metaphysical to fundamentally corporeal, Tully's discourse reveals new ways of approaching the human/animal question in South African art, while also showing that this area of debate is not entirely backward-looking.

While the symbolic register rooted in the bestial, at one time/once part of South African artistic and everyday vocabulary, has obviously not entirely worn thin – as Ann-Marie Tully, or even Nandipha Mntambo's performance of "the figurative animality of the African body in colonial discourse"[13] in her acclaimed 2008 work *Europa*, can attest – the socio-political context in which the utilization of this vocabulary was equivalent to resistance or, in fact, was urgent and original has come to an end. If artists are to employ the human-animal trope, they need to find fresh ways of articulating it. But as art critic Matthew Blackman recently asked in an article titled "Art Born Free of Politics?": "If art in South Africa is changing then what is it heading towards? If identity politics and resistance art have run their course, then what will replace it?"[14]

ANIMAL

Daniel Naudé's *Africanis* series is one alternative: a recourse to the history of a species endemic to Africa, with a specific South African significance. A focus on the animal and its history in South Africa opens an ecology-based conversation about environmental ethics and the treatment of animals, expanding the concept of "community" to include the non-human.

Naudé's photographs of Africanis – literally "Dog of Africa", descended from the dogs pictured on Egyptian murals; used by the San as a hunting dog; and yet more recently seen as a mongrel "township dog" – reassert the canine's 7000-year lineage. In portraits that recall 1900s paintings thoroughbreds; or stud catalogues, Africanis is visually transformed from the skittish, feral dog lurking around refuse dumps to proud purebred (for example, *Africanis 1*, *Africanis 2*, *Africanis 4*, *Africanis 12*, *Africanis 16*, *Africanis 20*, *Africanis 21* and *Africanis 24*).

Although "the Africanis are loosely attached to rural settlements of humans, they retain their own independence and domain. They are thus unlike domesticated pedigree and cross-breed dogs that have a master, an owner"[15] reads Naudé's exposition.

But while one may be tempted to read a master/servant narrative into Naudé's work (particularly since his main body of work, which includes the *Africanis* series, is titled *Animal Farm*), the studbook-like composition of his photographs prompts a literal rather than figurative or symbolic interpretation. Like the oil paintings of famous thoroughbred horses that Naudé's photographs evoke, it is the bloodlines and history of the animal, rather than its environment that is important. And Africanis has a particularly interesting history. As Mary Alexander details in "Africanis: Dog of Africa":

> The earliest record of the domestic dog in Africa [is] from the Nile delta, dated 4700 BC. Today, Africanis is found all over southern Africa.
>
> Foreign influence on the breed came only with the colonisation of Transkei and Zululand in the 19th century. Later, migrant labourers brought Western dogs back from the cities, where they bred with local dogs.
> Particularly favoured was the Greyhound, which migrants would have come across at the dog races popular at the time. Their speed would have made

[11] Tully, p. 65-66.

[12] Ibid, p. 66.

[13] Ibid, p. 64.

[14] Matthew Blackman, "Art Born Free of Politics?" on *Artthrob*, 18 December 2013. [http://www.artthrob.co.za/Feature/Art_Born_Free_of_Politics_by_M_Blackman_on_18_December.aspx]

[15] *Africanis* exposition [http://danielnaude.com/africanis/#collapse1]

DANIEL NAUDÉ'S *AFRICANIS*
Clockwise from top left: Africanis 1, Strydenburg, Northern Cape, 2008; Africanis 15, Strydenburg, Northern Cape, 2008; Africanis 8, Barkly East, Eastern Cape, 2008; Africanis 7, Barkly East, Northern Cape, 2007.

DILLON MARSH'S *INVASIVE SPECIES* typology.

> them ideal hunting dogs. In Zululand, crosses between Greyhound and Africanis are called *Ibhanzi*. They are not considered to be traditional dogs.[16]

And, as David Beresford writes in "The Story of an African Dog":

> [The Africanis] have had plenty of time to develop a genetic heritage well suited to local conditions. It is a point which right wing Afrikanerdom would have done well to take on board in the latter stages of apartheid rule when they obsessively tried to breed wolf-hybrids – only to end up with wolves wearing booties to protect them from Africa's harsh terrain.[17]

Predominantly photographed in their natural environment – the Northern Cape and Highveld as opposed to the townships or a peri-urban setting – the evolution of Africanis is emphasised in Naudé's series. In *Africanis 2*, *Africanis 3*, *Africanis 7*, *Africanis 11*, *Africanis 13* and *Africanis 15* and *Africanis 24*, variegated dust-coloured coats blend into the scrubland. *Africanis 1*, *Africanis 8* and *Africanis 18* show distinct Whippet or Greyhound characteristics in rounded backs; long, springy back legs and protuberant ribs; while the stockier builds of *Africanis 5*, *Africanis 6*, *Africanis 9*, *Africanis 19* and *Africanis 23* reveal the traces of other breeds – Alsatian or Ridgeback perhaps.

A straightforward documentation unconcerned with the politics of representation, or politics for that matter, one might say. But, as John Gallant and Joseph Sithole reveal in *The Story of the African Dog*, the history of Africanis is, necessarily, caught up in the political history of South Africa. Africanis came to be seen as a "pariah dog" – dismissed as "mongrels, strays or even, because of their long association with black South Africans, with the racist epithet of 'kaffir dogs'".[18] Naudé's (re)vision of the animal – from mongrel to purebred – also critiques and re-opens discussions about the politics of representation and seeing in South Africa.

But does this mean that Naudé's series remains locked within the politics of race or a paradigm of difference? Perhaps not. Naudé's series is interesting in that although the history surrounding Africanis may be intertwined with that of racial differentiation and discrimination – indeed, the fate of Africanis, relegated to townships and rural areas and labelled "mongrel", could be interpreted as paralleling the fate of black and coloured South Africans during Apartheid – the subject matter is not cast as symbolic of this history (at least not overtly). Rather, one could see the *Africanis* series as documenting and adding to the South African archive a history that has hereunto been excluded or dismissed.

HUMAN AND ANIMAL

Comparatively, Pieter Hugo's 2005-2007 series *The Hyena and Other Men* (or *'Gadawan Kura' - The Hyena Men*) is more closely aligned with the symbolic, yet simultaneously opens a potential line of flight out of the quickly stagnating symbolic human/animal binary.

Although still trading off the dog as potential metaphor (Hugo titled his exposition for the series "The Dog's Master"), it is in an imminent sense, there to be apprehended if necessary – an academic safety net rather than a central theme.

Unfortunately, Hugo's exposition goes some way to routing the symbolic into what could stand as a straightforward documentary series. Scanning the notebooks he kept during the documenting of the hyenas and their handlers, Hugo says he noticed that "the words 'dominance', 'codependence' and 'submission' kept appearing".[19] This apparently throwaway insight could be a deliberate attempt at positioning his work in the always-contentious arena of debate that includes concepts of power, as well as the old human/animal binary; or an oblique expression of Hugo's own qualms in relation to his gaze as a white photographer.

"When I asked Nigerians, 'How do you feel about the way they treat animals?', the question confused people. Their responses always involved issues of economic survival. Seldom did anyone express strong concern for the well-being of the creatures," says Hugo. "Europeans invariably only ask about the welfare of the animals but this question misses the point. Instead, perhaps, we could ask why these performers need to catch wild animals to make a living."[20]

But is it maybe Hugo's question that misses the point? The assertion that "We could ask why these performers need to

[16] Mary Alexander, "Africanis: Dog of Africa" on *southafrica.info*, September 2007. [http://www.southafrica.info/features/africanis.htm#.UtJkjaWdwpE]

[17] David Beresford, "The Story of an African Dog" in *The Observer*, 25 May 2003. [http://observer.theguardian.com/worldview/story/0,,961718,00.html]

[18] Mary Alexander, "Africanis: Dog of Africa" on *southafrica.info*, September 2007.

[19] Pieter Hugo, "The Dog's Master" available online: [http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/hugo/nigeria_index2.htm]

[20] Ibid.

catch wild animals to make a living" could be replaced by *sell sunglasses in the Lagos gridlock* or *resort to running a protection racket in the slums* or *pick through landfills for recyclable goods*. Hugo expresses a seeming need to present an explanation for his subject matter beyond the fact that it is visually spectacular (and in itself raises questions about employment or economics in Nigeria). Hugo's anxious justification that the images "depict much more than an exotic group of travelling performers in West Africa" (concerns of a white photographer taking images of black subjects?), coupled with his observation about Nigerian versus European concerns may inadvertently slot his series back into a constricting paradigm of difference and particular signification.

Nevertheless, in *The Hyena Men*, the dog (Hyena)/animal and human are both present in literal rather than figurative or symbolic senses. The square-format images, usually with a central subject, are pin sharp – muscles strain, veins stand out, animal hair bristles, heavy chains shine dull and metallic. There is a pulsing physicality and tangible materiality to these images. The handlers retain a hardness of form and bearing; while the hyenas have a heft to them that is not eliminated by the flattening of the photographic process. These are not muted/understated photographs that blur the line between the real and the symbolic; there is no liminality here, except for a faint flickering between documentary and staged; the everyday and the exotic. But, as Hugo claims, "The motifs that linger are the fraught relationships we have … with animals and with nature."[21]

Hugo's *Hyena Men* is the kind of art that, as Don Randall describes, "works to discern the relationships human beings establish with the non-human world and to understand and evaluate humanity in terms of these relationships".[22]

The Hyena Men also extends beyond ethics, provoking questions that remain rooted in the literal, the environmental rather than the symbolic: what is the relationship between nature and the urban; animals and people in Africa, where cities often give way to the "wild"? But surely the same could be said of many other places in the world – South America, India, Australia, for example? When examining Africa, it's easy to fall into the trap of reproducing the narrative of African exceptionalism.[23] So perhaps the question is rather: What are the tenuous links that remain between nature and the urban; animals and people in ever-expanding cities? In Nigeria this is particularly pertinent. As George Packer describes in "The Megacity":

> In 1950, fewer than three hundred thousand people lived in Lagos. In the second half of the twentieth century, the city grew at a rate of more than six per cent annually. It is currently the sixth-largest city in the world, and it is growing faster than any of the world's other megacities (the term used by the United Nations Center for Human Settlements for "urban agglomerations" with more than ten million people). By 2015, it is projected, Lagos will rank third, behind Tokyo and Bombay, with twenty-three million inhabitants.[24]

As cities carve away at nature, multiply over it and stamp it out, often all that remains are a few controlled urban green spots. "What I found fascinating was the hybridisation of the urban and the wild," says Hugo of Nigeria. *The Hyena Men* shows the wild animal in an urban setting and the scene seems wrong, disjointed – we have become unaccustomed to seeing wild animals outside of controlled environments: the zoo, the game reserve; or in magazines like National Geographic or Nature programmes on television. Hugo's *Hyena Men* shows another alternative: hybridisation rather than delineation between nature and the urban.

NATURE AS INTERVENTION

The transposition of the wild into the urban is also present in street artist Ricky Lee Gordon's work. "I believe removing the greyness from the soul of the city is the job of artists,"[25] says Gordon (a.k.a. Freddy Sam) of his murals: transitory paintings of springbok in brown, white and black, their flanks streaked, horns and noses dripping paint – a rough 'n' ready urban rock art both nomadic in subject matter and created by a city nomad wielding wall brushes and cans of Dulux.

Comparisons with Belgian street artist ROA's massive building-side murals are evident, but while ROA's black-and-white artworks (labelled "environmental graffiti") magnify the coarse, untamed side of everyday feral animals in the urban and peri-urban environments – a kind of frightening Donnie Darko menagerie of squirrels, rabbits and pigeons that surreally scale humans down to rodent size – Gordon's animals are non-threatening. His springboks are seamlessly assimilated into the urban,

[21] Pieter Hugo, "The Dog's Master" available online: [http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/hugo/nigeria_index2.htm]

[22] Randall, p. 210.

[23] cf. Hedley Twidle, "'In A Country Where You Couldn't Make This Shit Up?': Literary Non-Fiction in South Africa" in *Safundi*, Volume 13, Numbers 1-2, January-April 2012.

[24] George Packer, "The Megacity" in *The New Yorker*, 13 November 2006.

[25] *Freddy Sam website* [http://www.freddysam.com/about-cv/]

Ricky Lee Gordon a.k.a. Freddy Sam at work on a mural in Atlanta. Photograph: Jaime Rojo.

migrating like an extended metaphor down busy city streets alongside swarming pedestrians.

The murals have a fleeting quality, quick-slashed brushstrokes that run together in the familiar lines of South Africa's national animal, yet a lot of Gordon's commissioned work appears overseas. One piece, a Kentridge-esque herd of smudgy charcoal-grey springbok migrating across prefab concrete walls carries the tag "I am because we are", inspired by the Ubuntu philosophy "We cannot be human all alone". Like the eland in San rock art, Gordon's springbok becomes a "linking or unifying symbol that promotes cohesion within…society as well as preserving balance between the human community and the rest of the world".[26]

Transported out of South Africa and imported into the urban environments of Atlanta and Philadelphia in the United States, Gordon's animals could also be said to retread a particular trade route, but although crossing the Atlantic passage between Africa and America, they do not carry any signification relating to slavery. Rather, the art carries a positive symbolism. In the often bleak housing projects or "ghettos" of America, similar to the urban areas where apartheid's "mechanistic layouts and minimal architectural treatment … stripped both the housing and ultimately, the occupants of their identity",[27] graffiti has often been used as a way of enlivening blank façades. Nature, too, has been introduced as a way of interrupting the acres of dull tarmac and concrete that replaced parks or gardens as a way of controlling certain urban areas the state deemed volatile by making the districts easy to police and not conducive to forging neighbourhood communities. The springboks carry something of Sekoto's miners, a form multiplied, but with the song of the veld rather than the pick, symbolic of community, freedom and a mindful relationship with nature.

Gordon superimposes nature back into the urban, not relegating his wild animals to delineated parks or 'green spots' that are slowly eaten away by concrete. It's a (re) population of the (concrete) jungle with animals – a re-aestheticisation, where springboks surprisingly leap out from rows of stark breezeblocks and otherwise unfinished surfaces. Gordon's murals act as a gentle reminder of nature and the environment, rather than a potentially terrifying re-imposition of nature on the urban. Ultimately, the outdoor paintings will be weathered away, revealing concrete and brick, the springboks remaining just as traces and eventually fading away altogether.

[26] Hope B. Werness, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in Art*, The Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, 2006, p. 158.

[27] André van Graan, "Contested Modernism: Post Slums Act Public Housing in Cape Town" in *SAJAH*, Volume 24, Number 2, 2009, p. 31.

In a Deleuzian sense, Gordon's murals are perhaps a starting point – a provisional link between living and nonliving that enables the nonliving, that is, the architecture of the urban to project its existence, throwing into relief the "life" of architecture (its decay and renewal), and ultimately the life and changing form of the city itself.

AN URBAN–NATURE CONTINUUM

In Cape Town, the urban has perhaps had a tougher time overcoming nature than other cities in other parts of the country or the world. It claws up the slopes of the mountain and, like a tide washed up the beach, falls back in a concrete wave to sweep unbroken over the Flats. This is the setting in which photographer Dillon Marsh finds his subject matter for *Landmarks*, an evolving series of typologies. Inspired by Bernd and Hilla Becher's photographic documentation of industrial architecture, Marsh goes a step further, showing not just typologies of buildings, but typologies of urban-nature continuums.

Cell-phone towers disguised as trees; the structure of electricity pylons; city rivers; quarries and landfills; footpaths through tracts of undeveloped land – Marsh's typologies reveal an ecology that is not limited to nature, showing the inherent interconnectedness of nature and the urban: the urban effect/affect on nature and the subsequent (re)shaping of both.

Marsh's photographs have a static, stultified quality, a claustrophobia brought about by uniform desaturation. More than ever, we are made aware that these are frozen moments, scenes wrenched out of time. Marsh's photographs emphasise arrested movement, whereby underscoring the perpetual change nature inflicts on the city or the city inflicts on nature.

Although not as technically masterful or engaging as Pieter Hugo's photographs and subject matter, Marsh's series definitively moves the conversation of nature and humans beyond questions of race, identity, gaze and ethnography. The human in Marsh's series is only present as a kind of invisible intermediary between urban architectural structures and nature.

Presented as a series of typologies of between eight and sixteen images, Landmarks comes across as something of a catalogue of forms, or an atlas. As you look at individual typologies, and then at the series as a whole, a topography emerges from the grids of images, like details rising from a map.

Beaten Paths reveals the traces left by people in nature when infrastructure has failed, such as in Atlantis – a town at the limit of the Cape Town metropolitan area, developed during Apartheid as a coloured area. This is nature worn through, the human imprint on land that although not formally "developed", is nevertheless used by humans, even if only as a transversed rural space; a shortcut to work in the urban town.

Matter of Course tracks another kind of path: the passage of the Kuils River as it draws a line between affluent (Durbanville) and impoverished areas (Blue Downs, Khayelitsha and Macassar), finally flowing out into the Atlantic Ocean. Its channel between areas still demographically divided in terms of race and wealth intimates a commonality and communication between what at first appear to be vastly different spaces/places – nature cutting across an invisible economic divide.

Situated between straightforward and more complex typographies, *Hill and Dale* shows the carving out of the earth, its hollowing for quarries, which produce the materials with which the landscape is reshaped; and landfills, which collect the debris from the urban. In this series, a cycle is revealed: the use of nature (clay, limestone etc.) to build cities, which in turn produce rubbish that is put back into the earth. Both endeavours change the landscape, whether in the form of quarries or mountains of waste slowly covered over and turning back into hills.

An important question, however, is why Marsh has chosen fairly benign examples for this particular series, omitting the towering landfills of trash that will never degrade or be reclaimed by the earth. Is this an intended remove from the politics of environmentalism? Marsh's most well-known series, *Invasive Species*, which does engage with environmental questions and concerns (albeit obliquely) suggests that this may be the case. Perhaps Marsh's intention goes beyond politics, or, instead, rather engages with the politics of seeing: what do we see when we look at *Hill and Dale* – the imposition of the urban on nature; or the reclaiming of the urban by nature?

Invasive Species documents the phenomenon of cellphone towers disguised as trees. The series raises obvious questions about our perception of the relationship between nature and the environment, but also illustrates the uneasy integration of the urban and the wild.

At first glance, the cellphone towers appear treelike, but

on closer inspection they're a little too tall, a little too static, their colours not quite right. Although there seems to be an attempt to match the type of "tree" with its environment – for example, a "dead" trunk with artistic irregularly spaced leafless branches in an area where other trees have been cut down – the fakery is evident. No one is really fooled by these phony palms and pines (see, for example, the lone "evergreen" in the wasteland surrounding an industrial Timber City), but, ironically, they have become a feature of the landscape, a kind of pseudo-missing link between nature and architecture. Does this perhaps indicate an unwillingness to replace nature with urban forms; or a kind of guilt – attempting to cover up an environmental crime, a willingness not to see the impact of urban necessities, such as cellphone towers, on nature? In a sense, the urban is itself an "invasive species"…

Means to an End features electricity pylons, a subject that attracted Marsh because of "the seemingly haphazard variations of their designs and the cryptic reasoning behind their structuring". The pylons have a totemic quality – huge poles; delicate animal-like geometries of steel and cable linked across the landscape and charged with power. Uniform lighting and desaturation across the series has a flattening effect, reducing depth. The pylons stand out against an almost-grey sky; dark, crisscrossing lines that recall instructions for complex origami flowers or birds.

An interesting omission in the series is adapted pylons – how the inhabitants of Cape Town's townships have connected their shacks to powerlines with thousands of snaking cables, staking a claim to the infrastructure of the city. Akinbode Akinbiyi, who has photographed a similar occurrence in Lagos, notes that it is often a means to an end that "lies behind what Western observers often like to call chaos or anarchy. It's rare to have a constant supply of electricity. The jumble of cables testifies to this hidden self-help, the attempt to remain connected".[28] In a sense this is another kind of "wild": disconnection from the urban.

So, what replaces the specific, political human/animal binary used as shorthand for "disenfranchised human identity"[29] in South African art? Both Daniel Naudé and Ricky Lee Gordon's work prompt a potential return to a South African history that extends beyond apartheid, using animals to represent connection rather than disconnection between humans, or between humans and nature; while Dillon Marsh's typologies, rooted in the here and now, reveal the immediate and immanent changes nature and the urban have on each other. Still connected to the traditional debates of South African art criticism – Gaze, Self and Other, The Body – Pieter Hugo's work nevertheless pushes the limits of these discourses to include questions of economics and nature-city hybridisation in expanding (African) urban environments. Ultimately, all four artists' work moves the symbolic human/animal binary and its attendant discourses forward, employing it merely as a starting point for a contemporary, urgent discussion about nature in/and the urban.

[28] Akinbode Akinbiyi, "Lagos: All Roads" in *Afropolis / City, Media, Art*, K. Pinther, L. Förster and C. Hanussek (eds.), Jacana Media, South Africa, 2012, p. 135.

[29] Tully, p. 64.


PATTERN

[PATTERN]

Fabric

The essence of a city is often called its "fabric". What would the fabric of Cape Town look like? What would its pattern be? As a port town it would probably be a foreign cloth, from China or India, printed with a Kenyan pattern – it's the in thing these days, bright patterns from the equator, rather than the local shweshwe designs of tiny flowers, guinea fowl, *amasi* sour milks, Mandela heads and mielies.

The Cape Town garment industry is based in Salt River and Woodstock, its brick buildings and factories tacked close together, afternoon buses needling through spaces that seem too small, weaving taxis threading through the overlocked traffic.

Patterns

Patterns make cities easier to decipher, to interact with. Even the exurbs and "informal" settlements – the townships that sprawl between Cape Town International Airport and the asthmatic sea – adhere to the developer's grid.

When a pattern is broken, people are unsettled. A few years ago, a brash resident of Voetboog Road in Bo-Kaap painted his multiple-storey hillside house a particularly violent shade of magenta – a colour Plascon Swatches dubs "Fuchsia Fizz" – finishing it off with black trim. It caused some controversy, sitting askance, like a gaudy hat thrown on in a moment of immodesty above the neat pleats of the city and its paired necklace – the coloured-bead houses that hang around the neck of the hill.

"A bright colour against the mountain and as high as you can ... Only people wanting to be noticed wear pink and purple," Mr Osman Shabodien, chairperson of the Bo-Kaap Community Association, told *IOL News* (who gleefully titled the story "Purple House Has Residents Seeing Red").

Further away from the city centre, interruptions in suburban uniformity become more apparent. And more contested. When Victor Bikitsha and his family moved to Somerset Ridge in the Helderberg near Somerset West, he painted his house pink and slaughtered sheep – the will of the ancestors, he explained. Incensed, neighbours labelled the Bikitshas uncivilised and, with blind irony, proceeded to vandalise their home, "spraying graffiti on its walls, throwing rubbish into the garden and stealing the street number from the wall".

AN AFRICAN YARN

Interview

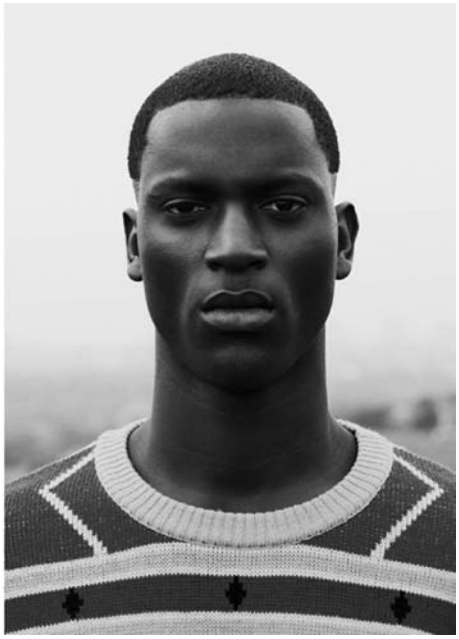
A new knitwear collection weaves together international fashion and market trends with traditional beadwork designs to create South African clothing solutions. An interview with designer Laduma Ngxokolo reveals the inspiration behind his brand.

WHAT'S THE IDEA AND INSPIRATION BEHIND YOUR DESIGNS?

LADUMA NGXOKOLO: My art is knitwear design. That's what I specialise in. I started it as a B.Tech project at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University down in Port Elizabeth. That was in 2010 during the Soccer World Cup momentum. My overall project was based on finding design solutions that young students identified around their environment. I identified a problem within my culture: the fact that in my culture – Xhosa culture – we have to go through an initiation process when we are aged between eighteen and twenty-five for about six months – nowadays about a month – in an initiation school. When we come back from there we have to wear brand new clothes. Knitwear is part of the new clothing that the Xhosa initiates buy in the Eastern Cape. When I was an initiate I felt that the knitwear that I had to buy was not relative to my culture. I felt the patterns were quite foreign to me, and the brands too, as well as the heritage behind the brands. So I thought okay, I could come up with some unique designs, which might be relative to the Xhosa tradition. We have magnificent aesthetics within the Xhosa culture, if you dig deep. Luckily there was an exhibition of Xhosa beadwork at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum which I took a friend with to photograph. Then I took those patterns and I basically just knitted them into the knitwear patterns that you see today. But I sort of modified them to make them modern so that they appeal to young South African men.

SO HOW DO YOU MERGE THE MODERN AND THE TRADITIONAL?

LN: I take existing [beadwork] patterns and motifs, digitise them on the computer and then translate, or reinterpret the patterns into designs that are actually quite new. Then I take the significant colours of the Xhosa culture and use those colours to form the designs. I also look at the styles that are trending and take some of those elements and blend them with my designs. I'm fortunate to come from Port Elizabeth as it's the mohair capital of the world. More than seventy-five percent of the world's mohair comes from the brokers in Port Elizabeth. So, for me, it was fascinating to hear that news. The irony was that fifty-five percent of that mohair gets exported outside the country in raw form. Not a lot of designers are taking advantage of that. We have the biggest mohair/wool industry in Africa. So I took those raw materials and used them to make my knitwear: twenty percent South African mohair and eighty percent South African wool. Fortunately, mohair and wool are sustainable fibres and they're very durable. That meant that one can actually buy my knitwear and preserve it, keep it for about fifty years – our grandfathers, they still have the clothes that they bought, like, decades ago.



Above: A jersey from Laduma Ngxokolo's "MaXhosa" collection. Photograph: Misha Taylor.
Below: Beadwork influences.

DO YOU HAVE PEOPLE IN SOUTH AFRICA MAKING YOUR GARMENTS? HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE THE PROBLEM OF CHINESE IMPORTS?

LN: Basically my target market is a niche market – men who appreciate unique products, which are proudly South African, that have African aesthetics. So my raw materials – the wool and mohair – I source from Port Elizabeth, from spinning mills. It gets dyed there and it gets washed and spun into yarn. Then I get it sent here to Cape Town and it gets knitted and gathered together into knitwear pieces in the designs that I came up with.

I think that this is one of the systems that one can actually use [to overcome the problem of Chinese imports]: use resources that are available locally; redesign things; and create new experiences that aren't available locally and turn them into products that we can export.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRENDS THAT YOU'VE WORKED INTO THE TRADITIONAL AFRICAN DESIGNS?

LN: Pattern was very in since about 2010 and I integrate a lot of pattern. So my signature style is that I basically do a lot of pattern work – that's what makes my work distinctive from any other brands. I don't focus much on trends because I think being unique is very important and I have to focus on the unique selling points of my products. Take for instance jackets – I've also done some jackets, which I've blended together with my knitwear – these were the top sellers in the range because there was functionality which met good aesthetics. I think that's what makes a good product.

I think trends are so transitory and to make something well is more important. And that obviously translates overseas. Trends come and go and doing signature pieces means that that can be a trend for the next five, six years…

DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR WORD OR PHRASE THAT EXPRESSES WHAT YOU'RE CREATING?

LN: For me, I think the most significant phrase that I can liken my knitwear to is "umsebenzi wezandla" – handwork. Xhosa people like handmade products. I grew up making handmade beadwork. At home we like craftwork. I grew up making the knitwear by hand, knitting on the machine. My late mother taught me how…So it's a special product.

SO THIS IS HERITAGE? YOU'RE INHERITING A SKILL AND MOVING IT ON…

LN: Ja.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE MERCHANTS FOR YOUR EXHIBITION? DO YOU HAVE OTHER OUTLETS THAT SELL YOUR PRODUCTS?

LN: Merchants is actually the first outlet that sold my knitwear. The owner of the store – Hanneli Rupert – she's the one who actually spotted me. I got a lot of requests from boutiques around Cape Town to share my knitwear with them, but I didn't agree instantly. I went to each and every one of them and actually checked out the ambiance and everything, but once I came to Hanneli's store,

Merchants, I was very impressed with the fact that she only stocks African clothing and products and luxury products that are unique from the other products that are available locally. So I gave it a shot.

One of my marketing platforms is to do exhibitions and interact with people and explain what my knitwear is about. I've done one in Port Elizabeth three months ago, which was called "My Heritage, My Inheritance", which is the name of my 2013 collection.

A LOT OF PEOPLE SAY THAT CAPE TOWN ISN'T AN AFRICAN CITY. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THAT?

LN: For me personally, I think it's African in its own way, you know? I personally see it as a hybrid city, because there's a whole lot of culture mix here in Cape Town, whereas in Port Elizabeth there's mainly Xhosa heritage – here I see a lot of Dutch influence, Xhosa influence, Muslim culture… But I think it's modern in a sense that everything has been modernised much faster than it has been in other parts of the country because Cape Town has an amazing design industry, which is ahead of other provinces.

DO YOU THINK THAT'S WHY CAPE TOWN IS THE 2014 DESIGN CAPITAL OF THE WORLD?

LN: It's definitely one of the reasons why, because, you know, Cape Town designs are amazing. I think each and every best element of design from Africa is pulled to the city. Cape Town is like a one-stop-shop where tourists can come and experience, to a certain degree, African culture. If they want to go deeper, they can specifically go to the Ndebele in Limpopo; they can go to the Xhosa people in the Eastern Cape; they can go to the Basotho people in Lesotho…

Cape Town has a bit of everything. I was here for six months and once I got here I started to interpret my designs into other products like socks and blankets and mats.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE IMPORTANCE IS OF PATTERN IN AFRICA, OR IN SOUTH AFRICA?

LN: The importance of pattern…I think it's very important to actually make our designs distinctive. If there isn't pattern then it will probably be plain and that will mean it will probably be classic and the classic look is already likened to the aesthetics that are from overseas, like Germany … Europe… So we need pattern according to the context of what we actually are, distinctive-wise. We are a very visual nation, for instance the Bushmen

The collection on the runway. Photograph: Simon Deiner.

graffiti and Ndebele wall paintings and Xhosa beadwork patterns and Zulu beadwork. So I think there isn't any other route that's better for us except the pattern route. I mean, it doesn't have to be printed or in colour: it can be monochrome or crocheted pattern or laser-cut – it can be done in various methods, one doesn't have to stick to the basic form that everyone is using.

[PATTERN cont.]

Map

The landscape of the city space is always changing as old buildings are demolished, new foundations laid, street names changed, walls repainted, traffic diverted. People stream through the streets. The lived reality of the city space is that of a city in flux.

The mapped city is totalising and immobilising, creating a seemingly ordered vision of the city from the lived chaos of the city space. Meanwhile, the lived experience of the city seems unsystematic, but is guided by the underlying order that is created by the organised network of streets that channels movement through the city. The city is at once concrete and mutable.

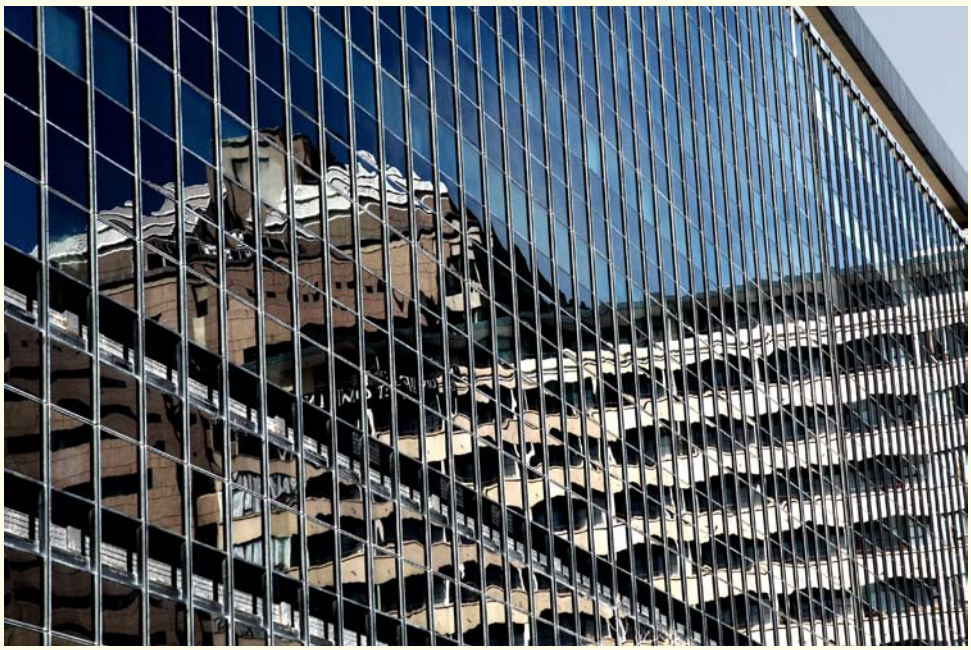
The complexity of cities, the flows of traffic across ever-changing grids, coupled with the peculiarities of physical addresses, occupations, interests and needs, produces for each one of us a particular pattern of familiar or habitual movement over the skin of the earth, which, if we could see it from a vantage point in the sky, would appear as unique as a fingerprint.
– Ivan Vladislavic, *Portrait with Keys*, Umuzi, South Africa, 2006, p. 12.

Puzzle

In the city you get a sense of solving something, of making sense of the fragments of a disrupted pattern. Look at the buildings – their repeated lines; their shapes. Stark and stone, but there's an illusion of movement in repeating designs, angles and vertical and horizontal lines that comprise their façades. Look at the patterns people wear and the maze of their movement through the crosshatched streets. See the dotted trees; the swathe of concrete broken by paint; the pattern of water, channelled; the dense fabric of metropolitan noise punctured by silence; the pattern of a suburb broken by taste.

A city is made up of surfaces, of textures. A different puzzle to each person.

Detail: floor of demolished house (now a carpark), Woodstock. Photograph: Alice Inggs.



Above: Glass building, Foreshore. *Below*: Windows in Long Street. Photographs: Alice Inggs.

[PATTERN cont.]

Trade

Down now to Green Market Square in the city centre, where Habtamel, a trader, spills riddles along with loose threads and glass beads blown in another city far away. They roll from his hands to fill the cracks between old, Dutch cobblestones. "Where am I from? Can you guess?" he says, face symmetric as a sphinx, softly lisping his zeds. He indicates Ethiopian wooden crosses, Jesus and Mary carvings; bronze bracelets from Benin; beads from Ghana. His story weaves and winds with the smoke from a scrap of newspaper and a smudge of tobacco at his lips. "I came to Cape Town fourteen years ago. It's very different to the other African cities. People here are from all over. In Ethiopia – where I'm from – you meet Ethiopians. Here you meet everyone. It's a trading port."

A thoroughfare, a port, a city gathered to a point at the very edge of Africa.

On, to the Grand Parade, where Valentine, a tailor from Nigeria, sits behind an ancient Singer sewing machine. People still bring their clothes to the city for mending. He's holding a white shirt with a monogrammed collar, a crimson flourish under his thumb, still connected by a single red thread to the needle. Valentine came to Cape Town in 2001 and likes it better than the other cities he's lived in – "Lagos, Jo'burg, Pretoria, Port Elizabeth… There's still work here," he says. A Ghanaian in a white fez is acting as a parking attendant nearby, simultaneously offering hash to tourists.

Does anyone really know the city they live in? "Cape Town is so many cities in one," says Valentine. Can we ever know them all?

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