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ISSN 2206-9658



<http://www.journalpublicspace.org>

The Journal of Public Space

2019 | Vol. 4 n. 3

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The Journal of Public Space is addressing social sciences and humanities as a major field, and is interested also in attracting scholars from several disciplines. It will perform as a scholarly journal but also as an interdisciplinary platform of discussion and exchange by scholars, professionals, organizations, artists, activists and citizens, whose activities are related to public space.

The Journal of Public Space will be enriched by hosting papers on design projects, art performances and social practices, fostering civic engagement and non-expert knowledge.

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Authors are welcome to submit original research articles dealing with themes relating to the vision of the journal, which may include, but are not confined to:

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The Journal of Public Space welcomes full papers for 2020 issues, to be published in April, August and December.

Submissions will be ongoing throughout the year.

Submission can be made:

- using the OJS platform by registering online. If you are already a registered author you can log in using your username and password;
- by sending an email to the Editor in Chief Luisa Bravo at this email address: jps@cityspacearchitecture.org.

Before submitting, please read:

- the Focus and Scope of the journal
- the Author Guidelines

Full papers should be between 5.000 and 8.000 words.

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Cover image: *Orizzontale, 8 ½ - Yap MAXXI 2014. Picture by Alessandro Imbriaco.*

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EDITORIAL

Exploring the Work of Artists and Activists to Translate Research into Action and Foster Public Space Culture

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In November 2018 The Journal of Public Space published the special issue 'Art and Activism in Public Space', that was launched in Barcelona at RMIT Europe headquarters, during the SkypeLab Sympolab (<http://www.skypelab.org/>), and was introduced by Estanislau Roca Blanch, Vice Rector for Infrastructure and Architecture at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya.

The issue collected a selection of projects of invited artists and activists, from Italy, Spain, Germany, United States, South America, Africa and Australia, and was the result of collaboration between City Space Architecture and RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. The Journal of Public Space is an academic, double blind peer reviewed journal, so the main aim is to publish quality outcomes of academic research. Also, The journal is devoted to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, adopted at the Habitat III conference in Quito (2016), and to the dissemination of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, in regard of public space. Then the mission of The Journal of Public Space, as an open forum for public space knowledge, is to translate research into action and foster public space culture, with the ambition to help defining city-wide public space strategies for local governments.

The work of artists and activists all around the world is making clear that a human-oriented approach with short-term but context-sensitive interventions can have a long-term impact in specific areas where the lack or underdevelopment of public space strongly influence everyday life of large populations, especially in the Global South. Artists and activists are playing with imagination, redefining urban scenarios and opening to a different level of consciousness of places, based on a different way to approach, see and understand everyday urbanism of different places. They are able to produce outcomes, through visual interpretations or temporary interventions that strongly and powerfully deliver the message of what public space could be, and reinforce the sense of pride, civic identity and social cohesion among communities.

The special issue 'Art and Activism in Public Space' published in 2018 received an overwhelming success: according to our data and statistics, it gave a significant boost to the journal, so we decided to start a series on this topic. The Journal of Public Space is interested to embed artists and activists' research work in the discussion on public space, highlighting the importance of on-the-ground observations and human-oriented thinking for the future of cities. In May 2019 City Space Architecture entered into an agreement with RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia, which is a leader in public space art practice. We then started to work on the present issue, inviting artists and activists and later made a selection of projects from

Italy, Slovenia, Cyprus, Kenya, Brazil and Kurdistan. The issue features also a special section with artists who have come through the MAPS - Master of Arts (Art in Public Space) program at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. The MAPS program engages with multidisciplinary practice based creative inquiry to explore key issues confronting global public environments. By making connections between theory, art practice and everyday life the program explores issues critical to local and international cultural, political and social debates and recognises the important role public space plays as a forum for these exchanges. The program is designed around work-integrated learning through local and international site and location specific contexts, to develop conceptual and practical skills and to undertake collaborative and individual projects. MAPS draws together a cohort of those with skills in visual practice, performance, video, sound, creative arts, writing, design, architecture, fashion and curatorial and cultural management fields with ambitions to develop and extend skills within their existing career or to move into spatial and social practice in and about public space. MAPS is closely aligned with the RMIT School of Art's research group CAST - Contemporary Art and Social Transformation, as a hub for artistic practices that intersect with issues of equity, access and democracy and radical ways of knowing and being, with an interest in the public sphere, the intersection of human and nonhuman forces, global indigeneity and the role of education as a change-agent. RMIT's partnership with City Space Architecture and The Journal of Public Space enhances MAPS ambitions to provide quality education within an internationally networked environment.

We are planning to publish an 'Art and Activism in Public Space' issue every year in November. In February 2020 we will publish a call for expression of interest on our website, and we will later select a number of relevant projects to be published in November 2020.

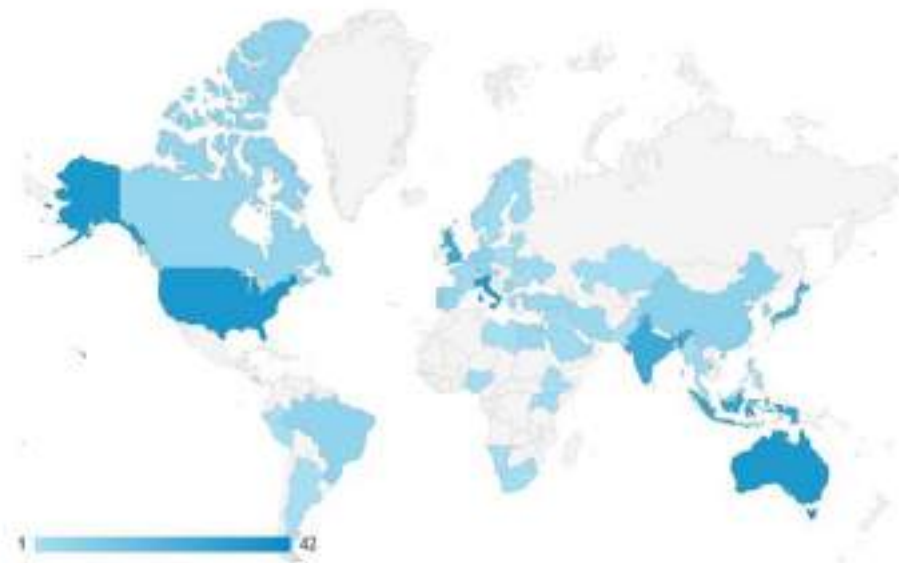


Figure 1. Impact of the issue 'Art and Activism in Public Space' published in November 2018.

To cite this article:

Bravo, L., McCormick, M. Hillary, F. (2019). Exploring the Work of Artists and Activists to Translate Research into Action and Foster Public Space Culture. *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(3), 1-2, DOI 10.32891/jps.v4i3.1230



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EDITORIAL

Working in the World

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At RMIT University, we pride ourselves in achieving outcomes that not only prepare for, but enhance the future careers of our graduates. 'Work ready' is a term often used to describe these qualities; those who complete our programs are seen as future leaders in, indeed the shapers of, the 'world of work'. In this sense, every graduate works in public space.

But what do we mean by the term 'work' in the field of contemporary art? Do we mean the artworks themselves; or, work as practice? Is this working for the betterment of society; or, supplying the art market, that supports artists' and gallerists' livelihoods? Do we mean work undertaken in the wider 'creative industries', an increasingly important dimension of national and international economies; or, in so-called 'cottage industries' - local, often not for profit communities of practitioners that focus on felt rather than theoretical issues, to develop their own models of exchange and sustainability?

We can use the notion of 'engagement' to consider the role of public art in this world of work: engaging across disciplines, nationalities and cultures; but also with industries, communities and the world at large.

The idea of engagement is not new. 2019 marks the centenary of the founding of the Weimar State Bauhaus by Walter Gropius. Revolutionising models of art, design and architecture education at the time, the school drew on interdisciplinary ideals, international parameters and a deeply held social conscience. Gropius stated:

Our guiding principle was that design is neither an intellectual nor a material affair, but simply an integral part of the stuff of life, necessary for everyone in a civilized society. (1935)

Gropius established the archetypal Modernist school by engaging across media, disciplines, cultures, classes and genders, with a deep commitment to the material, the applied and the experimental. These aspirations ring true one hundred years later, although the models and measures have changed.

Also in 2019, the Australian Research Council published the first outcomes from a new metric for research excellence: 'Impact and Engagement' rates universities and fields of research on a low, medium, high, scale for:

- Impact: “contribution the research made to the economy, society, environment or culture, beyond the contribution to academic research”
- Engagement: “interaction between researchers and research end-users outside of academia”

For artists seeking to engage in the public domain, how do we demonstrate value without instrumentalising creativity? How do we research in order to achieve impact but also to explore the unknown? How do we educate to achieve innovation but remain connected to history? How do we sustain a critical commentary on society whilst receiving the rewards and resourcing? What can we learn from indigenous perspectives on engagement? Does engagement allow new futures for art and design schools, or has engagement become a dirty word?

Industry has never been more keen to engage with artists. We are seeing increasing interest across all sectors in the skills developed by artists, as research into the future of work makes clear. As Tyler et al explain in their study ‘100 jobs of the future’ (2019):

Almost all the reports refer to creativity, but this is often linked with ‘enterprise skills and entrepreneurship’, ‘decision making’, ‘critical thinking’ or ‘strategic problem solving’. [...] we identified three major clusters of skills; cross disciplinary skills that marry deep knowledge of one area with breadth, with digital skills, and with a creative orientation (‘learn how to code, and learn how to paint’); interpersonal skills suited to working at the technology-human interface; and adaptability in learning strategically.

Similarly, a 2016 Foundation for Young Australians report ‘The New Basics’ found that the proportion of (Australian) jobs that demand digital literacy has increased by 212%, critical thinking by 158%, creativity by 65% and presentation skills by 25%. While these statistics refer to Australia, these trends resonate globally. The 2018 study for the World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report, identified ‘analytical thinking and innovation, active learning and learning strategies, creativity, originality and initiative’ as three of the most important skills for the workforce of 2022.

The artists discussed in this special issue of the Journal of Public Space have each identified their individual response to the role of art ‘working’ in the world. Indeed, this edition is characterised by the diversity of practices it encompasses and how work and activism can coincide. As implied by the Bauhaus and later made overt in Rosalind Krauss’ famous essay, ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’ (1979), the field of public art has expanded as never before: artists work across media, cultures, industries and economies, often simultaneously. The widening horizon of practice that this collection represents is also indicative of an increasing emphasis on collaboration between the artist and those who engage with art: embedding practice in society.

The challenge then, is not just how to engage, but what to do with that engagement, and how to collaboratively re-think the world through art. This, too, is no small undertaking; as Hannah Arendt said (1975):

There are no dangerous thoughts for the simple reason that thinking itself is such a dangerous enterprise.

Here we find perhaps the most important work of the artist: negotiating risk to think anew. Arendt's assertion reminds us of arguably the origins of contemporary public art, the critical practices developed at a conference of artists, poets and writers in Italy in 1957. The Situationists gathered around Guy Debord's critique of capitalism in 'The Society of the Spectacle' (1967), contributing not just to the formation of an art movement but also the student-led revolution in Paris the next year. Here, art, life and work intertwined in the most impactful way.

Like Arendt, Giorgio Agamben points to the critical role of artists in 'witnessing' the events of our time, by giving voice to and making visible those who cannot speak (1999):

the value of testimony lies essentially in what it lacks; at its centre it contains something that cannot be borne witness to and that discharges the survivors of authority.

He points out that those who experience the full force of conflict, are those most likely to perish and therefore, be unable to tell their story. For artists working in the public domain, this witnessing brings events to our collective attention, urging reflection. The practices discussed in this edition of the Journal of Public Space each require this thought on the part of the viewer. Whether pursuing a *dérive* to find new vectors in the expanded world of work that exploit the increasingly valued status of the artist as cultural producer in economic terms; or, engaging in *détournement*, to redeploy the forms and functions of public space as modes of witnessing, commenting and protesting, these artists address how action can be, must be taken.

This text was drafted in Hong Kong, a city punctured by nearly six months of student-led protest. Fifty-one years after the May 1968 Paris uprising, we see a different political model contested. The city is stoic, bracing as protest, counter-protest, police and military action ripple from its administrative centre to the regions, with universities increasingly becoming the battleground. The walls of the arterial roads are a palimpsest of redacted graffiti, often several layers deep, as slogans are painted out only to remerge the next day. Long chains of hand-made paper cranes appear on walkways, made by protesters of all ages, to vanish overnight. Pedestrian bollards have been dismantled, leaving gaps like missing teeth in the urban fabric. Umbrellas protect not against rain, but tear gas and rubber bullet. Black, white and yellow have become the colours that not only mark tarmac roads, directing the flow of traffic; but are also the colours worn by those seeking to direct the flow of history, literally becoming the (their) city. An art of activism indeed.

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To cite this article:

Wise, K. (2019). Working in the World. *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(3), 3-6, DOI 10.32891/jps.v4i3.1218



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Building as a Verb

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Abstract

This paper describes the approach of architecture/urbanism practice and research workshop “orizzontale”, based in Rome, Italy.

The approach of the group is heuristic: it is to get involved, to put themselves on the line, to “play the game”. As a machine that absorbs and transforms every kind of things, orizzontale has a clear attitude for mutation over production. The act of building things is a primary tool the group uses to build communities, link them together and create confidence in the idea of a better society.

Experimental does not mean “avant-garde” but rather “empirical, exploratory, in-progress”. The scientific attitude toward fact-finding and result-testing is an integral part of orizzontale approach, together with the artistic aspects of the work. Among the strategies adopted by the collective a special attention should be given to the attempts to translate in a spatial language the ideas, very literally. The results of this process can be called “spatial metaphors”, “discursive buildings” or “talking machines”. What orizzontale leaves behind is not necessarily a construction, but the process which is able to build up knowledge, consciousness, and trust.

Keywords: public space, temporary architecture, building, open process, DIY

To cite this article:

Ammendola, J. (2019). Building as a Verb, *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(3), 7-40, DOI 10.32891/jps.v4i3.1219

This article has been double blind peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



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A Recipe for Public Space

During all times ideal cities have been imagined and designed, embodying the features that most counted for that particular epoch. If we shall define the features of the ideal cities of the XXI century the first one would certainly be the quality of the public space. In the last decades public urban space has been increasingly at the centre of attention.

Awareness has grown. Yet, despite increasing commitment and efforts of administrators, decision makers, planners, architects and designers, despite big investments in urban renewal, renovation, redevelopment and regeneration, real-world public space does not show clear signs of a widespread improvement.

While some issues are being taken care of, several new ones seem to continuously emerge. The space that have been created do not match expectations. Some do not even resemble the mental picture that inspired them in the first place. Others look beautiful but are not used and remain empty and abandoned. Others fall too soon into ruin, leaving inhabitants wishing they still had what existed before. Often the good intentions and projections of ideal urban space give place to a dystopian reality: the tools used to enhance public space reveal themselves as powerful instruments of exclusion and segregation.¹

So, while we converge more and more on the idea of an ideal public space, increasingly our cities and their outdoor spaces become fractured, crowded with traffic, desolated, empty, and inaccessible.

But why the efforts to improve outdoor collective places are so rarely effective? And what is the recipe to construct a better public space?

Orizzontale's recipe is an anti-recipe. The quest for a one-size-fits-all solution for the creation of a unified ideal public space never aroused any interest. The collective's approach is far away from this: it is to get involved, to put ourselves on the line, to "play the game". It's a mix of architecture, urbanism, public art, and DIY practice, with a strong inclination toward practical action. In this vision of architecture there is no division between designers and builders, and a porous edge between design and construction. The two activities are always interwoven, mixed in time, creating a recursive approach to design and something we could call a *speculative* way of building. Public space needs to be built and it cannot be built with words or discourses. It cannot be changed only with plans and maps. And it definitely cannot be envisioned or designed, let alone built, from a distance. Of course, as Cedric Price could have said, "the best solution to an architectural problem is not necessarily a building", yet building, *as a verb*, is the only possible answer to the problems of public space.²

Building / Unbuilding

Architecture in public space must stop being monumental and start being mutable. Public space needs to shift form and matter along with the shift of its content, namely the people, the activities, the conflicts, the events that take place in it. Public space physical shape should be designed to permanently adjust. But is it possible to be

¹ Cf. Interboro, Armbrorst T., D'Oca D., Theodore G. (2017). *The Arsenal of Exclusion & Inclusion*, Actar, Barcelona.

² Cf. Till J. (2011). *Architecture Depends*, MIT University Press, Cambridge-London, p. 167 and Awan N., Schneider T., Till J. (2011). *Spatial Agency. Other ways of doing architecture*, Routledge, London, p. 31.

favourable to change without being consumeristic? Can an approach to urbanity open to continuous change be sustainable? The answer is yes, and it would be strange if that could be in any way different. Enormous resource-intensive projects age and become useless or wrong pretty quickly. Demolition of these dinosaurs is even more resource consuming and polluting. We need to learn how to design and construct public spaces that are able to adapt to change, to oscillate between different states. Opening and closing. Fragmenting and uniting.

Interventions by *orizzontale* are always reversible, and its conception of time is not linear. Moving towards, the future can in some cases mean to unbuild, to scrape off the top layers, with the aim to rediscover, both physically and culturally speaking, lost treasures.

Building with Whatever

Real-world is almost never made of what you expected. People often find this simple fact frustrating, *orizzontale* learned to consider it a great luck: we can only expect what we already know, while reality is much bigger than that, and much more diverse.

Working with available resources, imagining new forms, uses, performance for materials and places has been for millennia the starting point of every building activity. Building became in this way a magical action that breaks down reality's stubbornness and makes things work in new, amazing, ways. This ability, that we are very quickly loosing, is at the centre of *orizzontale*'s work.

It is an attitude towards mutation over production. *Orizzontale* is a machine that absorbs and transforms every kind of things: places, ideas, materials, containers, contents, joints, words, vehicles, boats, techniques, beliefs, forms, plans, views, geometries, games, images. Thrown away plastic balls become lampshades ("SOS — Spazio Open Source", "8 1/2"). Forgotten types of terrestrial wind-powered vehicles become tools for connecting places and people ("Urbanauts' Units"). Landfill-rescued industrial plastic piping and blister pack aluminium foil become high-performance experimental claddings ("Space Cabins, Osthang Project"). Space-age styles and symbols become the tool for reflecting on the meaning of heritage ("Spin-off, Steirischer Herbst Festival 2015").

Building Communities

Reality is living with the others and building is a magic ritual. It's very hard, if not often impossible, to build something alone, so building is a collective practice, and a tool for building up communities.

While building *things*, at the same we time build relationships, we build links between communities and we build up confidence in the idea of a better society. In a kind of a paradoxical circuit, we could say that community is created as a side-effect of the building act, and that the *things* we produce are themselves side-effects of the process of creation of the community.

Multiple trends continuously affect public realm. The last and perhaps the worst being the idea that reality can be *augmented* by watching it through a digital screen. With its work *orizzontale* offers an opposite kind of "augmented reality": one that is enhanced

by the humans that are physically in it, touching each other, touching things, handling materials, moving stuff, getting dirty, assembling structures, experimenting, exploring, building observatories, changing their mind, getting hurt, jerry-building, learning the hard way, learning to make mistakes, undoing things, fighting, finding solutions, reaching agreements, doing it their way, moving over, coming through, re-cycling, up-cycling, dismantling, crossing boundaries, solving problems, breaking things, looking in the eyes, talking to each other...

Building Experiments

In the process of building and unbuilding orizzontale builds up the experience, the knowledge, the intuition that is needed to understand, explain, think, imagine and tell the space that wants to change. That's why orizzontale is a permanent research workshop. What does "research" mean? For orizzontale, something which is less like "thought around buildings" and more like "building around thoughts".

And what about "experimental"? For orizzontale, it means less "radical" or "avant-garde" and more "empirical, exploratory, in-progress".

"Experimental" has two separate moments. The first one is the chaotic exploration of unconventional, innovative solutions. It's similar to what is usually referred to "brainstorming", but in a practical empirical way, since in this phase orizzontale builds things, assembles furniture, and creates spatial configurations. The second moment is the "scientific" testing of hypothesis and ideas in the real world. This can be done in several ways. For example one kind of experiment can be the insertion of a small and self-contained object in an existing space. Some of the projects, beyond the eye-catching look, are very *scientific* in this specific sense, for example "Casa do Quarteirão" or "Up". The collective is very interested in the effects on reality of this kind of minimal interventions. Another kind of experiment can be represented by the enclosing of a space separating it from the surroundings, as was done in a part of "8 1/2" or more clearly in "A.R.C.A.". The space is perceived in a completely different way. This dialectic between open and close can be also explored the other way round: what happens if we remove boundaries from public space?

Building Narratives

Orizzontale very often likes to take things quite literally. It's a way of playing with words, with ideas, but in a physical way. It's using building as a mean to translate in a spatial language the ideas we have and want to tell, in a sort of crystallization of discourses. We could call them "spatial metaphors", "discursive buildings" or even "talking machines".

Opening up the space is done by physically removing barriers, as in the first action made in Piazza Perestrello back at the beginning of orizzontale's story.

Shifting point of view has been done by building an upper sight spot, like a terrace-observatory ("Casa do Quarteirão", "Urbanauts", "Habitat") that can also represent a way to relate in a completely new way to the context, that being a small forest or an archistar-signed museum building ("Space Cabins", "8 1/2").

Creating a flexible space is done by building a mobile structure like in “Gondwana”, that can literally be moved around and “give place” to an infinite series of combinations and uses. This theme is explored again in “Mulino”.

Empowering communities is done by realizing real-world tools of control and participation, as we did in “Workwatching”, or by giving them a place to meet (“Costruire Largo Milano”).

Putting a forgotten space in the centre of the stage can be achieved by creating an outdoor theater around it and light it up with a circle of spotlight-benches (“SOS – Spazio Open Source”).

Creating an intimate space is done by literally enclosing space, by erecting a porous screen (“8 ½”) or a kind of a nomadic pavilion (A.R.C.A.), or in a different context, a temporary interior structure with the aim of make an abandoned industrial building again usable (“Habitat”).

Unveiling hidden potentials takes the literal form of the tip of a submerged iceberg (“Iceberg”).

Connecting places is done by building boats, traveling pieces of spaces that at the same time are living communications devices. We did that in Kiev, re-using an old speedboat from Soviet Era (“Progress”), and again in Lecce (“Do It Together”) and in Utrecht (“Urbanauts’ Units”).

Foundations to Build Upon

Orizzontale’s works are platforms, primary infrastructures that wait for further construction to take place. Orizzontale never builds on empty space, always overbuilds the existing city, and expects its interventions to be overbuilt themselves as soon as the opportunity arises.

What orizzontale leaves behind is not necessarily a construction. Sometimes something physical is left behind. Some other times not. But the process always builds up knowledge and consciousness in the people involved, leaving traces that can easily become a fertile ground on which to build new collective visions.



Orizzontale team: Jacopo Ammendola, Juan Lopez Cano, Giuseppe Grant, Margherita Manfra, Nasrin Mohiti Asli, Roberto Pantaleoni, Stefano Ragazzo.
Picture by Musacchio Ianniello.

Orizzontale is an architects' collective, design office and permanent research workshop. It is based in Rome, Italy, and has been active since 2010, promoting projects of common relational spaces, giving form to both dismissed and unseen images of the city and experimenting on collaborative interactions between city dwellers and urban commons, as well as on architectural creation process itself.

Over the years, orizzontale gained recognition and has been invited to participate in significant international events, such as "Osthang Project" in Darmstadt in 2014 and "Steirischer Herbst" in Graz in 2015. "8 1/2", a project for a pop-up theatre, was awarded in 2014 the international prize of Young Architects Program by MAXXI Museum and MoMA PSI and in 2018 earned orizzontale the "Young Talent of Italian Architecture 2018" prize.

In 2017 Orizzontale was awarded first prize in the competition for the regeneration of Piazza Europa in Aprilia, launched by Italian Ministry of Culture and Italian Board of Architects. The project is currently under construction.

<http://www.orizzontale.org/>

8 ½ -Yap MAXXI 2014

Typology: installation - workshop

Status: built

Date: June 2014 - November 2014

Location: MAXXI Museum, Rome, Italy

Client: MAXXI - Museo delle Arti del XXI secolo

Photo credit: Musacchio Ianniello - courtesy Fondazione MAXXI, Francesco Russomanno, Daniele Lanci, orizzontale, Alessandro Imbriaco

8½ is the winning design of YAP MAXXI 2014, program in support of the young architecture organized by MAXXI with MoMA/MoMA PSI (NYC), Constructo (Santiago de Chile), Istanbul Modern (Turkey) and MMCA National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Seoul (Korea).

8 ½ is a mobile theatre, a machine to experience public space. It investigates the dual nature of public space, as the place of intimacy and elective relationships and in the meantime the preferential territory of event and spectacle. The installation intends to be a reflection about the transition that changes public space from being the background of private encounters and individual moments to being the scene of public events and collective representations.









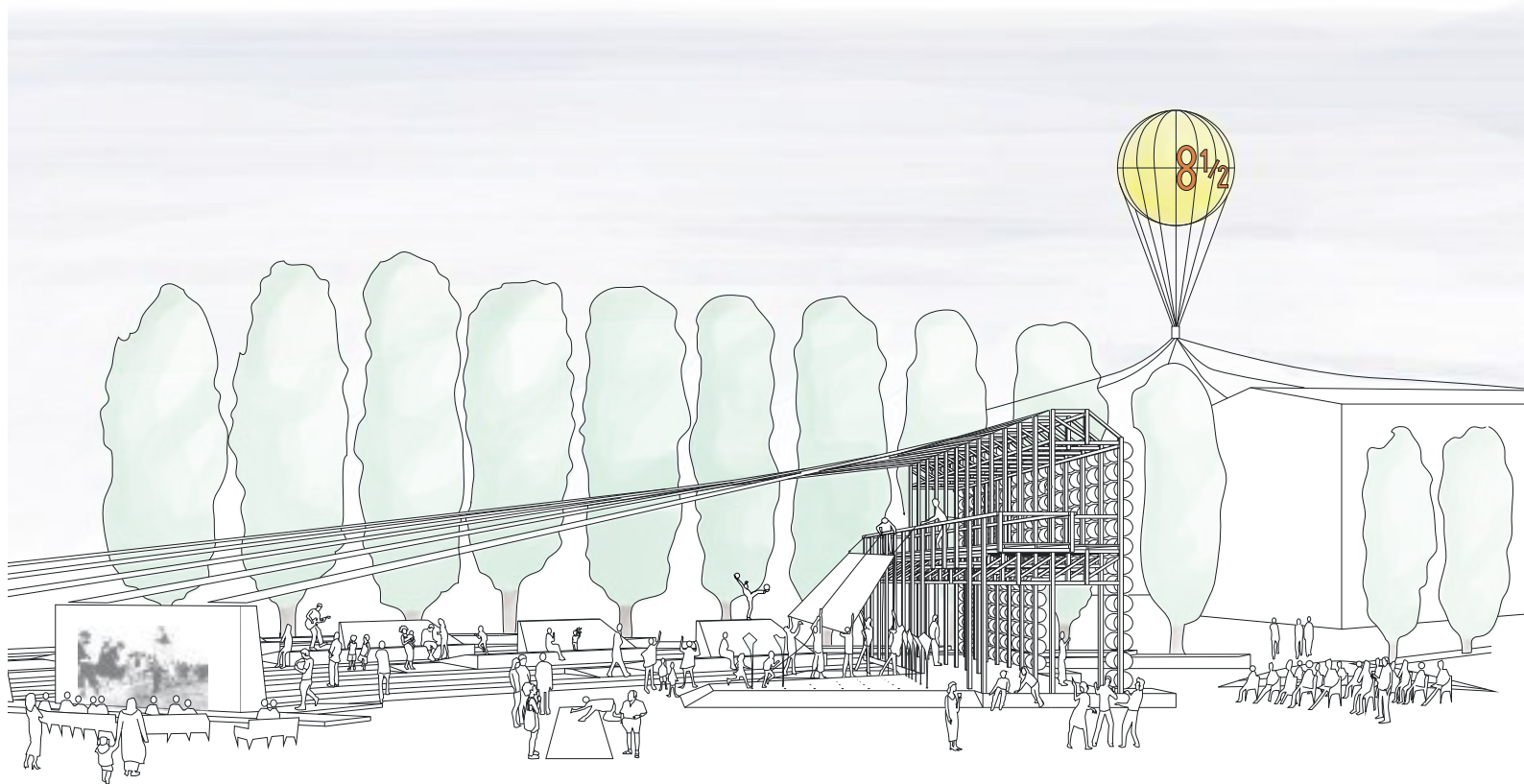
8 1/2 consists of two complementary elements: the wall and the arena.

1. The wall: 8 and 1/2 meters high, is built with modular timber frames covered with upcycled beer kegs. It transforms the surrounding space laying down a principal direction and creates a threshold effect dividing the “front” from the “back”. An opening in the structure can be used as access point to the interior space and as stage alternatively facing one side or the other. During the plays, the wall works as scaenae frons, backdrop or technical infrastructure for machines and equipment. A path climbing to an upper level can be used during the shows as a part of the stage or, in the everyday life, as a new point of view over the area. The LED lighting system works as a display that can show geometrical drawings, graphics, and typographic fonts.

2. The arena: it consists in four “relational objects” and a canopy that goes from the wall to a linear system composed by six blocks. The arena is both a theatre, a place addressed to public events and plays, and a square, an architectural device for the daily use of the common space. An accurate shadow study of the canopy allows both shaded and sunny areas during summertime. The wall and the arena work together creating an intimate relational space, an “urban room” where you can enjoy the space together, play, chill or simply stay.

8 1/2 was built in 4 weeks, the construction site became for 2 weeks a workshop open to students from all over Italy. The participants worked on the wooden structures of the arena and on the upcycle process of plastic beer kegs into lampshades for the wall.

All the parts of 8 1/2 have been recycled by orizzontale and became something else: wood beams and lampshades were re-assembled in different forms as smaller installations (“Replica”) or interior design self-built objects (“Lampada 8 1/2”).





Casa do Quarteirão

Typology: public space

Status: built

Date: July 2016 - ongoing

Location: O Quarteirão, Ponta Delgada, São Miguel Island, Azores, Portugal

Client: Walk&Talk

In collaboration with: Francesco Zorzi - No-Rocket

Photo credit: orizzontale, Sarah Pinheiro, Rui Soares

“Casa do Quarteirão” is a project developed within Walk&Talk 2016.

It was born out of the community that lives and works in the neighborhood called Quarteirão of Ponta Delgada, the capital of the Azores archipelago in Portugal, reclaiming a physical space for convivial and collaborative use.

Walk&Talk is an annual arts festival based on site specific cultural creation. Since 2011 it contributed to transform the islands into a laboratory for contemporary and transdisciplinary artistic creation, producing experimental projects, in a permanent dialogue with the territory, the culture and the local community, promoting a favourable environment for sharing and co-creation.





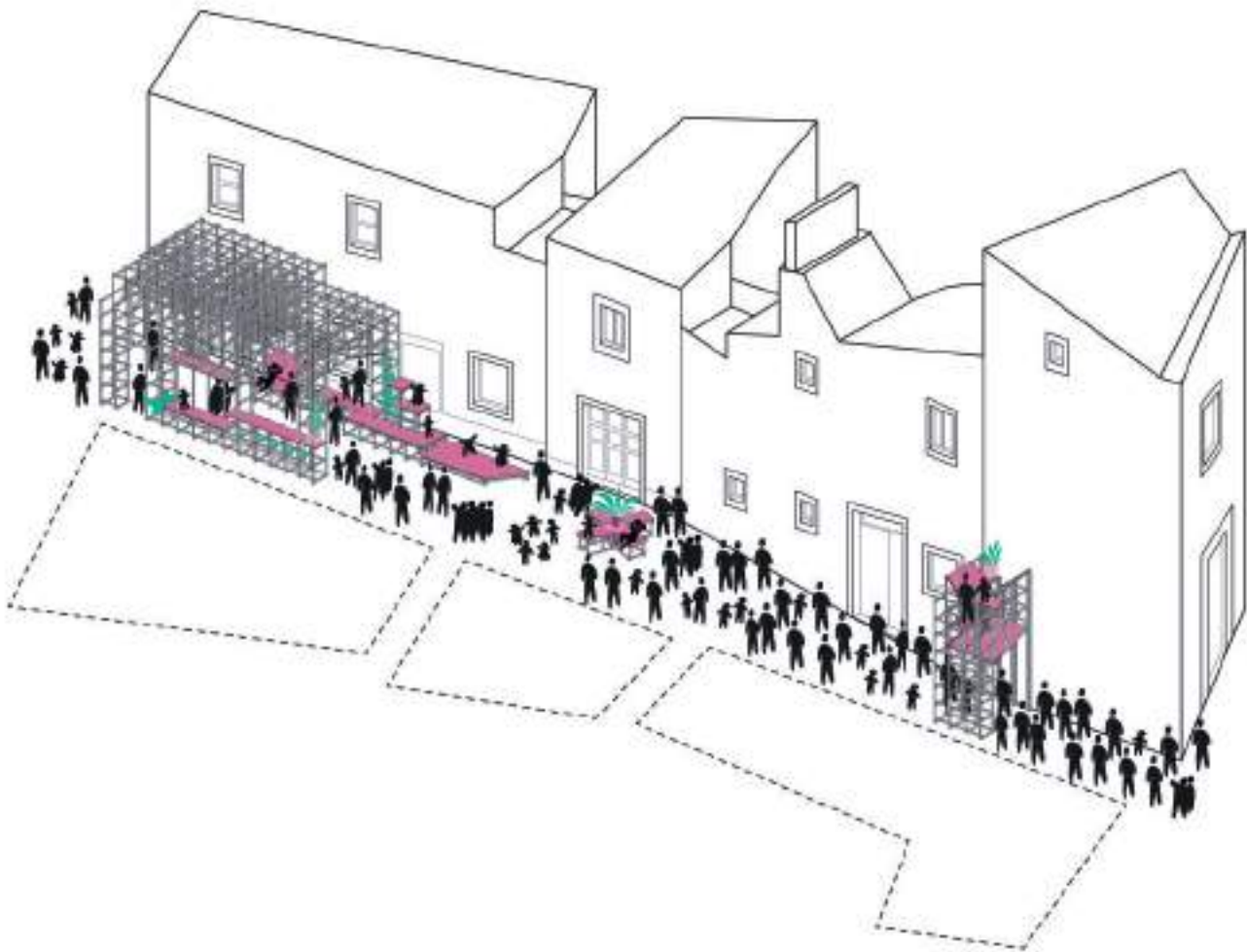
Orizzontale was invited to realize an installation in the core of the neighborhood and to collaborate with NO-ROCKET (a project by Francesco Zorzi, Amsterdam based Italian visual designer and illustrator) that had his intervention on visualizing “O Quarteirão” identity. The neighbourhood is close to Ponta Delgada historical city center, but out of the touristic and commercial district, so that public space is completely invaded by parking lots and cars. After a first visit in Ponta Delgada, during a public talk at MIOLO Art Gallery, we choose together with the inhabitants to work in the small Travessa da Rua d’Acoa, to materialize a common square, a place for the community.

The project’s feature is metaphorically a *Viveiro*, a collective greenhouse to make “O Quarteirão” flourish and develop spontaneously. At the same time the idea was to re-create the intimacy of a traditional Azorean house. Starting from these two inspirations orizzontale worked on two elements, creating new inviting entrances to the space: a pavilion to provide a place for people to gather and organize events (Rua Pedro Homem) and a small structure with a tiny terrace (Rua d’Acoa), to give a cozy and unusual view of the area. Between these structures a new square took shape.

“Casa do Quarteirão” program was decided by its own users and was conceived as an open project: the simple building system made out of modular frames, could be adapted and personalized according to several configurations and needs and the various activities that the community wanted to develop.

The structures were built in five days, together with a group of inhabitants, using wood from *Cryptomeria japonica*, an endemic conifer species that grows in the island.





A.R.C.A. – Zooart

Typology: pavilion

Status: built

Date: April 2017 - ongoing

Location: Cuneo, Saluzzo, Alba (Italy)

Client: Associazione Art.ur

In collaboration with: Art.ur, Politecnico di Torino

Photo credit: Marco Sasia

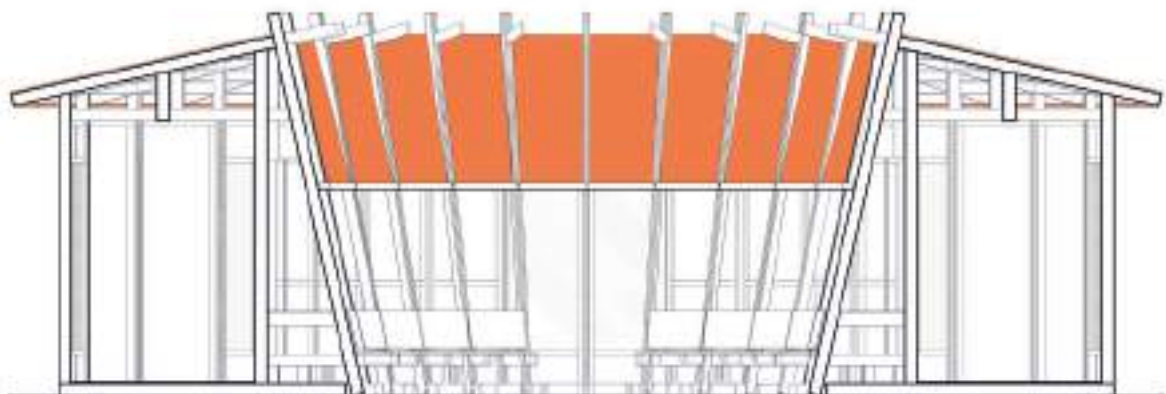
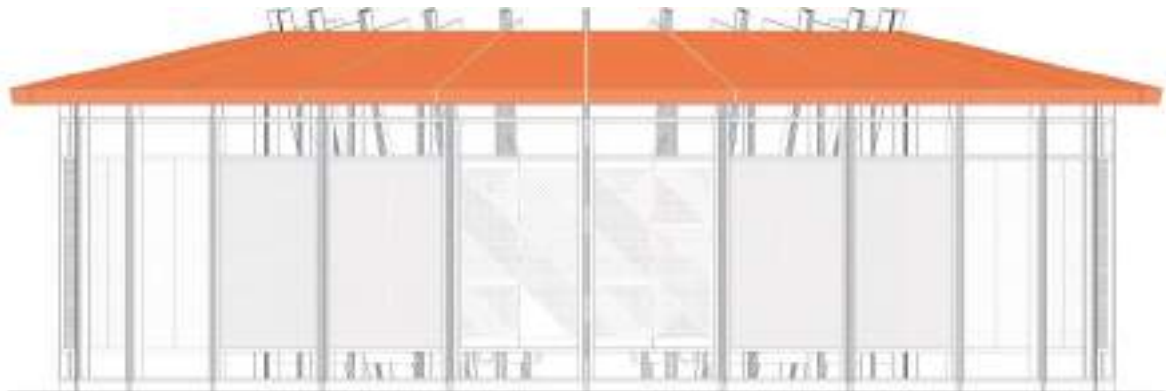
A.R.C.A. is the acronym for *Arte, Ricerca, Comunità, Abitare* (Art, Research, Community, Inhabit) and is a project born within the contemporary art platform ZOOART. The aim is to combine the experience of art with reflections on how to live and share creation in urban space. The program of this artistic framework extends to the territory of the province, specifically to the cities of Cuneo, Saluzzo and Alba (Piedmont, Italy).

The project started in Cuneo in 2017 with a construction workshop: together with the students from the Polytechnic University of Turin (followed by Prof. Daniele Regis and the architect Roberto Olivero) and Art.ur team we built up the pavilion.

Then, A.R.C.A. started travelling through the region, being re-assembled in different location to host the the works of the artist Grazia Amendola (in Saluzzo) and Ettore Favini (in Alba). The experiment was so successful in this area that in summer 2018 A.R.C.A. came back to “Tetti blu” district for the whole season. Lately, in summer 2019, A.R.C.A. has moved to Madonna dell’Olmo (CN), to provide shadow in a public garden where all the trees were suddenly cutted down because of a ravage of insect parasite.









Ephemeral Living: the central space as an archetype of temporary inhabiting

A.R.C.A. refers to the models of the nomadic architecture, an architecture whose structures appear and disappear almost instantaneously in already consolidated urban areas, leaving at the same time evident traces, even if intangible, of their transit. The places are enriched with new memories and meanings, which are able to activate unconscious imaginaries and bring out untold potential.

A.R.C.A. is part of that large family of mobile, unstable, provisional architectures, and dynamics that populate the human imagination since ancient times and which, in the contemporary world, find a new *raison d'être*. A.R.C.A. is a pavilion that opens up as an instantaneous square, it holds temporary installations that are reorganized within the space according to the needs; it is an infrastructure that can be assembled and disassembled in a few hours using light materials coming from the same territory in which it is inserted. The central form, naturally full of symbolic and spiritual meanings because of its purity and geometric simplicity, is the most immediate gesture in defining a space and in its delimitation. Circular constructions have many advantages, such as, for example, the maximization of the volume and the internal space in the face of a reduced consumption of soil and resources, a good energetic behaviour, the possibility of using lighter and more easily transportable materials, remaining statically stable. Because of these characteristics, the circular structure represents the archetype of a wandering space.

A.R.C.A. is a device with a central plan, which circumscribes from time to time the space in which it is placed, creating a gathered and protected space. It is a traveling object that carries a strong identity, which is overwritten by interactions with places and people.

A.R.C.A. is a volume whose base is a polygon consisting of twenty-four sides and whose structure, made of fir wood, is assembled by simple repeated modules, arranged in a radial shape. The succession of these modules can be changed to create different figures and areas, depending on the needs of use.

A.R.C.A. is a threshold that defines a transitory space in dialogue with its urban surroundings. Its identity is defined by crossing and inhabiting the city through memories and imageries that overlap and enrich it with new meanings.

A.R.C.A. is a community space, a mobile device and, at the same time, a permanent place through which art moves in cities, becoming accessible to everyone in a public and free way. The central room is protected by the ring that fences it, but at the same time it is open to the external environment, making it perceive differently from those who enter it.





Urbanauts' Units

Typology: installation, public space

Status: built

Date: October 2017 - ongoing

Location: Berlijnplein, Leidsche Rijn, Utrecht, Netherlands

Client: RAUM, State of flux

In collaboration with: Brommerbios, HUT, Goede Vrijdag

Photo credit: orizzontale, Juri Hiensch

Urbanauts' Units is a project developed within RAUM - Makers in residence programme 2017. RAUM is a workshop in Utrecht with a placemaking vision created by State of flux. State of flux has been commissioned in 2016 by Utrecht Municipality to create a cross-disciplinary space at Berlijnplein. This square is exactly on the border between existing and new city, in the new Leidsche Rijn Center: the largest vinex location in the Netherlands. The goal of this creative placemaking is to imagine the city of the future and make people feel this future.

Berlijnplein is today an interesting threshold space: it's an "in between" area, temporary suspended, able to create expectations of what will come and at the same time ready to receive innovative impulses. These features characterize Berlijnplein, and its big potential lies in the fact that this area is set between the central historical district and the development of the new neighbourhood Leidsche Rijn.





The strategy that we decided to follow was to find and bring out an imaginary story that could create together with the community a strong identity to this new part of the city. The project principle was to make people feel the area of Berlijnplein like an unknown land to discover. Pioneers, become “urbanauts”, contemporary adventurers that sail in the large public space, re-defining urban circulation under a different perspective and meaning, so that urban mobility is intended as a recreational form of experience.

The boat has been for our civilization, from prehistoric time until the present, a great instrument for development, in a material and immaterial sense. It has been the central tool of our economy and simultaneously, as described by philosopher Michael Foucault, “the greatest reserve of the imagination” [M. Foucault, *Of Outer Spaces*, 1967]. In fact the ship has been the main vehicle for exploration of unknown and far lands, a useful mode of transportation and thanks also to many authors and painters, it represents in the mass culture the ideal space for adventure.

During the centuries we’ve recorded a large variety of boats, normally used for water mobility. The research brought us to an ancient vehicle, a traditional sailboat’s spin-off, with an original and imaginative appearance: the land sail or sail wagon. The sight of this wind-powered device, created in China around 610 AD, stimulated people’s surprise and wonder. Usually used as a mode of transportation, under Prince Maurice d’Orange it became a recreational device to entertain guests, making it more similar to a carnivalesque cart or a fantastic scenography.

During our residency in Utrecht in October 2017 we built two boats prototypes, that represent fragments of this dreamlike dimension and are “errand interaction devices” that inhabit Berlijnplein and stimulate unexpected conviviality, promoting collective amusement. “Bora” is a wheeled boat made out of various materials like iron, timber, mesh, aluminium tubes, ropes and steel cables. It’s a mobile device whose uses are to play with urban discovery and interact with public space. The boat final design is the result of the customization of a family bike provided by local collective HUT.

“Sciampagna” is a sailing boat table made of timber with a 2,40 m high aluminium mast, designed to promote meeting and conviviality. It’s placed at the ground floor of the “urbanauts’ headquarter” being at the same time an original furniture and a playful setting. The mast stands with steel cables and ropes that connect it to the tabletop.

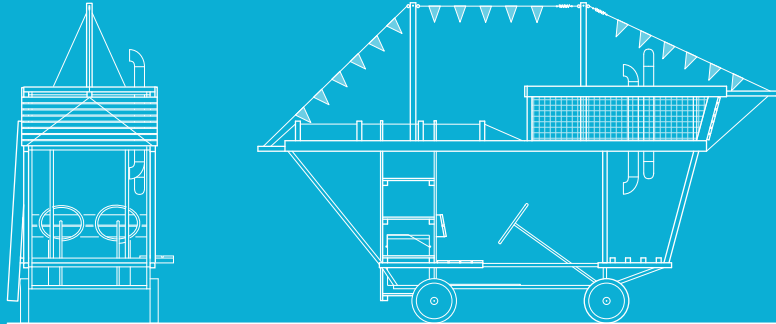
As a complement to the boats we built the “urbanauts’ headquarter”, a modular wooden fixed structure, a urban façade which suggest the existence of a parallel space, a playground dedicated to leisure and encounter. The ground floor is shaped to host the boats and it could work as a laboratory to build or repair it. On the elevated platforms and the small tower, it’s possible to observe the surrounding area from an unusual point of view. The tower works also as a landmark, thanks to the iron cage on top, which holds a red LED sign. The “urbanauts’ headquarter” works in units, urban parcels that can be expanded and personalized.







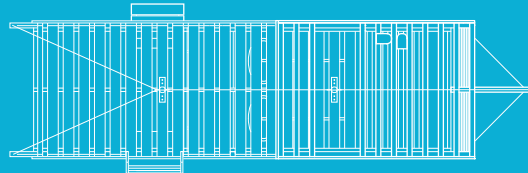
URBANAUTS' UNITS by orizzontale ----- "BORA" the cycling boat



PROFILE

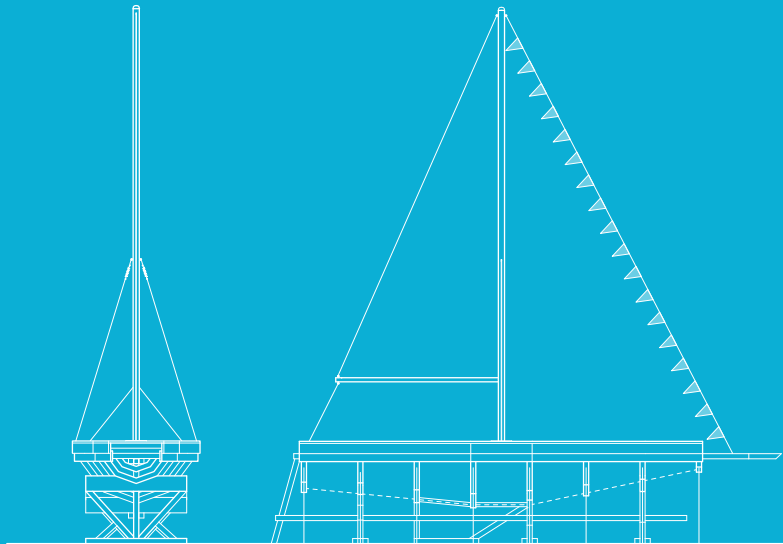
GENERAL DIMENSIONS

length overall	470 cm	185.04'
height	290 cm	114.17'
mast length	125 cm	49.21'
cargo box	75x45x45 cm	
equipment	flashlight, bbq	



PLAN

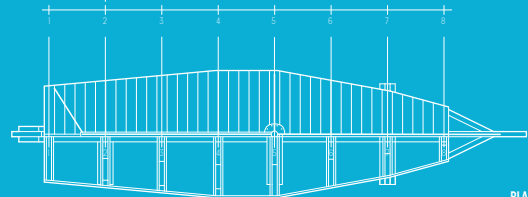
URBANAUTS' UNITS by orizzontale ----- "SCIAMPAGNA" the sailing table



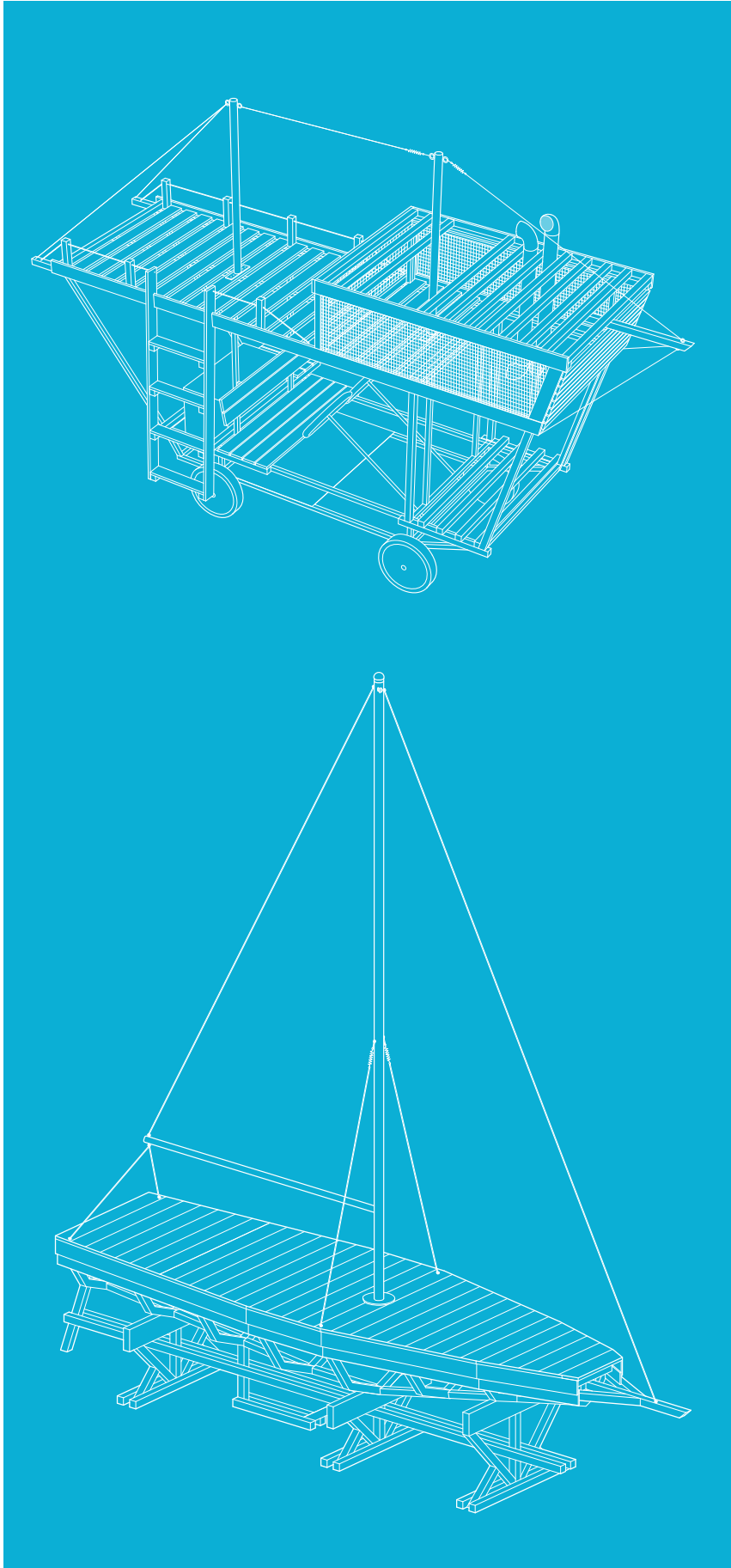
PROFILE

GENERAL DIMENSIONS

length overall	500 cm	196.85'
length of hull	435 cm	171.26'
height	700 cm	275.60'
beam length	120 cm	47.24'
mast length	475 cm	187.00'



PLAN





Perestrello 1.0 - Work-watching (2010-2011)
Perestrello 2.0 - (2011)
Perestrello 3.0 - Iceberg (2017-2018)
Perestrello 4.0 - L'Argo (2019-ongoing)

Status: built

Date: 2010 - ongoing

Location: Largo Bartolomeo Perestrello, Rome, Italy

Photo credit: orizzontale, NOEO, Luca Chiaudano, Nicola Barbuto

The site of the intervention is “Largo Bartolomeo Perestrello” (41°53'09.0”N 12°32'30.9”E), a free space of 1400 m² in the district Marranella, in the Roman suburb in Italy. This place has been neglected to the inhabitants for ten years, closed by mesh fences. In 2010 “Perestrello 1.0” started, with a large participation of the neighborhood, the fences opened and disposed to shape a big question mark. The objective of this phase was to stimulate a reaction, drawing attention to the theme of the lack of public spaces in the city. Right after this action, the area was again closed to start a construction site for a new open-air market. Thus in December 2010 during a neighborhood demonstration we realized a temporary installation called Work-watching, a device that worked as a meeting place and watching point for people to control the transformation of Perestrello site.







In 2011 the building site closed and the square was opened to the public. Together with the neighborhood committee we organized a celebration day: Perestrello 2.0.

At that time, Largo Bartolomeo Perestrello was in a state of decay, and defined as a “roof of a below grade parking garage, not a real square”. In fact the large empty area was awaiting for urban transformations, like the open-air market plan, that has never been completed. Furthermore, the place didn’t have an official toponymy and the maintenance agreement between the Municipality and the developer of the below parking garage was unclear, leading it to a situation of degradation and abandonment in terms of basic infrastructures and social refurbishments.

In 2017, within the fourth edition of “New Generations - Architects vs. the Rest of the World”, we decided with Itinerant Office and NOEO to continue the urban reactivation process, launching “Iceberg – Perestrello 3.0”. “Iceberg” is a metaphor and a reflection about the neighborhood’s invisible resources and the existing potential of the area. We explored the “abyss” of the local culture bringing together associations, citizens, students and professionals from architecture, design, art and psychology, to debate about the situation of the district. Two workshops were held, construction and urban exploration, aimed at creating a basic public infrastructure and conducting an investigation into the local culture of the Marranella neighborhood and the inhabitants’ perceptions of Perestrello square. The project brought to the creation of a local associations’ board to coordinate existing activities and to start a reflection on the management of the area, in synergy with the public administration.

The dialogue undertaken with the administration of the Municipality V conducted before, during and after the realization of ICEBERG, unfortunately didn’t reach the desired outcome.

In 2018 the ICEBERG “melted”, clashing with the limits of a regulatory and bureaucratic procedure, unable to work in the territory with an updated methodology and to respond to contemporary society’s needs. This led to an impasse.

Nevertheless, the analysis on the district underlined the great potential of this place. In fact this historical neighborhood is nowadays known for the wide range of ethnicities and cultures. Communities, citizens and local associations every day enrich Largo B. Perestrello with traces and stratified meanings, inhabiting it through various spontaneous uses.

In 2019 “Perestrello 4.0” intended to be the key to unlock the regulatory impasse, widening the research group and sharing reflections on urban tactics and new methodologies for public space revival: how can design, graphic art and psycho-sociology create a new urban storytelling and give a shared sense of ownership, despite cultural and social differences to encourage collaboration and reactivation of common spaces?



To Build the City on Temporary Success

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Abstract

Some urban spaces are more dynamic than others. While the city centre, suburban areas and consumption spaces are rapidly changing and re-shaping, other parts of our cities seem to be stuck in time, in a permanent standstill. Such areas include stagnant construction sites, green areas and public squares in old housing estates and many forgotten, marginal public spaces scattered across the city. Conventional planning tools might be too slow, too weak or too broad to revitalise such spaces. We propose a different, interventionist approach. Temporary interventions have the power to change the planning process, involve more people and require less time.

Keywords: urban intervention, urban regeneration, public space, temporary urbanism

To cite this article:

Velkavrh, Z., Korenjak, A., Otorepec, K., Cvetko, M. (2019). To Build the City on Temporary Success, *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(3), 41-60, DOI 10.32891/jps.v4i3.1220

This article has been double blind peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



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Forgotten Public Space / Forgotten People

In the past 15 years prostoRož has worked on more than 70 projects: exhibitions, actions, events, interventions, workshops and long-term revitalizations in Slovenia and abroad. We approach our projects differently: some start based on our own observations, some with the invitation of local civic sector, some are initiated by the city government and other decision makers. While our work has always been informed by international currents in urban design and participatory planning, it has also been focused on specific spatial, political and administrative issues in our locality. For example, our first project, revitalisations in the historic city centre of Ljubljana, made sense to us in 2004, and makes none today due to rapid touristification. Today, regeneration of public space in estates built during socialism is one of our prime concerns. Renewal in these neighbourhoods is hindered by a range of obstacles in the fields of finance, ownership, urban planning, maintenance, legislation, social values and communication.

Urbanism Camouflaged as Art

prostoRož believes that public space must be accessible to all social groups, and we strive to understand the multitude of ways in which public space can be used. We want to contribute to the co-creation of quality public spaces that support the individuals who work in them. Such spaces are flexible and democratic, allowing for change and spontaneity. Early on, we discovered that we can overcome many legal restrictions and bureaucratic hurdles by branding our activity as “art”. The main aim of our interventions has been clear from the very beginning: to regenerate open public space as common space, to preserve the existing qualities and to convince people to spend more time outdoors. Often our interventions feature loud colours and bold designs. Following the famous quote of American sociologist William H. Whyte – “What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people” - we design interventions to attract people. However, each intervention has a rather dull counterpart: a plan, a list of maintenance improvements, meeting minutes and other tools commonly found in the ‘bureaucratic toolkit’. Often, a lot of work is done to achieve important long-term changes that seem almost invisible in comparison with bold temporary interventions.

New Experience of Space and Communication

Tactical interventions have been deservedly criticised in the context of the gentrifying Western neoliberal cities. However, temporary interventions still prove effective for spaces in a need of re-boot. In 1:1 scale, stakeholders are able to experience one of the possible futures for open public space. In return, they are less likely to surrender the space to decay, uncontrolled development or, as has too often been the case, to coincidence. Our work shows that public space can be improved by a light intervention regardless of fragmented ownership, dispersed responsibility and the lack of funding for renewal. Users of a busy street can test how a shift to pedestrian traffic will change their everyday routines. Last but not least, temporary interventions enable urban planners and citizens to experience new forms of participation and collaboration. Quick, low budget and temporary interventions in public space can act as a catalyst for long-term regeneration until financial and regulatory requirements for renewal are met.

The Interplay between Temporary and Permanent

"Urban art" as practiced by prostoRož does not address just the city dwellers, but also decision-makers. Temporary interventions without a long-term plan are mere empty gestures. However, as a first step in a long-term renewal process, they have the power to establish a link between residents, planners and local decision-makers, easing the way for permanent improvement. Moreover, they can restore the common communicative and physical space. The multitude of actors involved in a tactical intervention repositions open public space as common space and opens new scenarios for permanent renewal and a well-informed long-term collaboration. Experience from prostoRož's projects show that the success of a tactical intervention depends on several factors. Among the most important ones are the size of the area and an open attitude towards public participation. Practitioners should engage in open discussion about the present and future of public space, meet with local residents and stakeholders, learn about their wishes and present them the goals of their project. What is often forgotten are the limitations of temporary urbanism. Spatial and social problems need to be simple (or simplified) enough to be addressed with a temporary intervention. The dedication to improve the quality of urban life in the long-term is even more important. As much as temporary interventions can provide a foundation for creating a just, fun and accessible city, their success can only truly resonate if there is a clear vision for the city's future.



prostoRož

The mission of prostoRož cultural association is to improve public urban space. We explore public spaces in cities and their meaning for local residents and the society at large. We pay attention to overlooked public spaces and organize, rearrange and revitalize them according to the needs of residents and visitors. prostoRož was spontaneously formed in 2004 in Slovenia by three architects who wanted to improve the public space in their own city. Today it consists of architects, urbanists, sociologists, lawyers and other technical co-workers and focuses. We are the first organization in Slovenia to receive the public service status in the field of space, based on our work.

<http://prostoroz.org/>



Map of wishes

(2011)

Photo credit: Urška Bojkovac

We placed a 150 sqm large carpet in front of Slovene Ethnographic Museum – a map representing the Tabor quarter in Ljubljana. Individual colours on the carpet represented current usage of ground floor. Residents of the quarter as well as the visitors were invited to the carpet. They were able to state their wishes or make suggestions for the neighbourhood. At the end of the fifth day, there were around 200 wishes on the carpet. The mayor of Ljubljana went over the suggestions and announced what city council of Ljubljana will implement by the end of the year. As promised, Tabor quarter got two new playgrounds. The project was carried out as a part of long-term revitalization programme of Tabor Park in cooperation with Bunker association.





Čufarjeva street

(2013)

Photo credit: Dijana Vukojević

Due to the proximity of schools near Čufarjeva Street, almost two thousand children and teens walk through it every day. That is why it was important for Čufarjeva to become a safe and friendly street for pedestrians and bikers. With small interventions and through a change of traffic regime, we limited car traffic and enabled children and adults to walk, play and rest on the street care-free. The street's "furniture" was designed in collaboration with schoolchildren and high-school teens. The youngest ones helped us design interactive playground equipment through a series of workshops. Čufarjeva Street project is an important contribution to reducing car traffic in the proximity of schools and kindergartens. It also encourages parents to take their children to school by bike or on foot.









Optimists

(2013)

Photo credit: Matjaž Tančič

After ten years of stagnation, the owner of the Museum square in Ljubljana decided to renovate the abandoned fountain that is in the middle of the square and permanently fill it with water. As part of the U3, Triennial of Contemporary Art in Slovenia, we were invited to think of an installation for the fountain that would attract the local residents and others to socialize at the square. We placed four sailboats in the fountain. Passers-by had the opportunity to climb on the boats and enjoy the water. Parents and children alike enjoyed the fountain, and it quickly became an urban corner for adventure and socializing. The installation also contributed to the environmental improvement of the otherwise concrete museum platform that radiated with heat in the summer.





Savsko Naselje Neighbourhood

(2013-2016)

Photo credit: Matjaž Tančič

Savsko naselje is one of the first neighbourhoods constructed in Ljubljana after WW2. In the past few decades, it regressed in social, spatial and economic sense. We started an Integrated Urban Regeneration project in Savsko naselje, initiated by the Department of Urban Planning of Municipality of Ljubljana. It was based on the inclusion of local residents and linking together of different organizations. Through organized and spontaneous community meetings we formed a programme for regeneration on several levels: social and cultural activities, sports, informal socialising, bottom-up spatial planning and a traffic plan for the neighbourhood. In two years' time, several experts, municipal institutions and NGOs have joined the process.









Meeting Places Skopje

(2014)

Photo credit: prostoRož

Public playgrounds were a response to an overall lack of public space initiatives in Skopje. They were based on personal interpretations of public spaces by nine students from five countries. The students focused on public spaces around the local youth cultural center. Through open access of public spaces to various social groups, the students tried to understand the variety of uses of public spaces. A series of ideas for interventions was created from already existing unused urban elements. They were incorporated in a way not to disturb the flow of activities detected on the location, but to improve their use and quality. Immediate reactions of the by passers proved that small and smart interventions can easily test and point at possible scenarios for alternative use of public space.









Changing Faces Competition. Mobilizing Citizens to Reclaim Public Spaces in Nairobi

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Abstract

Statistics show that urban green public spaces deteriorate globally. In African cities, where the urbanization rates are the highest in the world, public spaces quickly disappear under layers of garbage or are grabbed. For public authorities having to deal with other pressing socio-economic challenges in the context of outdated regulations, insufficient capacity and resources and wide-spread corruption, public spaces are not a priority. However, the research worldwide has demonstrated the potential of public spaces to become the key catalyst of socio-economic growth given their environmental, economic and social benefits that are however largely ignored by public authorities and the general public in African cities. This article suggests a citizen-driven public space upgrading movement can address these challenges and presents a gamification approach for citizen mobilization and raising awareness: The Changing Faces Competition that has been piloted by Nairobi-based organizations Dandora Transformation League and Public Space Network.

Keywords: public spaces, African cities, placemaking, community ownership, gamification

To cite this article:

Tehlova, A. (2019). Changing Faces Competition. Mobilizing Citizens to Reclaim Public Spaces in Nairobi, *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(3), 61-86, DOI 10.32891/jps.v4i3.1221

This article has been double blind peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



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Introduction

Formerly known as ‘the Green City in the Sun’, Nairobi used to be praised for its green parks, forests and even a national park within the city limits. However, the aerial map of Nairobi (Figure 1) reveals significant disparities in the green coverage between the eastern and western parts of the city. An overall divergence in quality of life within the city is reflected by the segregated urban pattern, inequalities in population density, and access to green areas. Despite having few large green parks (such as Uhuru Park, Arboretum or Karura forest) most of Nairobi public spaces and especially small-scale open spaces in residential areas tend to be completely neglected, covered by the dumped garbage or disappearing under the common threat of land-grabbing.



Figure 1. Aerial map of Nairobi (from Google).

The deterioration of public and green open spaces¹ is not limited to Nairobi - statistics have revealed the loss of urban green spaces around the world. African cities are however leading in terms of the rate of deterioration of green spaces. The causes range from the fast urbanization rate, insufficient or outdated regulations, bureaucracy, corruption, lack of skills, financial constraints, to poverty and lack of awareness about the benefits of quality public spaces (Mensah, 2014). As a result of these challenges, maintenance and upgrading of urban public spaces is not a priority for African governments and the spaces continue to degrade under the pressure of the increasing number of urban dwellers.

Research has shown the importance of quality public spaces for quality of urban life, given their environmental, social, and economic benefits. It is even believed that public space has the “potential to become a key generator of socio-economic growth” (UCLG, 2015). As such, there is a need to raise awareness about these benefits among African governments and the general public to make the upgrading and maintenance of public

¹ We refer predominantly to public open spaces that may be both green and grey spaces in this article.

spaces in African cities a priority. Larger recreational parks and small-scale public open spaces both have an impact on quality of life of their users. This article will analyse and take a deeper look specifically at small scale open spaces in Nairobi, including courtyards, footpaths and streets across the city that urban dwellers use daily and have a more direct impact on daily life.

Noting the urgency to upgrade and improve public spaces across Nairobi, and the limited resources the Nairobi City County Government has to invest in these projects, Public Space Network (PSN) has focused on mobilizing communities, who are the users of these spaces, to take responsibility and accountability to transform, maintain, and preserve these spaces and to elicit quicker action, results, and a sense of ownership among the population.

Nascent Efforts by Community Groups to Improve Their Neighbourhoods

In African cities, “urban social movements are emerging” (Cain & Midi, 2017) to claim their right to the city and access essential urban services and liveable environments. As David Harvey argues, the right to the city is “a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends on the exercise of a collective power to reshape the process of urbanization” (Carson, 2018). Community members coming together to reshape public spaces for community use is the key movement to claim the right to the city (Carson, 2018). Over the last decade, we have observed nascent efforts by community groups to improve their neighbourhoods in response to the lack of governmental capacity and limited resources to upgrade and maintain public spaces in Nairobi.

In many cases the groups, whose members are often unemployed youths, focus on correcting the non-existent or insufficient waste management systems. Usually they ensure a regular waste collection from residents, which offer an income generation while maintaining a space clean. Furthermore, some groups have started to organize regular clean-ups to remove waste dumped in these spaces or install creative dustbins on the streets to prevent littering.

Other groups have been beautifying their neighbourhoods through art. Graffiti and street art are the most common ways to bring colour to the neighbourhoods, while conveying messages about social issues, empowerment, and education. The Hoperaisers Youth Group, from the informal neighbourhood of Korogocho, exemplifies this as they have run a successful project “Talking Walls” which the entire community participated in to beautify the streets.

Other communities have reclaimed their public spaces through sports. In the Mathare informal settlement, Mathare Environmental Conservation Youth Group (MECYG) transformed a neglected open space into a soccer field and began organizing soccer tournaments to engage and unite children and communities around sports. Similar activities are being undertaken by the youth group Reformers in the low-income neighbourhood Kayole, as well as in Korogocho by the Hoperaisers, who teach children roller-skating and organize skating competitions on the closed streets.

Similar to sports events, some other community-based organizations and youth groups are bringing communities together and reclaiming their public spaces through events,

shows, and entertainment. This is exemplified by the Umoja Talanta group, which reclaims public spaces to strengthen social cohesion through dance and music. The Dandora Transformation League (DTL), from the low-income neighbourhood of Dandora where petty theft and crime has been high under the context of high youth unemployment, has been mobilizing youths to take responsibility to transform previously neglected open spaces into clean, green, and safe community places through placemaking methods, often using low cost, locally available materials. Unfortunately, while we could map these diverse and inspiring citizen-driven initiatives to reclaim abandoned and abused public spaces across Nairobi, they still remained isolated and localized with one group often unaware of the existence of another group nearby. The potential for a large-scale impact has thus been hindered by the lack of framework to connect the initiatives with each other and the lack of collaboration amongst groups, communities, and stakeholders.

Building the Placemaking Movement Through a Gamification Approach

Innovation thrives and grows in environments that encourage collaboration (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003). PSN remains convinced that each initiative could have a stronger impact and elicit greater change if the groups can see what they are each doing and share ideas. Many of the activities are complementary and groups can enrich their activities by learning from one another's successes and failures.

In addition to creating an environment for collaboration and showcasing existing efforts, PSN sought to create an environment that would incentivize community groups to take care, ownership, and accountability for their public spaces, and to eventually create a movement of citizens shaping their public spaces according to their needs.

Therefore, we applied a gamification approach to bring the existing and aspiring placemaking groups across Nairobi together around the common cause of public space upgrading via the Changing Faces Competition (CFC). The CFC drives and empowers youths to change the face of their neighbourhoods and transform their mindset to one of responsible, accountable community members who take ownership for the cities, streets, and spaces in which they live.

Any group that is formally registered with the government (self-help groups, community-based organizations, residents associations, etc.) can register for CFC and identify a neglected public open space in their neighbourhood they wish to transform into a clean, useable community space. They crowdsource the resources for the transformation to create a new, public, shareable space - such as a playground or park - using locally available and donated materials and equipment and creative placemaking methods. The best teams are selected by the jury of urban experts and announced at an awards ceremony, where winning teams receive a monetary award.

The competition was successfully piloted by the Dandora Transformation League (DTL), a founding member organization of our network, in Dandora neighbourhood for 3 competitions since 2014. DTL has managed to mobilize over 3,000 youths that transformed 120 public spaces in the neighbourhood. After the success of the concept in Dandora, people from other parts of Nairobi started to express interest in bringing the competition to their neighbourhoods. Public Space Network (PSN) leveraged our networks with diverse expertise and experience, and existing members operating in different parts of the city, to scale the competition in 2018 to the city scale.

The recruitment strategy, relying predominantly on our community champions spreading the word in their communities, led to the participation of 114 community groups from mostly lower-income neighbourhoods and informal settlements across Nairobi in the competition. These groups transformed public spaces, with over 60 sites being selected for visits by the jury and urban experts who selected 10 finalists who were honoured and received awards at the ceremony.

In this competition teams need to innovate and be creative to get among the top ten. While the common base element for most of the teams was a thorough clean-up of the site, additional elements for transformations were very diverse: from teams using art to bring colour in their neighbourhood, educating their community about maintenance of public spaces, and conveying messages about social issues. Others created sports fields and introduced programmes to engage street children around sport activities and used recycled waste material to create playground equipment and benches for community parks.

The winning team cleaned the polluted Nairobi River which runs through the Korogocho informal settlement, cleaned the dumpsite that was on the bank, and planted grass and trees to create a clean and green oasis for the community to enjoy. Given the diversity of interventions, the teams have been encouraged to visit each other's sites and continue to enrich each other, learn, and grow by sharing experiences.

Another key element of the interventions is sustainability. The teams are invited to explore the productive function of the space and to identify income-generating activities related to the maintenance or community use of the space to cover the maintenance costs in the long-term. In residential areas, tenants and landlords of plots surrounding the space tend to agree to contribute to regular monthly contributions for maintenance, security and waste collection ensured by the youth group. Some groups created multifunctional sites that can serve as playgrounds during the day and a commercial parking at night. With a new clean, artistic and/or green face, other sites now attract musicians to shoot their video clips, couples to take their wedding photoshoots, organizers of art or community events to host their functions. All these activities have the potential to provide income to the group in charge of the maintenance of the space, ensuring that they keep transforming the space after the competition. This excludes additional benefits such as safer communities, better property values, and other social and economic benefits.

Beyond the "fun" aspect of a competition and the transformation of a large number of spaces at a low cost, there is another important benefit: raising awareness. It raises awareness among the users of the spaces about the value and benefits of quality and clean public spaces, individual accountability and responsibility in managing the spaces, and maintaining the spaces for the future. For many living in lower-income neighbourhoods, the deteriorated spaces had become the norm and communities were unaware or ignored how they could easily have an active role in changing this status quo. Our community champions and recruiting teams helped show aspiring change makers the way to improve their neighbourhoods and spaces, and how communities using the selected spaces could experience and appreciate having access to a quality clean and green community space where they can safely interact with their neighbours, exercise, rest, or let their children play. The competition educates the general public

about how and why to keep their spaces clean, and that they should have access to quality and safe public spaces in their area.

Secondly, the competition results in engaging public authorities and raising their awareness about the importance of public spaces. The community champions first have to seek a moral endorsement of local authorities for the grassroots interventions. Subsequently, the authorities tend to start feeling a bottom-up pressure to support the interventions more actively as the community takes over the part of the government's mandate, demands support and unites around the initiatives.

Building Partnerships for Sustainability

PSN first focused on building a grassroots movement to reclaim public spaces, with citizens taking ownership of public spaces being the drivers of sustainability. However, citizens alone would have a hard time growing and maintaining the movement and impact if they were alone in their efforts. Building alliances with partners, from the public and private sector that support the grassroots movement with expertise, materials, equipment, financial and technical resources is key to scaling the potential impact and ensuring long-term sustainability.

The competition also serves as a platform to connect the community groups with key stakeholders. During the first Nairobi-wide competition, interested experts (architects, urban planners, urban designers) volunteered their time to advise teams on inclusive designs using the available materials. Private businesses donated materials for transformations as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts and local public authorities started to support the initiatives by facilitating the approval process and providing material and tools.

The competition facilitates collaboration and synergy, bringing together stakeholders and partners and raising awareness and increasing visibility of participating partners. This increases the sustainability of the initiatives far beyond the competition and its framework, allowing it to empower and impact other areas and unite communities around placemaking movements.

Our approach refers to Ostrom (1998, 2005) theories of self-organized systems for robust common-property institutions and polycentric systems. While a community-driven management of urban commons that public space represents enhances sustainability due to the creation of a sense of ownership by the community, the cooperation with other like-minded organizations, public authorities, private sector and academia can maximize the impact of locally based initiatives through knowledge and resource sharing.

Conclusion

Building a citizen-led movement to reclaim public spaces in fast-growing, resource-limited cities like Nairobi is needed to ensure all urban dwellers have access to quality public spaces near their homes. Public authorities facing numerous challenges, such as issues related to fast urbanization, limited financial resources, lack of knowledge, bureaucracy, and outdated regulation or corruption do not have the capacity to ensure a sustainable management of small-scale public spaces across the city. However, these are the spaces used most often by urban residents on a daily basis for a wide range of

activities. The users of the spaces are the best drivers of the transformation movement, knowing the challenges, importance of quality spaces, and impact on their daily lives. The of the biggest obstacles we identified to building such a movement is the lack of awareness about the benefits of quality of public spaces and the role citizens can play in their management. Applying a gamification approach to public space upgrading raises awareness among the general public, mobilizes a large number of community groups to join the placemaking movement, and advocates for placing public space upgrading among urban priorities.

However, to ensure the highest large-scale and long-term impact, the grassroots movement cannot remain isolated and needs to build partnerships with public and private sector stakeholders to leverage their resources. From our experience in Nairobi, other stakeholders express interest in joining the movement once they see the results of these community-driven interventions. Our goal is that the competition acts as a catalyst for creating a framework for the cooperation of diverse stakeholders to challenge the fragmented urban pattern of cities like Nairobi, and to co-create inclusive equitable cities through multifunctional vibrant public spaces distributed throughout and improving the quality of life of each citizen.

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Public Space Network

Public Space Network (PSN) is a Nairobi-based non-profit association that brings together a diversity of stakeholders involved in public space management in Nairobi, driven by the vision to improve the quality of life for all Nairobians and make Nairobi a world-class city, by creating clean, safe, healthy, inclusive, vibrant and connected public spaces. PSN provides an enabling environment for community-driven public space regeneration projects to reach scale. The network connects the community groups with the key actors and ensures a sustainable city-wide public space management through a Public-Private-People Partnership model. The flagship project of the organization is the international award-winning mobilization tool Changing Faces Competition.

<https://www.publicspacenetwork.org/>

Changing Faces Competition

Changing Faces Competition (CFC) is the PSN flagship project. It is a fun mobilization tool to engage community groups to take responsibility for transforming and maintaining public open spaces in their area. CFC is a platform that empowers citizens to become the lead actors in public space management and creates a grassroots movement of citizens transforming their public spaces. It is also a platform to raise awareness and advocate for policy placing a sustainable public space management among urban priorities. The competition was piloted for three editions at the neighbourhood scale in Dandora low-income neighbourhood and was scaled to Nairobi city scale in 2018. Over 200 community groups got involved since its inception, transforming the same number of spaces. The concept received two international awards for its potential to engage many citizens and transform a large number of spaces at a low-cost: Dubai International Award for Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment and Le Monde Smart Cities Award in category Global Citizen Engagement.





Under the Changing Faces Competition, the community groups design and implement their own projects. Public Space Network is the facilitator mobilizing the groups, connecting them with other stakeholders such as public authorities, private sponsors and urban experts, and developing their skills to transform a space. PSN recruits community champions who are community leaders and know their communities and local authorities. The community champions are trained in placemaking and community engagement skills and are in charge of recruiting teams, guiding them in regard to their site transformation and engaging local authorities to receive their endorsement and support. During the Nairobi edition 2018/19, 10 out of 114 participating teams were nominated for awards by a panel of judges. Below are details about some of the most outstanding projects.

Komb Green

The winning team of the first Nairobi-wide edition of the Changing Faces Competition in 2018/19 comes from the informal settlement of Korogocho. Komb Green focused on one of the biggest and most challenging public space issues in Nairobi: the polluted Nairobi River and its banks.

Komb Green is a youth group composed of 70 members, equally balanced between men and women. In the context of high youth unemployment, many of the members used to be involved in petty crime - thefts, mugging or sex work. Many of their close friends lost life in clashes with police and some started to realize they need to reform themselves and start doing some meaningful activities for a better life.

In 2017, they decided to start restoring a section of the riverbank by the Nairobi River passing through their informal settlement that used to serve as a dumpsite. They removed the garbage covering the land, planted grass and trees. To prevent flooding, they strengthened the bank by building walls from stones collected in the river to separate the bank from the river. To make the space more pedestrian friendly, they created a paved footpath through the park connecting to the stairs that they also built, that lead to the





adjacent bridge. The park is the only green and clean space in the neighbourhood that the community can freely enjoy.

Further to the green park, the group cleaned the adjacent space with a vision to transform it into a playground for children. Through a partnership with a foreign foundation, they received playground equipment that bring attention of hundreds of children from the whole area.

More importantly, the group has adopted a long-term agenda to clean the river. They started by removing the solid waste from their section of the river and stones making the solid waste to pile up. After bringing attention of stakeholders from other parts of Nairobi to their intervention, they started to participate in stakeholders' forum to establish a more holistic strategy to clean urban rivers and share their experience with other community groups operating around the Nairobi River.

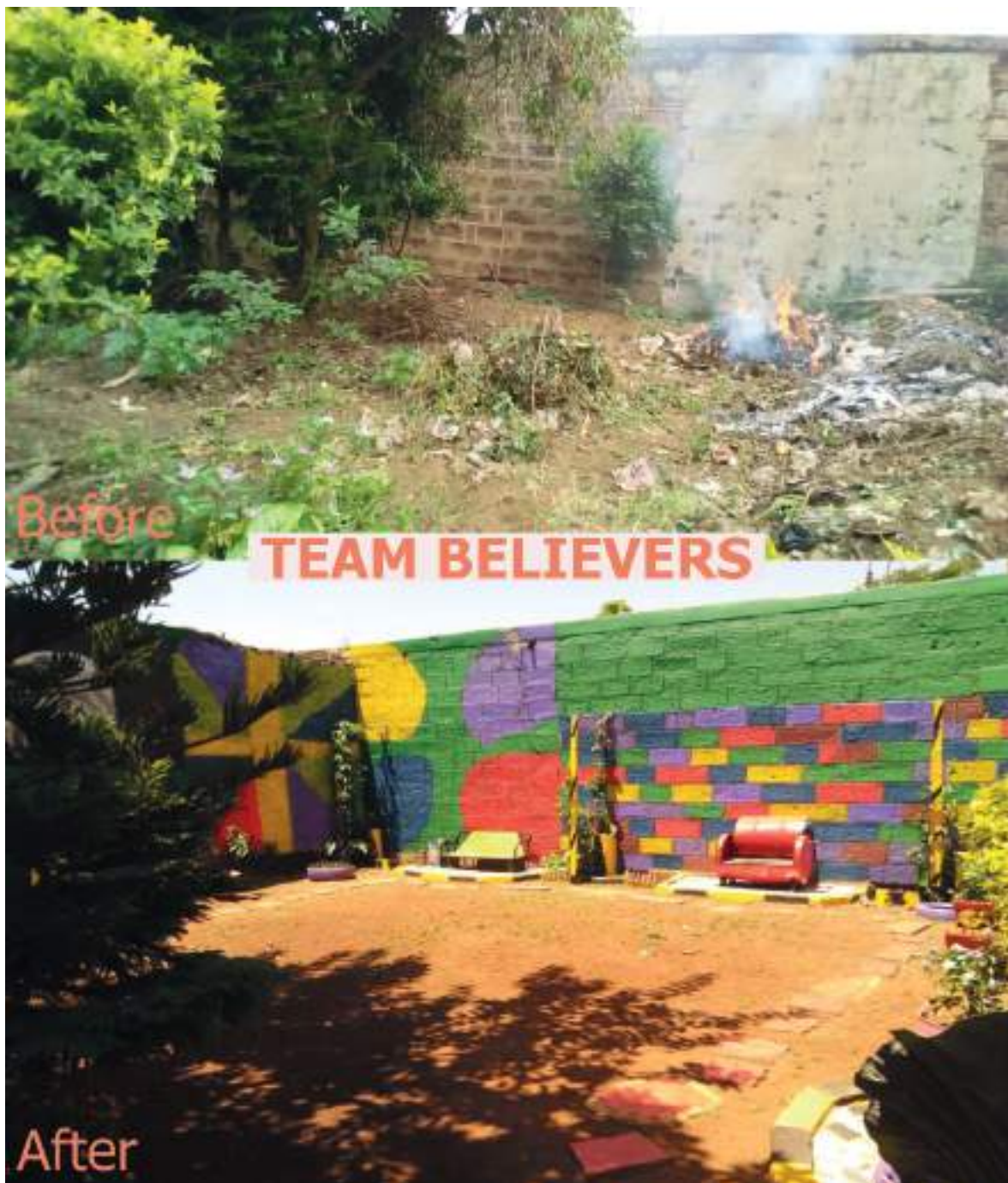




Believers

Believers received the Best Child-friendly Space Award in the Nairobi-wide Changing Faces Competition 2018/19 and are one of the youth groups operating under the umbrella of Dandora Transformation League, PSN founding member organization, in the low-income neighbourhood of Dandora. The group is composed of 13 active members. Their space is referred to as a courtyard and is surrounded by residential plots. Residents used to dump waste on the open space and part of the space was covered by overgrown bushes.

The open space is fragmented by the plots into several sections, each having a different function. All sections are connected by a footpath that has been levelled and clean-up, with the adjacent drainage being reopened for the water to flow away.





One section serves as a park to rest. A tall fruit tree provides shade and well-maintained grass and planted flowers add more greenery to the space. The group has leverage on reusing of the waste material, such as old tyres, iron drums, pieces of drainage, but also old gum boots, toilets or old computers, to build seats, benches and flowerpots.

To bring more colour to the space, the group painted the walls surrounding the space. Believers thought about every little detail to make the park a real paradise for the community: small notes with inspirational quotes hang on trees and flower pots across the garden and animals have made the garden their home too: an aquarium with fish is situated in the shade under the tree, a tortoise sleeps in the corner, a cat lies on the sun. A small structure in the corner of the garden is an upcoming library.

Another section of the Believers courtyard offers playground equipment such as a seesaw and a swing, built locally by the group. Las section was levelled to provide a flat surface. During the day, children play ball games on the site and at night it serves as a commercial parking.

After initiating the transformation of the site as volunteers, the residents living around the site agreed to contribute KES 100 (USD 1) per month per household in exchange for a regular clean-up of the space, security and waste collection.





Before

TEAM MUSTARD SEEDS



After

Mustard Seed

Mustard Seed is the first pilot space that was transformed in Dandora by the founder and CEO of the Dandora Transformation League, Charles Gachanga. In 2014, Charles did not want to passively observe his dirty neighbourhood and children playing with the waste dumped outdoors and decided to start transforming the first space. He organized a community meeting and invited the members to join him in the clean-up exercise. At first, only two his friends joined him and started the hard work of removing the garbage, levelling the ground and digging to open up the drainages that had disappeared over time under layers of debris.

Same as Believers courtyard, Mustard Seed also has more sections. One serves as a garden, another as a playground and are connected by a restored footpath. The playground offers swings and a slide created from locally available materials such as tyres and iron poles. The garden offers a lot of shade thanks to trees, flowers and shrubs. The group introduces benches made from tyres, wood planks and pieces of old unused drainage and recently opened a public toilet next to the space.





Mustard Seed was at the beginnings of the Changing Faces Competition. After the great transformation, Changing Faces Competition was suggested as a fun mobilization tool to inspire more youth groups in Dandora to replicate the same type of intervention on other places in the area. Over the last five years, Mustard Seed has inspired over two hundred groups working on the same number of sites to replicate the community-driven model. Mustard Seed keeps changing and innovating. In addition to the regular maintenance, the group keeps adding new elements to the site: new painting, benches, stage for events etc.





Turkana Lane Wall

In addition to the Changing Faces Competition, Public Space Network has organized Placemaking Days, during which it brought together Nairobians from different parts of the city to volunteer to transform a selected site.

Turkana Lane is a vibrant pedestrian lane in Nairobi downtown, connecting a bustling Nairobi Bus Station with a busy road. It mostly serves as a transit space and street vendors sell fruits, vegetables and other items to passers-by.

The lane used to be a fairly clean but being enclosed between two buildings, it was very grey. The major goal of the project was thus to beautify the space by painting the wall on one side of the lane.

Public Space Network selected two paint colours that were suggested by the owner of the building that serves as a medical centre. The painting was supervised by one professional artist who gave simple guidelines to the participants who came from different backgrounds and neighbourhoods of Nairobi. Through the collective creativeness, the participants created a beautiful abstract pattern that has brought light to the lane.

The street vendors operating on the lane welcomed the intervention as it has provided a more enjoyable working environment as well as offered a potential to attract more clients.









Activating the Publicscape. The case of Urban Gorillas

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Urban Gorillas

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Abstract

Urban Gorillas, a Cyprus based NGO, emerged at the aftermath of the 2013 socio-economic crisis where the notion of publicness was deeply shaken. A cross-examination of the public sphere has led the team to coin the term publicscape and identify working methodologies within this context. Urban Gorillas took on the role of a catalyst between underused public spaces and the society's uneasy relationship with the notion of publicness. The work, spontaneous in nature, temporarily transforms spaces while creating permanent human networks. The recurring temporariness that characterises the actions revokes activism in the social structure, revitalising physical spaces and inspiring an urban culture of participation.

Keywords: publicscape, public space, co-creation, urban activism, Cyprus

To cite this article:

Antoniou, V., Carraz, R., Hadjichristou, Y., Tourvas, T. (2019). Activating the Publicscape. The case of Urban Gorillas, *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(3), 87-116, DOI 10.32891/jps.v4i3.1223

This article has been double blind peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



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Introduction

On the morning of 25 March 2013, anyone waking up in Cyprus had the opportunity to witness the results of the European Union's experiment on the island's bank depositors. On that day, savings on the two main Cypriot private banks were confiscated, a total of 10 billion euros, as an attempt to save the banking system. With the wake of the 2013 economic crisis and under the threat of a financial catastrophe, surprisingly and in contrast to other European countries, very few people manifested. Public protests were minimal, ascertaining the crashing realisation that the fundamental culture of a public sphere was missing.

The essential development of a social critique, the production and circulation of discourses, which are primordial aspects of public space, were missing. This incident was the cradle for the creation of Urban Gorillas (UG). It emerged as a reaction to the lack of publicness, at a time when democratic governance was under question and when civil society was in tatters. Given that in the Aristotelian perspective the city is the manifestation of the ethics and lives of citizens, a place where democracy emerges and as public spaces could be recalled as the "window into a city's soul" (Zukin, 1996, p. 260): how could we act to enforce this purpose of the city?

The circumstances in 2013, urged a multidisciplinary team of urban enthusiasts that later formed UG, to call for a new understanding of public culture and public life. A great inspiration to this endeavour were city ideals as those initiated in the 30's in the US such as Robert Park's proclamation: "if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live [...] in making the city, man has remade himself." (Park, 1967, p. 3), and the aspiration of the healthy urban society conceptualised by Lefebvre (1994) and interpreted by Purcell (2013, p. 318):

In urban society, urban space is not ruled by property rights and exchange value but by inhabitants who appropriate space, make it their own, and use it to meet their needs. Urban society draws inhabitants into the center, into vital urban spaces where they encounter each other and engage in collective and meaningful negotiations about what kind of city they desire.

Public spaces in Cyprus

UG emerged within this turbulent context and understanding, in a desire to find, to create, to connect, to catalyze and to redefine the role of the public in this context of a likely defective public space. Generally speaking, we observe a general uneasiness of Cypriots when using public spaces, but this comes as no surprise. Historically, or more specifically in the last 450 years, the notion of public space, both in its physical and social form has been conceivably impaired. It is possible that the Ottoman empire (1571-1878) did not allow spheres of public activities due to the need to control the uprise of the island's communities and the succeeding British colonisation (1878-1960) did not intend to improve this urban parameter despite the modernisation that it brought to the island. Following this period, urban development was based on the worldwide trend of the modern movement, of which the outcomes are well known: cities designed for cars and the emergence of privatisation of public spaces, led to the aspect of social interactions in urban spaces was largely discarded (e.g. Jacobs, 1961). After the declaration of independence in 1960, the young government of Cyprus was busy with

the internal conflicts between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. The 1974 coup d'état, the Turkish invasion and the division of the island, further led to the failure of public administration and citizens to deal with the vital issue of the lack of public space.

Globally, the provision and management of urban public space have become increasingly privatised (Németh, 2009; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993), hybrid spaces have emerged (Nissen, 2008) and we have become accustomed to a dearth of public space supply and usage within our communities and public culture. In recent years, Cyprus is no exception to the trend. The notion that public spaces in Cyprus are often underused and underutilised is a widely recognised problem among local citizens. A large-scale survey by UG, focusing on public spaces in Cyprus based on a random sample of 1,000 representative urban Cypriots revealed that 61,4% of respondents had a “neutral” or “negative” view of their public spaces. Participants in focus groups related to the survey stated that lack of safety, cleanliness, and activities were reasons leading to their negative or neutral perceptions of urban public spaces (Carraz et al., 2018). Conversely, participants were attracted to visit semi-private public spaces such as malls and outdoor cafe seating areas that have been on the rise (Carraz and Antoniou, 2015).

Public space seeks users

For UG, public space is also a literal space: it is the need to create a physical space where social encounters and possibility of self-management is enabled. This has been a major challenge in UG's work as the intention was not limited to improve public spaces and advocate for democratic governance but also to activate citizens in this context. Therefore a major task, given the precarious relationship of people with public space, was to find users of public spaces, in other words, to find ways to engage the public into the discourse of the public sphere. This is a major concern in today's public space interventions, that is, the fundamental need to reconnect the public with spaces, with each other and to meet user needs. Improving the usage of our public spaces allows increased access to freedom to their users, as Carr et al. (1993, p. 43) stressed: “Public places afford casual encounters in the course of daily life that can bind people together and give their lives meaning and power”.

Yet, current research has noted that a well-designed public space does not necessarily guarantee success in achieving those needs, numerous cases showed it is essential to create stimuli to encourage the public to actively engage with their surroundings, and in turn cause social interactions and intensify usage (Gehl, 2010; Hou, 2010; Stevens, 2007; Schmidt and Németh, 2010). The generation of public spaces opportunities should be exciting, responsive and give meaning to the city spaces by the use of different design strategies, such as playful, inclusive, and bottom-up designs (Carr et al., 1993; Francis, 2003; Hambleton, 2014; Merry and Carraz, 2015). For instance, it has been suggested that the implementation of a design strategy with an “enjoyment factor” situated in the public realm will allow for a pleasurable experience (Hassenzahl et al., 2013), leading back to intensified spatial usage and socialisation.

One way that UG responds to adding this layer of “enjoyment factor” is through the organisation of events and festivals in public, semi-public or even private spaces. This seems to be even more necessary when the situation is further affected by the

conflicted nature of the sites. Issues surrounding the social, political and financial division and ensuing crisis currently affecting the island of Cyprus can momentarily be alleviated by these ephemeral festivities and events: gay and carnivalesque, human-centred and creative, these events revoke activism at its core, as just like a carnival, a festival is ultimately a momentary rejection of social hierarchies for the sake of pleasure.

Activating the publicscape

UG's relationship with the public realm has been ongoing, rendering actions that vary in scale, form, approach and impact. There is no one formula fits all, and each project is place-specific. Yet, the essence of every action remains fundamentally rooted in democratic values, through an exploration of diverse artistic forms that trigger the change of spatial and social perceptions. UG orchestrates actions from a bottom-up approach to transforming often ephemerally urban realms into public spaces. It negotiates between public and private, and often reverses these notions to transform spaces with limitless publicness into accessible urban hubs. This generates the raising of awareness for the public space and to script spontaneous, momentary urbanism and show alternative ways of creating sustainable cities.

UG projects follow the underlying idea of activation of the "Publicscape", a word we propose to coin here, a word that expresses not only the activation of public spaces but also of the people as an integral part of the process. Publicscape offers a wider view of the role of the public that extends from public space understood both as a metaphorical and spatial term to public relations and public governance. Adopting the term publicscape allows us an extensive perspective of the notion of public, so we can respond with solutions to physical settings that are primarily inclusive for all citizens, and create meaningful relationships within such spaces. Fixating our working methodologies on people who are often omitted in the design of public spaces (Mueller et al., 2018), is the antidote to current development trends guided by the need for high capital margins for the investors to the detriment of other stakeholders of the process (Low and Smith, 2013).

UG's desire is to inspire communities to produce and manage urban spaces themselves whether this takes place through urban design, planned events or informal urbanism. Within this framework, UG becomes the "middleground" between authorities and people and is the vision for a permanent remedy for the governance of healthy cities. Cohendet et al. (2010) put forward the idea of "middleground", as an essential element in the dynamics of a creative city. Their idea is that we should move away from the anatomy of the creative class (Florida, 2005) and focus instead on the anatomy of the creative city. The middleground consists of communities and collectives that are important in sustaining a creative milieu. It connects formal institutions (such as firms, universities, government bodies) to creative individuals outside any formal institution, as they function in entirely different modes and only rarely connect to each other. To activate the creative fabric of a city, the availability and quality of places, spaces and events, as well as networks of people are essential.

The lack of formal public spaces in the city as a result of the deficiency of a vision from the local administration has driven UG to seek unofficial ways of generating urban public environments. For instance, UG temporarily hijacked historical monuments during the "ΦΟΥΣΚΟΠΟΛΙΣ" festival and transformed them from a mere point of reference in the

city, visited solely by tourists, into vibrant public spaces and arenas of joy and public contact. “ΦουσκόΠolis” translates into English as “Bubble City” that was ironically the cheerful rebound of UG for the economic crisis at that time.

Throughout the annual neighbourhood event “Pame Kaimakli”, UG collaborates with residents to introduce a series of “open” thematics that exemplify how contemporary artistic practices can bring about social cohesion in a given community. Through this socially engaged approach to contemporary artistic production, opportunities for expression to the wider community are created, and a sense of authorship and engagement is endorsed to the participants. During the “open houses”, and “open courtyards” events, for example, private space was turned into a freely accessible urban public hub as cultural activities took place in the otherwise inaccessible private houses. The houses themselves, momentarily, became an essential active member of the urban fabric during the event, triggering encounters between people who otherwise would have remained complete strangers.

The condition of public spaces in Cyprus is further aggravated by the complex issues surrounding the Buffer Zone, a line dividing the island, generating uneasy edges of the two divided parts of the country. The implementation of UG events as a response to deal with this multifacet political issue brings to the forefront a scene of “common ground” where people can co-exist and reclaim a city created through positive synergies, forward momentums and dynamic collaborations. The search for such a “common ground” was evident during the “In-Communicado” project where urban rooftops across the two sides of Nicosia’s Buffer Zone served as the arena of socio-cultural activities while talkie-walkies, flashing lights and communication technologies, dissolved the border and the distance, bringing together two communities.

UG has therefore strived to acquire the role of a catalyst, an agent for change, a link between underused or non-existent public space, and the society’s uneasy relationship within these spaces. In the physical context of non-space, UG identifies urban cracks, opportunities to create such connections, and generates the possibility of coming together without prescribed or fixed solutions. The activities described although temporal in their extent create a new layer of connections, and begin to galvanise communities into networks of not only shared physical space but also shared experiences, memories and participation.

Conclusion

Six years on, after the devastating economic crisis of 2013, the Cypriot government is still trying to re-enchanted its broken economy. The lack of long-term and sustainable vision together with a series of rushed decisions have further exacerbated the problematic urbanisation and gentrification of our cities. The coasts are gradually being built up to accommodate the villas sold to the wealthy few, highrises and private marinas are used as passport-generating schemes, while natural habitats and rural areas are under threat.

And although public space and the public sphere are still visibly suffering, there is however a sprinkle of hope. Recent years have seen the creation of a growing number of small independent groups, raising a voice against the catastrophic effects of over-tourism, over-construction, the environmental crisis, and the suffering of an ever-

increasing number of asylum seekers. These voices of resistance are creating synergies, shaping expertise and enabling a support system against growing capital and social inequalities.

UG is carving out publicspace to catalyse situations and processes connecting people with spaces and questioning the current developments. The “spontaneous urbanism” approach allows for urban expressions to be informally injected within the cities and temporarily recuperate the lacklustre environment that has developed due to the lack of a social and public policy in urban planning. This permanent temporariness that characterises UG’s actions, revokes activism in the social structure and renders UG as a catalyst of the public realm, revitalising physical spaces and inspiring an urban culture of participation. After all, the notion of recurring ephemerality establishes a notion of permanence and is how UG gradually embed itself in the Cypriot urban scene. Publicscaping is necessary and it should address the role of the different constituents of a healthy city: institutions, individuals and communities shaping together a healthy, socially inclusive and creative middleground.

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Urban Gorillas

Urban Gorillas is an NGO based in Nicosia, Cyprus that is run by a multi-disciplinary team of urban enthusiasts who envision healthy and socially inclusive cities. We came together in 2013 to create projects and actions that bring new energy and inspire change in city spaces.

At a time when approximately half of the world's population are city dwellers, having a positive impact on our public spaces and making city life more sustainable has become ever more important for maintaining creative and healthy cities.

<http://urbangorillas.org/>

Adopt an Artist

(2018 edition of “Pame Kaimakli” festival)

<http://urbangorillas.org/uncategorized/pame-kaimakli-adopt-an-artist/>

Kaimakli is a neighborhood that lies on the east end of Nicosia against the Buffer Zone. Although only a few kilometers away from the city centre, its edge condition meant that for years it remained an isolated neighborhood. Until recently, the number of residents was gradually decreasing with mainly elderly and migrants choosing to live there. Due to the financial disparity and lack of interest in investing in the area, the traditionally built fabric survived modernisation and is now almost intact.

The traditional core of the neighborhood, resembling a village, features well-preserved stone courtyard houses that form a continuous vernacular fabric, with narrow streets, and a traditional church square. In the last decade, Kaimakli has been “re-discovered” by locals who want to live in the neighborhood, gradually renovating a number of houses, shops and studios, bringing a new culturally diverse layer to the area. The neighborhood became also the home of the studio of Urban Gorillas.

Despite the neighborhood dense and quaint built fabric, there are very few opportunities for social interaction. In 2013, an organised group of residents joined forces to organise “open” events in order to bring residents together and open up their beautiful neighborhood to visitors. A series of open events were organised, leading to the annual “Pame Kaimakli” -- Let’s go Kaimakli -- festivals. During “Open Windows”, “Open Houses”, and “Open courtyards,” where otherwise inaccessible private spaces, homes and workplaces, opened up to the wider public creating a new public realm.





Previous page.
Children Workshop at Church Square.
Photo by Nafsika Hadjichristou.

This page.
Performance in resident's house backyard.
Performance Artist: Cyprus Contact
Improvisation Tribe and Crushed Officers.
Photo by Urban Gorillas.
Poetry installation in resident's garden.
Writer: Costas Manouris.
Photo by Urban Gorillas





“Adopt an Artist” was an extension of the “Pame Kaimakli” festivals. The 2018 edition of the festival, highlighted the growing gap between the production and enjoyment of art in increasingly privatised and closed art spaces, distanced from the physical public sphere and the wider community, especially the elderly and minority groups.

In the Spring of 2018, UG won a TANDEM Europe grant (<https://www.tandemforculture.org/programmes/tandem-europe>) which would form the basis of a collaboration with an Italian NGO called NonRiservato (<https://nonriservato.it/>), a network of artists and creatives from various artistic backgrounds committed to community-engaged actions. The initial idea for collaboration included the hosting - physical and virtual - of artists in people’s homes, investigating the idea of the production of art and its display through new methods and spaces. The context of the home as an extension of an open gallery became the basis for an investigation on boundaries between art and the community.

The grant facilitated the hosting and residency of four visiting artists from Italy, sparking the interest of local artists, and developing collaborations and interesting exchanges. The idea also formed the theme for the 2018 edition of “Pame Kaimakli”, “Adopt an Artist”. Milano and Nicosia municipalities, and the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture also supported the initiative bringing attention to the project.

Work and performances were developed site specifically. Courtyard houses, shops, streets, roofs and abandoned sites, were activated, carving a new public space into the private realm. This created a neighborhood gallery, where the work of artists was co-curated with the active participation of the owners of private spaces. Besides the four artists visiting from Italy, the festival opened up to local artists. As a result, 23 artists were presented in people’s houses and 38 projects took place in the neighborhood.

UG paired up hosts and artists in partnerships to develop ideas and projects together, acting as the connecting agent and facilitator between the two. The newly formed partners took on the role of co-curators while taking ownership of their actions. UG provided



support and facilitated the events, while catalysing connections, opening up the process and engaging the wider community.

In this open model of a socially engaged neighborhood festival, the borders between private and public spaces were temporarily eliminated with the extension of the public space into the otherwise introvert homes, forgotten backyards, private chapels, rooftops, and transformed garages. Events were orchestrated throughout the neighborhood bringing to life unseen spaces and giving life to the neighborhood in an unprecedented way.

In our opinion, the success of the project should not be measured in purely quantitative terms, though an unexpectedly high number of people did attend. Success was rather qualitative in nature, creating interactions amongst people diverse in ages, ethnic backgrounds, professional qualifications and interests, together with a desire of the participants to be part of it again.



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Art project in resident's backyard.

Artist: Foteini Pavloglou. Photo by Urban Gorillas

Graffiti at car park. Artist: Mathieu Devavry.

Photo by Urban Gorillas

"Shade of Waste" Canopy out of recycled bottles by Evdokia Demetriou. Photo by Urban Gorillas

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Graffiti at Car Park.

Artist: Eli Zaarour Work: "Refugees Welcome".

Photo by Nicos Philippou

Installation at resident's house rooftop.

Artist: Borderlight

Photo by Urban Gorillas

Projections at street level. Video art: Anthropometrie.

Photo by Urban Gorillas

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Abandoned shop hosts a photography exhibition.

Artist: Adelina Burnescu. Photo by Adelina Burnescu

This page.

Photography exhibition at the chapel.

Artist: Nicos Philippou. Photo by Nikos Philippou

Performance at Church Square.

Performers: Enact Theatre and Dimitris Chimonas.

Photo by Christina Scarpari

Exhibition at Party Contemporary.

Curated by Phanos Kyriacou and Natatalie Yiaxi.

Photo by Nikos Philippou



Green Urban Lab (GUL)

<http://urbangorillas.org/our-work/urban-interventions/green-urban-lab/>

The Green Urban Lab (GUL) was an initiative set up to regenerate public spaces in Cypriot cities. The project intended to raise awareness on the importance of public spaces, a dimension that is lacking in the Cypriot urban culture. It aimed at developing socially sustainable cities through bottom-up initiatives that endorse participatory democracy. The GUL took the form of public installations that were placed at various locations in cities across Cyprus. These installations - through which a series of events, activities, workshops and research took place - were the main tools in regenerating a series of urban public spaces in Cyprus.

The approach adopted for the realization of this mission was the utilization of participatory action research, both in terms of direct urban interventions and observational on-site research. In parallel to the research process that continued throughout the entire GUL project, a range of activities were carried out, varying in scale and approach. These included specialized workshops led by international experts, lectures, an open call for ideas and participation towards local community groups and a series of public events.





The first workshop, “Inflating the Public I”, took place in September 2014; this workshop initiated the design process and permitted experimentation on inflatable structures through pop-up installations in Nicosia, it was led by Dr. Daniele Mancini. The second workshop, “Inflating the Public II”, followed in November 2014, focusing on finalizing the design process for the programmed installations, it was supervised by Marco Canevacci, founder of the design firm Plastique Fantastique (<https://plastique-fantastique.de/>). It was accompanied by a university seminar, “Greening the Public”, where students designed and built green urban furniture through the re-use and up-cycling of existing materials. This process culminated in the “ΦουσκόΠolis” series of public interventions which were held for two days in each of the four main Cypriot cities between March and April 2015 and co-curated in partnership with Plastique Fantastique. The sites chosen in the coastal towns were important historical landmarks: the castles of Larnaka, Limassol and Paphos, while in Nicosia the events took place in the courtyard of the Cultural Foundation of the Bank of Cyprus. Additionally, the project acquired a bi-communal dimension that was not part of the initial proposal, resulting in the event “Life Inside_Outside a Bubble” at St. Nicholas Church / Bedestan in Nicosia. With this opportunity, the team was able to extend the aims of the project to the Turkish Cypriot community and to bring members of the two communities together through a series of community activities.



“ΦουσκόΠolis” was the catalyst event that accelerated the cognitive and emotional attachment to these spaces by citizens. Curated in collaboration with Plastique Fantastique, we launched an open call, where the feedback was excellent with many people submitting their ideas. We formed a selection committee and chose different works as a way to guarantee diversity and a plurality of content within and around the inflatable structures. Forty-six different activities were presented in total during the timespan of the project.

The interventions, installations, inflatables and festival events were created with the concepts of French philosopher Henri Lefebvre in mind, setting a goal for reinvention of a space into the unexpected. Lefebvre (2014) stated that “any location can serve as a site



for pleasure and joy once it has been hijacked, as in the case of a warehouse that becomes a ballroom on theatre". We purposefully and provocatively aimed at 'hijacking' the material presence of history and national identity, and offered it to the people for their enjoyment and active use. By using historical landmarks that are present in the collective memories of most Cypriots, we built our interventions on important historical and political landmarks and challenged their everyday use, or rather the non-use of these sites, located in the historical heart of the cities selected.

In each of the projects, special focus was placed on the notion of the "dissolution of architecture into momentary enjoyment" (Lefebvre, 2014). The chosen sites were not taken as mere landmarks but were rather thought as a continuation of the city's flows as another urban artery, which should have been freely and invitingly accessed by people. The aspiration was to alleviate the permanent, uninviting and strong attributes of the monuments by creating exactly the opposite situation with the light, ephemeral and transparent inflatable structure. The introduction of joyful events into the city through playful design techniques had the potential to produce perception changes and new usages, thus turning under-utilized public spaces into vibrant places suitable for public life (Merry and Carraz, 2015). The Green Urban Lab project was made possible through funding from the EEA Grants/Norway Grants. The project was fully documented and a book with project results was published (Carraz et al., 2018).

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Fouskopolis at the Youth Festival, Municipal Gardens.
Featured artists: Mathieu Devavry and Baroque Rococo. Photo by Apostolia Michael.

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Fouskopolis in Larnaca Castle.
Photo by Urban Gorillas and Stavri Papadopoulou.
Fouskopolis at the Youth Festival, Municipal Gardens.
Featured artists: Mathieu Devavry and Baroque Rococo. Photo by Apostolia Michael
Fouskopolis in Limassol Castle.
Photo by Urban Gorillas.
Fouskopolis in Larnaca Castle: Featured performers:
Pritz Pratz goes into the sacred Oak.
Photo by Stavri Papadopoulou

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Fouskopolis in Paphos Castle.
Photo by Stavri Papadopoulou
Fouskopolis in Limassol Castle:
Featured artist work: Alexandros Yiorkatzis.
Photo by Stavri Papadopoulou

This page.

Fouskopolis in Limassol Castle.
Photo by Stavri Papadopoulou
Fouskopolis at the Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation.
Photo by Stavri Papadopoulou





Urban Dinner

(Part of the Urban Spectacle series)

<http://urbangorillas.org/tag/urban-spectacle/>

Photo credits: Urban Gorillas

The “Urban Spectacle” public intervention series was a project consisting of 5 urban interventions across different public spaces in Cyprus. The urban installations and performances explored the increasing relationships between the urban landscape and a) art and activism, b) architecture and urban design and c) performances and installation. The performative acts aimed in bringing forward the importance of public spaces in the city. What if, the public space in your neighborhood could be an extension of your house? What if the city was really yours, and we could start to claim ownership on what is arguably ‘public’? The diverse forms of artistic projects took the form of activism because they challenged peoples’ perceptions about their contested environment, particularly in the pertaining issues of division, segregation, social inequalities, regarding the usage of public space.

The interventions explored human interactions within public spaces and examined the relationships between the observer, the performer and the spatial setting in an attempt to create new negotiations amongst them. Through various actions, the city is explored both as a spectator and performer in settings where the boundaries between public and private, physical and symbolic, start to dissolve and intervene with one another. The aim was to challenge the citizens from stereotyped ways of seeing and interacting not only with one another but also with their urban public spaces. A “stage” in the respective public spaces offered a new spatial organization in the assigned location and entailed an element of surprise for the passersby.



The “Urban Spectacle” series involved the collaboration with young Cyprus-based artists whose work challenges the observer juxtaposing her into a spectacle of the urban scene, different from the mass-produced consumerist displays omnipresent in our urban culture. Art in these intervention series was presented outside formal institutions and was made available in open public spaces for free in the form of installations, live painting performances, performing arts and graffiti.

These were small scale, extremely low cost urban aesthetic experiments taking place in open public spaces without formal consent and documented all through video media: Curated by Veronika Antoniou & Mathieu Devavry and installed by the UG team, “Urban Dinner” was an “Urban Spectacle” set at the Larnaca Pier depicting a group of people having dinner in the city, in this unexpected location. The setting was more like a theatrical stage with the sea as the backdrop. A dinner with friends or strangers is a moment where we all come together to share. The desire to relate with each other as human beings and adopting the act of eating as an engaging participatory experience was the focal thematic of this act. The plot was centered around food as an element that heightens all the senses. This was accentuated through the installation as the emphasis on the colours of food, on noises, smell, taste and touch were negotiated throughout the dinner.

The act of dining in a public space, under a unified white cloth equally highlighted the issues of participation, engagement and belonging in public spaces, that we all share on equal terms. Covering the table and participants with one white tablecloth created in addition, a sense of equality and unity amongst all dinner guests.

A series of eating instructions were given to guests in order to facilitate the envisioned interactions between people. Each guest on the table had one type of food in his plate with a distinctive colour. During the dinner, guests shared their food with one another and as colours began to mix, the guests were indulged in eating different food offered to them. Consuming, preparing and sharing food are primary human activities. Food is becoming a central theme in UG’s investigations of how we can create connections with people that overcome social, cultural and ethnic divisions. Our food-based projects propose a re-examination of the ways we connect and share within the society as a whole. It suggests a more active engagement within public urban spaces. By the conclusion of the event, the table was transformed into a canvas of a colourful, unified creation. Through art and intercessory experiences, the project proposed new channels of communication and sharing between people.



Open Kitchens

<http://urbangorillas.org/our-work/urban-interventions/open-kitchens/>

Photo credits: Nafsika Hadjichristou, Ana Vives

“Open Kitchens” is a co-creation tool in the form of cooking and dining launched by Urban Gorillas. It aims to enhance the participatory aspect of the upcoming “Pame Kaimakli” 2020 festival by building a dialogue amongst diverse groups of people in a relaxed and inclusive manner. At the same time, it celebrates the cultural layers of the neighborhood of Kaimakli through the launch an open invitation for sharing stories, visions and tasty food.

“Open Kitchens” took place in July 2019 and is a continuation of a series of events presented in previous “Pame Kaimakli” editions (“Open Doors”, “Open Windows”, “Open Courtyards”: for details check “Adopt an Artist” description). An open call addressing Kaimakli residents, artists, social practitioners, activists, academics was launched asking the public for the development of activities together with the migrant community of the area. “Open Kitchens” was a unique dining experience where residents of Kaimakli, from diverse ethnic backgrounds and a passion for cooking, were hosted in the homes of local residents’ to stage dinners from around the world. Chefs from Italy, Somalia, Japan, Syria, Philippines, China, and the Caribbean were hosted in seven houses in the neighborhood. In total, 77 participants from 15 different nationalities, from diverse paths of life and ages from 15-86 years old participated and distributed evenly amongst them the seven dinners.





The food prepared and served was intentionally vegetarian in order to further increase awareness about the impact of raising animals while in a climatic emergency state, and a proposal to move towards a more sustainable lifestyle. This was challenging for chefs and participants, yet unsurprisingly, and according to the participants, it was a successful attempt demonstrating alternative, healthier and possibly tastier eating habits.

After the selection of the participants, UG acted as the mediator between invited chefs and hosts with regular meetings in order to finalize the identity of the activity based on the uniqueness of each chef and host. UG also acted as a matchmaker between involved participants and hosts, in an attempt to distribute people of different ages, nationalities and backgrounds evenly in the 7 houses.

The gathering and the assignment of the participants to houses and chefs took place at the traditional coffee shop at the church square of the old Kaimakli neighbourhood. All the participants were involved in the preparation and the cooking following the instructions of the chefs. During the cooking and the ensuing dinner, the participants discussed various issues about the act of eating as a catalyst for socializing and bringing together people, that otherwise would have never found an opportunity to meet. They also brainstormed with ideas for the forthcoming festival.

Even though dining with complete strangers, the process of food preparation made it easy to connect. People shared relevant stories personal, communal, ethnic expressed through dancing and singing and other spontaneous activities. The moderators of each group documented the ideas and proposals and shared them with the participants during a wrap-up gathering at the end of the event. This took place back at the coffee shop, where the traditional local sweet “mahalepi” was served. The participants expressed an unprecedented enthusiasm for the whole event, while through testimonies, it seems that it might have been the first time that many immigrants felt like part of the neighborhood’s community.

For many participants, the communal cooking echoed the lost tradition of the celebration of weddings, where the community helped in the preparations in any possible way that included cooking together to celebrate and indulge to a collective joy in the settlement. Open Kitchens has been a research tool for UG, where input from the discussions over dinner provided information on how to best plan the next edition of the “Pame Kaimakli” festival adopting the themes of food culture and integration of disadvantaged communities.



Activating the Publicscape



Green Kitchen Bus

<http://urbangorillas.org/our-work/urban-interventions/green-urban-kitchen-bus-2/>

Photo credits: Urban Gorillas

The Green Kitchen Bus was realized in 2014 and was the first action to be implemented by Urban Gorillas. This project was the result of a collaboration with AKTI an NGO active in promoting sustainable development, where UG proposed an urban intervention to create awareness of the Tiganokinisi campaign of AKTI, regarding the recycling of cooking oil. Tiganokinisi was a program converting used cooking oil into biodiesel. The program's aim is to encourage the public to participate actively in the process of converting waste cooking oil into biodiesel for a more sustainable and green living in the community. With a 2,000 euro support from the Fulbright Foundation, the UG team was in search of low-cost alternatives in order to create an urban intervention with the maximum impact. We turned our attention into a metal junk yard, looking for interesting discarded objects, where we detected an out-of-use bus; it was instant epiphany: we could not have thought of a more effective tool to promote the idea of biodiesel conversion! After several weeks of working in the junkyard, UG converted this old and discarded bus into an accessible green haven. Inside, the bus we laid a scene of a "green kitchen" planted with vegetables and herbs, food, cooking equipment and utensils. On the outside, the bus turned into a surface for an art project to be displayed. With the collaboration of wood print artist Evgenia Vasiloudi, her flower series of "Natural Conversation" was exhibited on the bus through stencils and painting techniques.







The “Green Kitchen Bus” raised the issue of public transport and more generally dealt with the promotion of sustainable lifestyles, alternative mobility options, recycling materials, and home-grown vegetable gardens. At the same time it offered ephemeral shaded seating areas in two locations: in a large parking place in Limassol city and in Ag. Demetrios park in Nicosia, both lacked public benches.

The public installation offered the public a fresh perception on the use of public spaces and generated creative forms of social interactions while promoting a renowned artist’s work on the street level. It has rendered two sites with both familiar and unprecedented urban vibes, scripting a new urbanscape for its inhabitants creating common stories and memories. These ephemeral and spontaneous injections into the two sites, enriched them with qualities of momentary urbanism.



“The Patterns of Displacement”. From “I AM NOT FROM EAST OR WEST... MY PLACE IS PLACELESS” Series

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Abstract

“The Patterns of Displacement” from “I AM NOT FROM EAST OR WEST... MY PLACE IS PLACELESS” Series is an immersive social installation realized with the community of Arbat Refugee Camp, in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Focusing on the plight of its youth, this ‘tent’ reveals the names of over 280 children whose identities are largely writ invisible, within a political landscape of ongoing international calamity. As an artwork of testimony, its nature (components in pieces that are put back together randomly each time it is displayed) is representative of a collective cultural body (refugees) with little control over their fate and mobility, reduced to a statistic. Rushdi Anwar reveals the dehumanizing reality of these people, his artwork a beacon of hope in increasing awareness of their fragile existence.

Keywords: displacement, collaborative project, public art, social installation, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, refugee camp, Middle East, installation art

All images by Rushdi Anwar.

To cite this article:

Anwar, R. (2019). The Patterns of Displacement”. From “I AM NOT FROM EAST OR WEST... MY PLACE IS PLACELESS” Series. *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(3), 117-128, DOI 10.32891/jps.v4i3.1224

This article has been double blind peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



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“The Patterns of Displacement”

“I am from there. I am from here.
I am not there and I am not here.
I have two names, which meet and part, and I have two languages.
I forget which of them I dream in.”
- Mahmoud Darwish

(فرمان فهمی ، دیار محسن حسن ، سولین حسن ، سامیه حسن ، لیلی عافو ، هیفا ، سامیه حسکو ، سنأ
محمد نعمان ، خلیل عباس ، جیهان عمر، بریقان حانون ، هیبه عباس محمد ، نازه نعمان ، آیة علی ، سارا
عیسی ، حفیفه عبدالملک ،...)

These are the names of refugees I encountered, and worked with, for a collaborative project in “... one of the most significant features of modernity: the camp”¹ - Arbat Refugee Camp.



Figure 1. The Patterns of Displacement. Paint, UNHCR tent fabric, safety pins, wooden frame and single channel HD video. Dimensions variable. Installation view at MARS Gallery, The Notion of Place and Displacement, solo exhibition, Melbourne, Australia 2017.

¹ Anthony Downey, *Art and Politics Now* (London: Thames Hudson, 2014), 160.



Figure 2 and 3. Installation detail, Patterns of Displacement, UTS University of Technology Gallery, Sydney, Australia, 2017.

From September 2016 to February 2017, I worked in several refugee camps in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. I encountered refugees from a diversity of backgrounds (Yazidi, Christian, Shabak, Sunni, Kurdish, Arab, Syrian and other minorities).

“The Patterns of Displacement”



*Figure 4. Repetition of patterns.
Overview of section of Arbat Refugee Camp, December 2016.*



*Figure 5. Repetition of patterns.
Overview of section of Arbat Refugee Camp, December 2016.*

The projects² that I produced within the camps focused on the daily living conditions of the refugees.

² Project “I AM NOT FROM EAST OR WEST... MY PLACE IS PLACELESS” Series: 1) “We have found in the ashes what we have lost in the fire”, 2) “Reframe “Home” with Patterns of Displacement”, 3) “ONE DAY WE WILL RETURN”, 4) “The Patterns of Displacement”, 5) “The Notion of Place and Displacement”.

For “*The Patterns of Displacement*”, I used a discarded official UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) refugee tent that I found in Arbat refugee camp.



Figure 6. Discarded official UNHCR refugee tent used for the project.

The tent is a common object in everyday life and marks a place of family gathering and living in the camp. A refugee tailor who lived in the camp cut this tent into 285 pieces. On each piece at least one name appears. These are the hand-written names (in Kurdish and Arabic) of children who live, and attend the camp school, in this camp. These pieces of tent are joined together by safety pins, stretched over a wooden frame that returns this material to its original form – a rectangular tent. The audience is invited to walk in to this tent; at its rear is a single channel television with a twenty-minute video showing the production process of making the work. The ambient sound that emits from this video shares the sounds of children talking excitedly about how to write, of people in the background praying or children kicking balls in the dirt. Most of the youth have been in the camp for two to eight years and have been through serious trauma. They hoped for many things, but there is not much for them there.

Organised with the UNHCR, the managers of the camp and the directors of its schools, the process of making the work took almost four weeks. Each stage referenced the communal experience of these refugees, which subsequently revealed the shared nature of their circumstances.

Providing paint, brush and a piece of tent canvas to each child, their unique and exceptional handwriting highlights individual identity and personality, but within the camp such individuality is lost as the context of their lives reduces them to ‘refugee’, regardless of who they are; what their interests may be; what they want to be; what they dream of, and so on.

In some of the refugee detention centers, including in Australia, refugees have often been called by numbers rather than by their names, which in a way dehumanizes them. “The camp is thus a space of exception, and those entering it, such as refugees, are

placed in an exceptional, invariably detrimental relationship to legal procedure and political discourse.”³



Figure 7. Texts repeat patterns of the camp.

The core aim of the project was to expose the names of these youth, whom most of the time, are excluded and invisible, lost in the fog of political conflict. In this regard, Mahmoud Darwish writes “And your visions are your exile in a world where a shadow has no identity, no gravity. You walk as if you were someone else”.⁴

The space that was created inside “*The Patterns of Displacement*”, references the size of the tents in which refugee families of up to eight members live. For some refugee families, these tents have been their homes for more than five years and replace any sense of a real home. For many, ‘home’ no longer exists—apart from in their memories and imaginations, or through photographs. This work aims to examine and question notions of individuality, communality and the repetition of patterns of displacement in the camp as well as in the context of current refugee situations in the world more

³ Downey, 103.

⁴ Anthony Downey, “The Jerusalem Show” *Ibraaz and the Visual Culture in the Middle East Series*, accessed 22 July, 2019. <https://www.ibraaz.org/publications/17>.

broadly. “The world of today is dotted with uprooted people who have no state or homeland where they can settle”.⁵



Figure 8 (top). Sharif Rony Hachi holds up his name at the Arbat Refugee Camp, December 2016.
Figure 9 (down). Gulstan Ahmad holds up her name at the Arbat Refugee Camp, December 2016.

As a collaborative project working with a refugee community, it was a highly sensitive and critically challenging undertaking. It was crucial to represent the complexities of the camp and the situation of the people with care, I wanted to draw compassion for these lives suspended in uncertainty in various ways, because of the political landscape in the Middle East especially (Syria and Iraq). This political uncertainty has been created, driven and maintained as “Biopolitics”, by neighboring, regional countries and international political power players from east to west.

⁵ Jean Robertson and Craig McDaniel, *Themes of Contemporary Art : Visual Art after 1980* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 208.

“The Patterns of Displacement”

“The Patterns of Displacement”, evokes modes of circling conflicts, generated by a global political agenda in the region that benefits from weapon manufacturing. Their company agenda is clear; keep conflict ongoing to sustain financial profit.



Figure 10 and 11. Writing names on the fabric, roadside, Arbat Refugee Camp, December 2016.

The UNHCR tents are historical objects, distinct realms that should not be separated from the history of conflict in the region. *“The Patterns of Displacement”*, brings the past and the current traumatic political events together (the war against ISIS and even post ISIS) as a sort of archive; containing layered narratives about refugees, displacement, war and broader histories of conflict, communal memory, revised history and the relationship between east and west, and much more. Such an archive questions our consciousness of the assumption of content and context of war, the tent becoming a document of located communal memory sharing the loss and tragedy of home and loved ones.

Throughout the process of the project, I was working with great concern and awareness to not portray the camp as commonly reflected in dominant media. It was essential to me, to highlight and underline the agony, pain and their struggle, with a

poetic approach, away from looking at their pain through a political or propaganda lens. For me it was a great honor and responsibility, to encounter their lives, to engage and to work with these refugee communities.

“The Patterns of Displacement”, evokes issues of loss and invisibility, as well as the degradation of human values. I also wanted to highlight how these political issues overshadow, and thus dehumanize affected minority groups (racial and ethnic groups). I thus wanted this project to give visibility to their existence. The process of producing this installation – taking a found object (the tent) and cutting, adding, re-forming and reassembling into new forms and shapes – is a reflective process which recalls the experiences of these refugees. Like this tent, these refugees will never return to their semblance of ‘home’, the ‘original’ forever lost.

Through the process of deforming and reforming the tent, the purpose and meaning of this tent shifts - from international aid agency; to refuge for the nameless; to a monument as testimony – as a paradoxical object loaded with absence recalled through the names emblazoned on this tent as communal gathering space. A space that clearly indicates the names of children that has become a hub of remembrance in the face of political violence and conflict. The assembling of this collection of written names has an accumulative effect and evokes the notion of collective memory and experience.



Figure 12. *The Patterns of Displacement*. Installation view at MARS Gallery, *The Notion of Place and Displacement*, solo exhibition, Melbourne, Australia 2017.



Figure 13. Installation Patterns of Displacement,
UTS University of Technology Gallery, Sydney, Australia, 2017.



Figure 14. Detail of pieces joined together with safety pins.
UTS University of Technology Gallery, Sydney, Australia, 2017.

Caterina Albano writes: "... In this context, the object acts as an icon that transitions from individual trauma to collective history, from personal pain to public horror, entangling questions of remembrance and documentation with emotional susceptibility".⁶

The pieces of the reassembled tent are joined together with safety pins, every time the work is installed, the pieces move around and appear in different places. This reflects the fact the work has a fluid quality and not static, moving like the collective flow of people, of refugees whose lives are occupied with uncertainty, their "... life as social being is based on adjusting to shifting context...".⁷ The notion of mobility is an essential quality of the work. In this context of a refugee camp, the tent (as an object that houses but never assumed permanent) is a striking recall of displacement, highlighting the permanent precarity of the condition of their exile.

"*The Patterns of Displacement*" signifies the struggle for 'place'. In this context Edward Said states, "I found myself reliving the narrative quandaries of my early years, my sense of doubt and of being out of place, of always feeling myself standing in the wrong corner, in a place that seemed to be slipping away from me just as I tried to define or describe it".⁸

Working within its class rooms, its 'streets', its little milk bar shops I developed quite an emotional attachment to these people. This attachment returns each time I install this work, recalling the faces of the children, their laughter and dreams. Dreams recalling idols and places that I fear they will never have the chance to explore. Most of the time I question myself and wonder what is their future? And where will they end up?

⁶ Caterina Albano, *Fear and Art in the Contemporary World* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 94.

⁷ Robertson and McDaniel, 50.

⁸ Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 558.



Figure 15. A collaborative public art project done by a group of refugee kids as street art at Arbat Refugee Camp, December 2016. The text in Arabic says ‘ONE DAY WE WILL RETURN’. Rushdi Anwar was not directly involved with this project but found it a powerful statement.

“The Patterns of Displacement”, evokes the dreadfulness of displacement, conflict and violence. Through this work I try to make sense of this nonsensical world.

Acknowledgement

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body. It has also been supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

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The Test: “how will we know what it is that we are doing?”

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Abstract

The Test outlines a public art project developed by ROARAWAR FEARTATA titled The Crossing, undertaken as part of Melbourne City Council’s 2019 Test Sites program. Drawing on the figure of the ferryman from Hermann Hesse’s Siddhartha, as well Henri Lefebvre’s concept of Rhythmanalysis, this project sought to occupy the everyday practice of the pedestrian crossing, utilising the position of the artist within this everyday practice to develop a methodology for conducting a rhythmanalysis of public space. Through the process of performative adventure and the reading of rhythms, the project aimed to strategise a process for art to participate in the practice of the everyday whilst maintaining the tension of the question: “how will we know what it is that we are doing?”

Keywords: performance, public space, rhythmanalysis, everyday practice, advene, remaindered

All images by Ben Cittadini.

To cite this article:

Cittadini, B. and Peade, C. (2019). The Test: “how will we know what it is that we are doing?”, *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(3), 129-140, DOI 10.32891/jps.v4i3.1225

This article has been double blind peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



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The Test: “how will we know what it is that we are doing?”

The Crossing was a project developed by ROARAWAR FEARTATA as part of Melbourne City Council’s 2019 Test Sites program. Aspects of this concept of crossing were first explored in multiple iterations at various sites in central Melbourne by Benjamin Cittadini, Fiona Hillary, Shanti Sumartojo and Ceri Hann, in association with the Contemporary Art and Social Transformation (CAST) research group at RMIT University in Melbourne for the "Performing Mobilities" conference in 2015. For Test Sites in 2019, the project focused on one particular pedestrian crossing in Melbourne at the intersection of Victoria Parade and Cardigan Street, provisionally located within the designated ‘Melbourne Innovation District’, narrowing its focus to the practice and production of public space within a single site and situation.

Building upon an established practice of embodied, performative adventures in public spaces, *The Crossing* aimed to use the Test Sites format to further explore the potential for performance as a practice for *advening*, rather than *intervening*, in the everyday practice and production of public space. Further to this, the project sought to test and develop a methodology for applying Henri Lefebvre’s concept of Rhythmanalysis by firmly positioning the performer’s body as the main tool for rhythm-analysing public space.

In this article we will provide an outline of the initial concept and questions of the project, followed by a descriptive account of the performative process and outcomes on site. We then outline the development of the rhythm-analytical methodology and its application before presenting some of the ‘remaindered’ or unanalysable traces of the performative rhythm-analytical process that are the important but elusive outcomes of producing art in public spaces. Through the continuing development of the practice of performative adventure, along with a methodology for conducting a rhythm-analysis of site, we hope to further establish the practice of art in public spaces as not only innovative, but as a vital means for reading and participating in their everyday production.

Testing: questions and provocations

In Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, the ferryman takes people across the river; people that see the river as an obstacle, a nuisance, a barrier to their forging ahead. (Hesse, 1998) The ferryman tells Siddhartha that the river is a teacher and he is a listener; his life crossing the river and observing its ever-changing rhythms and moods have taught him to listen.

For *The Crossing* then, we first asked ourselves if rather than the overcoming of an obstruction, we could approach the simple act of crossing a busy intersection as an opportunity to listen to the flow that is ‘everywhere at the same time’ (Hesse, 1998). Could it be an opportunity to listen to the journey in its present passage, to not just to negotiate obstacles between the past and the future, but to live in a space that is neither a departure nor a destination, but a deeper space that is only crossing, never crossed? Could we posit a gift-giving of the self; our own body’s fleshly humility given away. Would we receive anything in return?

Secondly, we asked ourselves if this positioning of our bodies within the liminal space of a crossing might be the ideal location from which to read and analyse the rhythms of the everyday. To do so we would have to experiment with some means for documenting these rhythms that adhered to the precepts of conducting a

rhythmanalysis as outlined by Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre states that ‘an accident makes confused rhythms sensible’ however the rhythm analyst ‘does not have the right to provoke an accident’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 21). But what if the accident is art and the artist is an analyst of rhythms?

Finally, we challenged ourselves to confront the deeper question concerning the practice of performance and participation within the public sphere: how will we know what it is that we are doing?

Performing the crossing

To perform the crossing, we aimed to position ourselves clearly as ‘performer’s’, or everyday actors obviously outside the everyday actions of the site. This was important for us to test the notion of art ‘provoking’ the accident of rhythms, but also so as not to imply any conceit that we were doing anything more – or less – than the practice of art within the everyday context of the site. For this project, the uncanniness or the practice of art was crucial to the participation in the everyday. To do so, we dressed in elaborate costumes of uniform white with bespoke headwear and folders containing the rhythmalytical self-surveying forms awkwardly dangling around our necks, as if absurdly over-sized jewellery. We also had a small portable speaker playing an ambient, harmonic soundscape to further provoke the site.

Without canvassing the public for interaction or interrupting the normative functioning of the intersection, we crossed from opposite sides of the crossing on each and every stopping of the traffic. We had a set of broad and basic actions which we would improvise according to each crossing situation, including but not limited to:

- Offering to hold hands with other pedestrians
- Bowing low as if in deference or servitude to the crossing
- Spreading arms wide in joyful embrace of the space and the people crossing
- Walking backwards, stopping mid crossing, experimenting with the propulsive movement of crossing the road, exploring the space in the time afforded by the traffic lights.

Whilst the offer of holding hands was rarely taken up, when it was it produced an uncanny and awkwardly pleasant sharing of the journey. After each crossing, we would immediately fill out the rhythmalytical self-survey and wait for the next crossing. Each time somebody asked us “what are you doing?” we directly explored the question “how will we know what it is that we are doing?” We would answer with what we knew (we are doing an art project and conducting a rhythmanalysis of the site) and open the conversation to further discuss what we didn’t know. This often led to pedestrians lingering with us after they had crossed to further discuss our understanding, or non-understanding, of what we were doing.

We also experimented with a more specific choreography of crossing – a ritualised ‘dance’ that took place in the middle of the crossing whilst cars waited and watched and pedestrians moved around us. The dance involved walking hunched over, meeting together and bowing courting gestures where each greeted the other with semi-circular backward steps; the palms of each other’s hand slap playing patty cake, an exaggerated self-grooming of the head and its hair; a climactic lift book-ended with a return to hunched over backward steps bowing with arms down and palms out upon display. One pedestrian asked us: “is this a traditional dance?” Perhaps it was, a provincial cultural practice for this unique site.



Figure 1, 2 and 3.

The Test: “how will we know what it is that we are doing?”



Figure 4, 5 and 6.



Figure 7.

Rhythmanalysing

In developing a methodology for conducting a rhythm analysis, two main questions arise: how do you *do* a rhythm analysis? What would it *look* like? Previous studies, drawing from diverse disciplines such as architecture, urban design and geography, have taken different approaches, mostly utilising the strategies of “mapping” either the prevalence of observed activities, the observed accumulation and dispersal of groups of people or the observed occurrence and regularity of certain events (Simpson 2012, Edensor, 2010). Whilst some have tried to place the observer’s body in the middle of the observational activity (Roberts, 2015), some have been concerned with the visual mapping of movement and the collation of socio-cultural data to build a rhythm analytical picture (De Wandeler & Dissanayake, 2013). One of the main ambiguities of the concept has been Lefebvre’s insistence that just observing is not enough, that there is no way of visually documenting the production and affect of rhythms: ‘No camera, no image or series of images can show these rhythms. It requires equally attentive eyes and ears, a head and a memory and a heart.’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 36) For Lefebvre, observing rhythms involves both the action of *grasping* and the position of the *grasped*: ‘Observation [...] and meditation follow the lines of force that come from the past, from the present and from the possible, and which rejoin one another in the observer, simultaneously centre and periphery.’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 37) He is clear that the main instrument for reading rhythms is the body of the rhythm analyst.

To approach the question of how to do a rhythm analysis, an understanding of what Lefebvre is referring to when he talks about rhythms is important. For Lefebvre rhythms are inherent in the practice of the everyday, and within this practice the body is the

foundation of the rhythmic world. From within its metabolic activities the body produces a rhythmicity – a 'chronobiology' – whereby the body is seen in its entirety as a rhythm-based organ (Meyer, 2008: 151). Taken together, these bodily rhythms form 'a harmony, an isorhythm', whose oscillations produce a distinct temporality – a *lived time* (Meyer 2008: 150). In contrasted to this, there is the abstracted clock time of contemporary life, which is set upon the *capitalisation* of temporality and its 'imperious contempt for the body and lived-time.' (Meyer 2008: 151) Alongside these are the narrative rhythms of an individual's trajectory through life – birth, childhood, youth, middle age, old age and death – and the social rhythms of friendship, family, love, random acquaintance and the mutuality of other bodies oscillating in close proximity. Through all these draw the vaster cyclical rhythms of nature, the seasons, the elements and rotations of our planet (Read, 1993: 127). Rather than a 'teleologically settled' (Roberts, 2006: 61) or fixed and trackable temporality (linked seamlessly with the past and projecting unerringly into the future), the rhythms of the everyday are inherently complex, contradictory, conflicting, elusive and unstable.

So how to grasp them, be *grasped* by them and identify their complex affects? To begin with, we would clearly position our bodies as the primary instruments for measuring rhythms. Rather than mapping the accumulation, regularity, dispersal and aggregation of people, interactions and events, we would try to annotate the *trajectories* of our own experience of the space at regular intervals (each crossing of the intersection) over a period of time. We identified three broad areas of the experiential space that we would self-analyse after each crossing:

- Atmosphere / to include elements such as sounds, smells, heat, cold, dust, wind, pressure etc.
- Interaction / to include social participation, conversations, exchanged looks, physical interactions etc.
- Daydreaming / to include memories, fantasies, imaginings and other coalescing temporalisations that provide the depth for the human understanding of space.

Lefebvre posits classifying rhythms by 'crossing the notion of rhythm with those of the secret and public, the external and internal.' (Lefebvre, 2004: 17) For our purposes, this would mean our experiences in these three areas would be measured on a seven-part scale for each area. The scale would indicate a level of interior or exterior quality to the experience, whereby three would be most exterior or interior and one would be least interior or exterior. The dynamic between exterior and interior would measure the quality of the experience as it passes through the measuring body of the rhythm analyst. For example, if in the measuring period one experienced a distant, abstracted sound that elicited no particularly corporeal response, this would register a three in the exterior of Atmosphere. Or if there was a strong, physical repulsion to a certain smell, then this would register a three in the interior of Atmosphere. If there was an interaction with someone that was mostly gregarious but slightly self-conscious, this might measure a one or two in the exterior of Interaction. Or if there was a feeling of being a little lost in one's memories during the crossing, this might measure a one or two in the interior of Daydreaming.

In the middle of the scale, zero would indicate an event space. In this space, the rhythm analyst's experience is neither, or both, internal and external; the moment exists

in itself beyond the measurement of the rhythm analyst and is shared in its unanalysable presence by everyone. This event space represents what Brian Massumi refers to as a 'vanishing point', an 'escape' within the interactive measuring process 'where the interaction turns back in on its own potential, and where the potential appears for itself.' (Massumi 2011: 49) Within this event space our own fragmented presence co-mingles with the situation of strangers creating intimate spaces together as we cross a space that is neither departure nor destination, and within all these fragments experience is shared, each 'with its own little ocean of complexity' (Massumi, 2011: 52).

ROARAWAR FEARTATA: The Crossing Test Sites, Melbourne 2019		Site:	Date: __ / __ / __	Observer:	
Time Start:				End:	
Atmosphere	Internal	3			
	Internal	2			
	Internal	1			
	External	E			
	External	1			
	External	2			
	External	3			
	Interaction	Internal	3		
		Internal	2		
		Internal	1		
External		E			
External		1			
External		2			
External		3			
Daydreaming		Internal	3		
		Internal	2		
		Internal	1		
	External	E			
	External	1			
	External	2			
	External	3			

Figure 8.

So, immediately after each and every crossing, we would self-analyse our experience of Atmosphere, Interaction and Daydreaming on the scale, noting the exact time of each measurement and taking further notes outside of the measurement scale where we might include the rhythmic instances 'of flowers and rain, of childlike or bellicose voices, of secret meetings' (Lefebvre, 2004: 69). Due to the high volume of pedestrian traffic, we would take a rhythmic measurement approximately every two minutes. This regularity of rhythmic readings would gradually produce the outline of the *trajectories*, or experiential waves of Atmosphere, Interaction and Daydreaming, representing the oscillations between external and internal affect, occasionally touching upon the 'vanishing point' of event, tracking over the course of the measurement period. The next step for this project is to explore ways of reading the rhythm analytical data we have collected that can form the basis for further performative adventures. Rather than addressing some socio-spatial problem, the aim is to develop strategies of continued artistic production that advenes with the everyday production of space.

The Test: "how will we know what it is that we are doing?"

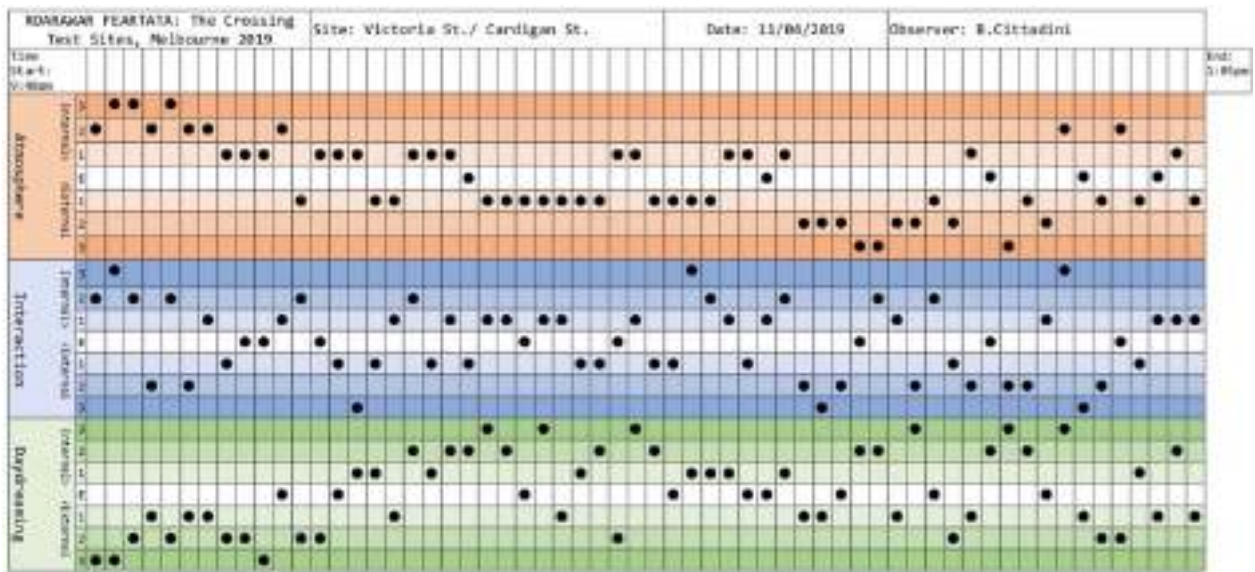


Figure 9.

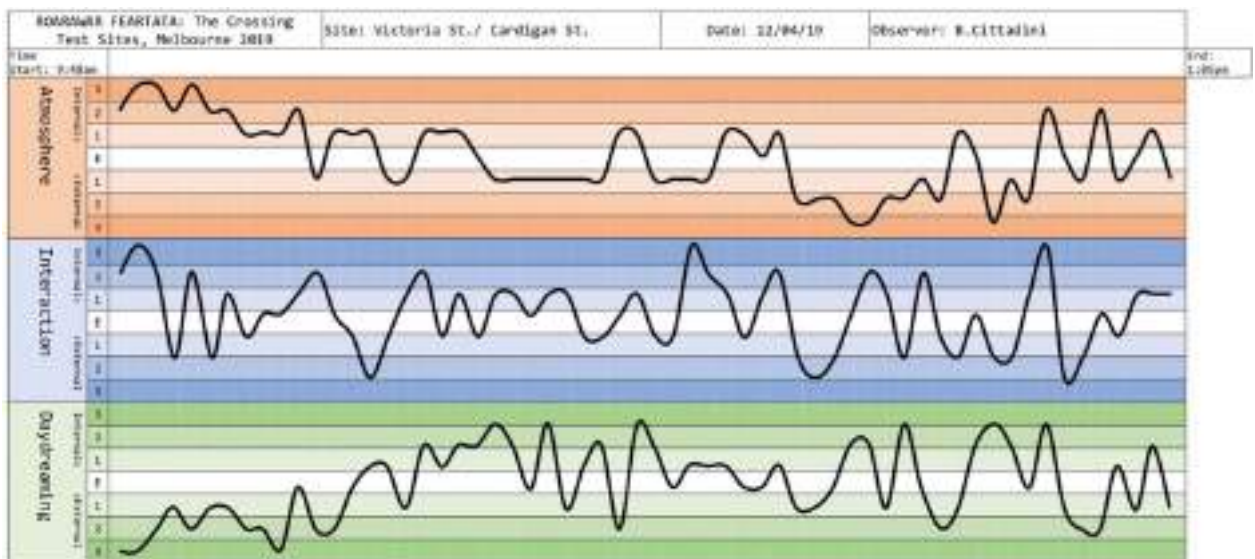


Figure 10.

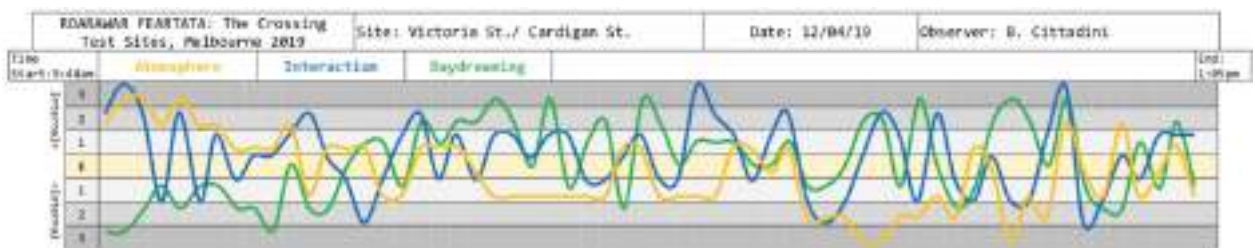


Figure 11.

The remaindered

In the lived, practiced experience of space, there will always be a surplus, something *remaindered*, an 'unanalysable but most valuable residue' that resists expression other than through poetic means (Schmid, 2008: 40). The following notes, taken alongside our rhythmanalytical readings, represent some of the traces of our experience of the situation that will forever elude analysis, but remain some of the most valuable documentation of the project. Within these traces the most valuable question remains: how will we know what it is that we are doing?

What are we doing?
Get into it brother - fuck oath!
The Boys!
Smokers cuddle.

How long have you been crossing the road?

I have been documenting a socialist meeting.

a whimsical smile as children play with their parents keys.
And there is lack.
There is passive aggressivity.

Are you having fun? - I'm not.

You have something in your teeth - spinach?

we are going nowhere - well nearly, almost going nowhere.

ALMOST.

Meet Victor from Rhode Island.
There is a stumble.
Nearly a tripping over - almost
Sideways glances and caution abounds.
There is blue finger nail polish.

Are we spaghetti monsters?

WTF

What?

The fuck

Sun joy.
Trolleys.
Cyclists.

Breath. Breathing. Leaf blown.

Hands held. Hold up. Joy. Held. Up.

Did ya lose a bet mate?

Emergency sirens as she walked by. SIRENS! - as they walked by!

EMERGENCY.

SIRENS.

DESIRES.

Mouth. Thirsty.

Mouth.

Fatigue.

Hunger.

I have a scratch.

I cannot itch.

More questions.

What are the parameters?

Less answers.

Savoury chips!

Are you for real?

As real as you sir!

Art is beautiful man.

Clichéd Americans.

There is a couple of them!

Child.

Infectious.

Greetings. Nodding greetings.

That way boys.

What am I supposed to be imagining?

What are we?

Scientists?

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ROARAWAR FEARTATA are a real-playtime-based-interactual-live-immerciful-performancapist-asocial-insituational art theatre established in 2003 by Benjamin Cittadini and Craig Peade. They have created text-based performances, including the award winning “Bunny”, performance interventions in galleries and curated art spaces and have conducted site-specific performance exploration residencies in inner and suburban Melbourne in Frankston, Dandenong, Footscray, Collingwood, Bendigo as well as internationally in New York, USA and Prato, Italy. In 2009 they were involved in the 'Interventionist Guide to Melbourne' at Platform Artspace located at Flinders St. Station and performed with Jill Orr, Stelarc and Domenico DiClario at Federation Square in central Melbourne as part of Karen Casey's “Global Mind Project”. They presented “I luv Amanda Crowe 4 eva” as part of LiveWorks at Performance Space in Sydney in 2010. In 2016 they collaborated with Triage Live Art Collective on “Hotel Obscura” and with Punctum Inc. on “Complete Smut: Art Auction” for the Melbourne Festival of Live Art. In 2015 and 2019 they developed work for the City of Melbourne's Test Sites program and are currently developing a new live art work through Punctum Inc's “What If...” residency program. Benjamin Cittadini completed a Master of Arts (Art in Public Space) at RMIT University that included collaborative projects with Craig Peade.

The Long Game

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Abstract

The Long Game explores one artwork, The Care Taker, iterated across multiple sites, as a slow and gentle resistance to current divisive political discourses in Australia. By placing a familiar domestic set in public spaces and asking participants to reveal something personal about themselves, the installation places a sense of intimacy and care in public places. Based in Social Acupuncture theory (O'Donnell, 2006) a site responsive practice produces iterations adapted to place, to engage diverse social and cultural audiences in suburban Australia. Using care, kindness and generosity as the foundations of each iteration, the artist considers how gentle transgression or activation of public space can open and connect strangers to each other, and hopefully inspire empathy and kindness which over time may contribute to social change.

Keywords: care, strangers, social acupuncture, iteration, intimacy, site responsive, suburbs, long game, empathy, conversation

To cite this article:

Goronszy D. (2019). The Long Game, *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(3), 141-154, DOI 10.32891/jps.v4i3.1226

This article has been double blind peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



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The Care Taker: The Long Game



Figure 1. *The Care Taker*, Dandenong 2017. Photographer Olivia Allen.

Have you got something on your mind?
A feeling that just won't go away?
Sit down
Relax.
The Care Taker is in.

*intergenerational mental health, because it's my lived experience
that I accept other people's ideas before mine, every time
so much time has been wasted, I didn't know the rules
being older now, I will never have housing security
nightmares, I feel so alone
our grandson is on ice
am I doing enough for the environment
the shame of our government and Manus Island
my aging parents don't speak English, and so I have no time for my own pursuits
my sisters call me names
the plebiscite means I know how my family really feel about me
I wake in the night, thinking, thinking*

that I will never be loved without conditions
if I grade up I will feel bad because my friend will be left behind
time for family, time for work
people don't understand me, and I don't know how to be different so they can
will I ever get past this grief
tight pants
mediocrity slaughters the creative soul



Figure 2, 3. *The Care Taker*, Balaclava 2016. Photographer Theresa Harrison.

The Long Game of Cares

In *Guerilla Kindness and other acts of creative resistance*, author Sayraphim Lothian (2018) proposes that kindness, to others and ourselves, is a radical act. Kindness towards strangers seems doubly so, and its no wonder, considering we teach the phrase ‘Stranger Danger’ to children, and never revisit or reverse the sentiment as they/we grow older. In this article I discuss one work *The Care Taker* (2016), that was iterated across fifteen locations, privileging kindness, generosity and care as a vehicle for connecting me to strangers, and also introducing strangers to each other’s real-life cares.

My practice is concerned with creating unusual arts experiences that aim to provoke conversation about our humanity. For fifteen years, I have worked both solo and collaboratively, delivering participatory installations, theatre, puppetry and performances around Australia and the world. My work explores developing an integration of rigorous design and participant freedom. This coupling of specificity and openness has been crucial in utilizing the arts within communities in recovery such as with incarcerated young people in youth justice centres (2007-2012, Liminal Lines, Parkville Youth Justice Centre and Biribi Rehabilitation Centre in suburban Melbourne), bushfire areas across Whittlesea in outer metropolitan Melbourne (2006 - 2018), all in Australia and in Minamisanriku (2011/16 with Polyglot Theatre) situated inside the Japanese tsunami zone of 2011.

The Care Taker (2016) was seeded as an antidote to Australia’s current divisive political discourse and sensationalised news reports that compound feelings of fear and alienation between strangers and neighbors alike. *The Care Taker* sits in public spaces, asking people to reveal something personal, which will then be shared with others. It is a slow and gentle resistance, a face-to-face call to action to care for the self and others. Through gathering and sharing very human thoughts of strangers, and sharing them with other strangers, the installation presents an alternative, personal narrative about people and their community. Its positioning of gentle activism in public space is part of a long game, which aims at influencing long-term change and hopefully inspires empathy and kindness.

“You really don’t realize we are all going through so much”

Through iterative practice, *The Care Taker* explores the vitality of conversation as a vehicle for uncovering and addressing social challenges located in time and place, and seeds unexpected connections that could potentially alter and recast our social fabric. *The Care Taker* as with the majority of my practice, aligns with Darren O’Donnell’s (2006) theory of Social Acupuncture, which suggests art can shift social structures and politics by repeatedly disturbing the civic sphere. O’Donnell’s theory does this by transposing theories of Traditional Chinese Medicine on the social body instead of the human body, and creating situations that, like acupuncture, ‘needle’ points of excess or deficiency, and in turn affect other points in the social body. In society, excesses and deficiencies could be characterized by power dynamics and accessibility respectively. Furthermore, it’s through repeated arts activity, or acupuncture, that impact on the larger social body can occur.

This thinking is ambitious, but also relieves the pressure on the artist to produce a dynamic shift in place with one artwork, and instead locates each encounter as one

amongst many that must occur over time. As this gentle work of transformation needs time, the visiting artist will probably not witness the change. It's slow, but importantly, the generation of ideas and reflection comes from the people within place, sitting subtly alongside more agitative activism and campaigns.

Contemporary art and the suburbs

The Care Taker privileges suburban public locations, rather than major inner-city streets, to engage people going about their everyday business, and also to connect with less artistically engaged community members. When I refer to 'less artistically engaged' community members, I am referring to the desire and means to seek out and consume contemporary arts, which is a judgment I am knowingly making. This judgment has been informed by my childhood growing up in suburban Western Sydney, where movies and popular main stage musicals were our arts experiences¹; and years of presenting public art experiences across cities, suburbs, towns and remote communities. I never tire from the questions:

Why is this art?

Do you have a job?

Are you from council?

I still love seeing arts presented inside institutions and in the inner suburbs, but if audiences are full of artists and institutional subscribers, I ask: who are the arts for? There is nothing wrong with presenting artworks to a familiar audience, but it leaves me unsatisfied as both an artist and audience member.

I explain my dissatisfaction through a Social Acupuncture lens. To broaden access and participation in the arts, we must reach the larger society, which means finding ways to engage any ordinary person. It's essential, not only to include their voices in the arts, but by placing arts experiences in public spaces unfamiliar with them, we can challenge assumptions about contemporary arts², and boost contemporary arts literacy. From here, we can build new audiences for contemporary arts, and create deeper accessible arts experiences. Another long game, I know.

Concurrently the suburbs are a powerful point of departure that artists and the arts industry can benefit from through critical exchange on artworks in this environment, and further, to do so requires an adjustment in expectations and evaluation methods. I propose that by being site-responsive when presenting participatory encounters in suburban public spaces, we enable an in-depth, integrated and accessible practice to be developed, which can engage diverse social and cultural audiences in Australia.

Participants in suburban *The Care Taker* interactions revealed intimate and personal 'cares' to a stranger in full view of the public eye, suggesting people are very engaged

¹ Statistical information gathered by both Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014) and Australia Council of the Arts, National Arts Participation Survey (2017) concerning audience participation in the arts in Australia is limited by being concerned with ticket sales through major ticketing providers. Findings show the highest attendance being cinemas, music events and festivals. Attendance of contemporary, independent arts and culture, or art experiences without a commercial marketing output is absent.

² The National Arts Participation Survey (2017) found 43% of people over 15yrs in metropolitan Australia agree that the arts "attracted somewhat elitist or pretentious" people.

and interested in intimate arts experiences. Perhaps by profiling arts experiences in the suburbs, and their ability to investigate content beyond statistical comparisons (Kjaerulff, 2018), we can contribute to providing alternative concepts of place.

The Care Taker

The Care Taker is a live art, participatory series of installations creating an atmosphere of care, intimacy and community between strangers in public space. It is multiplatform; a public art installation, with exhibited crowd-sourced content; a site-responsive concept that can adapt to meet the conditions of an environment; and a research project to create new public art installations.

Sitting with comfy lounge chairs and a small rug, the Care Taker invites people to share a care with her, particularly one they'd like to be free from. The 'cares' are written down as the participant speaks, read back to them, assigned a catalogue code and the exchange concludes with a receipt for their care. Anonymous and uncensored, people speak uninhibited about topics affecting their lives. Being a stranger is meaningful, as it asks people to connect with someone they don't know, and in turn, may provide other connections beyond the familiar.

*This is better than seeing my psych
A knot has loosened
I've never said this out loud before³*



Figure 4. Exhibition of Cares, Arts Centre, Melbourne 2018. Photographer Bryony Jackson.

³ Participant responses.



Figure 5. Exhibition of Cares, Arts Centre, Melbourne 2018. Photographer Bryony Jackson.

Cares offered are generous and personal, ranging from world issues, to everyday life. Unlike a counselor, the Care Taker does not give guidance, and in this way cares for herself. The collection of ‘cares’ is exhibited for others to read, making visible the inner worlds of ordinary community members. Viewers find resonance, surprise and connection with the collection, and it offers a unique insight into people, located in time and place. For example, by writing the cares onto the window of a vacant shop, they became ideas hanging in space, requiring you to focus in-between yourself and the empty room behind the window, appearing almost transparent. At the same time, the reflection of the reader in the window acted to frame the care within that person’s face and body, making them somehow complicit in the content. This reflection extended to mirror the street and created a psychological atmosphere, of viewing our world, with a floating overlay of the collected cares. It offered the possibility that the cares may belong to anyone yet were explicitly linked to all of us under a public façade. The effect was poetic and added layers of possible readings to the artwork.

reading this makes me feel not so alone in my worries⁴

By placing a comfortable and inviting lounge chair installation on the street, I critique existing seating, provided by councils along footpaths and in public squares, that discourages striking up a conversation with strangers. Public seating is scarce, often uncomfortable, metal, unsheltered, cold and unwelcoming, limiting its use.

⁴ Audience response.



Figure 6. Exhibition of Cares, Balaclava 2018. Photographer Theresa Harrison.



Figure 7. Exhibition of Cares, Spotswood 2017. Photographer Sharyn Brand

Opportunities to sit and relax face to face with others are at cafes or restaurants, highlighting the consumerist delineation of public space. *The Care Taker* installation is perfectly positioned to sit within these spaces as a transgression of social norms and intended use of space questioning: Who is allowed to linger and connect in public spaces?

For accessibility across demographics the simple ritual and the Care Taker's role are designed to allow multiple entry points for participants to engage in the work at their own pace. Some know what they wanted to say immediately, whilst others, sit

contemplating for some time before revealing their offer, and a few people need to have a chat about other things before they can share their care. Some cares are a few words long, while others take up the whole page. Some people laugh as they speak, others are quite serious. Each experience is unique, highlighting the importance of the practitioner's openness to the individual participants.

To date fourteen iterations have been presented across Melbourne's suburbs and outer metro area, with one inner city location outside the iconic Art Centre Melbourne. Sites included footpaths, pop-up parks, festivals, shopping centres, libraries and inside a perspex cube. Design elements such as costume respond to the site, upscaling for particular venues and events, or casualizing to suit the community.

Iterations in response to site: Bus of Care and The Grounding

Being located temporarily in the site, rather than tied to the site has allowed iterations to be site responsive, while keeping the integrity of the works aims. This was especially important in two iterations; *Bus of Care* (2017) inside a bus at outer metropolitan Melbourne, Hurstbridge, and *The Grounding* (2018) at the regional extreme arts walk Mountain to Mouth. Each of these iterations departed significantly from the original iterations by being self-navigated installations. I took care while creating each of these to remain true to the original aims of the work, without the direct conversational aspect.



Figure 8. *Bus of Care* 2017. Photographer DanGoronsky.

Firstly, on being awarded a Nillumbik Shire Living in Landscape artist residency located at Hurstbridge, I was asked to consider including the Metro Community Bus in *The Care Taker* project. Due to access, the passengers, mostly octogenarians, were generally overlooked when it came to arts experiences, artworks and residency focuses in Nillumbik Shire. I was excited by the challenge to address this social deficiency through a form of Social Acupuncture (O'Donnell, 2006), and began by dressing the bus interior

Dan Goronszy

with colourful crochet blankets as a gift to the participants to create a sense of feeling cared for. *Bus of Care* gently introduced the passengers and bus drivers to the bus as an arts space and exposed an unknown desire for artistic encounters in the passengers and drivers. This created an opportunity for conversations and imagining of future projects on the bus, between the passengers and council workers.



Figure 9, 10. *The Grounding* 2017. Photographer Theresa Harrison.

Secondly, Mountain to Mouth is a biennial 80 km extreme arts walk, beginning with a morning ritual ceremony in the YouYangs mountains and ending with an evening ritual ceremony the following day, at Barwon Heads, via the river mouth. Local Indigenous Wathaurong people lead the ceremonies and were collaborators in the event with Artistic Director and ritual artist Margie Mackay. Along the 80 km, nine artists are curated to present commissioned artworks, called Walking Circles. The event sees up to 200 walkers travel the distance. *The Care Taker: The Grounding* was the ninth Walking Circle site and welcomed walkers and visitors over two hours.

The provocation to the walkers was: 'The Care I would like to leave behind is...'
The venue, The Grand Caravan, was a 1980's Millard caravan with the floor covered in soil. As the day progressed, the soil became an ephemeral map of the participants and the mingling stranger's footsteps.



Figure 11, 12. *The Grounding 2017*. Photographer Theresa Harrison.



Figure 13. *The Grounding 2017*. Photographer Theresa Harrison.

Cares as research: Self Serve and Freedom is a Moment

Two iterations were in residency format where an artistic response to the 'care' collection was created drawing from visual and theatrical art forms. Responding artistically to themes emerging from place, I used a holistic approach seeking integration between the cares, materials, form and site. Ephemeral materials and encounters sharing properties or metaphor with the content were researched and explored. *Self Serve* (2017, Dandenong) and *Freedom is a Moment* (2017, Hurstbridge) artworks offered further moments of reflection, conversation and connection after *The Care Taker* installation was gone. They were also my final gift to the communities for having me. In *Self Serve* people could take one of four specified periods of time. In this iteration time is free for whoever takes it, and challenges passers-by to offer themselves a moment of care. It is presented on price tags to critique consumer industry of care and subtly draws attention to the cost of time.



Figure 14. *Self Serve* 2017. Photographer Dan Goronszy.

Freedom is a Moment drew on my long practice in shadow puppetry. Shadow birds challenge physical limitations by appearing to make a daily journey from parkland over the wall of the courtyard, and into the offices that join it at the other end. The viewer may respond by remaining distant or stepping out into the sun with their own shadow mingling with that of the birds. Responding to the clouds and earth's orbit around the sun, the shadows, like cares, are sometimes visible, dark and defined, while at other times, a spectre that passes when we look back, maybe to return the next day, solid, or gone altogether.



Figure 15, 16. Freedom is a Moment. Photographer Dan Goronszy.

The Long Game Continues

Stranger Danger itself seems a dangerous concept worth our interrogation and our resistance. *The Care Taker's* popularity, both in the sharing and reading of cares, was a welcome surprise, suggesting a broadly shared desire to connect with strangers about personal topics. It gathered and shared information about previously undocumented real-life issues, present in time and place. People were surprised, moved, shocked and sometimes saddened by reading others 'cares'. Through its various iterations, the installation deepened my practice, and my understanding of how one artwork may be site-responsive and engage people from incredibly diverse demographics. Empathy and

kindness were present often, and potentially a ruffle in the social fabric has been made, contributing to the long game of social change.

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Dan Goronszy creates unexpected arts experiences that provoke wonder and conversation about humanity and the world. She is a multi-disciplinary artist and collaborator drawing on participatory installation, puppetry, design and physical theatre. Dan works with governments, festivals, schools and community organizations throughout Australia and the world to share arts experiences in a variety of settings. She is a long-time core member and international touring artist with Melbourne's Polyglot Theatre. Dan's public installations invite people to reveal themselves. This can be seen in several works undertaken in central and suburban Melbourne, Australia such as *The Care Taker* investigating intimacy between strangers at the Arts Centre Melbourne (2018), *Hobsons Bay Art In Public Space Festival* (2017), and in *Nilumbik Public Arts Residency* (2017); *Bedsheet Ghost Party* making children visible by making them invisible at *The Lost Lands Festival* (2018) *Abbotsford Convent* (2016); *Blood.Sex.Tears. Women of The World* (2017), *Geelong After Dark* (2016) and *La Mama Theatre, Melbourne* (2016); and *The Launching Board*, *Fawkner and MoreArt* (2015) and *Darebin* (2016).

Further interstate and international highlights include: *The Waterhole: Galapagos Islands*, giant puppet theatre after Graeme Base for Melbourne Zoo's *Neon Playground* (2019); *Future Postal Service*, Commonwealth Games Festival (2018), *Regional Arts Victoria tour* (2016), *Perth International Festival* (2015) *Federation Square* (2015) and *Arts Centre Melbourne* (2015); *Food Security Training* at *Alice Desert Festival* (2014); *When Claude Met Roxy* tri-state tour and sell out season *Brisbane Festival* (2013); *Pigeonhole* at *White Night* (2013); and *My Strange Pet* for *ABC3* (2009). Dan received a Master of Arts (Art in Public Space) in 2018 from RMIT University.

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Anti-monuments to the Immemorial. Exploring the how, why, and what next of our relationship to our environment.

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Abstract

Monuments typify human habitation of place, memorialising ideologies of the prevailing power from moments in time. In recent decades, their form has undergone a revolution. Along with their transformation from the heavy permanence of monumentality, to the temporality of anti-monumental form — subject matter has also diametrically shifted from representing the state, to representing the marginalised. My practice-based research explores further the anti-monuments' potential for social activism — to expand memorialisation beyond a human-centric narrative, to acknowledge the immemorial forces that shape place over deep time. An iterative creative process informs the major body of site-responsive works Human/Nature undertaken as Artist in Residence at Kyneton Botanic Gardens in regional Victoria, Australia, presented at the Kyneton Contemporary Art Triennial 2018.

Drawing on the site's deep time environmental and ideological origins as transformative forces, I created a series of anti-monuments: activating public space as an experimental laboratory to explore and discover the how, why, and what next of our relationship to our environment.

Keywords: social activism, public space, place, human-nature relationship, monument/anti-monument, deep time

To cite this article:

Stanley, J. (2019). Anti-monuments to the Immemorial. Exploring the how, why, and what next of our relationship to our environment. *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(3), 155-170, DOI 10.32891/jps.v4i3.1227

This article has been double blind peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



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First Things First: activism and public space.

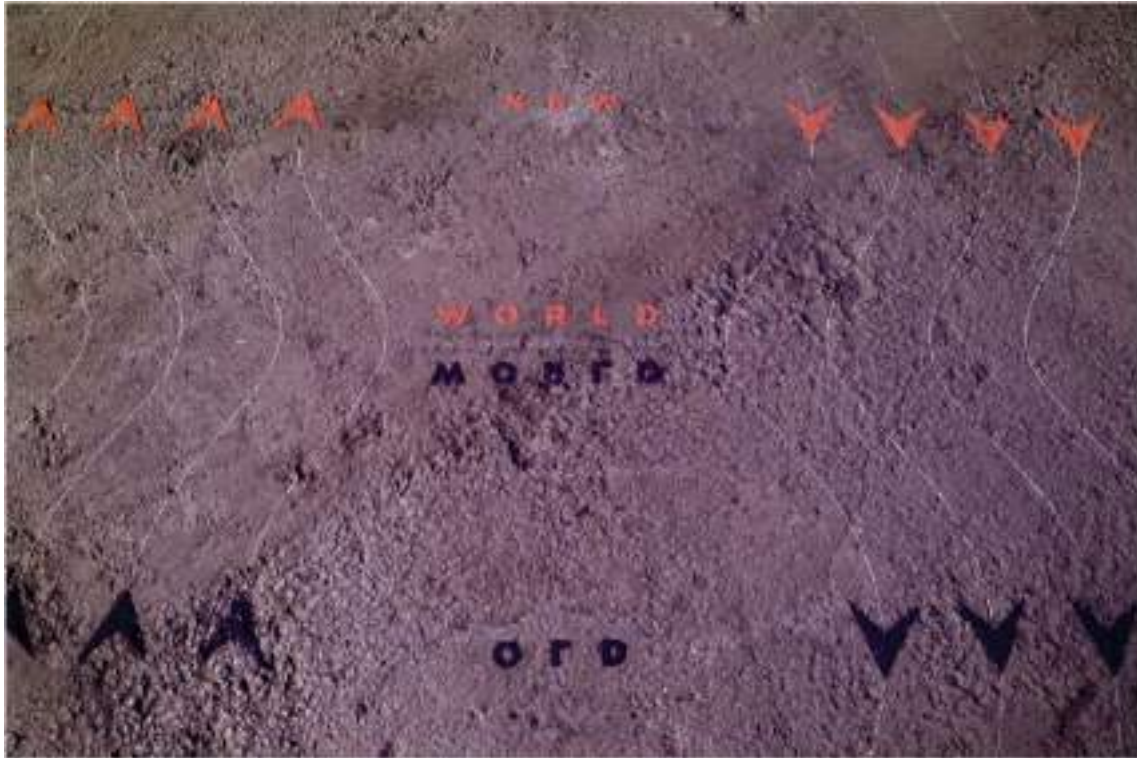


Figure 1. Detail of *Human/Nature, Act 01: Native/Foreign, Old World/New World*.
Photograph Jessie Stanley.

Framing the way I approach activism and public space in my arts practice, is my background in graphic design and alignment with the *First Things First Manifesto 2000* (Kalman, Lasn, et al 1999).

The manifesto was re-issued when I was midway through my graphic design studies in 2000. Its impassioned declaration for a paradigm shift in graphic design - to serve public over private interests - beautifully articulated the potential I saw in graphic design to help shape a better world. The original manifesto (written and published by Ken Garland in 1964) summarised a growing unease with the entanglement of graphic design with global consumerism, and their saturating effect on public consciousness through television, press, radio, and billboard advertising. Its re-issue by a new generation of designers reiterated this dissatisfaction with graphic design's role in saturating public space and challenged graphic designers to utilise their communication skills to engage in work championing democracy and curiosity.

“Designers who devote their efforts primarily to advertising, marketing and brand development are supporting, and implicitly endorsing, a mental environment so saturated with commercial messages that it is changing the very way citizen-consumers speak, think, feel, respond and interact. To some extent we are all helping draft a reductive and immeasurably harmful code of public discourse.”

(Kalman, Lasn, et al 1999)

It situated the predominant function of graphic design as shaping and occupying a public space that symbiotically championed consumerism, whilst it drowned out more pressing issues of our time: “unprecedented environmental, social and cultural crises” (Kalman, Lasn, et al, 1999). It indelibly impressed upon me the role that graphic designers can play in positively (or negatively) affecting the way meaning is produced within society:

“We propose a reversal of priorities in favour of more useful, lasting and democratic forms of communication – a mindshift away from product marketing and toward the exploration and production of a new kind of meaning. The scope of debate is shrinking; it must expand. Consumerism is running uncontested; it must be challenged by other perspectives expressed, in part, through the visual languages and resources of design”.
(Kalman, Lasn, et al 1999)

Since first reading these words I’ve spent much time deliberating and experimenting with how I might use my skills as a visual communicator to create “more useful, lasting and democratic forms of communication” (Kalman, Lasn, et al, 1999). Upon graduating, I undertook internships aligned with the manifesto. First, I travelled to Fabbrica in Treviso, Italy - a unique communication research centre for under 25 year-olds to develop and test ideas for communication works as vehicles of social change (founded by Luciano Benetton, it’s also the home of Colors magazine founded by signatory Tibor Kalman). I then travelled to The Hague in the Netherlands for an internship at Studio Dumbar (founded by signatory Gert Dumbar) – a more traditional design studio that creates communication material for private and cultural institutions such as banks, telcos, galleries, and publishing houses.

Bringing these experiences home, I formed a design studio, Foundry (2003-2012), in my hometown of Melbourne, Australia. Its focus was to co-opt the private space of marketing communications, into opportunities to expand our understanding of the world around us - to communicate ideas that matter. I found like-minded clients who supported my approach - creating communication material ranging from a visual exploration of the mathematical structure of roses for an Aesop product; an artist’s book for Spicers Paper’s ‘Starwhite’ range featuring an extrapolation of Drake’s equation (which estimates the number of planets in the universe that have intelligent life forms); to a poster series for Oxford University communicating their research findings on genetic variation in the UK.

Gradually commissions came along that afforded more autonomous creative freedom, pre-empting me to refocus my practice. Today, I situate my practice as an artist/designer intervening in public space, with “useful, lasting and democratic forms of communication” (Kalman, Lasn, et al, 1999). Shifting the context of my practice from the commercial industry of graphic design to the cultural life of public space, continues to open up new and exciting ways of giving voice and attention to the pressing issues highlighted in the manifesto: “unprecedented environmental, social and cultural crises” (Kalman, Lasn, et al, 1999).

Today in 2019, it is imminent that humans will be declared as the most dominant force in shaping environmental change; heralding a new epoch coined the Anthropocene (Carrington, 2016). In order to shape a more sustainable future we must urgently rethink our relationship with our environment. By situating narratives about the

environment and human kind within public space, the human construct of 'place' is contextualised. Within my research intensive, site responsive practice, I contest and renegotiate our relationship with shaping place. Drawing on historiographic, geographic and scientific research, I create site responsive installations that temporarily co-opt place into an experimental lab — where we can test, explore, and discover the how, why, and what next of our relationship to our environment.

Place

The term 'place' originated in c. 400 BCE, with Plato and Aristotle philosophising about 'inhabited Earth'. Each viewed place as being an ontological condition for existence, as 'the ground for existence itself' (Cresswell 2015: 26). Today, place is a subject of debate across many disciplines, including architecture, philosophy, urban planning and ecology. My interest in place aligns with a geographical interpretation – describing the creative inertia of humans shaping their locality with its environmental assets and the tools at their disposal, driven by their ideologies. Place in this sense becomes 'a way of understanding the world' (Cresswell 2015: 18), and 'is not simply something to be observed, researched and written about but is itself a part of the way we see, research and write' (Cresswell 2015: 24).

Place + time

The phenomenon of monumentality is intrinsic to the genesis of place, as the prevailing power adorns their environment with memorials that celebrate their ideology. Marking moments in time, traditional monuments typically represent the desire of their benefactor to imprint a permanent legacy that reflects their position, power and influence. In their wake, Earth is littered with monuments – their meaning often forgotten or made irrelevant by the passage of time (Connerton, 2008; Savage, 1999; Winter, 1999). In this way, places assert a sense of time related to human life span (centuries, decades, or less), and the depth of our experience within them is contingent on the intelligibility and relevance of their symbolism.

The greater the extent of human development of our environments, the more removed we become from nature, and encountering a sense of time related to Earth's life span; 'geologic time' or 'deep time' (billions, millions or hundreds of thousands of years classified into aeons, eras, periods, epochs and ages). Accordingly, our opportunity to gain meaning and context by experiencing our sublime relationship to the astronomical scale of time and space becomes buried by place and concealed from our view (Grant, 2016; Hutton, cited in Farrier 2016; Marx, cited in Lefebvre, 1968).

Further to this, the way we experience place is now layered with a post-human relationship to technological tools, that mediate - and create an interface between physical, digital and virtual (Braidotti, Karvelas, 2018). Our smart phones have shifted our sense of time and place to a forever-changing luminous screen. Coupled with decades of consuming an avalanche of marketing messages, as the manifesto foretold, our attention span continues to shrink. And our concept of place becomes a decentralised, amorphous, abstracted reality, where we can be both here, and there, simultaneously.

The durational tensions that co-exist within place fascinate me. Anchoring my works within place provides a relational context to broach these durational tensions. I draw upon the particularities of a place, to engage the audience in our changing relationship with our environment and sense of time.

Place minus permanence: anti-monuments

In recent decades commemorative form has undergone a revolution; diametrically shifting from representing the state, to representing the marginalised. In 1992, James E Young coined the term 'counter-monument' to summarise this shift away from the emphasis of a memorial in public space from the monumental (a formal, tangible object to be venerated) to the contemporaneous (which instead invites audience contemplation, participation, and engagement: and emphasises their role in 'remembering' as the crucial element in completing the memorial) (Young, 1992; Hung, 2002; Froggett cited in Doherty, 2015). Since Young's seminal coining of the term, the practice of redressing monumentality has flourished, and the term is applied to many methodologies. Of particular interest to my practice is the 'anti-monument': a form of commemoration in public space that typically draws attention to under-represented subjects, takes on temporary or horizontal form, is site responsive and engages visitors in temporal experience and meaning (Stevens, Franck, and Fazakerley 2012).

Within my practice-based research I'm further exploring this potential of the anti-monument for social activism. I create fleeting experiences with ephemeral materials that change the way we understand an environment - beyond a human-centric narrative, to acknowledge the immemorial forces that have shaped it over deep time.

Human/Nature 2018

As Artist in Residence at Kyneton Botanic Gardens, Victoria, Australia, for Kyneton Contemporary Art Triennial 2018, I researched its flora, geology and history, and consulted with the Friends of Kyneton Botanic Gardens and horticulturist Dr Peter May to inform a series of site-responsive, anti-monumental works. My ontological investigation aimed to trace the influence of humans and nature in shaping the Garden's site through space and deep time. By focusing this enquiry on the Gardens, I sought to reflect a broader narrative of how place evidences the sublime: 'the world in a grain of sand' (Blake & Washington, 1968).

'All of the elements found on Earth originate from the first few seconds of the Big Bang, and, the closer we look at the origins of life on Earth, the closer we come to understanding the inherent connectedness of the Universe.'

—Extract from audio *Meteorological/Geological, Act 01: Native/Foreign*, Ajax factory installation, Kyneton, Victoria, Australia (Stanley, 2018)

Kyneton Botanic Garden's ordered landscaping and exotic plants from distant lands assert its colonial foundations and conceal the deep time geological transformations buried beneath it that support the areas agricultural success and are evident in the town's bluestone buildings.

The series of site-responsive and interactive artworks I created invited visitors to participate in a narrative journey, to join me in tracing the origins of Kyneton Botanic Gardens through space and deep time. Divided into three acts, each could be experienced sequentially or autonomously. *Act 01: Native/Foreign* was situated in a derelict factory in Kyneton's industrial area. *Act 02: Global/Universal* and *Act 03: Space/Time* were located in Kyneton Botanic Gardens. Visitors embarked on their journey at each with a map, and an audio guide accessible via Soundcloud.

Act 01: Native/Foreign

Ephemeral installation, various botanic and geologic materials, map, audio
Location: Former Ajax Factory, 31 Beauchamp Street, Kyneton

The materials used to create this installation were distinctly tenuous. Botanic and geologic specimens from the Gardens, together with products of economic botany such as spices and pigments, created an interactive chart to explore, guided by the audio narrative. Coupled into dualities, they represented a focused sample of the relationship between humans and nature in shaping Kyneton Botanic Gardens, addressing themes of migration, colonisation, globalisation, acclimatisation, capitalism, legacy and extinction.



Figure 2. Jessie Stanley sweeping away years of accumulated dust in preparation for installation of Act 01: Native/Foreign at the Ajax Factory site. Photograph courtesy Missy Saleeba, 2018.



Figure 3. Installing Act 01: Native/Foreign at the Ajax Factory site, Jessie Stanley with Mariah Bakhtiar and Jacqui Gordon. Photograph courtesy Missy Saleeba, 2018.



Figure 4 (on the left). Map detail, Floor plan of Act 01: Native/Foreign, Jessie Stanley 2018.
Figure 5 (on the right). Audio narrative for Act 01: Native/Foreign accessed via Soundcloud. Photograph courtesy of Marc Eiden, 2018.



Figure 6. *Human/Nature, Act 01: Native/Foreign, Meteorological/ Geological*, Jessie Stanley 2018. Ephemeral installation, bluestone aggregate and dust, local brown and grey dermosol soil, 5.6x5.6m. Audio track 02:36. Former Ajax Factory, 31 Beauchamp Street, Kyneton. Photograph courtesy Ian Hill.



Figure 7. *Human/Nature, Act 01: Native/Foreign, Migration/Germination*, Jessie Stanley 2018. Ephemeral installation, Black pepper, lettuce, basil, coriander and broccoli seeds, chalk, 2.45x2.45m. Audio track 01:16. Former Ajax Factory, 31 Beauchamp Street, Kyneton. Photograph courtesy Ian Hill.



Figure 8. Detail of *Human/Nature, Act 01: Native/Foreign, Survival/Extinction*.
Photograph Jessie Stanley.

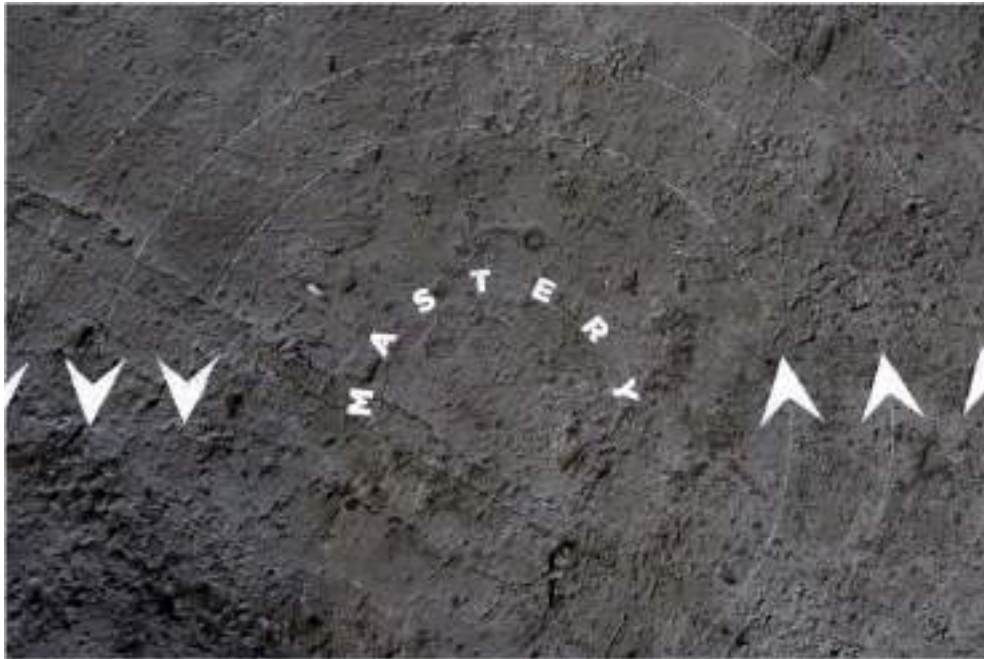


Figure 9. Detail of plain flour stencilled for *Human/Nature, Act 01: Native/Foreign, Mastery/Harmony*.
Photograph Jessie Stanley.



Figure 10. Detail of disintegration of *Human/Nature, Act 01: Native/Foreign, Old World/New World*. Photograph Jessie Stanley.



Figure 11. *Human/Nature, Act 01: Native/Foreign, Migration/Germination* in situ. Photograph courtesy Lauren Peters.



Figure 12. Visitors exploring Human/Nature, Act 01: Native/Foreign, Migration/Germination. Photograph courtesy Kyneton Contemporary Inc.

Jessie Stanley

Act 02: Global/Universal

Projection installation, transparent vinyl

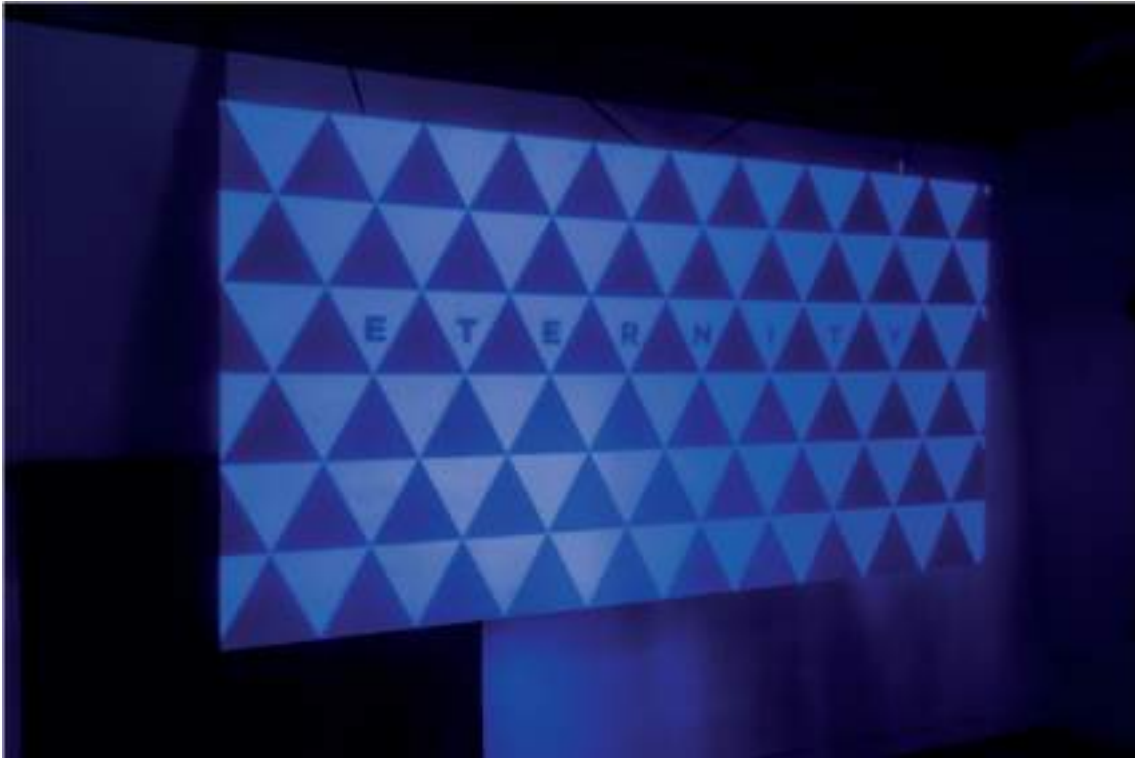
Location: Kyneton Botanic Gardens Cottage

This interactive installation transformed the cottage into an experimental lab broaching the colonisation of Mars. Projected light echoed the blue and red LEDs used to grow edible plants on the International Space Station. Filtered viewing through each coloured window pane concealed and revealed different elements within the projection, playing with the properties of light and the way we perceive colour to create illusions with form and text.



Figure 13. Visitors exploring the projection at the cottage: coloured filters on the cottage window panes transform the projected image of Human/Nature.

Act 02: Global/Universal.



*Figure 14. Projection as viewed through blue coloured window pane, Human/Nature, Act 02: Global/Universal.
Photograph courtesy Ian Hill.*



*Figure 15. Projection as viewed through red coloured window pane, Human/Nature, Act 02: Global/Universal.
Photograph courtesy Ian Hill.*

Act 03: Space/Time

Guided walk, map, audio

Location: Kyneton Botanic Gardens

A series of the Gardens artefacts were examined on this narrated walk to consider how they echo a broader relationship between humans and nature in shaping Earth, and the inspiration they provide to my artistic practice as examples of monumentality. Each of the works highlighted the elastic tension of the forces that shape place. Reiterating this idea through the use of dualities in their titles, I proposed dialectic enquiry for visitors to explore and seek a holistic 'true' representation of place (Kolodziejski, 2015). The overarching duality of *Human/Nature* informs each work's siting: with the very 'human' environment of a derelict industrial factory, paired against a man-made reserve for 'nature' at the Gardens. While the factory housed introduced geologic and botanic material (setting up a tension between the introduced, and the endemic), the Gardens cottage contained an installation symbolising technology. The projection installation in the Gardens cottage *Global/Universal* drew on the narrative posed at the factory site, as the next frontier being Mars — further playing on the inward/outward thinking it poses with the duality to be discovered in the projection: eternity/gravity.

The Gardens walk *Space/Time* completed the audience journey with a contemplative walk that embodied the transformation of space into place over time (Alys 2004; Cardiff 1991; Smudge Studio 2011). The audio that accompanied the guided walk examined the deep-time origins of the Garden's botanical and architectural artefacts. The final artefact; a somewhat small Sierra Redwood tree - comparatively to redwoods in their native land of California: which are the largest living thing on Earth by volume. The first and largest redwoods discovered by colonisers in California were stripped of their bark for display in London (Delamotte, P.H. 1859), and cut down for their timber. The walk culminates in a provocation for the audience to build a kind of anti-monument to the redwood's destruction with their imagination:

"Today, scientists are undertaking the monumental task of sequencing the genomes of the coast redwood and giant sequoia in an effort to learn how to protect them against climate change and regenerate their forests. Like human beings, redwoods manifest a broad genetic range - no two are identical. Contrary to humans, the coast redwood genome is ten times larger than the human genome. Within the human body every cell contains an entire genome, and if each base pair of our genomes were side by side, they would span just over a meter. If we were to print out the data of our 3.1467 billion base pairs - the same data would fill 1.2 million A4 single sided sheets, which would form a stack of around 130metres - towering just over the height of the Discovery Tree."

—Extract from audio *Profit/Value*, Act 03: *Space/Time*, Kyneton Botanic Gardens (Stanley, 2018)

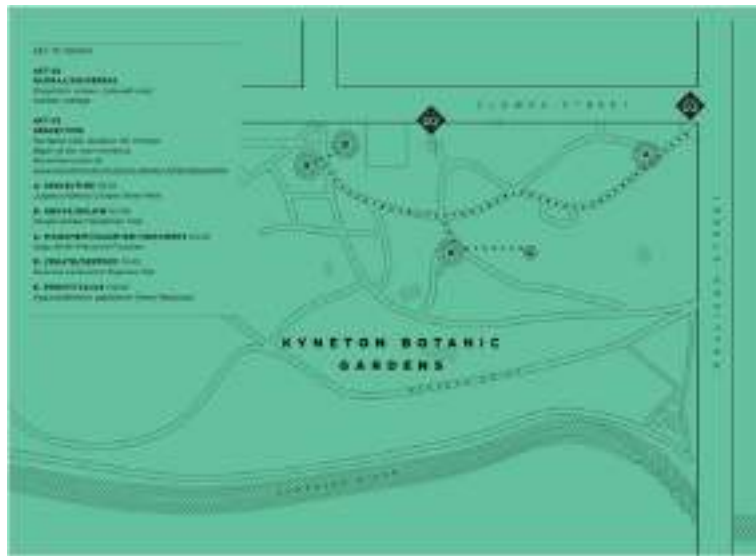


Figure 16. Map detail, Act 03: Space/Time, Jessie Stanley 2018.

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Jessie Stanley lives and works in Central Victoria, Australia, and recently completed a major body of works as Artist in Residence at Kyneton Botanic Gardens in regional Victoria. Stanley's background in graphic design informs her socially engaged practice, which embraces the congruence of art in public space and graphic design as platforms for affecting the way meaning is produced within society. Upon completing a Bachelor of Visual Communication with First Class Honors at Monash University in 2001, Stanley undertook an internship at Fabrica in Italy in 2002; and then established her design studio Foundry (2003-2012), in Melbourne Australia. Her design/visual art projects have received international recognition; awards include the Type Directors Club of New York, Premiers Design Awards, and Australian Graphic Design Association, and have been exhibited internationally. In 2018 Stanley was awarded Master of Arts (Art in Public Space) with Distinction at RMIT University, and the Vice Chancellors List for Academic Excellence.

Through typography, mapping, projection, and narrative, Stanley creates ephemeral works about place that contextualise our human experience within deep time and interstellar space. Works are site responsive and developed through an intensive process of historiographic and geographic research, underpinned by scientific theory. Unearthing the forces that shape place; Stanley stages scenarios that encourage curiosity in the sublime relationship we have with our environment.

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The Making of ‘Good’ Mirrors: Art and Activism in Public Space

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Abstract

This article, The Making of ‘Good’ Mirrors: Art and Activism in Public Space, discusses the Feminist and Indigenous methods I apply to co-created collaborative and relational portraiture projects expressly created for public space and semi-public space and how they act as art and activism. The discussed projects, created using still and moving image, work in resistance to the problem of the gendered aesthetic within the Australian context through the applied making methods within a social studio, the politics of representation and the public placement of the project’s products. Discussed projects include #IAMWOMAN (2017-current), Women Dreaming (2018) and Flipping the Script (2018).

Keywords: women, representation, photography, collaborative photography, collaborative portraiture, feminism, Indigenous methods, public space, art and activism

To cite this article:

Haines, J. (2019). The Making of ‘Good’ Mirrors: Art and Activism in Public Space, *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(3), 171-184, DOI 10.32891/jps.v4i3.1228

This article has been double blind peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



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The Making of 'Good' Mirrors: Art and Activism in Public Space

*"Good Mirrors are not cheap
it is a waste of time hating the mirror
or its reflection
instead of stopping the hand
that makes glass with distortions
slight enough to pass
unnoticed."*

(Good Mirrors are Not Cheap, Audre Lorde)



Figure 1. IAMWOMAN 2019 ArtsHouse, North Melbourne, Australia.
Documentation image. Photograph: Jody Haines.

The Mirror

What is and how do we make a 'Good' mirror? African American feminist poet and civil rights activist, Audre Lorde (1934-92) says in her poem, "they are not cheap" (2017: 177). If they are not cheap, is this an indicator of their rarity? Maybe a good mirror is not typical. For me, what I understand to be a 'good' mirror reflects with assumed accuracy. It does not distort appearances but echoes what I am expecting to see; the shape of my body, the colour of my skin, the lines of my face. A reflection I believe to be true. But what if I have never looked into a 'good' mirror but only into surfaces with varying degrees of distortion, imitating and informing my gender, my race, my sexuality. Would I know the difference? Can I see past the twist and the buckle crafted by another's hand and reposition my gaze? Is what I see reality or a construction? In the following document, I discuss making 'good' mirrors or creating an alternate reflection – specifically repositioning the gaze across public spaces, as it relates to the visual representation of women and those humans who identify as women. Through a feminist standpoint and my Indigenous methodology, I co-create collaborative and relational portraits with women. The works, created for public space and semi-public space, actively resist the problem of the gendered aesthetic within the Australian context, acting as examples of art and activism.

There are two key elements I respond to within my practice – the gendered and racialised aesthetic produced by the Australian media and the commercial photography industry. The media acts as a significant vehicle for the communication of race representation and gender norms that privilege men as a group (Brooks and Hébert, 2006, Dobson, 2015). The Australian media is also highly concentrated, controlled by a small number of corporations and interconnected family interests who dominate much of the production (Finkelstein et al., 2012).

Across media productions, the visual representation of women is both under-represented as producers and also disproportionately featured as either a victim or an object (Darian-Smith, 2016). The portrayal of Indigenous Australians is overwhelmingly poor. A Curtin University study found within 335 news articles over 12 months (2013-14) 15% were positive, 74% negative, and 11% were neutral (Stoneham et al., 2014). These products are highly visible and accessible across public space. The second issue is commercial photography itself, which predominantly is still a 'boys club'. Although women make up the majority of graduates from tertiary photography programs, they make up less than 25% of photographers represented by agencies within Australia (Sebag-Montefiore, 2019) and globally, women sit at 15% of professional news photographers (Hadland et al., 2016). Within advertising, although women make up over 80% of the consumer market, 92% of the advertising images are created by men (Sebag-Montefiore, 2019, Greenberg, 2018). As Internationally renowned portrait photographer, Jill Greenberg noted in her recent TEDx talk, *the Female Lens*, "those who are paid to create the images that shape our culture have real power" (2018 5min 16sec). In other words, it is the images created by men that surround us. The view presented, the creators of the non-verbal postures that we textually read, are predominately generated by the male frame, through their gaze (Berger, 1972, Mulvey, 1975, Wells, 2005, Greenberg, 2018). The first point of my activism: *break the mirror, replace the maker.*



Figure 2 (left). #Bruja, Tania, 2018 from series IAMWOMAN. Photograph: Jody Haines.
Figure 2A (right). #Collected, Vanessa, 2018 from series #IAMWOMAN. Photograph: Jody Haines.

Break the Mirror: replace the maker – A social studio

To break the mirror, replace the maker, not only refers to changing the gender behind the lens, but also to breaking the gendered approach seemingly inherent to the language of photography. *Shoot, capture, expose, take* are all photography speak and the typical image of the photographer, as author and theorist Ariella Azoulay (1962) has written "is identified as a male figure roaming around the world and pointing his camera at objects, places, people, and events..." (2016: 187). To *replace the maker* required me to change. To change the process and structure of the way I make photographs, the language I used to speak about photography, and the setup and performance of making. Susan Sontag (1933-2004) in her book *On Photography* (1971) notably argued that "there is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera" (1971: 7). To break down this idea of the aggressive and the predatory nature of the camera, the experience needed to become a personal and collaborative exercise, the camera, secondary to the engagement. In my practice, the concept of a social studio emerged; in 2017, although I didn't have a descriptor or term until 2019. The implementation of the social studio occurred during a residency at the Women of the World Festival, Melbourne, where I first began #IAMWOMAN. This social studio concept draws on my Indigenous and feminist

standpoint, a Tommeginner¹ feminist standpoint, a location to which I bring my whole self². The photographic studio becomes a place focused on the act of making and making together as equally as the image produced. It is a space where conversation drives the engagement. A discussion centred on examining the gendered aesthetic that surrounds us and encourages a societal change in our representation. My personal Indigenous methodology focuses on the importance of the act of making, and the act of making together, not primarily the ~~product~~ visual outcome produced. The making occurs through collaborative yarning and sharing of knowledge – personal, cultural and tacit knowledge³. This process of the yarnin' circle endeavours to shift the centre of power and knowledge away from a singular person to the collective group, developing the basis from which to form an equal and shared space to create and learn (Martin, 2018, Bessarab and Ng'Andu, 2010, Fredericks et al., 2011).

The projects are female-focused and female lead (for women by women). The objective is to create an *Active/Active* arrangement in the making - *Active* Photographer, *Active* participant. Historically, the active role has been granted to the photographer (generally a male), leaving the subject (usually a female) in the passive position of being looked at (Mulvey, 1975). To create the *Active* participation, firstly the women involved in the projects, all self-nominate. Creating active participation is formed through relationship building, a relational exchange. Together, we explore what it is to be a woman, our feminist futures and feminist pasts, along with the textual analysis of the very public images we see of women. Exploring the downward angle, the soft lighting, the seductive look, and who is privileged within this frame. Together we exchange. We discover. We listen deeply. We plot, we laugh, we cry, we swear. Together we make an image, a representation of a moment containing five frames. A moment directed by the participant who then titles their image with a word, sight unseen.

¹ Tommeginner is the name given to the Indigenous tribal group, the first people, of the North West Coast of Tasmania, Australia.

² The name 'social studio' should not be confused with 'The Social Studio' in Collingwood, Victoria. Founded in 2009, the Social Studio is "a social enterprise that champions the values of diversity, community, education, environmentally sustainable design and ethical business practices" 2015. *The Social Studio* [Online]. Online: Twist Design. Available: <https://www.thesocialstudio.org/about-us/> [Accessed July 2019].

³ Yarning or Yarnin' Circles is an Indigenous way of learning and exchanging knowledge. The exchange is based on the process of caring and communicating. Important elements include: to be present in the moment, to be respectful, to be open, honest and listen deeply. Plus acknowledge and share strengths and knowledge in turn. Dunleavy, J. n.d. *About Yarning Circles: A Guide for participants* [Online]. On line: GNIBI Southern Cross University. Available: <https://www.scu.edu.au/media/scueduau/academic-schools/-gnibi-college-of-indigenous-australian-peoples/About-Yarning-Circles-A-Guide-for-Participants.pdf> [Accessed August 2019 2019].



Figure 3 (left). #Strong, Lorna, 2019, from the series #IAMWOMAN. Photograph: Jody Haines.
Figure 3A (right). #Hope, Natasha, 2019, from the series #IAMWOMAN. Photograph: Jody Haines.

This process was applied to working with Aboriginal Elders (Aunties) in the *Women Dreaming* project⁴. The relationship was established through the collaborative yarnin' circle, exploring our connection to history, to culture, who we are as Aboriginal women. American author, professor, activist, and cultural critic bell hooks (1952) in her book *Black Looks: Race and Representation* says

Since decolonisation as a political process is always a struggle to define ourselves in and beyond the act of resistance to domination, we are always in the process of both remembering the past even as we create new ways to imagine and make the future (1992, p. 5)

It is this act of re-defining ourselves or defining our position through the yarnin' process I am transferring into the studio for the image-making, creating images that draw on the returned gaze and the right to 'look'. The visual feel of the project was co-created between the Aunts – the colour transitions and use of language words included in the project. The end product was the representation they wanted to share, a description of a moment containing five frames. In the words of feminist author and academic, Sara Ahmed "moments can become movements" (2017: 436). My next point of activism: *Break the Mirror, reposition the gaze – whose voice?*

⁴ 'Aunty' is the term provided to a female Australian Aboriginal Elder. An Aboriginal Elder is someone who has gained community recognition, respect and standing, someone who holds knowledge or is a custodian of knowledge and lore.



Figure 4. Projection Detail, *Women Dreaming*, Aunty Peggy, 2018, Brisbane Powerhouse, Queensland, Australia. Photograph: Jody Haines.

Break the Mirror: reposition the gaze – whose voice is privileged?

Woven through my work is a commitment to the politics of representation and how we represent ourselves. I acknowledge I am far from being the first artist to engage participants in a co-authoring or collaborative portraiture process. The shift towards including participants in the making rather than being seen as the 'subjects' of photographs has been developing since the early 1970's, growing out from the community photography movement in the United Kingdom (Palmer, 2013, Turnbull, 2015, Luvera, 2010).⁵ Inside my practice although generally my finger is on the shutter, the process of how we 'represent' is explored with each participant - through informed consent and engaging in an open discussion about the look and feel of images and their 'directorial role' in the engagement. #IAMWOMAN project privileges the voices of

⁵ Key artists working in the collaborative photography field include (but are not limited to) Australian photographer Anthony Luvera, American photographers Wendy Ewald and Susan Meislas, and French artist, JR.

women. The women who participate in the project are intergenerationally ranging from younger to older (18 to 89 years old). They're also intersectional across their lived experience - race, religion and sexuality. *Women Dreaming* privileged older Aboriginal women, honouring their knowledge, lived experience and community standing. For *Flipping the Script*, an initiative of Wyndham City Council and Creative Victoria, the women included here are young women from the Afro-diaspora living in the Western suburbs of Melbourne. Young women ranging in age from 15 to 20 with family roots in South Sudan, Sudan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia and more. At the time of creating the work, the political climate prescribed an African Gang problem existing across Melbourne, which in turn became a racialised media frenzy (Budarick, 2018). The young women were completely unrelated to the 'gang problem', yet they personally expressed how they felt socially labelled and treated as such.

Across four weeks, learning photography and video techniques, lighting, storyboarding and visual language, the young women explored ideas of Australia's cultural ignorance of *Africa...Not a country* (Haines et al., 2018a), Queer identity in *For You* (Haines et al., 2018b) and the feminist politics of hair in *Don't touch my hair* (Haines and Olubodun, 2018). The collection of video works may not have been the familiar stories expected by the commissioning body, but the funders voice wasn't the priority. The stories reflected the representation the participants wanted to create, privileging their stories, their faces, their lived experience. Next point of Activism: *Break the Mirror, reposition the gaze – public placement*

Break the Mirror: reposition the gaze – public placement

As indicated in the previous section, the politics of representation is not a new idea and today, there is an increasing number of photographic practitioners choosing to work through this question, in collaborative or socially engaged practice (Luvera, 2019). The key characteristic of my practice I explore after the making of collaborative works, is their placement across public spaces, and how this could be read or received by the public.

The product of *Women Dreaming* was a large-scale projection displayed on an exterior wall of Brisbane Powerhouse in Queensland. The venue, an old Power Station transformed into a contemporary performance and arts space, sits adjacent to the active public gardens, New Farm Park, Brisbane. Programmed during the state-wide Cultural Celebrations Festival 2018 (created for the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games), and Women of the World Australia 2018 (both the commissioning parties), *Women Dreaming* aired for four nights, situated amongst the celebration of the Commonwealth⁶. An entity that stole, colonised and practised the systematic destruction of Indigenous knowledge, language and culture. Australia, as part of this celebrated 'Commonwealth', is the only Commonwealth Country to have never signed a treaty with its First Nations People (Marshallsea, 2017).

⁶ The Commonwealth is a political association originally created by the British Empire.



Figure 5. Projection Detail, *Women Dreaming*, Aunty Norita, 2018, Brisbane Powerhouse, Queensland, Australia.
Photograph: Jody Haines.

A number of ideas went into the presentation, including the colonial ideas around who has knowledge (First World/Western/modern worlds) and who has culture (Third World/first peoples/indigenous peoples) (Mignolo, 2009). Knowledge played into the work by incorporating a language word provided by each Elder. Culture operated in the magnitude and scale of the projection. At approximately nine meters high and sixteen meters wide, the size felt like the women's gaze challenged the audiences right to look and ultimately, the structure of the celebration itself. Strong black women looked back. They were asserting their space and their culture. Outside of the programmed festival audience, the very public location allowed the wider community to 'stumble' across the work. Wanting to know more, many people engaged in conversations on treaty,

constitutional recognition, language, and why only female faces were displayed. The grandkids of the women looked on in awe. They saw black women, older women, their family publicly honoured - not a visual representation Indigenous kid generally see. Seeing our community represented, in a self-directed, collaborative way, rather than as a victim, object or negative representation expands options and perspectives for the next generation. As American activist Marian Wright Edelman says, "It's hard to be what you can't see" (2015, para. 5)



Figure 6. Install Image #IAMWOMAN 2017 Knox Community Arts Centre, Immerse Festival.
Photograph: Jody Haines.

Counteracting woman-as-object, #IAMWOMAN has had several public presentations across different iterations of the work, from being installed in A0 sized light boxes facing a highway at Knox Community Arts Centre, Baywater, an outer suburb of Melbourne, to appearing in two Women of the World festivals across Australia (Brisbane and Melbourne). Fifteen newly created images were installed across public spaces in North Melbourne (July - August 2019). Supported and programmed by Arts House, City of Melbourne, large portraits appeared in windows across the North Melbourne Town Hall, Post office, Library and Community Centre. The faces are women from around the area. Often #IAMWOMAN is located and viewed amongst the myriad of images that occupy public space – primarily the advertising we are surrounded by; this iteration is no different. The proximity and juxtaposition with advertising hold the potential to de-power the images, reinforcing the idea of woman-as-object (Greenberg, 2018). However, through the size, intimacy and visual difference of #IAMWOMAN, a visible difference created through the social studio experience, the work due to the proximity with advertising also has the potential to impact a viewer. Australian art historian, Dr

Julie Cotter, who specialises in portraiture, wrote the following about #IAMWOMAN telling the impact she experienced in a letter of congratulations,

"The images show an intimacy of interaction between the artist and subject, gently shared in turn with the audience, displaying a depth of emotion and dignity; you feel you could know them in a personal way." (2017)



Figure 7 Projection Detail, Women Dreaming 2018, Auntie Moira. Brisbane Powerhouse, Queensland, Australia. Photograph: Jody Haines.

The true impact on the viewer is unmeasurable. But if the images raise interest or show them something different, I can only hope they'll begin to question and challenge "the hand that makes glass with distortions." (Lorde, 2017: 177)

'Good' Mirrors

In conclusion, creating good mirrors is a slow process. It takes time and necessitates bringing your whole self to the table. It exercises deep listening and changing behaviours – both personal and social - to build feminist futures that recognise Indigenous identity, to reimagine the mirror. My activism, my practice, it's a quiet, slow burn, chipping away at the fabric of our social bias by reshaping the mirror, by our own hands.



Figure 8 IAMWOMAN 2019 ArtsHouse, North Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia. Documentation image. Photograph: Jody Haines.

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Jody Haines is a photo media artist - photography, video and projection - based in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. By applying an Indigenous and feminist filter to her work, Haines focuses on identity, representation and the Female Gaze within the Australian context. Haines presents her work across the gallery cube and public spaces. Haines has exhibited widely including Sydney Festival 2018 and Ballarat International Foto Biennale 2017 as part of Tell: Contemporary Indigenous Photography, and Gertrude Street Projection Festival 2017. In 2017, Haines was awarded the Emerging artist award for Immerse 2017, for her work #IAMWOMAN, an ongoing social portrait project. She has been commissioned to create work for festivals such as Women of the World and Festival 2018 Commonwealth Games with the Women Dreaming Project, and Through sKIN we Breathe, held in Dance Massive 2019, and Our people Our place a new public art commission for Horizons Festival 2019, Sunshine Coast Queensland, collaborating with the local community in a visual and audio projection work. Engaged as a lead artist/video artist across projects including Flipping the script 2018 and Place Patterns 2018 both supported by Creative Victoria and Wyndham City Council. Haines completed a Master of Arts, Art in Public Space, at RMIT (2018) with Distinction, and was included on the Vice Chancellors Academic List RMIT 2018. Currently a PhD candidate at RMIT School of Art, she is looking at Relational and Collaborative Photography as a tool for social change. She lives and works on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung peoples and is a descendant of the Tommeginner peoples of Tasmania.

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VIEWPOINT

Neither a hoax nor art: Politics

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Abstract

On a Saturday morning in May 2013, a sign indicating a public work was installed on Padre Belchior Street, in central Belo Horizonte. According to the sign, in just a couple of days the busy street would become a construction site in which the main goal would be to undo four asphalted lanes and bring back instead the late Leitão stream – an urban stream which four decades ago was channelled and covered with concrete, giving place to a roadway. Three days later, the sign was no longer in place and the Federal Police had begun to investigate the authors of the “fictitious project” for improper use of government logos. This article recovers this story in order to discuss the relationship between the processes that mark how cities are constructed, public participation and urban interventions.

Keywords: urban politics, urban streams, public space, urban art, participation

To cite this article:

Regaldo, F., Marquez, R. Andrés, R., Cançado, W. (2019). Neither a hoax nor art: Politics, *The Journal of Public Space*, 4(3), 185-191, DOI 10.32891/jps.v4i3.1217

This article has been double blind peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



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On May 25th, 2013, a sign indicating a public work was installed on Padre Belchior Street, in central Belo Horizonte. Signs like that do not usually arouse the interest of citizens of the sixth largest city in Brazil (or of any Brazilian city at all, for that matter), who are used to being excluded from public policy and decision making concerning the spaces they inhabit.

The announced work, which consisted in the “Restoration of the Leitão Stream” (an urban stream which four decades ago was channelled and covered with concrete, giving place to a roadway), caused immediate controversy. Curious passers-by stopped in front of the buzz formed on the corner of Augusto de Lima Avenue. Some praised the project, others were surprised by the initiative and many attacked it, on different grounds. There were technical arguments (how will traffic flow?), conformist stances (these things do not work in Brazil!) and hygienist pleas (we cannot make this a place for the homeless!).

With strong opinions on the tip of their tongues, local shopkeepers and merchants argued effusively, and at last articulated a collective reaction to such an unexpected intervention. Their mobilization had a practical vein: the stream restoration could put commercial activities at risk, both during the works and after them. According to the sign, in just a couple of days their busy street would become a construction site in which the main goal would be to undo four asphalted lanes and bring back instead the late Leitão. The stream would then be protagonist of an urban renewal in which clean water, fish, benches and cycle paths would coexist with the local commerce and the social and cultural diversity of the city centre.



Figure 1. A sign indicating a public work installed on Padre Belchior Street, in central Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

News of the unexpected utopia that the Federal Government, the City of Belo Horizonte, and the Ministries of the Environment and of Fishery and Aquaculture promised to jointly carry out with funds from the Federal Savings Bank quickly spread. On Monday, the 27th, newspaper *Hoje em Dia* printed a picture of the sign on its front page and devoted a full page to the report under the title “Leitão Stream Back to the Scene: Boldness or Prank?”. The paper listened to residents and local traders, and it revived the memory of its readers by briefly narrating the tragic fate of Leitão in recent

decades. It also broadened the discussion by reporting on the restoration of Cheonggyecheon river in Seoul, South Korea, about 10 years ago.



Figure 2. The interest of local residents and traders, looking at the sign.

From the papers, the news quickly bounced onto social networks. The City of Belo Horizonte, whose relentless water policy has prioritized the channelling and covering of rivers and streams, was mentioned on the board and that only added to the doubts. Had there been a change of posture? Or was it to be a “cosmetic” work, to be carried out for the World Cup? In that case, could it be that the stream would remain polluted and covered, and that the image on the board was picturing an artificial water mirror? Or, should the “prank” hypothesis put forward by the newspaper be the good one, who could have put that sign there anyway?

By Tuesday, the 28th, the sign was no longer in place. The newspapers *Hoje em Dia* and *O Tempo* announced that the municipal administration had opened an inquiry for violation of the City Code (fine: \$ 238.49) and that the Federal Police had begun to investigate the authors of the "fictitious project" for improper use of government logos. Such criminalization gave greater visibility to the issue. On social networks, hundreds of

people expressed their support to the action. An online kitty was organized for crowdfunding the fine.

What the audacious investigators did not realize was that on Monday's newspaper report, Mr. Agnaldo Odorico, quoted as the owner of a bar located on the fateful corner, had given an important clue about the arrival of the board: "It was a City Hall truck that stopped and put it there", he claimed. On Wednesday, in a surprising move, an editorial by *O Tempo* resumed the controversy, somehow challenging the common sense by legitimizing the action for raising awareness among the local population as to the state of urban watercourses. It still referred to it, however, as a "joke".

From being perceived as a "prank" or a "joke" and despite the clear testimony of a local citizen, the board quickly became a police case, and now the perpetrators were being hunted down as criminals. In less than 72 hours, the restoration of the Leitão stream went from a real and thought-provoking possibility to something comparable to the gags of bad Sunday TV entertainment shows, and then to the truculence of the police pages. The stream and the possibility of transforming the urban environment were quickly obscured by the excitement of the search for the "authors."

In the witch-hunt, the initial target was Undió, an NGO that promotes artistic activities and workshops for young people in Padre Belchior Street. The director of the NGO had to reaffirm several times that the sign was not related to Undió. It is interesting that, even though suspicion fell on artists – whose vast repertoire includes performances, installations, urban interventions, site specifics or simply artworks – the action was still described in the press as a hoax.

Authorship, it is well known, is usually claimed by artists or by terrorists. And in the face of the disquieting absence of authors, couldn't that board simply be considered a political action? Politics should not be taken here in its institutional, partisan or electoral sense (which in Brazil, as elsewhere, usually involves and often comes down to the attack and demoralization of opponents), but in its full sense. Politics as referring to the collective construction of the polis – that is, of ordinary life in the city. Isn't politics after all a prerogative of any citizen? Or should it be the exclusive domain of candidates and public managers, legitimate representatives of the yearnings of the anonymous and appeased?

What the board made possible in the few hours during which it remained on the public promenade was the invention of a popular and informal micro-parliament dedicated to an exhaustive debate of the problems and the best solutions for the Leitão stream and for Padre Belchior Street, but also for any river in any city, from the point of view of the experiences and expectations of each citizen. From being a trivialized device in daily urban life, the public work sign became something like a high-definition screen, capturing the attention of a small, instant crowd and offering a glimpse of an unlikely and suddenly shareable future.

The growing presence of environmental issues in the media, in political speeches and in institutional propaganda has made the discussion about the global impacts of human actions and the climate crisis more recurring, although there have been very few results in adapting economic interests to a policy agenda that effectively includes nature and traditional knowledge in line with their preservation. Interestingly, little is said about the web of relationships between natural and cultural elements that should make up a balanced ecosystem at all scales, starting from the local level. The springs, streams,

woods, birds, and trees just around the corner seem far and hopelessly doomed to disappear, while companies and governments shift responsibility for their actions and evoke the importance of every citizen in preserving the planet. The substitution of the word 'ecology' (the study of a place in which living organisms interact) for sustainability is symptomatic: the focus is no longer on the possible relationships between living beings, both human and non-human, and their environment, but on the possible continuity of a certain model. For green marketing campaigns, everything goes, as long as it is "sustainable".

Just as our coexistence with fish and birds is not on the agenda of the Ministry of Cities, cities are not on the agenda of the Ministry of Environment – much less on that of the Ministry of Fishery. And while the Ministry of Health cares for diseases, the idea of a city as a healthy and collectively produced ecosystem is very far away from state political agendas, at all levels.

The most elemental environmental changes should probably start with the recognition of the importance of water, but as long as streams and rivers continue to be channelled and covered with asphalt, no one will deal with them, because the consequences of such policies are made invisible. Within the logic of such inefficient and rudimentary systems that we insist, in the cities of the Global South, on calling "basic sanitation," nature is nothing more than a hindrance to progress, and the dysfunctions caused by its cycles will always be scrutinized by wilful technicians and solved by some new miraculous technology.

Belo Horizonte is a relatively new city, planned and built in the 1890s. Its planners never took into account the presence of its many waterways. They opted instead to rely on one single underground network that merged the city's wastewater and its storm flow, which was then directly released into its drainage system. Throughout the twentieth century, rivers and streams were channelled and covered, often with inauguration events and official celebrations.

In the year of 1963, two environmental occurrences marked the city: over 350 trees that lined the Afonso Pena Avenue were cut, while the Acaba Mundo stream was covered up with concrete. There were many protests against the felling of the trees, but almost none against the covering of the stream that once presented the townspeople with a waterfall within the Municipal Park.

The Leitão Stream was covered up in the 1970s, with the customary truculence of the military regime and its ideals of predatory modernization. Colossal developments at the time destroyed public gardens, cut down trees, and channelled and hid urban waters in order to ensure more car space. It is curious however that, after re-democratization, this remained the dominant ideal of municipal and state administrations, of all political stands.

While the city of Seoul now sees its Cheonggyecheon river flow back in the open, having suppressed more than 10 traffic lanes – without any prejudice to traffic – or while Medellín begins to transform 26 kilometres of expressways into a 424-hectare riparian park, Belo Horizonte passively watches as its main river, the Arrudas, turns into a steaming asphalt desert (sinisterly named "boulevard"), with more traffic lanes and no proven traffic improvement.



Figure 3 (top). The design proposal, as appeared on the sign, for the Restoration of the Leitão Stream.

Figure 4 (bottom). A before-after picture of the site (the black and white picture on the right is dated 1949).

It is well known and documented that adding more car lanes or building overpasses is not a good solution for traffic problems – although it generates millionaire construction and maintenance contracts. Cities that were able to improve traffic and mobility did

exactly the opposite: they reduced traffic lanes, eliminated parking spaces from the streets, widened sidewalks, taxed vehicle circulation, invested in public transport and bicycle infrastructure.

There is a joke that says that tackling traffic jams by widening roads is like fighting obesity by widening belts. It makes sense: the automobile is an ineffective and degrading means of urban mobility. It generates air and noise pollution, besides congestions. More than 4,000 people die each year in the city of São Paulo from diseases caused by air pollution. Automobiles are hugely responsible for such numbers. Another 1,500 people die from traffic accidents. The car is a sort of epidemic that kills, in Brazil, more than cigarettes or HIV and tuberculosis combined. Moreover, public policies designed to preserve such a plague devastate waterways, trees, sidewalks, parks – and hopes. If printing government logos is a crime worthy of an investigation by the Federal Police, would it not be even more criminal to use these same logos in order to channel streams, build overpasses, expropriate entire communities, gentrify neighbourhoods, and condemn citizens to a desolate life? When none of the spheres of government can produce healthy and happy cities (with intercepted and treated sewage, collected and recycled waste, quiet, tree-lined streets, clean rivers and streams, smart mobility, and spaces built for people), isn't the anonymous act of injecting a little imagination into the official agenda a generous citizen contribution? And if public debate forums seem increasingly obsolete and politics is rapidly moving away from the public interest, should we all not be engaged in creating other ways of doing politics, bringing citizens closer together and imagining other future ecosystems?

Piseagrama is a non-profit editorial platform, dedicated do public spaces and common life in Brazil. The group is also engaged in several actions such as debates, publications and campaigns. www.piseagrama.org

Thank you for reading!

The Journal of Public Space

ISSN 2206-9658

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