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INTRODUCTION: PERFORMING SPACE IN URBAN AFRICA

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> 'Changer la vie', 'changer la société', cela ne veut rien dire s'il n'y a pas production d'un espace approprié . . . à rapports sociaux nouveaux, espace neuf et réciproquement. (Lefebvre 2000 [1974]: 72)[1]

January–February 2011, Tahrir Square, Cairo. Hundreds of thousands gathered on a square that had been named *tahrir* (liberation) in commemoration of previous Egyptian revolutions. History was made in a place that already marked earlier histories. The square was, again, transformed into a space of historical importance and was, again, signified as a revolutionary site of liberation. Closer to the ground, however, the unfolding experiences were not as straightforward as the *post factum* story renders them. The square was transformed into a focal point of political, urban, historical, national, symbolic and global importance by people having backgrounds and aspirations of their own. They wrote key pages of their own life histories as much as they wrote world history, urban or national history. The square enabled the emergence of a particular social space signified through practices that can be understood as performative: the square was occupied, speeches were staged, drama and intimacy were shared on Facebook and Al-Jazeera, and people slept, cooked, cared – in short, lived – on a square that gained political importance by becoming part of daily life, part of the city and the nation, drawing on history and global connections, and at the same time shaping a more promising place in which to live their lives.[2]

Over 6,000 km to the south, 35 years earlier, the Soweto uprising intensified the confrontation between the apartheid regime and its opponents. For more than a

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[1] '"Change life! Change society!" These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space . . . new social relationships call for a new space, and vice versa.' (translated by Nicholson-Smith 1991: 59).

[2] Two and a half years later, the history and the production of space continue; partly repeating and overlapping with previous experiences, partly profoundly different, dissociating what had seemed a more unified space/movement of contestation in 2011. However, this opening vignette is not primarily intended to draw attention to big political events as such, but rather to the everyday practices of performing social space taking place behind and beyond the eye-catching revolt.

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decade, apartheid was ostentatiously defied in the Johannesburg neighbourhoods of Yeoville and Bellevue, and in particular along their main thoroughfares, Raleigh Street and Rockey Street. Activists and artists transformed their neighbourhood into a space that was freed – and had to be freed over and over again – from apartheid. 'Black and white' lived and ate together, played and listened to music together, waged political protest and suffered repression, and in so doing performed the place into an anti-apartheid environment. The apartheid regime implicitly strengthened the power of performance by prosecuting and prohibiting it. Contemplating those days and the difficulties entailed in travelling to and from music venues in the area, Coplan (2008: 9) writes: 'If I had charged the musicians and actors who showed up after midnight at my Yeoville, Johannesburg flat after dodging the police, I would have made my rent.' In other words, not only the neighbourhood and the street, but also his flat were transformed into a space of defiance; and not only demarcated gigs, but also the informal moving and hanging around, can be understood as performative practices that produce and give meaning to spaces.

At a conference panel in 2011 devoted to the idea of social and political 'signifying' through performative practices – out of which this collection of articles has grown – one of the contributions analysed the complex interplay of various layers of the 2010 Africa Week Festival in the same Yeoville neighbourhood (Guinard forthcoming). Many elements contributed to the multiple meanings of Yeoville for the people living, working, governing, shopping and moving around in the neighbourhood. The history of the neighbourhood, including its role under late apartheid; its social and multicultural composition, with dwellers originating from all over Africa; its location in and infrastructural relationship to Johannesburg; the worldwide attention focused upon South Africa in 2010; the efforts made on behalf of (or against) the festival by new as well as long-established inhabitants, by town and neighbourhood authorities, and by private organizations and entrepreneurs; and, during the festival itself, the role of the street parades and artworks encapsulated in the event. It turned out that the festival had a variety of effects, often ambivalent if not contradictory, that could best be captured by studying the way it had given shape to a particular urban space. Yeoville 2010 was not the same as the Yeoville of the 1970s and 1980s. The neighbourhood was signified in relation to the manifold intertwined historical, spatial and social connections of the neighbourhood and its people. What is more, the multiple meanings were actively performed by these people, both on the days of the Africa Week Festival and throughout their daily lives.

These examples draw attention to how people perform the urban spaces in which they live, emphasizing historical, spatial and social connectedness. Although not as spectacular as the Arab Spring or the anti-apartheid struggle, the articles in this collection show how African urban dwellers respond to challenges of their times by producing, transforming and performing social spaces. Women's jokes and portraits carve out spaces to cope with the consequences of male migrant labour, socio-cultural change and global economic crisis (Buggenhagen, Wiley); changing cultural and economic politics on national and global scales lead to generational and gendered strategies necessary to make a living in a field such as choreography (Neveu-Kringelbach, Sieveking); and people react to national politics and urban restructuring by investing in their neighbourhoods, drawing upon local and global sports resources (Baller).

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Foregrounding everyday practices, this issue focuses on the creativity of urban Africans in dealing with contemporary difficulties and opportunities, highlighting how they thereby create social spaces and shape urban life. Urbanity,[3] performative practices and the production of space are thus understood in relation to each other. We thereby combine, but also go beyond what Africa-related urban studies and performance studies have focused on so far. We do not conceive of the city as a given space, nor even as a space in the making, but as a setting in which urbanity takes place, thereby producing manifold temporally, spatially and socially entangled urban spaces rather than producing 'the city'. To put it differently: we do not employ the city as a unit of analysis that is situated on a hierarchically scaled continuum below the state, Africa or the world, or conceived in opposition to the rural. Instead, we focus on how all scales come together in urbanity, which can hence be characterized as multilayered and interconnected. When looking at the performing of urban space, then, we are more interested in social space as the outcome of performing, and in how urban spaces are produced and transformed through performative practices, than in the performative practices *per se*. By focusing on the performing of social space in urban Africa we thus bring together and create a dialogue between African urban studies and performance studies.[4]

While recent explorations of African cities stress the 'elusive, invisible, yet to come' character of urban life (Guyer 2011: 474, referring to Nuttall and Mbembe 2008, De Boeck and Plissart 2004, and Simone 2004), performance studies have explored and conceptualized ways to create presence (Schieffelin 1985, 1998) and achieve the 'coming into being' (Drewal 1992) of things that are meaningful and very real in people's lives, although they might not be literally visible or easy to grasp conceptually. In this collection of articles we examine these correspondences and start clearing a path between different theoretical starting points, which have been strongly related to the contentious issue of African modernity/ies. Resorting to the notion of social space and a broad concept of performing, we hope to lead the reader towards an understanding of African urbanity that allows us to de-dramatize the perception of urban Africa, while consciously sidestepping the issue of modernity and the modern city. Without ignoring the all too real challenges of inequality, hardship and conflict, we want to get away from the modernist template and interventionist attitude that frames African cities in discourses of deficiency, crisis or violence. In so doing, we link up with similar approaches in recent literature on African cities (Castryck 2013; Diouf and Fredericks 2013; Fourchard 2011). However, in order to explore the creative potential of people living within and between cities, we argue, it is not the

[3]Urbanity is here used as the quality of being urban, and not in the more common usage of being urbane. This meaning of urbanity – which names the characteristics and viewpoints associated with urban life – was stimulated by the reflections on *urbanité* by Henri Lefebvre in *Le droit à la ville* (1967) and more recently has been adopted in anglophone urban studies (Simone 2011, for example).

[4]As explained in more detail below, we understand performative practices in a broad sense, including, but also going beyond the domain of arts and cultural practice. Likewise, the production of social space and its inherent power differentials have been studied empirically in Africanist urban studies, as we indicate below, as well as in works on gender, religion and transnationalism (Desplat and Schulz 2012; Lachenmann and Dannecker 2008; Nageeb 2004).

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city but urban life and urban social spaces that provide the appropriate units of analysis.

The articles look at how people shape, perform, transform and (re-)create the urban space they inhabit in a changing world; the writers do not take the effects of global spatial hierarchies, fixed territorial units or preconceived cultural patterns as an unquestioned given. They study practices of performing in African urban contexts as a means to construct spatial relations, create connections, and thereby give shape to new forms of urban sociality. In order to account for the specific ways in which African urban life is spatially interconnected, we need to be particularly sensitive to different spatial scales and their historicity (Fourchard 2011). In this respect we follow Doreen Massey (1994: 5), who pointed out that 'the particular mix of social relations which are ... part of what defines the uniqueness of any place is by no means all included within that place itself. Importantly, it includes relations which stretch beyond – the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside.'

Combining, in this collection, attention to urbanity, performing and spatiality, we assert that the performing of social space provides a privileged entry point to disentangling spatial, social and political changes and challenges in urban Africa, and to understanding the shaping of a multilayered urbanity that so extensively pervades social experience in post-colonial Africa as well as in an interconnected world. To that end we first explain our three main axes, namely social space, urbanity and performing. Finally we highlight how each of the articles contributes to this approach, and how the collection as a whole gives insight into African responses to contemporary challenges on intertwined urban, national and global scales.

SOCIAL SPACE: GENERATIVE AND SCALED

Space, in Henri Lefebvre's understanding, is always socially and politically constituted. It is animated by the multiple rhythms of embodied social practices and has to be conceived as a productive force. Every society produces its own spaces carrying the potentialities as well as the legacies of historical change: 'Effet d'actions passées, il permet des actions, en suggère ou en interdit' (2000 [1974]: 89).[5] Building on Lefebvre, we conceive of social space as both outcome and facilitator of history. As becomes clear in the contributions to this issue, the different actors all draw upon their layered histories. The forms of portrait photography and life at the outskirts of Dakar feed into the albums of Beth Buggenhagen's protagonists; histories of the Senegalese state and the Pikine neighbourhood are reflected in the way *navétanes* football is lived in Susann Baller's story; gender, family and ethnicity, as well as political and economic crises, underpin both the life and the jokes of the Kankossa women depicted by Katherine Wiley; and the dancers and choreographers in the articles by Hélène Neveu-Kringelbach and Nadine Sieveking plug into historically defined possibilities, examples and aspirations.

[5] 'Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others.' Translated by Nicholson-Smith 1991: 73.

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By analysing how people occupy, transform and imagine space, Lefebvre underlines their active engagement with the production of space. His concept of social space as generating and generated through everyday practices and his emphasis on the historicity of these processes have proved very inspiring. Drawing on his approach, though not necessarily adopting his Marxist underpinnings, scholars interested in understanding 'the making of times and places' (Ebron 2002: 16) have provided important additional perspectives that indicate how the notion of social space can be made productive in empirical social research. Karin Barber's concept of 'generative materialism' and her focus on potentiality in processes of cultural production (2000: 8) are particularly stimulating. Explicitly adopting Lefebvre's 'ground-up approach', she analyses how cultural forms emerge and 'come into being' by starting from production and not from the finished product (*ibid*.: 7).

A quarter of a century after Lefebvre, Massey made an important advance in the conceptualization of social space by taking up the question of how space is produced in and through everyday life in ways that inscribe inequalities and recreate a 'power geometry' on a global scale. Massey's assertion that 'space must be conceptualized integrally with time' (1994: 2) evolved out of critical reflections on mobility and 'a sense of place' in an era characterized by 'time-space-compression' (1991: 24). Building on an understanding of the specificity of place as based on 'a particular constellation of social relations' (1991: 28), she develops a notion of space 'not as some absolute independent dimension, but as constructed out of social relations: that what is at issue is not social phenomena in space but both social phenomena and space as constituted out of social relations, that the spatial is social relations "stretched out"' (1994: 2).

Much like Lefebvre's conceptualization of space, Massey's was inspired by thinking about cities. Her concern with inequalities on a global scale, however, leads her to interpret the heterogeneity of a particular urban environment in terms of power and mobility differentials that can only be grasped when linking up this specific place with the world. These links do not exist exclusively in and between urban places but also encompass rural environments and articulate a highly complex social differentiation that can be studied by assessing relations on various interrelated scales: socially constituted space, hence, is both historically and spatially layered, whereby these layers are never discrete but rather entangled, 'cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism' (*ibid*.: 3). Massey thus testifies to Martin Stokes's observation that although '"globalization" is nothing new . . . the current situation affords a greater degree of sophistication and self-consciousness in what we might call "scalar" thinking – in other words, how we think about the relationship between our "localities", our "regions" (plus other intermediary levels), and our "worlds", and how we make connections between actions and agencies in one level and those in others'. (Stokes 2007: 6)

Referring to Anna Tsing, Stokes elaborates how 'scalar thinking' has drawn 'attention to the "located specificity of globalist dreams"' (*ibid*.). Like Barber's adaptation of Lefebvre's ground-up approach, Stokes's turn towards the everyday practices of 'people in specific places and at specific times' indicates how the performative process of space production can be studied empirically and analysed in a way that highlights its generative potential: 'The shift of emphasis is significant, and, in my view, highly productive. Most importantly, it restores

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human agencies and creativities to the scene of analysis, and allows us to think of music as a process in the making of "worlds", rather than a passive reaction to a "system"' (*ibid.*). Stokes applies his observations to music but they hold equally true in other domains. At the same time, his formulations implicitly point to a problem of representation that arises when the making of times and places is no longer analysed as situated in one world but interpreted as a manifestation of multiple 'worlds'. This problem should not be neglected when it comes to representations of Africa.

Linear views of globalization or modernity discourses tend to set Africa apart from the rest of the world and limit the full understanding of how spatial entanglements operate. But emphasis on multiple worlds, which often goes along with a seemingly Africa-friendly insistence on cultural dynamism, vibrancy, creativity and multiple modernities, does not undo the risk of setting Africa apart and threatens to eclipse persistent inequalities in worldwide power relations, as James Ferguson has pointed out. One way to overcome this opposition between one world and multiple worlds is his understanding of Africa as 'a place-in-the-world'. In order to analyse 'how a vast, complicated, heterogeneous region of the planet has come to occupy a place-in-the-world . . . that is nowadays nearly synonymous with failure and poverty' (Ferguson 2006: 5), he proposes a conception of the world that allows us to assess what Massey probably meant in terms of power geometry, namely a 'categorical system within which countries and geographical regions have their "places", with a "place" understood as both a location in space and a rank in a system of social categories' (Ferguson 2006: 6). This does not mean that Africa's place-in-the-world should be taken as a given – on the contrary, it invites us to examine how Africa is at the same time economically and politically situated, culturally signified and actively 'performed' on various scales (Sieveking 2013: 275–7; Ebron 2002). Instead of separating cultural diversities from political and economic inequalities, 'we must analyse the culture of politics and the politics of culture by constantly shifting the scale of analysis from the most spatially specific . . . to the most spatially diffuse' (Cooper 1994: 1540). Rather than squeezing the representation of African cities between micro-studies of cultural resilience and macro-accounts of global deprivation, we see African urbanity as the outcome of efforts to live with and between these different realities.

URBANITY: MULTILAYERED AND GLOBALLY INTERCONNECTED

In *Thinking About Cities* Bob White (2011) reflects on his fieldwork in the popular music scene of Kinshasa in the 1990s, asserting that while he 'never set out to do an ethnography of the city *per se*' (2011: 14), neither was the research on music *per se*. Although the topic of Congolese rumba might have been interesting because this genre of popular music has been influential all over the continent, 'colonizing' much of sub-Saharan Africa, 'what really caught my attention as an ethnographer was the play of power between local bandleaders and their musicians' (*ibid.*). Eventually, as White succinctly reports, his research and writing concentrated on the question: 'in this particular context, after 30 years of authoritarian rule, what does it mean to be a good *chef*?' (*ibid.*: 15). However, we could also understand his work as an in-depth study of the multiple and

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interconnected relations that give shape to a particular social space, created and recreated through music as a form of practice that not only embodies and communicates aesthetic and ethical meanings but is thick with various layers of contemporary and historical experience.

Accordingly, the contributions to this volume are not about the city, but about the performing of urban spaces. Studying socially constituted space implies that we try to make sense of the way empirically observable historical actors carve out, signify, perform and transform social space, based on what their environment provides in the form of aspirations and imaginations, and of translocal and global connections. With this approach we can draw on a range of insightful and innovating studies on music and performance based on empirical research in African cities (examples include Neveu Kringelbach 2013; Baller 2007; Erlmann 1996; as well as works mentioned elsewhere in this introduction). However, we do not take the city as a pre-given analytical framework, but rather address the social practices which relate to and help to constitute the urbanity in which they unfold.

Because of its affinity and adaptability to new media and technologies of communication, music has become a privileged site for studies of globalization (Erlmann 1999) and in particular of the role of cities as portals of globalization. As Stokes (2004: 64) concludes, '[m]usic understood in the context of a global city . . . can testify to the processes by which diasporas and migrant populations from nearly everywhere on the planet interact in neighbourhood festivities and religious practices, in local media, and in multicultural civic institutions'. Although the global city rhetoric and the dramatized notion of time-space compression give the impression of newness, cities have probably 'always been global' (White 2011: 16). If it is true that in Africa '[f]or many urban residents, life is reduced to a state of emergency' (Simone 2004: 4), it is nevertheless important not to essentialize this aspect, but rather to unravel the various layers of relations and practices, each with its own rhythm, historicity and temporality, that connect African urban environments with other parts of the world. In this respect, the notion of 'worlding', which AbdouMaliq Simone (2001: 19) interprets as 'a process inherent in the very formation of African cities themselves', is helpful. On the one hand it allows us to account for the 'very specific engagement with non-local worlds, and particularly, non-African worlds' that accompanies policies on various levels aimed at improving conditions of urban life in Africa, reminding us thereby of the 'real' political-economic processes that interact with 'fantasies of a categorical "Africa"' (Ferguson 2006: 7). On the other hand, it also enables us to grasp the various improvised, creative and unruly ways in which 'African cities operate as a platform for people to engage in processes and territories elsewhere' (Simone 2001: 25).

In his research on *bandiri* music in Kano, northern Nigeria, Brian Larkin (2002) identifies the local presence of Sufi religious brotherhoods, Lebanese businessmen, Ibo traders and Hausa politicians, including their 'discrete networks that extend in different directions over the world'. Within this constellation he analyses the significance of *bandiri* music as a combination of social, cultural, religious and political meanings and practices, entangled with various spatial and historical layers. 'Hausa musicians . . . take Indian film tunes and change the words to sing songs praising the prophet Mohammed' (Larkin 2002: 739). In so doing, 'Bandiri sits at the nexus of very different sorts of transnational flows, Islamist revival and Indian popular culture that meet and make sense in Northern

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Nigeria, in the context of a spatial configuration of culture, media and religion' (Larkin 2002: 740). The translocal embeddedness of *bandiri* as a means to actively produce and give meaning to locality reflects the multilayered and global interconnectedness of urban life in Kano, including the impact of the Nigerian oil boom, the practices of politicians, traders and businessmen, and the spatial connections stemming from diverse geographical and historical backgrounds, spreading in different directions over the world.

The urban connects, not only from city over nation and region to the global, but also between people and places within the city. The global or the national is not only a reference to which the city relates, but is part and parcel of the urban experience itself. We conceive of this multilayered and global connectedness as constitutive of urbanity, and not only in Africa. Gyan Prakash reaches a similar understanding when he argues that the idea of the city as 'defined by an internally coherent civic life and structured by clear relationships to the region, nation and wider world, appears obsolete' (Prakash 2008: 1). We subscribe to this statement and stress that spatial scales do not exist discretely, layer upon layer, but are intertwined and simultaneously at play. Thereby we can take account of the fact that '[u]rban dwellers experience their globally situated and connected urban space as decidedly local lifeworlds, thick with specific experiences, practices, imaginations, and memories' (Prakash 2008: 2). However, instead of using this observation to rethink the city, its history and urbanity, we focus on how the experiences, practices, imaginations, and memories of urban dwellers are articulated, signifying urbanity and performing social space.

PERFORMING: RELATIONAL AND TRANSITIVE

This collection of articles puts forward a notion of performing that encompasses the irreproducible event of a single framed performance, as well as the reiterated performative acts of everyday social practices and discourses. We subscribe to a very broad notion of performing, one which acknowledges that 'human sociality continues in moment-by-moment existence only as human purposes and practices are performatively articulated in the world' (Schieffelin 1998: 196) and underlines the performativity inherent in any human activity. Hence, we attach performing neither to particular genres or types of cultural practice nor to preconceived cultural patterns and fixed territorial units; instead we study the active, transformative and unfolding political and social meanings that are performed.

In this respect we follow Edward Schieffelin (1998: 194), who conceives of performance as dealing 'with actions more than text: with habits of the body more than structures of symbols, with illocutionary rather than propositional force, with the construction of social reality rather than with its representation'. Like Schieffelin we are interested in performative activity 'as an achievement in the world' (1998: 198), as an accomplishment. For this reason we adopt the word 'performing' as a present participle, expressing its transitive, processual and productive capacity. Whereas Schieffelin is mainly interested in the accomplishment of performance in terms of the creation of presence, we focus more narrowly on the coming into being of urban social space. The productive and transformative capacity of performance makes the notion particularly useful for examining the meanings that social transformation processes have for the actors involved.

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Telling jokes (Wiley), posing for portrait photography (Buggenhagen), getting ready for a football game (Baller) or engaging in gendered and intergenerational strategies towards successful dance careers (Sieveking and Neveu Kringelbach) are all examples of such transformative practices, producing social spaces and signifying interconnected urban lifeworlds.

In contrast to the research domain of performance studies, however, we do not focus upon performances or performative practices *per se*, but upon social space as the object and outcome of performing. With this active notion of both performing and space we analyse the processes of constructing and signifying spaces, including the relational way in which they articulate connectedness and separation between people, places and times. Here we acknowledge the inspiration of the Manchester School and other groundbreaking research on performances in urban spaces, especially the works published by Clyde Mitchell (1956) on the Kalela dance, by Terence Ranger (1975) on Beni Ngoma, and by Margaret Strobel (1976) on Lelemama. These authors treat performance as a means to deal with the political changes of colonization and to respond to the social challenges of the times. Kalela, Beni Ngoma and Lelemama performances have been analysed as a mode of negotiating social status or gendered identities within multi-ethnic migrant and post-slavery populations. What these performances have in common is their relatedness to an emergent urbanity where belonging has become ambivalent and social status insecure, and where new class, gender and cultural identities are being (per)formed.

More recently, scholars have addressed performative practices in post-colonial rather than colonial urban settings, thereby primarily highlighting the performing of the nation. Studies of popular performances as a kind of political practice include, for instance, Kelly Askew's (2002) account of the construction of Tanzanian national culture through music and dance in Tanga, Marissa Moorman's (2008) study of the Luanda music scene against the backdrop of Angolan political strife, or White's (2008) account of how the political culture of Mobutu's Zaïre provided the model for rumba bands in Kinshasa. Although we can draw on the insights of these more recent as well as the older studies of performance in urban settings, the way the spatial references of performative practices have been analysed and conceptualized needs to be revised or expanded. Rather than conceiving of space as a territorially defined given or an element in structural analysis, and at the same time going beyond the nation state as primary unit of analysis or prime frame of reference for urban life, we want to analyse the coming into being of urban spaces. In other words, we are interested in how practices of performing produce locality in the sense of context-*generating* (Appadurai 1996: 186) as much as context-*generated* social space.

Emphasizing that space is being performed does not mean ignoring its materiality or suggesting that social reality is 'only' constructed and not conditioned by its material environment. The physical aspect of social space plays a crucial role in the contributions to this issue, whether in the form of the body (Neveu Kringelbach, Sieveking), a photo album and the private living room in which the photo album is presented (Buggenhagen), a public market place (Wiley), a neighbourhood (Baller), or geographical distance and travelling (several papers). Physical space and materiality substantiate the 'possibilities' (Guyer 2011: 487; Robinson 2010: 237) and the 'potentiality' (Barber 2000: 430) of social praxis in everyday life where people 'continually generate and regenerate

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their moral environment' (*ibid.*). This potentiality as well as the actual 'power of performance' (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1997) relies very much on non-discursive bodily dimensions of experience and the multiple ways in which embodied meanings refer to spheres and contexts beyond the concrete time-space occupied during the performative act itself. We thus stress the multi-dimensional and ambivalent ways of signifying through performing that cannot be reduced to a single dimension of meaning.

Concurrently, we go beyond the narrow focus of conventional performance studies that concentrate mainly on the 'internal relations' (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1997: 13) of performances in terms of particular framed events that are singled out from everyday practices and experienced as a reality apart by the actors involved. Hence, we reject the 'theatre model' of human action and the notion of a social actor as playing a (prescribed) role. This metaphor implies an 'as if' mode of action and frames performing as a simulacrum. Thereby it ignores what Ngugi wa Thiong'o has called the 'external relations' of performances, namely the connections with other 'social centres and fields of human action', as well as the historical dimension and significance of the performance space.

Rejecting the 'theatre model' of human action does not mean that we dismiss the important contribution of Ngugi himself, Barber, Coplan and others (Edmondson 2009; Shipley 2004; Cole 2001), who have explicitly focused on theatrical performances in Africa and studied not only the production of framed events on a theatre stage but also their reception and the constitutive element of audience participation in this whole process. Notably Barber's (1997, 2000) account of audiences as a 'historical product' constituted by performances can be interpreted, in our view, as an analysis of social space. Reflecting on the particularities of relating to audiences in African urban contexts, Barber (1997: 355) states that performances 'are a site where both performers and audiences, by the act of participation, may claim to belong to – or become aware of belonging to – a collectivity'. Specifying the ways in which these collectivities emerged from 'a deeply heterogeneous mass, united and divided by religion, occupation, language, family, place of origin and degree of education, and often by philosophies of irreducible human difference' (*ibid.*: 350), she points out that 'different uses of [physical] space are connected with different forms of address to the audience' (*ibid.*: 351). Barber's analysis of these connections, fully elaborated in her monograph on Yorùbá popular theatre, perfectly illustrates the relational and transitive character of the performing of social space.

Performing conveys lived experiences and material representations that transmit meaning as sensual impressions, feelings and passions, but also as conscious reflections on particular situations. These may be articulated in a prospective, invocatory sense or in terms of retrospective memory and commemorative images. Practices of performing can, on the one hand, convey ideas of a desirable society, aspirations for a better life, beliefs in particular values and imaginations of alternative realities, and, on the other, express protest, fears, and rejection. They can articulate the hopes and aspirations of social mobility, ever more related to spatial/geographical mobility as well as to the challenges to established hierarchies and social cohesion that go along with shifting inequalities on a global scale (Makhulu *et al.* 2010; Weiss 2004).

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PERFORMED SPACE: THE CONTRIBUTIONS

The articles explore how performative practices contribute to the creation of multilayered and interconnected social spaces shaping contemporary urbanity. They indicate the co-presence of spaces that are characterized by different temporalities (Benga 2002), degrees of structuration and forms of connectedness. The three articles based on empirical research in Dakar illustrate the fact that there are many 'Dakars', emerging from various layers of urban transformations and civic contestations (Diouf and Fredericks 2013). They give evidence of performative practices that signify locality in different ways and through different means, while linking up with other places, 'worlds' and times.

Moreover, the articles adopt different perspectives in analysing practices of performing and thereby indicate the multiple levels of meaning and signifying, including the aesthetic dimensions of bodily, visual or oral performances, the spiritual dimension of religious invocations, and the social and political meanings of diverse forms of organization and networking – be they in the form of informal gatherings of women, neighbourhood associations, dance troupes or training workshops, international development cooperation or transnational mobility. The social spaces created through these practices may affirm or challenge territorially confined frames of reference, such as the neighbourhood, the city, the nation state, the African continent or the world at large, but at the same time also combine and re-signify these territorial references. The examples given in the articles substantiate the notion of a certain 'worlding' of African urban lifeworlds which cannot be comprehended within a coherent local or national framework. They indicate that the different scales encompassed in urbanization, shifting statehood, global integration and economic challenges are simultaneously at play in the social spaces shaped by urban Africans.

Analysing how football is organized during the *navétanes*, Baller provides a view on how the neighbourhood is performed and becomes meaningful as a dynamic and at the same time durable and reliably local social space, conveying feelings of affection, of 'family-like' belonging, but also of passion and crisis. Her article suggests how lacking physical infrastructure that ought to be provided by the state/city entails a particular commitment to creating some kind of social infrastructure that can be maintained independently of national or municipal institutions. The dressing of neighbourhood and people both temporally and spatially extends the performing of *navétanes* football far beyond the pitch. The names of the football teams that play for the neighbourhood reveal their global aspirations, but also stand for political orientations or locally oriented social programmes. The efforts of the Senegalese government to gain control over the extremely popular games have resulted in a highly ambivalent relationship between the spheres of the neighbourhood and the state. Moreover, Baller points to the tensions and contradictions raised by simultaneous processes of professionalization, oriented towards financial success within the global football arena, and of politicization, aiming at the mobilization of local constituencies, both of which are at odds with neighbourhood control and allegiance.

Professionalization is also a driving force in the field of choreographic performance in Dakar, which Neveu Kringelbach analyses from a historical perspective, focusing on the conflictive relations between three successive generations of performers. She gives an account of how urban social space is

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globally connected and historically layered, building on relationships that extend over time. These are partly affirmed, partly contested by choreographers, who find themselves in very different situations regarding state support and opportunities to realize their vision of an urban cosmopolitan lifestyle. The article shows how, through their bodily practice, artists create meaningful connections across difference, playing with elements of distinct genres while relating to various places in the world, as well as to different times. These multiple relations, reflecting connectedness on local, intergenerational, national, ethnic and global scales, are articulated on the level of the individual performing body but also on that of the collective body of performance troupes.

The professional dance training workshops in Ouagadougou, described by Sieveking, constitute a social space that is similar in the way meaningful relations are created on individual and collective bodily levels. Connected with the field of choreographic practice in Dakar through professional networks, the dance scene in Ouagadougou is also characterized by highly mobile, cosmopolitan urban lifestyles. Yet the translocal and transnational relations, as well as the historical layers of national cultural politics, reveal cosmopolitan aspirations of a different kind. Focusing on the case of an artistic development project aimed at reducing gendered inequalities among professional performers, Sieveking critically examines how the vision of a deliberate transformation of the local social environment leads to the establishment of new boundaries and inequalities. The disengagement of the state and the strong impact of foreign funding agencies contribute to contradictory dynamics in this artistic field, caught between the funders' and organisers' agenda of social change and the participants' quest for social mobility.

The dilemma of performing social mobility and at the same time creating sustainable networks of belonging in an urban environment fraught with inequalities and uncertainties is ever present in the article by Buggenhagen. Examining how Murid women in a Dakar neighbourhood circulate portrait photographs, she studies the multiple layers of social relationships that are partly revealed, partly concealed by this practice. The circulation of images creates connections on various spatial scales and between different social spheres, linking up with family members who live abroad as well as with the spiritual centre of the Murid congregation in the city of Tuba. The multilayered gendered urban spaces that are constituted through these performances of social and spiritual belonging provide meaningful forms of sociality, while simultaneously articulating inequalities within the family, the neighbourhood and the global spheres. The aesthetic device of multiple exposures and cutwork used in the photo albums points to the significance of modern media technologies in bringing forward the ambivalent meanings of the body as a multiplied and at the same time fragmented space.

Multiplication of meaning and the performance of ambivalence are at the core of the article by Wiley, describing practices of joking among market women in a small Mauritanian town. Analysing how joking at the same time recreates and challenges social boundaries, Wiley explores multilayered social spaces articulated through language and orality. The article provides evidence of historically rooted, ethnically framed forms of urban sociability that contain the potentiality of change. The effects of economic transformations on global and national scales, reflected in shifting gender relations and hierarchies, are voiced and commented

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upon in the jokes, which are accessible only through local knowledge. Wiley shows not only how these gendered performative practices signify locality, but also how they create meaningful relationships with foreigners, inviting them to join the laughter and thereby contribute to the creation of a highly valued presence – either as a subject or an object of the joking performance.

All five articles in one way or another probe into performed spaces, which women and men in urban Africa shape and signify to cope with challenges, mobilizing social relations on various intertwined spatial and temporal scales. The constructed and context-generating nature of social space, the multilayered and globally interconnected characteristics of urbanity, and the relational and transitive potentiality of performing justify a ground-up understanding of African urban life, which can hardly be achieved if we take the city, the state, Africa, or the global sphere itself as a pre-given unit of analysis.

CONCLUSION

> While *Rumba Rules* is an ethnography that takes place in Kinshasa, I am not sure to what extent it is about Kinshasa. . . . [While] many of my colleagues and advisors seemed overwhelmed by the idea of doing ethnography in a city of more than 5,000,000 people, for me – and given my object of study – it just seemed normal. Perhaps this is because I never set out to do an ethnography of the city *per se*. (White 2011: 14)

Our prime concern is not the city *per se*, but rather what is going on in urban Africa and how urban dwellers make sense of it. We explore how people in contemporary Africa are actively dealing with contemporary changes and challenges that accompany urbanization, shifting stateness and global integration. By analysing the performing of the neighbourhood, translocal and transnational social networking, the dynamics of professionalization and its effects on cohesion or differentiation, the contributions to this issue engage with change without uncritically adopting a discourse of newness. Changes do take place – affecting the meaning of age or seniority, gender, class, ethnicity, nation and religion – but they are not unidirectional, nor can they be understood as new stages that undo and replace a closed past. Through performative practices people can reveal or conceal change, articulate its ambivalence and at times also enjoy it.

With this issue we hope to open new avenues for transdisciplinary empirical research, going beyond the often privileged national or ethnic framework, and questioning the unity of 'Africa' as a territorially confined and predefined object of study. Instead we take as a vantage point the scaled spatiality of thoroughly intertwined urban spaces, articulated and (re-)created through practices of performing that simultaneously include social, local and historical as well as global, national and African references.

Studying the way people navigate and create space in their aspirations towards an enhanced living highlights the creativity and resilience of ordinary actors to circumvent hardship without adopting a utopian narrative of the (eventually) victorious subaltern. From this perspective, history never ends and previous experiences in turn lead to new aspirations or frustrations, as well as to re-signifying through everyday practices of performing urban life in Africa.

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