

MUNICH EXCHANGE

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS 26 APRIL 2018

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Welcome address

Speakers: Professor Andres Lepik

Dr Mpho Matsipa

Professor Lepik welcomed the delegates to the conference. He stated that the purpose of Munich Exchange is to discuss the findings of the workshops so that these can inform future discussions.

Dr Matsipa reiterated Professor Lepik's introduction, stating that the intention behind Munich Exchange is to bring as many of the exhibition contributors together as possible. The discussions at the conference are localised and embedded in local networks of exchange. These also bring in architects, thinkers and artists from elsewhere. Munich Exchange is the first time that the largest number of contributors are in the same room at the same time.

It was pointed out to Dr Matsipa, by Mabel Wilson, that one needs to really think about the African Mobilities Exhibition as a provocation that different contributors can participate in. At this conference, the discussions are framed by three key questions:

- Cartographies: Immobility is thought about as disruption.
- Other texts: Protagonists' narratives and creative strategies are identified for engaging with questions of mobility in Africa and the diaspora.
- Design as a critical intervention in the content of hypermobility in the 21st century

Panel 1 Cartographies: Immobility as Disruption

Panel Members: Ikem Okoye

Mario Gooden

Mabel Wilson

Olalekan Jeyifous

Olawale Lawal

Key Questions:

- How do bodies experience space through motion and immobilisation?
- How do black bodies, in particular, intersect with disruptive technologies of surveillance and control?

Key Points:

- Bodies experience space through architecture and virtual reality.
- Black bodies intersect with disruptive technologies using protest.

Synopsis:

Mobility, in the African context, is not merely about the mobility of bodies in space. It is also about mobilities of ideas and how one begins to grasp as well as grapple with reconstructing and re-

describing these kinds of physical and social movements. It is necessary to think about African history from a deeper and wider spatial containment than what is done at the moment.

One needs to understand Africa and its culture as a people who are well practised in matters of motion and movement. One of the ways that this can be done is by looking at an early map of the continent. At the time that this map was drawn, no Europeans had entered into the interior of Africa. They had only ventured as far as the coastline. The question needs to be asked as to how the map was produced as, compared with a modern-day map of the continent, there are many points of similarity. The supposition is that Europeans on the coast were in discussions with Africans in order to produce the map.

The early images of Timbuktu are critical to the issue of mobility. There are rectangular buildings that have semi-circular buildings (which may be described as 'huts') dispersed among them. This style is still in evidence today. The ancientness and exchange of ideas between people inhabiting the same space in the West African context is quite complex as the architecture of certain kinds of objects produced in relation to traditional pre-Islamic religion is complex. It is architecture that travels across space. Nomads and their lifestyles co-exist with people who are building solid masonry buildings. They co-exist in the space.

It is often thought that Europeans do not have much to learn from Africa and its history. In many African contexts, urbanism and nomadism exist together. In Europe, nomadic people are seen as those who need to be excluded and have no legitimacy in the contemporary universe. From the West Africans the Europeans can learn that nomads do not need to be seen as a 'problem'. They are an integral part of society.

A much more complex way of knowing needs to be put in place. This way of knowing must do more than impose a disciplinarian way of thinking. It is vital to reconsider the nature of scholarly work so that scholarship itself increases in mobility. In the absence of this one will never be able to find the tools to grasp some of the complexities that have always been true of Africa in relation to the movement of bodies and ideas.

Space and architecture fundamentally work to segregate European bodies and, in the words of Denise da Silva, 'Europe's Others'. The paradoxical situation in the 1950s - when there were massive urban renewal projects in New York in the United States - was connecting white suburbs to cities via highways. These often cut through the poorer, black suburbs. These construction projects happened at the same time as the student protests which occurred during the Civil Rights Movement. Although termed 'urban renewal', these projects did not renew urban areas. Rather, they removed Negroes. Architects and planners were central to this.

Protests are a demonstration of mobility. One can see the intersection of architecture and mobility when protestors marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Alabama. They were met with violence and tear gas. The protestors organised their protest in a strategic way in which the streets and the same arteries were taken over. In this respect, public space is dead space. The message is that certain lives do not matter or thrive in public.

In the Shanty Megastructures Project, in Lagos, Nigeria, the organisational and typology language of the communities were scaled up to large megastructures which would then be placed in privileged sites throughout Lagos. The point that was made is that these marginalised communities have a visible presence and prominence in a particular reimagined future of Lagos and the world. The idea is that Africans can be part of this imagination.

In their project, Olalekan Jeyifous and Olawale Lawal created narratives to give their future world life in order to show the viewer the daily experiences, culture and organisational bodies that govern this world. They look at how technology fuels segregation and separation. There is a way that technology can fuel immobility and restrict a person. Through this one can see conflicts between virtual and physical space. There are black bodies in virtual realities.

The tension or interaction between the virtual and physical space is shown in this project. When one thinks of cartographies and African mobilities often one thinks of physical space, how people move. There is also mobility that happens virtually, for example through social media and the Internet. Virtual mobility subverts everything that one knows about physical mobility. Now it is no longer a Western gaze on African life; it is also about what African life has to say about Western life.

Panel 2 Other Texts: Protagonists, Narratives and Strategies

Panel Members: N’Goné Fall
Julia Wissert
Jean-Ulrick Désert
Lesley Lokko

Key Questions:

- How can performativity de-stabilise power relations?

Key points:

- Performativity can de-stabilise people’s long-held perceptions of race and the fact that whites are not always powerful.

Synopsis:

N’Goné Fall looks at space and mobility from the point of view of public space: spaces designed by states in addition to spaces occupied, reinvented or reshaped by artists.

In the early 2000s, when Alpha Oumar Konaré was the president of Mali, he decided to redesign the capital with roundabouts. On each of these traffic-calming measures a statue or monument - that tells a story of the empire of Mali was erected. The fact that all these monuments were designed and constructed by Chinese and Koreans, in a country where local artists are plentiful, caused a great deal of consternation. The question has to be asked as to why the decision to favour international talent over local was taken.

Many artists have responded to how the state is reshaping cities and the way one navigates within such a city. For example, in 1999 Beezy Bailey performed a performance art piece on General Louis Botha against the calls to take down statues of various personages in South African history. Another example was a piece done by Camille Turner. She posed as “Miss Canadiana” and toured popular sites in Dakar, Senegal. People congratulated her, not because she had won the crown but because a black woman can win the title of – what they thought – was Miss Canada.

Artists are looking at a city as a place of memory and addressing issues that are crucial to the society. In a piece by an artist from Kinshasa, she covered her naked body in oil and walked through the streets. She was making a statement that oil – which the Democratic Republic of Congo is known for producing – is destroying the environment for the Congolese people.

There is a significant problem to do with structural racism. It is quite difficult to speak about this issue. One can see this, for example in Germany, as 'racism' has become synonymous with 'Nazism'. The narrative of the white individual has become much stronger in recent past owing to changes in government.

Jean-Ulrick Désert is interested in making invisibilities visible. A certain amount of his work is as a reaction to the experiences that he has had. He amplifies the voice of protest. In one of his projects, he travelled through Germany, adopting various personas which come with different assumptions - for example the privilege to travel, to be free, etc. He asked people along the way to take pictures of him and Jean-Ulrick used these images in various artworks.

Another part of his work is about looking at his Caribbean roots. In this area, he brings together the voice of protest with the voice of growing religion. In other words, evangelicalism in the Caribbean, taking a particular text and expressing it through our particular patois.

Europe is in the midst of a profound reckoning with its otherness and Africa is in a stage of critical change. Looking at it another way, the continent is experiencing multiple different but interlinked moments of change. Tertiary education is experiencing a great amount of instability worldwide. African architectural education is unstable and shifting. It is vital to have the courage and tenacity to take hold of the momentum created by students and drive through those changes.

The population wants our architecture to represent us but not the real us. In that context, education is less about producing competent architects and more about new thinking of new ideas of what architecture could be. The issues of migration, diaspora and race – which it is felt are central to the ongoing explorations – around African architectural identity at home and abroad are being investigated.

Panel 3 Prototype: Design as Critical Intervention

Panel Members:

- Ilze Wolff
- Doreen Adengo
- Will Monteith
- Patti Anahory
- César Cardoso Schofield

Key Questions:

- How can architecture and urban research serve as critical interventions in our urban environments?

Key points:

- Architecture and urban research can tell us about cities as well as how they can remake or reimagine the cities beyond the borders of the market itself.

Synopsis:

With the African Mobilities event, it was very important to conceptualise it as a moment along various moments of African mobilities. The purpose was to think about African mobilities as unfolding, as an interdisciplinary and transnational research-driven project.

The beginning point was thinking about how the content could be appropriated into the spaces. It was discovered that a lot of the content was driven by videos, sound and libraries. The museum had to be a space where people felt comfortable to just 'be'. This is so that the idea of delay was incorporated into the exhibition.

Much of the content overlapped in very important ways. Thus, it was necessary to think about that very carefully. In other words, how to domesticate the space. The gallery space was transformed into a domestic space through plants and lighting. One of the projects that motivated that idea was Beyond Entropy which centred around the Angolan landscape.

Aspects such as light colour, light intensity and geometry were manipulated in order for the viewer to see things differently. Layering fabric on timber became very important in the idea of shifting geometries and space.

The visitor to the exhibition needed to think about the displays as having no end. To this end, in the last room the wall was curved and there was a lit-up twisted circle to represent that the issues addressed in the exhibition are an ongoing conversation.

If one thinks of the urban, the city, as a form of intensification, the marketplace is the embodiment of the urban. Markets are a site of urban re-description and experimentation. People come together, not for a long period of time, and assemble something new. The new objects can tell us about cities as well as how they can they remake or reimagine the cities beyond the borders of the market itself.

The marketplace is a place of arrival. The central marketplace is often symbolically situated within the centre of the city and is habitually the first place to which new arrivals in the environment come as they seek access to new information, resources, shelter and livelihood. For example, the interaction of the Congolese people in Kampala with the city is mediated through the trade in wax fabric.

Islands are spaces, or fluctuating spaces, where indigenous and exogenous narratives are always constructing, restricting and shrinking the space. Cape Verde, since the slave trade, has been a space of much flux and movement which has been forced, desired and imagined. This movement has shaped narratives about this space and issues of identity. These narratives, which bind us in this georeferenced landscape, must be questioned. Other narratives and cartographies of the space that we are caught inside must be conceptualised.

Geopolitical forces shape our current contemporary spaces, for example import, export, immigration and emigration. In the case of Cape Verde the key players in this have been Portugal and the European Union.

There are a number of challenges to conducting research in Africa. The lack of infrastructure often hikes up costs as one needs to bring in satellite technology to communicate with others in other countries. In Africa, there are not many local specialised skills. Research projects should focus on upskilling local resources, with these specialised skills, so that they can benefit the local economies.

Another challenge is how to combine different ways of thinking. Everyone needs to have a common purpose in mind and be working towards the same goal. New ways of reaching like-minded researchers who can contribute meaningfully to the research need to be developed.

The next step in the discussion of African Mobilities is to document the conversation and make the literature available to the public. Collaborators need to be found and the reach needs to be on an international scale. Developing a pedagogy for designers is also extremely important.