

## Review

Gurney, K (2015) *The Art of Public Space: curating and re-imagining the ephemeral city*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

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In an excavation of movement, public space and performance art, Kim Gurney takes the reader through Johannesburg as she retraces the footsteps of the city walker and urban performer. In doing so, Gurney anchors her commentary around three festivals within the greater New Imaginaries project (2011/12) – Shoe Shop, A MAZE. Interact and Spines, offering a complex narration of the multi-faceted city. Conceived by the Goethe-Institut Süd- Afrika, the New Imaginaries project delivered the trio of festivals which aimed to respond to what Achille Mbembe referred to as a ‘crisis of imagination’ in thinking about Johannesburg.

An early sub-plot of Gurney’s takes the shape of the somewhat invisible ‘act 1, scene 1’ played out in the form of a typical inner city street choreograph, inconspicuous in its staging. Here the indistinguishable nature of ‘ordinary’ occurrences within the city, and that of a performative piece is brilliantly foregrounded on the eastern end stage as characters and spectators slowly emerge from the bustle. The latency of movement and performance has hinged much of the work of conceptual photographer Annie Leibovitz. Speaking not in the context of cities but rather of dance, Leibovitz notes: ‘I began to understand that dance couldn’t be photographed. How wonderful that it couldn’t be photographed. [...] It was this art that lived in the air’.

This ephemerality almost defines the experience of the city walker and indeed the analysis presented by Gurney, as the thread continues through many of the book’s chapters – with the city existing in a constant state of flux, endless possibilities are offered for how we read, shift, realise and

re-read its ultimate potential. *The Art of Public Space: curating and re-imagining the ephemeral city* serves as an inspiring reminder of the street as stage and walker as performer, together creating fertile ground for such 'new imaginaries'.