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Délestage Lelo Awa:
Experiments in Radical Cartography

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How, precisely, to characterize the work of Congolese artist Méga Mingiedi is something of a conundrum.¹ A discombobulating mix of graphic poetry, collage, architectural drawing and cartography – part sketch, part comic strip, part lovingly detailed account of over-arching urban vistas and tiny street-corner details – it defies categories. No maps of Kinshasa have come as close as his work does to accounting for the complexity of the city he calls home and few writings, even by the very best (Filip de Boeck, Ch. Didier Gondola, AbdouMaliq Simone), have managed to be as direct. Had novelist Sony Labou Tansi, Kinshasa’s most brilliant storyteller, lived to see the 21st century, one imagines he would have been a fan.

The strength of Mingiedi’s maps – let us call them that – lies in two characteristics of his work, both of which constitute a radical departure from mainstream approaches to cartography and cities more broadly: its staunch refusal to consider urban space from a single perspective, resulting in cityscapes that look deceptively linear, yet on closer inspection turn out to be equally (il)legible from left to right and top to bottom; and their fundamental ambivalence, a push-pull of simultaneous desire and recoil that puts in intimate proximity two entities that Modernist discourse on the city insists are wholly incompatible: the “jumble” of spaces born of “informal” economies and the “order” imposed by “formal” planning.² These two features – a multi-positional vantage point resistant to any single linear perspective

1 A longer version of this article, in which broader theoretical and contextual questions are teased out, appears in *The African Cities Reader* Vol. 2 (2010) (*Chimurenga Magazine* & African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town). Many thanks to the editors of *Art South Africa* and *The African Cities Reader* for their openness to publishing both versions.

Many thanks, too, for their kind support as I was writing these pages, to Méga Mingiedi, François Duconseille, Christian Hanussek, Eléonore Hellio and Jean-Christophe Lanquetin.

2 Notions of “formality” and “informality” are of little use, I find, in thinking about spaces and economies, urban and otherwise. Readers familiar with the SPARCK project (Space for Pan-African Research, Creation and Knowledge / The Africa Centre), which I co-direct with my friend and colleague Kadiatou Diallo, will recognize this take, for it underlies all of the projects supported by SPARCK (<http://www.sparck.org>).

and an unwillingness to come down on either side of what the work shows to be a wholly artificial dichotomy – puts Mingiedi’s readings of city space at loggerheads with officially sanctioned approaches to the city and urban renewal projects underway today in Kinshasa and DRC more widely.

On the Art of Seeing from Multiple Perspectives

“Kin Délestage,” a recent work (2010) (**Fig. 1**), provides a useful starting point to beginning engaging with Mingiedi’s work. At first glance, this large piece appears to present a linear view of the city. Its horizontal format and the artist’s use of both vanishing points and arrow-like lines linking one side of the composition to the other suggest a fairly straightforward reading from left to right. This in turn seems to accord with the theme of the work. The focus of the piece is load-shedding practices that result in large portions of the city living for days on end without electricity, while the inhabitants of tiny wealthy enclaves enjoy the comforts of generator-powered air conditioning, Internet access and lighting.³ Read thus, from left to right, “Kin Délestage” appears to propose in visual form a boilerplate analysis of economic inequality, with resources and labor moving in one direction, from the jumble of an informal city that serves as the artist’s vantage point (on the left), to the clinical order of a distant formal city to which he has little access (on the right).

Closer scrutiny suggests a different narrative. Indubitably, wealth and Modernist ideals of development – symbolized by a high-end timepiece, complete with thumb-like appendage poised on the stopwatch function – suffuse the city at right. Several of the features which identify that city as “modern,” however, are present also in the evidently less-well-off city on the left: skyscrapers and antennas most notably. The city on the left boasts more roads than its counterpart at right; infinitely more movement, a sine qua non of business, is possible there. Kinshasa’s single most quoted visual icon of modernity, an immense cement and steel tower-cum-monument erected in the Mobutu era and key to political discourse under Kabila father and son, though it tends toward center, is unequivocally located in the left-hand city.⁴ These various

3 Méga Mingiedi, personal communication, 4.2010

4 The edifice is the work of French architect Olivier-Clément Cacoub (1920-2008), builder of choice for many an African dictator.

elements speak of significantly more balance between the two halves than seemed present at first glance – or, in any event, of a push-pull that casts doubt on the viewer’s initial reading of “Kin Délestage.”

This sense of doubt is accentuated by a kind of seepage that draws the attention as one begins to look more closely at the piece. An undertow – a manner of sucking force – seems to be at work that has objects and materials sluicing back and forth between the two ends of the city. Buildings, or more properly their foundations and bottom stories, cannot seem to decide which side they are on. The roads on the left may be curvier and narrower than their runway-like counterparts on the right, suggesting an older pedigree (some, indeed, are recognizable as thoroughfares laid down in the late colonial and early Mobutu eras), but their tangle seems in places to be exerting an irresistible pull, slurping up like so many strands of spaghetti the linear perfection of the roads on the right. A peculiar sludge – a red/green/blue mix of water, bubbles, minerals and gems – is seen as if traveling back and forth between the two extremities of the cityscape, settling at neither end. A stream of spirits, in the form of cruciform designs patterned on the logo of Primus beer, Kinshasa’s drink of choice, tethers one side to the other. Squint slightly, as you might after one bottle too many, and the blue-and-white crosses start to look like blinking lights enveloping the two cities in single electropop loop.

No one perspective – left-to-right or right-to-left – makes more sense than the other. While Mingiedi’s location seems clear enough (the presence of two mouths on the left says as much: this is the locus from which he is speaking), the city is just as clearly in flux and this makes the artist’s position – formal and conceptual – significantly less clear than even he might like. Still closer scrutiny highlights a front-to-back and back-to-front push-and-pull that further complicates the possibility of linear readings. Spend too much time looking at “Kin Délestage” and you start to feel a bit nauseous, as if your eye had somehow become attached to a bouncing soccer ball (an example of which turns up, uncannily, near top left).

Dangers and Pleasures of Ambivalence

The result of all this is a distinct sense of unmooring. Underlying this sensation, present but just out of sight, is a niggling doubt as to whether the artist himself knows where he stands – ethically, politically – in relation to the push-pull of the two cities. It seems fair to say that he is more comfortable on the left; the sheer amount of detail that he builds into the picture there is telling, as is the fluid mix of humor, irony and dead-serious precision that characterizes the left side of the composition. At the same time, one would be hard put to overlook the sense of distant perfection that marks the right-hand city. The careful order in which the buildings are arrayed – in a rhythmic dentate pattern at top and a gentle ascending curve at bottom – recalls rows of bottles in a well-stocked bar, a recession-proof establishment such as one might find in the lobby of an international hotel frequented by moneyed foreign investors. There is a certain wistfulness here that suggests a latent desire for something else: for an experience of the city distinct from the everyday haphazardness of the vibrant but intensely complicated districts Mingiedi calls home.

The question of what, precisely, that something else might be adds several layers of complexity to the piece and to Mingiedi's work more generally. At the core of the matter is the figure of Mobutu Sese Seko: not so much the man himself, at whose name the artist grimaces, as what certain aspects of his three decade reign represent. As is common in cities wrecked by war or recovering from political upheaval, there is in Kinshasa a widespread nostalgia for something past and no longer attainable – a hazy, dreamlike recollection of what the city once stood for in the eyes of others abroad. East Berlin is one such city, Moscow, in its poorer districts, is another. In Mingiedi's city, comparisons are made at every turn between "Kin la poubelle" (Kin as trashcan) – the capital in its current form – and "Kin la belle" – a city, so the (much romanticized) story goes, that not so long ago was one of the continent's urban jewels. The principal characteristic of that city, part fact and part fiction, was its identity as a Modernist entity. While its origins as such lie in the colonial period,⁵ Kin la moderne is recalled today

⁵ In Congo as elsewhere (Eritrea, Algeria, Mozambique) colonial regimes treated cities under their rule as platforms to experiment with space and form in ways impossible "back home," resulting at times in pockets of high Modernist extravaganza.

primarily as a project of the early Mobutu era. The recollection is not wholly inaccurate: in the later 60s and the first half of the 70s, Mobutu expended gargantuan sums on constructing an image of his capital as an ultra-modern metropolis – a case in point being the massive restructuring of downtown Kinshasa that he launched in preparation for the Ali-Foreman “Rumble in the Jungle” held there 1974.

Elements of that “other” Kinshasa are present in the overwhelming majority of Mingiedi’s works. Icons of the period appear over and over again: the tower-cum-monument mentioned earlier (**Fig. 2A**); various stadiums that Mobutu refurbished (for the Rumble, notably) and built from scratch to serve as stages for his (in)famous displays of political and military might (one such stadium, its bleachers colored bright purple, appears at bottom left in “Kin Délestage”); military bases and airports; Mont Ngaliéma, in the western part of the city, atop which stood Mobutu’s fabled and feared Marble Palace; the TRICO II nuclear reactor, sub-Saharan Africa’s first, also positioned atop an outcropping overlooking Kin (Mont Amba) (**2B**)⁶... Many of these sites are now closed or crumbling, fallen prey to looting, catastrophic erosion, financial implosion and other debacles. In Mingiedi’s drawings, however, they appear as new. Referenced in images of these sites, in collaged scraps of (now useless) Zaire bills adorned with his effigy (**Fig. 3A**), in invoices made out to him as if he were still alive (**3B**) and in handwritten calculations that point to a time in the 70s when the Zaire was a currency to reckon with (**3C**), Mobutu haunts Mingiedi’s maps of Kinshasa. Seen and unseen, he is present everywhere.

Between this spectral presence and the push-pull of left and right hand city in the drawing with which we began there is an intimate tie. The city on the right is arguably Mobutu’s dream, untouched by the disaster that the megalomania of this very same dream let loose on Kinshasa. Seen in this light, the precise, clinically-rendered city on

6 Méga Mingiedi, personal communication, 10.2009.

While the reactor was not built by Mobutu (it was the brainchild of a peculiarly nuclear-obsessed Belgian cleric, one Monsignor Luc Gillon, who set it up on the campus of the University of Kinshasa in 1959), it was a source of great pride for the dictator and, in 1970, was upgraded by Gillon at Mobutu’s behest. It remains “active” today, if in a disastrous state of decay (Michaela Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurz: Living on the Brink of Disaster in Congo*, London: Harper Collins, 2000, pp. 138-144).

the right emerges as a wholly ambivalent space – ambivalent, that is, for the artist, who like many men of his generation is both too young to have experienced Kin la (supposed) belle of the early 70s and too old to have escaped the hell that befell the city in the final years of Mobutu’s reign. Desire and detestation, (grudging) pride and appalled recognition are present in equal measure, giving the lie to those who would offer simple before-and-after readings of the city or its inhabitants’ experience of it.

Slippage, Collapse and the Mind-Mapped City

Mobutu’s spectral presence is not a matter of Mingiedi’s cityscapes alone. As most any Kinshais will tell you, it haunts the city as a whole and much of DRC to boot. The man may be dead, but his spirit is fast afoot, prompting odd slippages in which present, past and occasionally future seem to collide and collapse into one another, resulting in dizzying experiences of urban hybridity.

Such collision/collapses and slip-slides into hybrid experience make repeated and striking appearances in Mingiedi’s work. Drawn or painted and at times rendered as full-scale models, they take the form of vehicles that come into being as a result of peculiar couplings: a dugout canoe and the nose cone of a 747 (**Figs. 4A and 4B**); a TGV bullet train filled with French politicians and a Kinshasa *combi* (a collective taxi/minivan, typically outfitted with wood benches and hugely overcrowded), positioned side by side or smashed into one another, products of an unlikely rear-end collision (**Fig. 5**).⁷ In these implausible contraptions, once again linearity exits the picture: there is no way to tell in which direction the wheels are likely to turn. A bizarre wheelbarrow-cum-caterpillar earthmover designed by the artist in 2008 to transport artworks imported by a Parisian collection for an exhibit at the Beaux Arts academy in Kin looks just as likely to slide laterally (or up) as it is to proceed left or right on a horizontal plane (**Fig. 6**). Thoroughfares traversing his maps similarly run/morph into one another, forming maze-like intertwinings alternately reminiscent of lassos or fun

⁷ For photography of a stunning mural of precisely such a collision, created by Mingiedi on the façade of his house in Kinshasa, see the upcoming edition of the French contemporary arts journal *Livraison* (no. 14, 2011), edited by François Duconseille, Frank Houndégla, Jean-Christophe Lanquetin and Dominique Malaquais.

house loop-d-loops (See Fig. 2A) and the circuitry of high tech motherboards (Figs. 7A and 7B), all of it leading everywhere and nowhere at once.

None of this is happenstance. Mingiedi has not stumbled, à la *art brut*, on approaches to mapping that coincidentally echo those of such art world and theory luminaries as Teddy Cruz, Bernard Khoury or Eyal Weizman. Were he a European artist, this would scarcely need to be pointed out; in the realm of contemporary African(ist) art history, however, it must sadly be underscored, lest an artist who has dedicated significant time to formal study be categorized, like so many before him, as some manner of genius autodidact. While, to my knowledge, he has read neither Cruz nor Weizman and is not acquainted with Khoury, after years of formal training at the Beaux Arts Academy in Kinshasa, Mingiedi has spent a great deal of time, first as a student at Strasbourg's Ecole Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs (ESAD), then as a collaborator on numerous design and installation projects across Africa and Europe, in the company of artists, scenographers and curators whom Cruz and co. and their forebears have mightily influenced.

ESAD is home to a cadre of professor-practitioners who have long engaged in sophisticated mind-mapping experiments. Among these are several people with whom Mingiedi has worked closely, by whom he has been influenced and whose practice he has in turn impacted. Among them are Eléonore Hellio, whose *art sans oeuvre* weds inspiration from mind-mapping guru Tony Buzan,⁸ Dreamtime cartographies of the Noongar, Gagudju and related peoples of Australia, double bind theory in its relation to complex systems and cybernetics, and Palo Alto School research on systemic clusters;⁹ Pierre Mercier, whose work explores coercive systems (*dispositifs*) as articulated by Michel Foucault and, in his wake, Giorgio Agamben; Jean-Christophe Lanquetin and François Duconseille, whose engagement with urban space and performance brings into play the writings of Hannah Arendt, Michel de Certeau, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Paul Gilroy, Achille Mbembe, Jacques Rancière, Georges Perec, AbdouMaliq Simone and

⁸ Tony Buzan, *The Mind Map Book*, London and New York: Penguin Books, 1996.

⁹ John Weakland and Paul Watzlawick eds., *Sur l'interaction, Palo Alto 1965-1974, une nouvelle approche thérapeutique*, Paris: Seuil, 1981.

others, all of whom emphatically reject both singular perspectives and linear approaches to the production of knowledge.

Public Space is the Place

For this Strasbourg-based crew, public space is the space of record: the single most important point of entry for reflection on and engagement with the city. The same is true of Mingiedi, for whom it has been a central concern since his earliest days as a creator, and it is the primary locus of interest for those with whom he works most intimately in Kinshasa: designers Cédric Nzolo and Iviart Izamba, with whom he has founded a collective, K50, whose focus is the art of shaping public space through processes of ephemeral remapping (**Fig. 8**).

This shared, cross-continental interest in public space has fed a synergy between ESAD and the Académie des Beaux Arts in Kinshasa: a seven-year partnership in the context of which several Kinois students – notably Mingiedi and Nzolo – came to study in Strasbourg, ESAD students took part in workshops, exhibits and performances hosted by ABA, and faculty traveled back and forth between the two schools. This in turn has spawned a number of projects centering on radical interventions on and into urban public space.

One such project, “Urban Scenographies,” initiated in the late 90s by Lanquetin and Duconseille¹⁰ and active ever since in cities across Africa and, more recently, Europe, brought Mingiedi to Johannesburg for a month-long multiple-creator residency at the Drill Hall in Doornfontein in April 2009.¹¹ There, he developed his most sophisticated and challenging work to date – a remarkable exercise in three-dimensional urban cognitive cartography entitled “Lelo Awa” (“Here Today”).

The brief for creators involved in the Urban Scenographies residency was to develop projects inspired by and meant to reshape – for a minute, an hour, a day –

10 <http://www.eternalnetwork.org/scenographiesurbaines/index.php>. See also Dominique Malaquais, “Douala en habit de festival,” *Africultures* 73 (2008).

11 <http://www.eternalnetwork.org/scenographiesurbaines/index.php?cat=joburgresidency>

public space in a five-block radius extending from the Drill Hall.¹² All participants lived within this radius for a month – Mingiedi in the Hall itself – and, at month’s end, deployed their takes on space in a public three-day happening/festival/multipolar event. The World Cup was looming on the horizon and there was much talk in Doornfontein during this period about the impact that the new inner-city tram line being planned at the time would have on the taxi business – this an issue of some grievance given the presence, across from the Hall, of the infamous Noord Street taxi rank.

Given this general state of affairs and his long-standing fascination with urban routes and mobility, Mingiedi had much to think about. Add to this an interest on his part in football as a political phenomenon and within hours of his arrival in Johannesburg Mingiedi was bursting with ideas. Shortly, he set about devising a moving installation that involved rolling a gigantic ball through the crowded streets of Doornfontein. The neighborhood, home and transit point for thousands of car-less folk mired every day in endless traffic jams – people whose origins and economic condition, it was clear by this point, would not make them particularly welcome at the Rainbow Nation’s WC celebrations – was about to be steamrolled by a Kin-and-fut-inspired, space-invading take on the violence of movement and access curtailed (**Figs. 9A and 9B**).

There were, however, two problems, which quickly became key concerns for the artist. First was the difficulty, given limited means, to produce a ball large enough to satisfy the project’s intentions (the diameter was to be no less than 2.5 meters), yet robust enough to withstand the less-than-smooth pavement of central Jozi. The second was the neighborhood itself. While certain participants in the residency were fascinated by the veritable Babel of languages, practices, ways of thinking and doing of Doornfontein’s multi-national environment, Mingiedi was mostly appalled. The miserable living conditions, fear of deportation and police violence, gang activity and broken dreams he encountered among so many “local” foreign Africans with whom he crossed paths on his forays through the area left him despondent. In the eyes of some, this may have

12 Such reshaping was not to leave a permanent mark. Indeed, one of the most interesting (and refreshing) aspects of the Urban Scenographies project as a whole, in all of the cities were it comes into play, is its active refusal to “fix” the urban environment

been an exotic laboratory for sociological observation. For him, it was just more of what he had seen elsewhere – in the hell that Kin had become by the late 90s, following the state’s collapse and the attendant trail of destitute men, women and children streaming from everywhere into a city that wanted nothing to do with them; in the ugly world of constant ID checks, holding cells and baton-wielding military police that greets African immigrants in many European cities. Most depressing for him were the homeless Zimbabweans adrift in Doornfontein. This was emphatically not what he had had in mind when he stepped off the plane at OR Tambo International Airport.

Mulling all of this over, Mingiedi took to his room. When he emerged a few days later, he had a plan: he would not leave his room *at all*. If public space in Doornfontein had become for so many a space of broken private lives, then he would contrive to explode private space, turning it into a radical reincarnation of public interaction. The project was properly bizarre and simply brilliant. First, he put a multilingual sign up on his door identifying the room’s occupant – in Lingala, French and assorted broken versions of South Africa’s eleven official tongues – as a Zimbabwean in Johannesburg (**Fig. 10**). Then he got to work, inviting those who wished to come in and see what he was up to.

Shortly, however, getting in got complicated. Mingiedi, it transpired, was building that massive ball *inside* the room and the object was no small contraption. It reached from floor to ceiling and left little space along the sides – just enough (a kind of narrow viewing gallery) to see a mural extending over the four walls: a drawn, painted and collaged cartography radically collapsing Joburg into Kinshasa, so that there was no way to tell where one city began and the other ended. In the first days, it was easy enough to enter the space, as he was in the process of constructing the ball’s armature, this out of plastic tubing used to house electric cables. If need be, to get from one spot along the mural to another, you could step gingerly through the coils of tubing. When the whole armature was up, however, this was no longer an option (**Figs. 11A and 11B**).

Then movement in and out became even more complicated, as the artist embarked on creating a cardboard shell for the ball (**Fig. 12**). If you were thin enough to squeeze by, you inevitably found that the mural had changed since the last time you’d come through, growing to incorporate an increasing number of references to the work

being done by other members of the residency. Mingiedi may not have been leaving his room other than for an occasional walk down the hall to shower or relieve himself, but he kept very much abreast of activities in and around the Drill Hall and, as headlines cribbed from daily newspapers and incorporated into the mural showed, he was making sure to stay on top of goings-on in Johannesburg and the world more generally. This latter process got even more interesting when headlines, entire articles and grainy color photographs began appearing on the ball itself.

Mingiedi had undertaken to cover the entire sphere in newsprint. Most regular onlookers had expected this process to take at least several days and were looking forward to reading the world, as it were, for by this point the ball at the center of the increasingly complicated cityscape inscribed on the walls had started to look like a planet rotating at the core of an urban implosion. But no: in a single, frenzied night, Mingiedi managed to coat every inch of the ball, resulting in a sight so peculiar it looked properly psychedelic (**Figs. 13A and 13B**). A row of empty beer and cheap whiskey bottles running the entire length of the floorboards, evidence of a per diem liquidly spent, glimmering in light streaming in through the room's one window, served to anchor the eye, offering a form of scansion for gazes that could scarcely find a point on which to settle in the buzz of implied movement filling every inch of the space

By the time the news-covered ball was finished, the only way in and out of the space was through the window. This might have discouraged many – walking by the door to Mingiedi's room, you could see that no access was possible (**Fig. 14**) – but at this point the ball-room had become such a source of curiosity that people were lining up on the fire escape for a look and possible visit. Private space had quite literally become public, in a haunting echo of the Gaza bed- and living-rooms described by Weizman: personal, indoor spaces transformed into public thoroughfares by the wrecking ball panopticon-on-the-move of the Israeli war machine.¹³ Here, however, a reversal had been operated. The ball was on the inside, claimed as his very own panopticon by the Congo-Zimbabwean at the heart of it all, along with not one but two cities (Joburg and Kin melting into one another) and a host of others adding guest appearances to the mix

13 Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, London and New York, Verso, 2007.

(a building plucked from the Manhattan skyline, an odd, pickle-shaped structure straight out of Dubai). The ball had no intention of wrecking anything, but it did make a dead-serious point: in a late capitalist public sphere that, on grounds of origins, complexion, accent or absence of means, denies many the right to decent private space (or, indeed, to any private space at all), there *are* the means – anger, imagination, sheer determination – to create bedlam from the inside out. What had begun as a wholly speculative experiment¹⁴ had turned into a full-fledged model for radically rethinking the urban borderlines between public and private space. Gaza, referenced also in the mural by way of comparisons with the ultra-violent “Red Ant” evictions taking place throughout Doornfontein at the time,¹⁵ was present in the heart of inner-city Johannesburg and, at Mingiedi’s hands, most definitely intent on talking – and taking – back.

A constant question from onlookers, first among them those who thought the whole thing should be somehow preserved and collected – “how are you going to get the ball *out of there?*” – unwittingly added to the message inherent in the installation. In one of the most implausible and, uncannily, one of the most logical mixes one could imagine, the spirits of French playwright Eugene Ionesco and Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Pierre Bekolo had managed to meet up at the Drill Hall – the former by way of his play “Amédée ou comment s’en débarrasser” (1954) and the latter via his film “Les saignantes,” two Ubuesque tales in which efforts to get rid of an unwieldy object make the lives of assorted city dwellers increasingly complicated and absurd. In both cases,

14 Mingiedi did not know, and at first expressed this concern repeatedly, if any of this would work.

15 As many South Africans know, the urban “beautification campaign” launched by the government in advance of the WC was accompanied by a wave of violent evictions in which poor immigrant families were beaten and ousted from whatever homes they had managed to make for themselves, their meager furnishings trampled and burned by gangs of rent-a-thugs known as Red Ants for their fire-engine red outfits. During their stay in Doornfontein, the Urban Scenographies participants witnessed several Red Ant evictions, the area immediately surrounding the Drill Hall being high on the “clean-up” list of local authorities. The majority of those who lost their homes were Zimbabweans living in abandoned buildings of the inner city. Descriptions of the early-morning rousts by the riot gear equipped Ants, complete with accounts and photographs of bleary-eyed and often bloody evictees staring at defenestrated mattresses, pots, pans and children’s toys, were chilling. A sense of helpless horror pervaded the Hall.

the object is a corpse. In Ionesco's play it is a body that will not stop swelling, taking up more and more space, and in Bekolo's film it is a deceased John who, despite attempts to cut his remains into disposable pieces by the prostitutes on whose watch he has died, keeps on reappearing in the most inappropriate public places.¹⁶ In both instances, the increasingly present corpse is the proverbial pink elephant: the THING taking over, whose presence no one will fully acknowledge. In the confines of Mingiedi's room turned public viewing chamber, the THING was not literally (or even symbolically) a corpse, but it did lend itself to a reading as a deceased entity: the Modernist city. In the urban heart of a neighborhood that had once been Apartheid South Africa's proudest claim to Modernist identity - so much so that it billed itself as "Little Manhattan" - the artist had created the ultimate rebuke to Modernist teleologies of unilinear, forward movement: a moving object that staunchly refused to move, inside a space that just as staunchly refused to be what its architecture dictated that it be, a closed and private space, choosing instead to become a public arena in which visitors were confronted not with one city, or even two, but with an palimpsest layering of urban cartographies in which all cities were suddenly one and one city was all others.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Elisabeth Malaquais for her suggestion that I consider Mingiedi's installation in relation to Ionesco's "Amédée".