Nottingham Contemporary

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Civic Practices and Architectural Eco-Fiction

with Thandi Loewenson and Frances Whitehead

Live transcript

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SPEAKERS
Theo Reeves-Evison, Thandi Loewenson, Frances Whitehead

2:08:57 Theo Reeves-Evison
Hello, and welcome back to the final block of talks for this online component of the After Growth symposium. It's my great pleasure to introduce our final two speakers. So we have Thandi Loewenson and Frances Whitehead. Thandi, born in Harare, is an architectural designer researcher who operates through design, fiction and performance, to interrogate our perceived and lived realms and to speculate on the possible worlds in our midst. Mobilising the weird and the tender, she engages in projects which provoke questioning of the status quo, while working with communities, policymakers, artists and architects towards acting on those provocations. Thandi is a tutor at the Royal College of Art London, visiting professor at Aarhus School of Architecture and co foundress of the architectural collective BREAK//LINE. So Thandi we'll be kicking things off but I'll just introduce our second speaker first as well. So Frances Whitehead is a civic practice artist bringing the methods mindsets and strategies of contemporary art practice to the process of shaping the future city. Connecting emerging art practice and the discourse of climate change, post humanism, counter extinction, and culturally informed

sustainability, she developed strategies to deploy the knowledge of artists as change agents, asking what do artists know? Questions of participation, sustainability and culture change animate her work, as she considers the surrounding community, the landscape and the interdependency of multiple ecologies. Whitehead's cutting edge work integrates art in sustainability, as she traverses disciplines to engage citizens, municipalities and other communities of practice in order to hybridise art, design, science, conservation, and civic engagement for public and for planet. Frances has worked professionally as an artist since the mid 80s, and worked collaboratively as ARTetal studio since 2001. She's a professor of sculpture and architecture at the School of the Arts Institute in Chicago, where she found the SAIC knowledge lab. She explores experimental geography and other transdisciplinary topics that engage the aesthetic, technological, and geopolitical dimensions of art making as a component of spatial practice. A long term resident of the Great Lakes region, she has recently relocated to the high desert of New Mexico to focus on xeric landscapes for the future, very much looking forward to hearing about those xeric landscapes. But first of all, Thandi if you'd like to introduce a film that you're going to show us, thanks.

2:11:53 Thandi Loewenson
Fabulous, thank you so much for this invitation, what an amazing gift that this symposium and set of two days is to us all so thank you to all the organisers and all the people involved in front of the scenes behind the scenes making the mechanics of this incredible exercise work. I was delighted to get this invitation to a symposium on post capitalist imaginaries. And this wonderful invitation resonated with me, with some work that I've been doing that is exploring histories of anti capitalist struggle in contention with colonialism, rooted in southern Africa, and thinking particularly about how we engage read, find, source and then continue this work today. So this work, which I'm sharing today, a film, very fresh off the press, explores the sonic as a space of post capitalist

imaginary and how that not only refigured space, but carries histories of spaces already liberated to, and with that over to the film.

2:12:56 Film
I want to start by talking about Sungura, which is a type of music that depending on who you ask originates in the Congo or Tanzania or Zimbabwe. As a Zimbabwean myself, I should probably stick to the party line. But I find something quite beautiful in the suggestion by Andrew Tzora and others, that it is instead a fusion of musical genres from the DRC, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, and even Cuba, which also has strands of traditional Zimbabwean genres in mandate GT shunga and suppose. The story goes that this mix was facilitated by Zimbabwean liberation guerrillas, who had trained to fight the white capitalist supremacy of colonialism in East Africa and returned to the country as combatants who had been exposed to a heavy conjoined mix of military training, class consciousness and associated sonic registers of refusal and reimagined.

I want to start by talking about Sungura, and you can't talk about Sungura without talking about Leonard Dembo and his band at The Barura Express that gave us such hits as Chitekete, a 14 minute love song written by Dembo when he was a young boy herding cattle in machinegold. Or the big big track Chinyemu released on the same album, which is a song written by a then famous Dembo in 1991. Rang Barry, the writer and curator of the sungura central platform and archive notes how this was a seismic moment for sungura - the lovesong Chitekete was the biggest hit the country had ever seen. And Chinyemu, an incisive critique on the way capitalism crept into corrupt the most ambitious parts of the Zimbabwean project of black liberation, reaching into people's homes, their places of work, and in Dembo's words, taking the meat out of their children's pots of soup. In Chinyemu, Dembo sings about workers struggles, and about the harshness of life in Zimbabwe during ASAP, the

economic and structural adjustment programme imposed on the country by the World Bank and the IMF. A mechanism now more commonly understood north of the equator, through the language of austerity. Kushanda ndinoshanda asi ndinoshaiwe simba sings Dembo - to work I work but I don't have power, I have no strength left. Ndisunungureiwo ndirangarireiwo - release me and remember me. I wanted to start by talking about sungura because you can't talk about some girl without talking about Leonard Dembo and once you're talking about Leonard Dembo, you're talking about love songs by their very definition a desire for a future together and you're also talking about struggle songs at the same time - you're talking about the fullness of life and the desire to fight for it and about the pressures which restrict contort and suppress that fullest flourishing. I'm assuming that certainly some people here will not have heard any sungora and so it is important that we right that wrong immediately.

Across the border in DRC we find another instance of this in the sembeni let's take the song Mario (non stop) by Franco Luambo and Le T.P OK Jazz. It is a relentless 14 minute track that appears to have no beginning and no end. I read somewhere that when Franco died there was a traffic jam in Kinshasa that lasted for two months and the radio played Mario nonstop for days. Franco was a master of the sembele, a sound so synonymous with Congo and composed of a hypnotic phrase that is played over and over again until it seeps into your bones. This was the music that taught Achille Mbembe an important lesson when he was writing a book on the post colony, Mbembe, writes, the emotional sublimity of the Congolese musical imagination, taught me how indispensable it was to think with the bodily senses, to write with the musicality of one's own flesh. Indeed, in Africa, music has always been a celebration of the inereovacability of life in a long life denying history. It is the genre that has historically expressed in the most haunting way our rage and desire not only for existence, but more importantly for joy in existence, what we should call the practice of joy before death. Across

the border yet again, when Zambia gained independence, the colander government implemented some of the most radical policies of nationalisation of land, infrastructure and minerals against the profit motive that we have ever seen on this planet. The Milan Gooshie project, a series of economic and social reforms would radically restructure relations between people property and earth through the abolition of private property and the nationalisation of mines. The country's land and minerals were no longer matter for generating profit, but rather matter that had the means to enrich the lives and futures of the Zambian population. Among these policies was a new law that determined that at least 90% of music played on the radio had to be of Zambian origin, with the objective of "reawakening the public to cultural and social realities". Zambian musicians were encouraged into the studio and a new genre emerged Zamrock forged between studios in the mining areas of the copper belt, and in the city in Lusaka, and played throughout the country. Zamrock sound was intimately concerned with the struggles and aspirations of young radicals in independent Zambia. In Born Black Chrissy Zebby Tembo questions societal inequalities, I am born black, and I'm poor, what wrong did I do to be put on a wrong side? On a later track Tembo sings I am not made of iron, I am a human being. In hometown by the band WITCH, an acronym for we intend to cause havoc, the gentle riff of an electric guitar evokes the calm of rural life in relation to the pace of life in the city later intimated in the frenzied No Time. Norman Muntemba, vocalist and bass player in the Zamrock band Salty Dog describes how despite enormous social and economic challenges, the sound of zamrock captured the optimism which people felt both for the country and concurrently for themselves too. To quote Muntemba, The good part was that with our independence, there was a renewed faith in the fact that this was a country that would go on and that we were a people who would go on, the music was just fantastic, because it also helped us explore our sense of independence, and our sense of reaching out. The political scholar Alistair Fraser identifies how nationalisation

had a significant cultural influence on how people imagined themselves. Rikki Ililonga of the band Musi-O-Tunya suggests Zamrock was born less out of the desire to emulate or mimic Western rock and roll and more out of a resonance of its sound and politics of liberation with musicians in Zambia. The result? Zamrock was not a facsimile, but rather something new and dialogue with the ambitious abolitionist project of the nationalisation of land, infrastructure and minerals, which was taking place all around. I wanted to start by talking about sungura, because you can't talk about sungura without playing some sungura, and then some sembele and then some Zamrock. And then it becomes immediately obvious that once you're talking about sungura you're no longer just talking. But you're listening. Your bones are vibrating at 130 BPM, 115 BPM, 120 BPM, your heart starts pumping faster, your pace of breath increases, you're dancing down to a molecular level, and you're dancing together. What is this magic, that in the face of foreclosure and violence, forces which restrict the space one can occupy, the air one can breathe, and even the possibilities one can dare to dream responds with a sound which conjures up the very opposite, collective movement, which carries ideas, which rejects the cards we've been dealt, and which demands the very opposite. detailer Nader nice speaks about the importance of black people moving together and moving in step as misery resistance and sonic refusal, how black sound facilitates a shared space of rehearsal across time and geography - a space in which resistance to oppression can be tested, pressed in vinyl, on cassette tape, on mp3 circulated on a battery USB and then enacted, generating a space in which it is possible to break free from oppressive forces entirely. A manoeuvre I have spoken about elsewhere as black flight. This is the possibility inherent in forms of black cultural production, such as Dembo's acrobatics in the time space of a sungura love song, such as a traffic jam that lasts two months in Kinshasa while the same song plays non stop, Mario (non stop) responding with the celebration of life on the occasion of death. Such as the entirely new sound we find in

Zamrock constructed out of the contortions of rock and roll with the ambitions of the abolition of private property, which inspire faith that a country will go on, and that a people will go on. Here modes of flight are constructed, generating acts of collective movement, which allow for both the incisive critique of the every day and simultaneously, the imaginary construction of alternative presents and futures

2:27:35 Theo Reeves-Evison
Thank you, Thandi. Well, that was so good. Unfortunately, on this computer the sound is just through the monitor, but I hope everyone at home has some Bluetooth speakers hooked up or ability to turn up in the bass. Over to you Frances. Without further ado, thanks.

2:27:57 Frances Whitehead
Okay, just give me one second here. Okay, can you see my presentation? Everything good? Okay. Oh, I have to get some real estate because I can't see what I'm doing here, just a second. I have too many bits and pieces open. Hi, everybody. I'm Frances Whitehead coming to you, as Theo has said from Santa Fe, New Mexico. Theo, I'm not going to talk about the xeriscaping today, because that project is just emerging. And it didn't really fit into the thesis that I was going to talk about today. But it's great to be at the symposium and with everyone in Nottingham and thank you for having me. For the last 35 years, I have lived in Chicago metro area, which includes Gary, and much of my practice is focused on the legacy cities of the Great Lakes Basin, A Global Resource holding 22% of the world's freshwater. These legacy cities - Chicago, Gary, Cleveland, Detroit, were the centre of the steel industry now called the Rust Belt. They continue to struggle with population loss, abandonment, and industrial degradation. These post industrial conditions are oddly mirrored in the post colonial context of Lima, Peru, which I will also mention briefly. Many expect in the Great Lakes these population trends to reverse in the next 100 years, as eco migration from the southwest, drives population back because of water. When the citizen

artist sits at the collective table, what knowledge and skills do they in fact bring? What do artists know that can contribute to the future? My practice is based in this question which has evolved into a platform, both message and method. Multiple practice strategies have emerged from this question including embedded artists working inside of a context, artists urbanists taking on the scale of the city, and the public artist, like the public intellectual, a new kind of problem solver, all forms of what I call civic art practice. Today I will discuss several key growth strategies. Most important is the imperative to work at all scales. But I have also adopted what I could call a vegetal consciousness, working with living plants as key collaborators. You will also see that I'm frequently flipping the script on development, what I call undevelopment, and touch on sleight of hand urbanism and hedge your bet urbanism, ways of dealing with contested ideas and sites that are not always upfront. The imperative for artists to step up and work at the scale of the environmental impacts leads us to the artist urbanists outside the traditional scale, materials and role of the artist - not just micro to macro or simple bottom up thinking but also ideas concerning relationality and the dynamics that drive scaled elements within systems. This work is also spatial and durational. And so today, I'm going to show you very briefly four projects that operate conceptually and physically at four scales. From microbe to the bio regional, small, medium, large, extra large. The four projects are conceptually framed as micro bliss, civic hive, pink infrastructure and fruit futures. Working as embedded artists with Chicago Department of Environment brownfields division, I joined a team of environmental engineers to envision new approaches to soil remediation. We evolved slow cleanup of phyto remediation or plant based remediation programme for Chicago's 400 plus abandoned gas stations that you see here. We reviewed the geotechnical characteristics of numerous sites to identify good candidates for the programme. While specific species activate the process by exuding root sugars, called phenols. The key players in this process are the existing soil microbes which

actually eat the petroleum. Surprisingly, very few plants have been tested, including the prairie forbs, native to Chicago, famous for their extensive root systems. Like all gardens, the plants show on the surface but all the action is below ground. All the action is in the microbulus, the invisible city within. Working with soil scientistvDr. A.P. Schwab, we established the field trials and the bench trials for 80 species. And through this process, we have identified 12 New definitive species of native ornamental petroleum remediators and a number of promising additional species. In addition to these hard science outcomes we used a process that will create value at every step - net benefits they call it. Students from four communities of practice had been involved in the project, including ecology, soil science, art and horticulture. Site. The glorious Peruvian potato drew us to Lima, Peru to work with the Global Food Security organisation in potato Gene Bank CIP, the Centro internacional de la Papa. CIP stewards 4000 varieties of Andean tubers representing 10,000 years of hybridisation by indigenous communities. The director of CIP linked us to the municipality of Lima to partner on creative strategies for urban agriculture and food security for the historic centre inhabited by the urban poor. Lima is running out of water and also struggles to move towards democratic participation. We began our work with the boxy yellow City Hall as the animating centre, which we conceived as the Camino civica the Civic hive as a symbol for civic participation. However, the hex motif from the hive concept also began to prove very practical as a space saving device in the cramped quarters of the Old City. And so with the civic hive, we learned to mix the symbolic and the practical freely. Infrastructure. Back in Chicago from 2012 to 2016, I worked as a lead artist for the design team on a three mile long rails to trails bike park called the 606, which you see here. There are many discrete sites that evolved from the overall project of adaptive reuse, such as the solar observatory, made from the construction rubble created in collaboration with Adler Planetarium. However, I was most interested in the overall rail structure, the linearity, the strict east west orientation and the

proximity to the lake. Here we performed what we can only call sleight of hand urbanism. Over the objections of the landscape architects, we were able to leverage the client's appetite for civic engagement into a major piece of climate activism through landscape. For some years, I had been in conversation with this man, Dr. Mark Schwartz, Mark has been forming the USA NPN, the National Phenological Network, an organisation aimed at gathering climate data across the USA, calibrated with a special kind of lilac. Mark and I had been working, looking for a linear site to observe and visualise the microclimates around Lake Michigan - the linearity of the 606 was perfect. This idea of using soup seasonal bloom data, nature's calendar is called phenology. Phenology from the Greek to come into view is the practice of observing natural events like bud burst, or bloom time, which you see here. Phenology is an ancient practice that is undergoing a revival across the globe. Because living indicators can tell us more about climate than isolated instrumentation. This project is actually based on an ancient cultural model, the Japanese Cherry Blossom Festival. The springtime festival is celebrated all over Japan, where the exact moment of bloom is anxiously awaited and predicted. Here you see a map from 2013 with probable bloom dates for each city. Court records of exact bloom date go back over 1200 years, producing the oldest and most important federal logic dataset. As a scientific and cultural investigation, we wondered if this strategy could be replicated on the 606. Could a flowering spectacle produce climate data here? Can beauty be catalytic? Can a line og flowering shrubs make climate change legible to the public? Mark Schwartz ran a climatological study for the 606 by comparing existing data from two weather stations just north of the trail. Due to Chicago's famous lake effect, Mark's climate model predicted a five day bloomspread from west to east for any temperature sensitive species planted along the trail. 453 serviceberries, a native flowering Apple were planted along the trail, allowing casual observers, people on bikes, runners, and the citizen science programme to see the microclimate of the lake every

spring and climate change over the next century. In so doing, we have invented a new urban form we call pink infrastructure, that is infrastructure for raising climate awareness. And if you pick up any molecules of feminism in that title, you will be correct. Lastly, the bio region. In addition to being beautiful and temperature sensitive, the service berry produces fruit. This fact pulled my thought and practice around the bottom of the lake towards Gary, Indiana, and the question of what fruit growing could do for the region. Gary was founded in 1909 by US Steel, the largest in the world at the time, and has remained a company town. Once employing 30,000 people, today it employs only 5000. As the steel industry has faltered, Gary has been left with a failed economy, environmental devastation and institutionalised racism. Gary is post urban rewilding. It's history as an industrial centre also obscures Gary's prime location. Looking bioregionally, Gary sits on the seabed of ancient sand deposits, providing the perfect drainage require required for excellent fruit growing. Gary's population loss is extreme, much more extreme than the more famous Detroit. Here you see the neighbourhood just south of US steelworks - green is vacant, or should we say available land. We began to ask a simple question. Why aren't we growing fruit in Gary? Privately, we can see this initiative as undev Gary - undevelopment embracing the ruralising processes that are well underway there. We knew this was a kind of hedge your bet urbanism. How do you create a project, a vision, an initiative that improves site condition when futures are uncertain? Here we can see fruit trees as such an intervention. You see if human population returns to the Great Lakes and to Gary, the fruit enhances the food shed resilience. But if humans do not return, the wildlife will enjoy the fruit. But in Gary, no one wants to give up on the prospect of redevelopment. And so we have cast the project as fruit futures or fig, a series of linked civic agricultural projects to initiate a new small fruit culture and economy with multipurpose landscapes that afford, engage and educate the public in what I call fruit time. The first project to be rolled out

is the community lab orchard. The lab orchard is a prototype layout we call the seven year lot - a planted wedge designed to demonstrate the time it takes for woody fruits to produce. It's about time. Unlike other projects that I've done, this is a bottom up artists initiated project. I moved my studio to Gary in order to do some deep hanging out to co create the projects. Two of my most important collaborators Deb Bacchus, an environmental engineer and Walter Jones, a local math teacher and master gardener bring expertise to the collaborative offering, agency not merely participation. We have a small, dedicated and diverse community group working on the orchard. The four principles for fruit futures are curiosity, cooperation, engagement, and beauty. A demonstration site to encourage curiosity and trained fruit growers, the lab orchard contains 36 varieties of fruit, shrubs and vines. Here is the orchard in the summer. As a deliberate act of futuring the orchard poses questions about time and scale which impede our understanding of other natures, ongoing but invisible and uncounted. It cultures a pan animistic worldview, offers non anthropic normative regional futures, and models degrowth economics. The orchard embodies a critique of Western rationality, development and capitalism, opening space for Afrofuturism, deep localism, poetry, participation, tactical magic and wonder.

2:42:17 Film
One of the things about Gary is that in its decrepitude, a lot of people, family, friends, it's like, wow, isn't that depressing man. Part is, but it's not the whole. We're still here. I'm 61 years old. I used to work in the mill. I've been in Gary all my life. And I've seen a lot of things. I think maybe in the course of years, I'm still living, I'll see it come back to where it was. Gary was founded in 1909 by US Steel. The cultural identity of Gary is so tied to US Steel, that people have a kind of blinders on to other possibilities. This is a region that needs new paradigms. Our question is, why aren't we growing fruit in Gary? Fruit Futures Initiative Gary is a multi prong, multi layer, short, medium and long term initiative to ask the questions how fruit species can

contribute to the revitalisation, repurposing, or perhaps the rewilding of the Gary, Indiana and Northwest Indiana region. I'm like a parade. So fig has three parts. It has the remediation arboretum where we look to see how fruits can contribute to soil health in urban conditions. It has the climate quarter. And then the third part is the community lab orchard, the initiative to put orchards throughout Gary for all of the available land. And then we'll see what everybody else is going to do. When we got that far, we'll run a string and we'll line them up so that they're lined up together. We got this bigger one should it go at the far end? Or is it better to have a big at the end? Gary has lost a lot of population, industrialisation, post industrial, climate change, microclimate, social and racial justice, environmental and food justice issues are much more extreme in Gary than other places. Gary was 200,000 people and is now 68,000 people. So we have a huge amount of vacant land just south of the steel mill perfect for fruit growing. If you drive around the neighbourhood, you'll see so much stuff. There's absolutely nothing happening. Nothing. We're dealing with the the reality that the city is a food desert, you have to put forth an effort to get to a place to get the fresh produce that you want. This was where my little league baseball team practiced. Here? Oh, yeah. Wow. My brother graduated from this rascal. So when we picked the species, we were thinking about time, the design concept is the seven year lot. It turns out that smaller fruiting plants fruit sooner than larger trees. If we planted them according to size on the lot, the wedge that would be formed would be an illustration of time. This is an experiment in whether or not floral beauty can create engagement. And can fruit be a beautiful, delicious curiosity that pulls attention towards the future? Too much, no, no, you're good. Yeah. All right. That's, that's a good job, buddy. I would love to be 20 and have had the vision along with the opportunity to start something like this. At 60, I can give it I know another good 10 years, this orchard won't be a baby, but it'll just be a teenager, and then, you know, so it'll impact generations behind. That's what it's about. Gary will change. But the thing that attracted me to this particular

project was I saw it as an expansion of what Gary will become. comfort to you. There is no separation between the immediate goal of the economic development of a new fruit economy or the necessity of growing climate awareness. So we may be participating in rewilding, and we may be participating in revitalisation of an urban area, no matter which way it goes, it's good thing. So it's kind of a collection of greening for different purposes. 100 years from now, I hope we have grown some growers. If we can grow growers who can grow fruit, then we can think about time outside short term cycles. If you can think in fruit time, then maybe you can think in tree time and then you can think climate change. And then I also like to say and if you can imagine climate change, you can imagine and if you can imagine you can dream.

2:48:22 Theo Reeves-Evison
That was another great presentation. Two very different presentations. But I think there's quite a lot of threads between them. That hopefully we can we can tease out in this q&a. I can kick things off because I think the the questions transferring the slightly strange way through zoom and YouTube, but the the first thing that maybe strikes me as a way of bridging the gap is questions of scale. So I think Frances you spoke very eloquently about the different scales in your work and how cities such as Gary, which have suffered really kind of drastic declines in economic growth, this macro economic scale, can translate into microbial fruit time. So I wonder if you could speak to that and and Thandi, also, the kind of these compelling examinations between the macro economic forces on Zimbabwe, and a number of other countries and the kind of musical situated sonic resistance, a kind of smaller scale. So maybe, yeah, opening up with questions of time. So I don't know anyone who wants to go first. Frances, you're you're unmuted. So maybe, maybe you go.

2:49:36 Frances Whitehead
Well, there are two ways. Maybe this is like how I got to

thinking about it. The first was the sense of scale, because when I started embedded artist, I was just trying to get a seat at the table. But the longer I was there, I became more uneasy with some of the ethical implications of what I was doing, and I began to do what I call embedded artists unembedded, and how do I take what I've learned and transfer it to others who don't have that access, that privilege. And so the sense of scale had to do with the scale of partnerships that I was engaging and political power, really, scale of power. But then because I am, as you can see, quite involved in, in art and science, that's my background. And so there's also another element that I'm always aware of, which is ecologically how the smallest, you know, water chemistry manifests out into, like, the foodshed, and how that is always operational. And so the dynamic between power scales, and ecological scales is something that's very alive for me in terms of systems thinking. Oh, and I have a question for my partner on the panel here, as you were describing all of these amazing ideas, and the sonic and the dance, of course, was so prevalent, a fabulous dance in your film, I found myself wanting to get out a map and see where all of the places you were talking about exactly, were in geo relationship to each other, because I kept wondering about how the ideas were flowing around geologic geographically. Because I'm not familiar enough with how that went down. And so to me that, that's also a geographic scale, that becomes a very important thing. I was thinking about that in your piece.

2:51:45 Thandi Loewenson
Yeah, thank you so much for your presentation on this incredible project that has been unfolding in a scale, unruly scale, by the sounds of it, in terms of the spaces that you're working in, but also the careful tenderness of your engagement there and how that has unfolded over time, which is so tangible in the film, which is very beautiful. I was also thinking about scale, I was also thinking about time, I love bloom time, and fruit time. And of course, in my work, I think listening been through sungura time, Zamrock time,

and so on, and temporal manoeuvres or temporal worlds that are held within those within that music. And I think it's operating in much of the same way that it is when you're working with these ecological notions of time, I think, which, which is to say that they allow us to hold an enormity or they allow us to hold a huge amount within something that is easily accessed and easily activated, either by the hand and planting the seed and nurturing this, this fruit tree or in the moment of the dance that happens on the side of the road. And I think there's something so interesting there in these mechanisms that we've both kind of latched on to, of course, very different, but very similar in the way that they allow any individual to access that scale of thinking, but also that space of collective thinking to something quite fascinating about that. You spoke about how the fruit pulls our attention towards the future. And I tend to think about it less as in terms of the sonic, less as pulling our attention towards the future, but already placing us in that future. So I'm increasingly thinking more about presences, actually, and how these mechanisms are much, not that's quite the right word. But how these instruments maybe allow us to shift temporal, shift our kind of temporal scale, not just in terms of the complexity of time that they allow us to engage but also quite literally how we're situated in time and place too. And so that's why I'm very excited by these genres of music, most of which are actually quite old now. But obviously still resonate and still have a frequency as and are still very much in circulation today. And so I think that moment of incredible ambition and political change that happened around independence period, is still present with us at this moment, and we're still able to access it. You're absolutely right, there is such an interesting geographical story to be told there. So I kept saying across the border and across the border, and of course, all of these borders are entirely manufactured and porous and steeped in a particular colonial and capitalist logic that can that is completely undone when you actually hear that overlapping of these these modes of sonic production, and the re worlding I think that's happening within those within that space. And

so that's something that I find and quite interesting actually, in putting together this work is sometimes you're hearing, you're hearing a sound that's located, particularly in Zambia, but you're seeing the movement from South Africa or the DRC with Zimbabwe. So there's the seamlessness of movement and sound that's happening that I think is, yeah, reworlding perhaps is a good a good term to use here and kind of confronting that, that those orders that have been, have been built.

2:55:34 Frances Whitehead
So reworlding and rewilding. Yes, there in the chat, there's a question about the rewilding, and whether it happens without human agency. Yes, but in disturbed landscapes, you may just get a lot of invasive species, what we would call weeds. And so the role of stewardship, in general is a conversation right to be had. And the role of, certainly of stewardship in these disturbed landscapes is definitely something to think about. And so for example, when we picked the fruits, we tried to include every Native fruit that would grow in the region, but also recognising the role of humans, you know, in the landscape. We included more conventional fruits, you know, like pears or apples, which of course, are coming from other other parts of the world, originally. Yeah.

2:56:43 Theo Reeves-Evison
I think you've already dealt with that question in the chat from Boyana. I can check in another one for Thandi, linked to some other work perhaps. So there's a great video people can watch online called the taxonomy of flight. And in that you talk a lot about the Zambian space programme. So I wonder if you can maybe talk about limits, and how they function in that work, the question of limits that animate some of these conversations today. So in particular, you talk about the kind of the link between the weird and the tender, the the interaction with the weird and the everyday in your practice, perhaps actually, this is also an opportunity Frances to get you to speak about xeric landscapes, which have a kind of

weird and homely dimension to them, what's the kind of attraction of those landscapes?

2:57:39 Thandi Loewenson
Yeah, thank you for that. I think some of that work, is related to a project that recently that I recently did at the waste recycling centre, the landfill site in in Lusaka, in Zambia, which is the capital of Zambia. And that's a site that has come up against privatisation of public services. And the kind of erosion of the social contract that was forged during the independence era in Zambia, of which there are a number of projects, some of which I spoke about, or you saw in the film, just now, the nationalisation of mines, abolition of private property, and then a number of cultural projects, which came along with that, such as the music that you've just heard, or this fantastic project in the Zambian space programme. And I think the question of limits is really interesting and important in relation to that, because all of that was happening at a time of great hostility towards projects of black independence and black liberation. And so these populations were having to recraft and reshape and reimagine the world, in the face of that hostility, and doing it with I guess, in the context of limited resources and scarcity. And so but what I think we find, and I think that's what I was trying to get to with this idea of black flight is that when the projects are successful in their interruption of the world as it is and then those limits are less of a problem. So what I mean by is, in the Zambian Space Programme, you have a space programme in which astronauts are employed in a project of thinking very carefully and seriously and acting very carefully and seriously on with the ambition to leave the planet. And they're doing that with a series of barrels and a series of rope swings and a series of kind of gathering and performative actions that bring them together. And underlying that. This there is a there is a space programme that happens, there's a restructuring of our relationships to one another, our relationships to ourselves and to the planet. There's a restructuring of relations between humans on the planet, what it means to be human. And so

something quite seismic is happening within what appears to be a limited set of material means and conditions. And so I think there's something very powerful to be said there. And I think, actually super beautiful to see it in your work too Frances, the way that a fruit, a fruit tree, something as humble as a fruit tree can actually create such a rupture. And when I'm using the term weird, I'm thinking a lot of Mark Fisher's work. And Mark Fisher, there talking about the weird is something that yeah, that does that, that I think he's got this great, this great turn of phrase, which tears, a hole in the grey curtain of reality. And there's something very powerful about the humility of the tools with which we need to do that actually very seismic work. I also had a question for Frances. I was loving this phrase of deep hanging out. And it resonated very much with me with this idea of collective movement and the importance of collective movement and that operating within a particular temporality. So, obviously, for me, it's this was the furiousness of the sungura and how that activates the body and collective bodies in particular ways, but I see that happening in your work in a very, actually a very tender way too.

3:01:37 Frances Whitehead
Well, it's a great term. Unfortunately, it's not my term. And I'm having a senior moment here and forgetting exactly the name of the sociologists that invented it, starts with a G. But it's a wonderful idea. And when we start talking about strategies, it's the most human of strategies, which is just to spend time with people and earn trust through shared experience. And I'll just say I haven't given up on solidarity. And I think coalition collaboration, collectivity, cooperation, all Lissy words are also important. And but it makes all of the work durational - you have to be willing to spend the time. So for example, in Gary, I joined a community initiative that was already going on, and attended it weekly for three years before I ever tried to do anything. First off, you know, I don't believe in swooping in, I had to become of the place to some extent, before I felt there was any defensible way to even propose anything. But also I

wouldn't know what to propose. And so I think that this idea of spending time together is crucial to any kind of engaged practice. And as you can see, I'm always resisting soundbite twitter time, you know, I don't even look at Twitter, God forbid. And I'm the anti Twitter, you know. So, yeah, I think it's a great term deep hanging out.

3:03:13 Thandi Loewenson
In Zimbabwe, we have a term, a phrase now, now. If anybody ever tells you that something will happen now now, that can mean it can happen in like five minutes, or 10 minutes or 10 years or 10 weeks, like you can't hold your breath when something's going to happen now now. And that's certainly the case in Zambia in South Africa, and certainly probably further afield in region two, but I also love it because there's, it resonates so much to me with this idea of deep hanging out that you shake off this notion of timely delivery, of efficient delivery. But you also allow for the time to just sit with one another and how that disrupts many oppressive notions of how we deliver projects and how we come together to think about projects too, how we can see yes, yes, very powerful in that, in that how you stay with claims for the temporality of your engagements with people.

3:04:11 Frances Whitehead
Yes, and I think that as a form of resistance, and refusal, those words have come up they're important words, it is the temporal resistance to immediacy is so important, because many things that are wrong with the world did not arrive overnight and they will not be fixed overnight. And we have to be realistic about what is possible and honour the other systems outside our anthroponormative ideas of efficiency, as you say, or and of course, this challenge is not only Western rationality, but it challenges and linear time, but but it also challenges ideas that we have about success. What do we mean by success?

3:04:57 Theo Reeves-Evison

I'm very reluctant to jump in because it's just such a fascinating conversation to listen to. But we do have a couple more questions. One from Ama Josephine B Johnstone, who you can catch tomorrow if you're able to come to Nottingham or slightly later, when that footage gets put online on the YouTube channel. So she's got a question for Thandi, so many things stood out for me from your exquisite presentation, my own research which thinks in / with / beyond Ghana, I find this really individualising loss of joyful embodiment, post independence. Can you say more about the importance of embodiment, joy, pleasure, music, movement, in political collective movements, towards the change, perseverance, and world building of your independence and beyond in your thinking?

3:05:52 Thandi Loewenson
Yeah, thank you so much for this question. And also for your work, which is fantastic. Definitely tune in turn up for Ama Josephine. Yeah, I mean, I think it's so it's, it's interesting. So thank you Theo for bringing in the previous project that I did. And that started out from me looking at this tradition of this incredible project post independence, this very radical restructuring of relations through this project of nationalisation. And then the response to that which came through economic and structural adjustment, and how that created quite oppressive conditions for people enforced by the World Bank and IMF as they sought to restructure these and return I think some of the work that, return, rather, some of the work that had been done through the independence projects. But what we also see is this incredible project of as you describe it, joy, pleasure, music, music and movement that continues despite this, and we see that in sungura, we see that in Zamrock, where people refuse to be, refused to be reduced, I think, entirely into the realm of the necropolitical, I suppose to use to use Mbembe's terms, to refuse to be reduced to matter for the production of capital. And these spaces of cultural production are spaces that actually that I've increasingly started to think of as, not just archives for

continuing the ideals of the Independence project, and how we might access them, but also as kind of vessels which, which within them have have held space for that project. And so I'm increasingly trying to think about how we might take that very seriously as a space, not just of theory, but also as a space of world making, world building, as you say, where alternatives are already present, but lively and moving, as kind of spaces of social, spatial political projects. And so I yeah, I'm just trying to occupy them as much as possible and bringing everybody into them, bring people that might not otherwise see them as activators or sources. So as I mentioned in the project, that Theo was encouraging me to speak about I was working with the City Council and the reenacting methods of this Zambian space programme with waste recyclers and city council workers on this site. And I'm, if anybody wants to host some sungura parties, let's go like let's do I think that could be a really exciting project. And I see that very much in your work as well, Frances, but this seems to be quite joyful spaces actually of planting and discussions that are happening in and around.

3:08:58 Frances Whitehead
Well, one of the things that I like to say and it really came to me working in Gary when the vision of the of the blooming fruit, imagine a cherry blossom moment, out just in the shadow of that steel mill, in the art in visual art we have so often in the last decades, askewed any relationship to beauty and the aesthetic as an instrument of power. And I began to realise that this was a position of privilege - that in Gary they so desperately need beauty. And so now I say we're back in the beauty business. Course I love alliteration, but this question of how to navigate the political problems of beauty, whose beauty, a beauty, all of the problems of acculturation and idealisation and identity that are wrapped up in that, but I'm not sure that we can just throw it out the window and not and not address it. I'm reminded of something Rem Koolhaas said many years ago about urbanism. That even though it is morally, there was a moral hazard, we have to go there

anyway, and do our best to navigate the complexity. We can't avoid things because they are complex, or vexed or troubled. We have to go to the trouble. And maybe that's why I'm going to the arid landscape Theo is I've been, there's a question in the chat from Lauren Bon, one of my partners in crime about the organising principles in my work. And even though I don't necessarily talk about it, in this case, all of my work in Chicago was about the Great Lakes because there is nothing outside the Great Lakes, the logic of the Great Lakes, it dominates everything in the Great Lakes legacy cities. It is why they were steel mills, it is why they are slag impacted landscapes now, everything is about the Great Lakes, is about water. And yet it's so ever present but it's invisible. And so getting ready for the dry future, I went to a part of the world that there is more consciousness and more conversation about that. I sort of just changed gears there from beauty to aridness. But anyway, trying to wrap up all the bits that I see in the chat. So I don't know what I just said.

3:11:22 Theo Reeves-Evison
It sounded good. Speaking of wrapping up, I think we better leave some time for Canan to just signal forward to the next day of the programme. But just again, thank you so much for for your presentations. There'll be available for people to view online, I believe, for a while. So yeah, if people watching have friends that couldn't make it, send the links, share their work, and it's a pleasure to talk about it with you. Thank you. Thank you.

3:12:01 Canan Batur
Thank you so much Thandi, Frances, Theo, I can't think of a better way of capturing the energy of what has been discussed here today. Just to repeat, I'm the curator of live programmes here at Nottingham Contemporary. I'm Canan Batur. And before you leave us here today, I would like to express our gratitude to all our speakers for joining us on this epic journey. Today has embraced different contributions from different continents and localities and we've been

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presented with a range of different readings of degrowth, slowness, and alternative economies, by way of acts of the experimental. From my perspective as a part of the organising team, it has been fantastic. So thank you so much. We will continue tomorrow with an in person event taking place at Nottingham Contemporary. And we will continue our collective deliberation with the contributions by Ez North of Land Workers Alliance, Kathrin Bohm, Bahar Noorizadeh, Ama Josephine B Johnstone, Manuel Angel Macia, Wild.NG, Asad Raza, T. J. Demos and Angela Chan. Again, thank you for thank you to our brilliant speakers today. And many thanks to our audience who have stayed with us for almost four hours on this warm, sunny shiny day. We hope to hear from you soon. And in the meantime, we wish you a beautiful evening, a beautiful day, wherever you are at the moment. I just want to ask for a round of virtual applause to all our contributors for their generosity along the way. Thank you so much and see you tomorrow. If not, hopefully soon.

Colophon

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