

CALL FOR PAPERS

Imagining the Ordinary City: Arts, Placemaking and Everyday Urban Lives

28-29 October 2024

Centre for African Studies Gallery, University of Cape Town

Confirmed keynotes:

Professor Jennifer Robinson (University College London)

Dr Thembinkosi Goniwe (Rhodes University)

Professor Lynda Gichanda Spencer (Rhodes University)

Though the city has long been associated with speed and spectacle, including its fast-flowing transport systems and towering buildings, it has also always harboured more mundane activity and sights such as the rehearsed small talk of (consequential) strangers and the habitual queues of daily commuters. These everyday practices (in Michel de Certeau's terms) form ordinary spaces that are fundamental to the urban imaginary yet are rarely explored in artistic endeavours and, connectedly, rarely granted a cultural value that adequately conveys the social value they afford a city's population.

In broader discourse on cities, when the notion of 'ordinariness' is accepted as an urban quality it often fuels a centre/periphery binary, with artistic and scholarly interest only occurring when it is located in the latter (the sustained representation of suburban ennui, for example). Resonating with Njabulo S. Ndebele's work (1991), it is important that cities – where the spectacle of state trauma and violence is often most obvious – are understood in more complex terms, with everyday urban lives foregrounded. Additionally, there is a tendency within and beyond academia to hierarchise cities, with those in the Global North held up as the model to which all others are compared, despite Jennifer Robinson's (2006) seminal work in calling for an alternative framework where all cities are considered 'ordinary' and worthy of examination.

In linking together different strands of understanding ordinariness then, this conference seeks to (re)establish the value of the 'ordinary city' as it is employed, constructed and imagined in a range of artworks including, but not limited to: literature, visual art, screen media, theatre and performance.

This conference is part of a British Academy-funded project and it is intended that selected papers will become part of an edited collection. More information about the wider project can be found here: <https://research.kent.ac.uk/imagining-ordinary-cities/>.

The conference will take place over two days and will explore 3 themes:

Theme 1: Overlooked Cities

This theme examines the representation of smaller, often overlooked cities in the arts (literary, visual, performance, sonic) and/or questions of distribution and exhibition in such cities. Topics might include:

- Portraying, performing, writing, scoring small cities
- Regional arts centres and venues (galleries, theatres, cinemas)
- Representations of everyday urban life across geographical regions

Theme 2: Mundanity in the Metropolis

This theme focuses on the ordinariness that does not exist exclusively at the periphery and in relation to the spectacle of the centre. Topics might include:

- Rediscovering ordinariness in spaces usually associated with violence and trauma
- Spaces in-between the city/suburban divide; urban edgelands; non-places
- Emotions and atmospheres of the urban everyday in sound and image

Theme 3: 'Ordinariness' as multi-faceted artistic lens

This theme looks into the experience of artists (writers, poets, theatre practitioners, filmmakers, musicians) in capturing and representing the everyday city. Topics might include:

- Drawing inspiration from the urban everyday
- Artistic practices that are rooted in mundane metropolitan activities
- Local artist networks and grassroots initiatives

We welcome abstracts (max. 300 words) in one of the three main conference themes. Please indicate in the abstract which of the listed sub-themes you would like to contribute to. Submissions should include the title of the paper, author's full name, email address and affiliation (e.g. university, college, archive, independent researcher/artist) plus a short biography (50 words). Final conference presentations should be 20 minutes.

The conference will take place in-person, but we may consider online zoom attendance by request. If applicable, please indicate this request in your submission.

The abstracts should be sent as a Word doc or pdf file via e-mail to imaginingordinarycity@gmail.com, with the subject: 'Imagining the Ordinary City Conference Abstract'. The **deadline for abstract submissions is 30 May** and all applicants will be notified of the outcome by mid-June.

Convenors: Lavinia Brydon (University of Kent); Bibi Burger (University of Cape Town); Sanele Ntshingana (University of Cape Town); Janina Schupp (University of Oxford)

Scientific Committee: Markus Arnold (School of Languages and Literatures, University of Cape Town); Emre Çağlayan (Department of Communication, Media and Culture, American University of Paris); Ashvin Immanuel Devasundaram (Department of Film Studies, Queen Mary University of London); Isolde de Villiers (Faculty of Law, University of the Western Cape); Louisa Uchum Egbunike (Department of English Studies, Durham University); Sonja Loots (School of Languages and Literatures, University of Cape Town); Rike Sitas (African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town); Dylan Valley (Centre for Film and Media Studies, University of Cape Town).