



# Performing the City

An interdisciplinary exploration of art, performance and play in the city.



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**

REGISTRATION

<https://bit.ly/performing-the-city>

Image credit: Sanné Mestrom, 'Weeping Women', Commissioned by Monash University Museum of Art, 2014

# PERFORMING THE CITY

## One-day online symposium Friday August 7th 2020

Co-presented by Dr. Sanné Mestrom, Dr. Ian Maxwell and Dr. Luke Hespanhol, University of Sydney

Public space is always contested. Competing interests vie for access to sites, proposing divergent—sometimes compatible, but frequently conflicting—uses, meanings, aesthetics, aspirations.

The discourses and practices engaging directly with the question of public space range from those of the physical/structural industries associated with the built environment (landscape architecture, urban planning), through to the cultural, sociological (human behavioural tendencies), and the phenomenological (the public realm as experienced directly through embodiment). And of course, everyone—not only scholars and other professionals—has a stake in the game: we all share—and contest—the places in which we live, work, play, and gather.

'Public art', as a specific set of practices and ideas, is a key player in these contests. More, in its capacity to engage imagination and playfulness in the materiality of sculptural objects and environment, public art has the capacity not only to participate in the struggles, but, by grounding interdisciplinary perspectives in that materiality, to serve as an organising logic for place itself.

Taking up an interdisciplinary perspective, *Performing the City* considers the ways in which works of art in the public realm create healthy, culturally-rich, intergenerational cities.

Together, we will explore the current—and changing—role of creative disciplines in bringing urban communities together, driving conversations, and nurturing senses of place. Through a combination of presentations, provocations and a workshop, we will reflect on the growing interest in presenting art outside of the gallery/museum context, examining the opportunities and implications of complex interdisciplinary relationships between art, landscape architecture, urban planning and the social sciences, as they redefine the role of public art in the move towards people-centred place-making.

With backgrounds ranging from digital design to sculpture, urban planning, sociology and performance studies, presenters will explore how sharing creative and innovative research in the arts can contribute to learning, civic debate, placemaking and community engagement.

We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.

## PROGRAM Friday 7th August 2020 10:00 - 16:00 AEST

### Zoom details

Meeting Id: 923 6613 7074

Passcode: performing

When	What	Who
9:45	Zoom room opens	
10:00-10:30	Welcome and Introduction	Sanné Mestrom
10:30-11:15	Session 1 Keynote Urban play: a dialogue between people and environments	Quentin Stevens
11:15-12:00	Respondent 1	David Cross
	Respondent 2	Felicity Fenner
	Respondent 3	Susan Solomon
	Respondent 4	Kirsten Bauer
	Respondent 5	Alice Covatta
	Open Q&A	
12:00 - 13:45	Session 2: Activity and break	Ian Maxwell
13:45 - 14:00	Upload findings to Padlet and reconvene in the Zoom room to share	Ian Maxwell
14:00 - 14:30	Session 3: Seminar 1. Affordances, habits, practices and rituals: towards thinking about performance, performativity, and performing the city	Ian Maxwell
14:30 - 15:00	Session 3: Seminar 2. Online and Blended Public Spaces	Luke Hespanhol
15:00 - 15:30	Session 3: Seminar 3. From the Ground Up: Playable Public Art for Intergenerational Future Cities	Sanné Mestrom
15:30 - 16:00	Open Q&A	

# Program & Abstracts

**9:45 - 10:00 Zoom room opens**

**10:00-10:30 Welcome and Introduction**

**10:30 - 11:15 Keynote: Quentin Stevens**

## Urban play: a dialogue between people and environments

Stevens will examine the variety of people's playful encounters with artworks in public spaces. Focusing on how these acts explore and develop new relationships between a person, a designed object, other people, and a surrounding urban context: Stevens will explore a range of concepts that have been used to understand these dynamic relationships and interactions between people and environments, including environmental determinism, function, ergonomics, 'triggering', affordances, appropriation, interactionism, play, and dialogue. This will draw together theories about person-environment relations, about the changing forms and experiences of sculpture, and about socio-material relations as explored in *Actor-Network Theory and Assemblage Thinking*.

**11:15 - 12:00 Respondents**

## Five brief responses from industry experts

Professor David Cross, Visual Arts, School of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University.

Associate Professor Felicity Fenner, UNSW Art & Design, University of NSW.

Dr. Susan Solomon, Independent researcher and author of *The Science of Play - How to Build Playgrounds That Enhance Children's Development* (2014).

Kirsten Bauer, landscape architect and Director of ASPECT Studios globally.

Alice Covatta, future Assistant Professor at the University of Montreal.

Open Q&A

**12:00 - 1:45 Activity and break**

**1:45 - 2:00 Upload findings to Padlet and reconvene in the Zoom room to share:**

<https://padlet.com/sannemestrom/yfg3t1k5mloawdpi>

**2:00 - 2:30 Ian Maxwell**

## Affordances, habits, practices and rituals: towards thinking about performance, performativity, and performing the city

What does it mean to speak of 'performing the city'? What might thinking about performance, or perhaps thinking performatively, contribute to the ways in which we live, together, in places both 'real' and 'virtual', and increasingly in the complex blending of those modalities?

**2:30 - 3:00 Luke Hespanhol**

## Online and Blended Public Spaces

Just when placemaking started to reach greater levels of maturity, increasingly adopted as a way to make cities more liveable and playful, the reality of a global pandemic hits and instantly evaporates the notion of public spaces as we knew them. Or does it, really?

**3:00-3:30 Sanné Mestrom**

## From the Ground Up: Playable Public Art for Intergenerational Future Cities

Mestrom rethinks the role of contemporary public art in facilitating the design of a child-friendly urban environment. Through questions related to 'risk' in both legal and cultural paradigms, she considers ways to reframe ideas around 'playability' and 'risk' in relation to the public realm.

**3:30 - 4:00 Open Q&A**

## Key Speakers



**KEYNOTE Associate Professor Quentin Stevens, School of Architecture and Urban Design, RMIT University**

Stevens' core expertise is in people's perceptions and uses of public open spaces and public artworks, and policies and practices for planning and procuring them. Published works include *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement* (2016, with Karen Franck), *The Uses of Art in Public Space* (2015, with Julia Lossau) and *The Ludic City* (2007). He currently leads an ARC Discovery project examining temporary and tactical uses of urban spaces using Actor-Network Theory.



**Dr. Sanné Mestrom, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney**

Mestrom's practice-led research seeks to incorporate "play" into a socially engaged practice as a means to question the social consequences of urban design. Her current research investigates ways that art in public places – and urban design more broadly - can become critically integrated, inclusive and interactive spaces. Mestrom was recently featured in the Thames & Hudson publication *'100 Sculptors of Tomorrow'*, (2019).



**Associate Professor Ian Maxwell, Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Sydney**

Maxwell is Chair of the Department of *Theatre and Performance Studies*, and Deputy Head of the School of Literature, Art and Media. A graduate of the VCA School of Drama, where he trained as a theatre director, Ian's doctoral work was an ethnography of Hip Hop Culture in suburban Sydney, published as *'Phat Beats, Dope Rhymes': Hip Hop Down Under Comin' Upper*. Research interests span youth culture, phenomenology, avant garde theatre and performance.



**Dr. Luke Hespanhol, Design at the School of Architecture, Design and Planning, The University of Sydney**

Hespanhol is a media artist, interaction designer, researcher, curator, producer and lecturer. His research ranges from digital storytelling, technology-mediated social interactions and digital placemaking, to urban informatics, media architecture and smart cities. He is curator of the Footbridge Gallery at the University of Sydney, founding member of the international Urban Media Art Academy, and a member of the Media Architecture Institute.

## Special Guests

### Respondents

#### Dr. David Cross (Deakin University)

Working as an artist, curator and writer, David Cross' practice extends across performance, installation, sculpture, public art and video. Known for his examination of risk, pleasure and participation, Cross often utilises inflatable structures to negotiate inter-personal exchange. He has performed in international live art festivals in Poland and Croatia and was selected as a New Zealand representative at the 2011 Prague Quadrennial. More recently he was commissioned by Scape Public Art 7 curator Blair French to develop *Level Playing Field*, a temporary intervention that fused sport, performance and sculpture in Christchurch. Cross is based in Melbourne.

#### Felicity Fenner, (UNSW)

Associate Professor Felicity Fenner is a renowned curator of contemporary art, having curated over 40 exhibitions of Australian and international art since the late 1990s. Fenner's research focuses on aspects of place and curatorial place-making, encapsulated in exhibitions such as *City Dialogue: Public art interventions + the Biennale of Sydney* at Customs House Sydney in 2020. She is the author of *Running the City: Why Public Art Matters* (NewSouth, 2017) and is currently writing a book examining biennales as agents of change. Fenner is based in Sydney.

#### Dr. Susan Solomon

Dr. Susan Solomon, Independent researcher and author of *The Science of Play – How to Build Playgrounds That Enhance Children's Development* (2014), published by University Press of New England 2014. Allaying data with design, *The Science of Play*, urges urban space agents to use playground design to deepen the American commitment to public space.

Solomon holds a Ph.D. in architectural history from University of Pennsylvania and is based in New Jersey.

#### Kirsten Bauer

Kirsten Bauer is Director of ASPECT Studios globally. She has led award winning and significant public realm projects across Australia and particularly Melbourne, and has been awarded by international and local organisations.

Bauer is a registered landscape architect, AILA; Fellow of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects; Master of Architecture (Landscape Architecture) by design RMIT University; Adjunct Professor, RMIT. Bauer is based in Melbourne.

#### Alice Covatta

Future Assistant Professor at the University of Montreal, Alice Covatta is an architect and researcher merging the two into projects, publications and events. Covatta has an interest in spontaneous urban scenarios aimed at the improvement of wellness in public space and have the potential to become a meaningful part of a bottom-up process that enhances community and generational cooperation.

Covatta her PhD from University of Udine, Italy and PostDoc awarded by the Japan Foundation Fellowship. Covatta will soon be based in Montreal.

For More Information  
Contact Dr. Sanné Mestrom  
Sydney College of the Arts  
University of Sydney  
[sanne.mestrom@sydney.edu.au](mailto:sanne.mestrom@sydney.edu.au)

