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Playing the Cyborg City

Introduction: *A MAZE.Interact*

The topic of a fence concluded an open seminar delivered in 2011 by Georges Pfruender, the head of the Wits School of Arts, that engaged with play in art. He cited a poem by Christian Morgenstern that in turn evoked a fence with ‘spaces in between’. These were taken away by an architect to build a house, the fence became mute and the view horrid but the instigator of this misfortune escaped. It is a helpful hinge to begin this chapter, in part because it picks up the discursive thread where the preceding chapter left off: discussing a *Shoe Shop* poster that depicted a fence and the related personal narrative it triggered. More importantly, the seminar topic (*Playing the City: Urban Games*) cues the underlying thematic of this second *New Imaginaries* project. *A MAZE.Interact* was a six-day convergence of art, new media and technology that used gaming as interdisciplinary trope.

This new indie gaming festival was held between 28 August and 2 September 2012 in various venues clustered in Braamfontein, a mixed-use suburb that hinges with the inner city and has recently witnessed a cultural resurgence. The festival comprised numerous parallel modules: an exhibition of artistic computer games, interactive installations and video documentations; screenings including an open-air of *machinima* (movies made inside computer games) on its opening night; public play such as street games; an ongoing symposium; various workshops to incubate synergies between South African and European culture; a ‘jump “n” run’ club night fusing art, music and video; and a concert, all preceded by a 48-hour game jam.
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It falls under the framework of *A MAZE*, a Berlin-based institution of game-centred events founded and directed by Thorsten Wiedemann, also known as Storno, whose productions generally connect punk, art and technology. The idea of *A MAZE.Interact* was to grow an interest and critical mass in the topic of games and media art, he says. ‘It’s a kind of interdisciplinary, playful, experimental, visionary festival’ (interview 38). Several months before its launch, Wiedemann described it as ‘a playful interaction with city and public space…technology and gaming design, to use playfulness to let something happen’ (interview 39). Indeed, the question most frequently asked of participants over this project’s duration was the solicitous: ‘Want to play?’

privacy = {'value': 'EVERYONE'}

The *A MAZE.Interact* festival, with its conflation of digital and analogue worlds, complicates notions of public and private in the broader analysis of the *New Imaginaries* trilogy, which explores public space in Johannesburg through artistic means. It suggests the third space already evoked may be characterised by hybrid fusions. Actions are understood to fall in a spectrum with relative degrees of public and private characteristics instead of discrete categories, with the body as mediator. Lynn Staeheli has devised a helpful graph to break the ‘parallelism’ of the private and public and to represent spaces and actions instead as orthogonal to one another. In her cross-shaped graph, public space and private space are at either end of the y-axis and private action and public action at either end of the x-axis (2009, p.514). Thus a private action could conceivably take place in public space and vice versa (sending a tweet from home, for instance). This kind of porosity has led to social media like Facebook in 2013 updating their preferences to allow for a range of visibility permissions, including the following intriguing programming script that seems to sum up this new paradox: privacy = {'value': 'EVERYONE'}.

*A MAZE.Interact* can also be read as timely critique of a preoccupation in many global cities with security, risk and encroachment. Authors like Mike Davis (*City of Quartz*, 1990) and Michael Sorkin (*Variations on a Theme Park*, 1992) explore a kind of urban noir. More pragmatically, initiatives such as *Secured by Design*, a template for new buildings in the UK endorsed by the police, rewards architects whose designs meet certain security requirements. Anna Minton writes that