Approached from the river, Kinshasa reveals itself in a different guise. On the river, amidst the sounds of silence, one is engulfed in the immensity of the water’s surface, stretching out in endless shades of silver and gray, hardly distinguishable from the watery sky above, a large canvas on which the black silhouettes of fishermen, standing upright in their canoes, paint a hesitant ripple when throwing out their nets.

Turning to the other side, in the direction of the city, all one sees at first is a wide marshy strip of long green grass. Behind it, barely visible, a skyline of palm trees, lining the neighborhoods of Masina and Kingabwa. As one floats downstream, small makeshift pile dwellings appear, sheltering fishermen and others who make a living out of the river. And then, one by one, the ports of Kinshasa glide by.

At first they emerge only in audible form, as an approaching soundscape that gradually breaks up the river’s silence. Voices shouting and yelling, the noise of machines, fragments of music carried across the water, the sound of metal upon metal, and the more subdued plops of wooden peddles entering the water.

Then one catches sight of a port now occupied by the United Nations. The unnatural white of their boats stands out against the background. On their white surfaces are painted, in large black letters, the acronym UN (les Uns, as the United Nations people are called in Kinshasa, in opposition to the “others,” les autres, the Kinois themselves). And then follow the other ports: Port Baramoto, the Yacht Club, Beach Ngobila. Here, the river banks are packed with people. Behind them, old warehouses with barely readable names painted on the dirty cement of their façades, names like NOGUEIRA, reminders of a time when Greek and Portuguese traders provided the shops of Kinshasa with goods.

The riverbank itself is hidden from view by boats, lots of boats, but boats that no longer float, dead bodies, cadavers of boats, old steamers and ONATRA (Office national des transports) ferries, in every possible shade of rust eaten brown. The port is a cemetery. Sunk, immobilized, stuck in the mud and entangled with floating carpets of hyacinth, these boats were dismantled and turned into squatters’ camps a long time ago. Still afloat, patiently waiting between these corpses, are hundreds of baleinières, large wooden boats with outboard motors, smelling of tar, dried fish and the penetrating odor of cassava. These are the boats that transport people and goods back and forth between the
Congo river and a vast network of waterways in the interior of the country. Like an octopus’ sticky tentacles, the hinterland’s riverarms thus firmly wrap around Kinshasa, connecting both in an endless ebbing and flowing of people and commodities.

Painted on each of the boats, in large, colorful letters, a name: “Satellite,” “The City of Jericho,” “L’Avenir” (The Future), “Tantine Henriette—Proverbs 13.11” (“Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle, but he who gathers little by little will increase it”). On one boat is written: “One day, the future will prove us right.”

In Of Other Spaces, a text I will return to later on, Foucault writes about boats as the greatest reserves of the imagination. But what if the imagination has been unmoored, and the ship itself has sunk? Even if, one day, the future proves the inhabitants of Kinshasa right, what will the shape of that future be? What elements, in an urban politics of the possible, could give form to the making and remaking of associational life in such an urban configuration?

The riverbanks of Kinshasa reveal the stunning material geography of failing infrastructure, a spectacular architecture of decay which constitutes the physical life of crisis. At the same time, the boats’ names reveal the local production of zones of desire, expectations and hope. Similarly, the myriad activities and the whole web of informal economies that have spun themselves around the river and the city as a whole, have given birth to multiple technologies of fixing and repairing. They form a constant reminder of the productivity of degradation and its capacity to invent new material structures and generate and moor social ties, even if these social ties are often marked by their harshness. Kinshasa is a pitiless city with no place for the weak. Infrastructures of lack and incompleteness rarely generate a great capacity for compassion.

**Kinshasa and Its (Im)Material Infrastructure**

**Simulacra of Infrastructure** | In ongoing discussions concerning the nature of the African city architects, urban planners, sociologists, anthropologists, demographers and others devote a lot of attention to the built form, and more generally to the city’s material infrastructure. Architecture has become a central issue in western discourses and reflections on how to plan, engineer, sanitize and transform the urban site and its public spaces. Mirroring that discourse, architecture has also started to occupy an increasingly important place in attempts to come to terms with the specificities of the African urbanscape and to imagine new urban paradigms for the African city of the future. Indeed, one can hardly underestimate the importance of the built form
and of the material, physical infrastructure if one wants to understand the ways the urban space unfolds and designs itself. For example, studying the process of the “bunkerization” of the city, as it is called by its inhabitants, that is the fact that one of Kinshasa’s crucial spaces, the compound, has evolved from an open space lined by flowers and shrubs in the 1940s and 50s to today’s closed parcelles, surrounded by high walls that make the inside invisible to the street, would certainly contribute to a better understanding of the city’s history of unraveling social relationships, its altered sense of security and its changing attitude towards the qualities of public and private.

However, as Kinshasa’s ports reveal, the city’s infrastructure is of a very specific kind. Its functioning is punctuated by constant breakdown. The qualities of failing often give the urban infrastructure the character of a simulacrum. For example, the television set, a status symbol, occupies a central place in the living room, but often it just sits there without functioning at all because there is nothing to plug it into, or because it broke down a long time ago, or because electricity has stopped to come. Often, while in Kinshasa, I am reminded of Mary Douglas’ “The Hotel Kwilu: A Model of Models.” In this text she describes how she visits the Hotel Kwilu, located in the town of Kikwit, overlooking the Kwilu river:
“The Hotel Kwilu looks like a modest version of the Sheraton or the Marriott or any of a number of well-standardized airport hotels: modest by comparison, but grandiose in its setting. As I remember, it is a handsome building made of solid stone, with broad steps up to the front entry, a reception desk on the right, a big glass-roofed atrium in front, potted palm trees around, a bar to the left, and a restaurant beyond that, all calm, cool, and inviting. Before looking in I asked to see the bedroom. It was still in the accepted Sheraton style: clean, big, huge mirror, air-conditioning, twin beds, twin pictures on the wall, the telephone, the reading lamp, well carpeted, the bathroom en suite. Inside the bathroom, again: perfectly in style, the bath, the gleaming fittings on the hand basin, shower, hairwashing spray, the lavatory. Everything was there, not forgetting the bottle of drinking water. The only thing I thought was odd was that the bath was full of cold water. I wondered if the last guest had not left them time to clean it, but no, I was told this was to economize water. The candle and matches by the bed I took for an extra courtesy in case of emergency. [...] The receptionist asked me to pay in advance so that they could procure the diesel fuel needed for refrigeration and electricity. He also said that the electric lighting went out at 8 o’clock, to save diesel. [...] However, when I got upstairs I found, with the help of the candle, that the taps did not run, the lavatory did not flush, the phone was not connected, nor the air-conditioning. But I rejoiced in the huge bath full of water, and a dipper for carrying water to the hand-basin and the lavatory.”

If Douglas had arrived at her hotel some hours before, she would have witnessed two women, with large plastic buckets on their heads, walking back and forth from a nearby public water tap all the way up to her room to fill the bathtub.

As with the Hotel Kwilu, Kinshasa is full of such disconnected figments, reminders, and echoes of a modernity that exists as form but no longer has the content that originally went with it. The fragments themselves are embedded in other rhythms and temporalities, in totally different layers of infrastructure and social networks. Failing infrastructure and an economy of scarcity therefore constantly delineate the limits of the possible, although they also generate often surprising possibilities, through a specific aesthetics of repair, by means of which breakdown is bypassed or overcome.

The unfinished city | Along the Bypass, the main road which coils around Kinshasa’s southern and western parts, a dusty sand road leads to the commune of Mont Ngafula. This neighborhood emerged in the 1970s as a semi residential area for executives, functionaries and upcoming politicians. Many
compounds in this neighborhood are spacious, with lots of trees and green. But many houses were never finished. With the generalized breakdown that characterized the end of Mobutu’s reign, the emerging middle class that bought building plots in this neighborhood was gradually cut off from its income. The (often spectacular) houses they had dreamt of building for themselves were left in various stages of unfinished abandon, impressing upon one the image of the city as a never ending, perpetual building site, a characteristic Kinshasa shares with many other African towns. Today, people live in the skeletons of their frozen dreams of progress and grandeur, in constructions of concrete and cement without doors, windows, roofs. Only the ground plan betrays the original aspirations.

Other, less fortunate inhabitants of this neighborhood witnessed how their houses disappeared overnight. During the rainy season, erosion is a constant threat in many parts of the city. Overnight, the erosion, which often finds its origin in deficient drainage, cuts through the sandy soil of Kinshasa’s hills, leaving behind spectacular abysses in which houses, roads and other infrastructure disappear. Here Kinshasa becomes a cannibalistic city, literally devouring its own urban tissue. Today, in Kinshasa, erosion threatens whole neighborhoods in at least 400 different spots.
Together with the dust roads, the generally spacious and green compounds, though usually surrounded by high walls, give the commune of Mont Ngafula a rather rural character. As in most neighborhoods of Kinshasa, water and electricity reach this part of the city only sparingly. Water, for example, usually comes between 2 and 4 am, whereas electricity is made available according to a system of what Kinois refer to as délestage: in different sectors of the network, SNEL or REGIDESO, the national electricity and water companies, switch electricity and water off at certain times in order to feed other sectors. It is totally unclear which criteria determine the distribution over the various communes and neighborhoods. Some receive water and electricity during certain hours of the day (but unfortunately these hours often vary from one day to the next). Other parts of the city are supplied for weeks and then cut off for weeks. Some areas are not served for months while many neighborhoods are not even connected. Each of these cases sets in motion a carousel of people. Girls and boys are sent out with buckets, tiles and cans to fetch water in nearby or more distant neighborhoods, fathers visit their friends to charge the batteries of their cell phones, and whole neighborhoods move elsewhere to watch soccer games in those compounds where there is a television set that works. When technologies remain silent or break down, and thereby give form to yet another level of invisibility that shapes the city, these lacks and absences generate new spheres of social interaction and different coping strategies and regimes of knowledge and power.

Possibilities of Infrastructure | Infrastructural fragments thus also enable the creation of new social spaces. A couple of years ago, on the corner between the main Bypass road and the entrance to the commune of Mont Ngafula, someone started building a FINA gas station. It took several years to complete, but the gas station finally opened in 2002. A couple of months later the owner placed a huge lamp post on the premise. Since the gas station used its own generator and therefore did not depend on the city for its electricity supply, the lamp kept burning. In no time at all, the lamp post gave birth to a large numbers of bars, a cyber café and a telephone shop around the station, while buses and taxis began to use this place as the terminus of their trajectory, thereby bringing even more people to the bars. Business at the nearby Fwakin Hotel started picking up again after many years. With fascination I observed how one lamp post transformed what was a quiet corner with little movement after nightfall into an important meeting point bristling with life till midnight. The process of random occupation of space also reveals the organic approach Kinois have to the production of the city. Space, in a way, belongs to whomever uses it, despite the halfhearted attempts of the city authorities to control the slow but unstoppable occupation and the progressive denser use of that space.
Simple material infrastructures and technologies, as well as their dysfunctioning and breakdown, thus create, define, and transform new sites of transportation, new configurations of entangled spatialities, new public spaces of work and relaxation, new itineraries and clusters of relations, new social interactions.

The *phonie* is a good example of how material infrastructure and technology create new forms of sociality and new topographies of propinquity, how they can bring people into physical proximity with each other, how they generate new (trans)urban public spheres, or enable, maintain and carry forward existing social landscapes, networks and affiliations under changed circumstances. *Phonies* connect Kinshasa to the rural hinterland. Every *phonie* transmits messages to specific towns. As a result, people from the same ethnic or regional background meet at these *phonies*, where they often spend several days before getting in touch with the person they want to talk to at the other end. The *phonie*, therefore, provides a place, a social island within the city to maintain, strengthen and reactivate different, often pre-urban ties of locality and belonging.

However, such islands of communication, association, collaboration and proximity, with their possibilities of reimagining a different ethics for the current urban life, remain very dependent on the materiality of their infrastructure and are therefore very vulnerable. In the case of the *phonie* or the cyber café there is the constant dependence on hardware that is costly, electricity that is interrupted all the time, radio transmitters that risk being damaged because of unstable voltage, solar panels that are hard to get by and easily break down, batteries of poor quality that have to be constantly recharged, computer viruses that infect all the city’s PC’s and are as difficult to get rid of as the viruses that attack the people of this city in real life. Beyond that, the existence of the *phonie*, for example, is strongly dependent on the absence of other, newer technologies. These may be more sophisticated and efficient but also more demanding, necessitating a larger investment or a higher degree of technical know how, which inevitably turns its users into mere consumers rather than producers or controllers of that technology. For example, as I write, the introduction of sophisticated cell phone technology by international communication multinationals in Congo is already turning the *phonie* meeting points and the social geographies they engender into archeological sites. In 2003, seven different telecommunication networks, each with its own international (American, South African, French, Belgian, Chinese) affiliations, were competing with each other to control the potentially vast Congolese telecommunications market (VODACOM, CELTEL, TELCEL, OASIS, AFRITEL, CCT [Congo-Chine Téléphone], COMCEL). In 2003, also, large parts of the interior were opened up through the implementation of cell phone technology in which
these international companies invested a lot of money. For the first time ever, people in remote villages can call Kinshasa, Brussels, Paris or New York and reach beyond their own horizon within seconds. Wonderful as this is in itself, it also means that established forms of cooperation, communication and collective responsibility, with their specific social capital and the particular levels of trust they summon, will become obsolete and disappear in the very near future (no doubt to be replaced by something else).
Invisible Architecture  | In spite of the fact that an analysis of the different physical sites through which the city exists and invents itself helps us to better understand the specific ways in which the materiality of the infrastructure generates particular sets of relations in the city, I would submit that in the end, in a city like Kinshasa, it is not, or not primarily, the material infrastructure or the built form that makes the city a city. The city, in a way, exists beyond its architecture. In Kinshasa, the built form is not, or is no longer, the product of a careful planning or engineering of the urban space. It is, rather, produced randomly in human sites as living space. Constantly banalized and reduced to its most basic function, that of a shelter, the built form is generated by this much more real, living city which exists as a heterogeneous conglomeration of truncated urban forms, fragments and reminders of material
and mental urban “elsewheres” (a lamp post, a radio antenna, a television screen, dreams of life in the diaspora). These are embedded into autochthonous dynamics and into an urban life that is itself produced through the entanglement of a wide variety of rhizomatic trajectories, relations and mirroring realities. They enjoin, merge, include, fracture, fragment and re-order the urban space through the practices and discourses of its inhabitants. Within these local dynamics, within these syncretic multiplicities, the cultural status of the built form seems to be of lesser importance, or rather, the material infrastructure that counts in the making of the city is of a very specific nature.

First of all, the infrastructure and architecture that function best in Kinshasa are almost totally invisible on a material level. Under the trees along most of the city’s main roads and boulevards one finds all kinds of activities: garages, carpenter’s workshops, showrooms for sofas, beds and other furniture, barber shops, cement factories, public scribes, florists, churches and a whole pleiad of other commercial activities and services. Yet, none of these take place in built structures. What one needs in order to operate a garage is not a building named “garage,” but rather the idea of a garage. The only material element needed to turn an open space into a garage is a used automobile tire on which the garage owner has written the word quado (supposedly after the name of a well-known Belgian garage owner in the colonial period). One cord between two trees suffices to hang up the newspapers of the day, thereby creating a meeting place for the parlamentaires debout, the people who gather under the trees to comment on the newspapers’ content and erect their agora, their parliament, by means of a rhetorical architecture, the built form of the spoken word. These vibrant urban spaces teeming with all kinds of activities generate an infrastructure of paucity, defined by its material absence as much as by its presence. The built form that makes this possible is not made of cement and bricks but consists of the body of the tree under which people gather and meet, and the space between the trees that line the city’s main roads. Short-cutting any dependence on unstable infrastructure and technologies, this is the level of infrastructural accommodation, the only level of accumulation also, that really seems to work.
Secondly, in the African city, next to the body of the tree, the main infrastructural unit or building block is the human body. Henri Lefebvre already noted that “ [...] there is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body’s deployment in space and its occupation of space. Before producing effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before producing itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before reproducing itself by generating other bodies, each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and also produces that space. This is a truly remarkable relationship: the body with the energies at its disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space [...]”
To think of the body as having a space and being a space is important for a good understanding of the way in which a city like Kinshasa, itself a giant body, exists. It is in and through the body and its functions (producing and reproducing itself) that the multiple, interrelated practices and meanings of the various spaces in the urban context are mapped out. The mere fact that there are so many bodies moving, working, eating, drinking, making love, praying, dancing, suffering and starving together already gives the city its specific, often feverish, inner drive and rhythm. These bodies, as living entities, also create a certain order out of the chaos that is Kinshasa, or rather, they impose their own relational logic onto the city. “As a ‘desiring machine’ capable of creating order not only within itself but also in its environments, the
human body is active and transformative in relation to the processes that pro-
duce, sustain, and dissolve it,” writes David Harvey. “Thus, bodily persons en-
dowed with semiotic capacities and moral will make their bodies foundation-
al elements in what we have long called ‘the body politic.’”15 The manner of
production of space and time in the city is thus inextricably connected with
the production of the body. Body and society reflect and are mirrored in each
other. In the case of Kinshasa’s street children, their bodies are the public
space, or as they themselves state: “Our bodies belong to the public sphere,
to soldiers and policemen, to the state, only our souls belong to God” (nzoto
ya Leta, molimo ya Nzambe).

At the same time, the body is one of the few sites in the city through which
the Kinois can transcend the raw functionalities of life as mere survival. The
body is the site in which personal and collective geographies, experiences and
imaginations meet and merge. It is a site in which desire and disgust, anxiety
and dream materialize. Through all of these, it always produces a surplus and
offers a road to something else, an extra, an elusive aesthetics that the harsh-
ness of the city and its infrastructures of decay do not offer otherwise.

In sharp contrast with the decrepit state of the city’s material infra-
structure, Kinois put a tremendous amount of energy not only in surviving, in feed-
ing, clothing, healing and keeping their bodies alive, but also in building their
bodies into a state of beauty and perfection. Throughout the city, young men
obsessively train their bodies, exercise the machinery of each body part and
build each muscle through boxing, wrestling, body building and other forms
of physical training. Young men’s coiffures have become increasingly com-
plex, with intricate patterns and motifs that demand hours of work to accomplish. Women as well are constantly working at improving, decorating and transforming their bodies, by means of wigs, through their dress, or through the more dangerous but common practices of whitening the skin with the help of beauty products or fattening up the body by injecting hormonal preparations. For Kinois men and women, the body is the basic tool in the cultural realization of self, and in the creation of the city’s private and public spheres. Certainly in Kinshasa’s youth cultures (and youngsters make up the overwhelming majority of the city’s inhabitants), identity is expressed corporeally as much as it is expressed discursively. The composite juvenile syntaxis of self realization materializes through the bodily dimensions of dress and dance. As I have noted before, the body often becomes the (sometimes subversive) site through which official political and cultural discourses and practices are questioned, reinvented or replaced by alternative forms of togetherness, conviviality, competition and success. And it is no coincidence that the loss of identity (as lived for example in the diasporic experience where one, often literally, becomes a non-identity, a sans papiers) is referred to in terms of a bodily loss (kobwaka nzoto, to shed or to throw one’s body away).

THE SEX OF THE CITY | The physical body, with its specific rhythms, also determines the rhythms of the city’s social body and ontologically grounds them. The comprehensive body work that is undertaken by the Kinois often generates specific forms of social life. For women, braiding hair is a collective enterprise, an occasion to meet, watch TV soaps together, or exchange news
and gossip. On another level, the women’s associations and financial support groups, the more recreational mozikis and the likelemba (a rotating saving and banking system amongst associated women) came into existence in Kinshasa in the 1930s and ’40s and continue to play an important role in the attempts of Kinois women to overcome the economic crisis. Historically, however, these forms of female associational life originated around specific sets of body-centered interests and in close relation with the ludic scene of fashion, music and dancing. Some of the earliest mozikis, such as La Mode and La Beauté consisted of women financing popular orchestras and launching new dress codes and fashions. The recent, more male oriented, cults of elegance known as Sape and bilamba mabe also testify to the importance of appearance in Kinshasa, where preachers, musicians, politicians and other figures of success embody to the full the biblical idea that one’s body is a temple. In a very real sense, therefore, the most important building that goes on in Kinshasa is body building.

In summary, the (re)making of social coherence in the city is only partly generated through its material infrastructure. To a much greater extent, it is shaped through dynamic processes of a more immaterial, invisible, relational nature between the various actors that inhabit, use and produce the city through the collusion of both their bodies and their minds. Bodies, and the relational networks they generate in the urban space, form the locus of much of the “invisible modalities of urban action.” For example, local notions of power that define the nature of the urban space in general strongly draw from different sources of the imaginary including hunting, sexuality, initiation, and political leadership. These form the underlying fields of passion which the city
assembles in various ways to give form to local structures of power. Power, in all of these forms, is driven and spurred by a deeply rooted and oftentimes violently expressed politics of desire and longing. Hence, as Mbembe has pointed out so brilliantly, its fetishization in and through the body and its various parts (the mouth, the belly, the phallus).

The body is constantly encoding the local urban cosmologies that become visible throughout the whole range of activities within the city. The body moors the urban imagination of which it forms its most crucial site. And this urban imagination, which often expresses itself in strongly masculine terms, dreams the object of the city as a giant female body, legs spread apart, full of seduction and unfulfilled promises. And if, in the city’s collective imagination, the sex of the city is female, the (male) subject of the city, therefore, is constantly aroused and excited. If the city is conceptualized as a woman (a temptress, a whore even, and occasionally also a mother), the urban mode of action, the taking possession of the city, is excessively male. The push and pull of the city forces the urban subjects into a constant erection, into constant excess, heterogeneity and dispersal, into an endless search for, and a realization of oneself through the fulfilment of all that throbbing desire, of all the promises the city makes but does never really deliver.
In Kinshasa, the major marker of success is lavish spending and excessive consumerism, a mode of action fully embodied by the mwana Lunda or diamond hunter. The successful mwana Lunda has “hands that spend easily” (maboko pete pete). He showers dollars as if they were peanuts. This spending behavior is referred to as la boum, dijigunda, dijibunda. The boumeur knows how to turn life into a party (loyenge). Many speak in this respect of “savoir vivre.” The realization of this economy of desire and the sense of an urban “good life” is associated with the conspicuous consumption of bottled beer, western consumer goods and women (or men, as in the case of Mado). The city’s socio-economic universe is, therefore, the exact opposite of Proverbs 13.11 (“wealth hastily gotten will dwindle, but he who gathers little by little will increase it”). To stick to the body metaphor, wealth is not defined within an economy of constipation, or through actions of closure and accumulation. Rather wealth functions in an economy of diarrhoea, of flux, of circulation, of injection into social networks, through which “eating,” consumption, becomes socially productive and is converted into social wealth and social weight. The capacity to spend lavishly or, to put it differently, to spend in an excremental way, to ejaculate, to contract large debts even, creates a seductive and potent image of oneself, makes one visible, and is a sign of strength: “We are strong,” bana Lunda say, “we can behave au taux du jour,” that is, we have the financial means, the possibilities, we are, quite literally, “on top of things.” Of such a person it is said that he is “planted like a pole,” assuming a central, erect position in the public space, seen and heard by all.154

The underlying mode of action which is revealed in this excessive expenditure and spectacular consumerism (and which is adopted by both men and women, as the story of Mado illustrates) is one of hunting and capturing. It also means that, just as the level of infrastructure which functions best in the city is a zero degree infrastructure (the idea of a garage rather than an actual building named garage), the level of accumulation that is manageable and functional in the city within this mode of action is restricted to what many in the West would consider as the bare minimum. One could say that, in this city, accumulation (that is, accumulation which is not compository but which brings together more of the same) never really gets, or at least not in a lasting way, beyond the stage of the small heaps for sale along the road or at the market: a heap of gravel, or cassava flour or makala charcoal, a pile of soap bars, a stack of roots, a sakombi (measuring unit) of maize or beans, all of them quantities that are manageable, that are not meant to last and are immediately consumable. All that surpasses this level is surplus and is immediately dispersed, injected into a broader social network. In Kinshasa, accumulation mostly takes place on this human scale, that is, on the scale of the human body, which is the measuring unit, the yardstick, the sakombi of the city.
As the example of the *bana Lunda* shows, in this context, the body itself is the ultimate accumulation strategy. In a seminal essay on modes of self realization in Central Africa, Jane Guyer focuses on nineteenth-century African notions of accumulation. As she rightly points out “ [...] the development of currency in Equatorial Africa may be associated with the relatively great importance of capture as a source, and destruction or immobilizations as destinations; that is [...] ‘alienation’. In accordance with the principle of self-realization, the assets were not things at all but the singular persons who harnessed sources and controlled fates.” 155

Viewed as such, the process of capturing and subsequently spending (in other words, destroying) becomes a process of self realization. Through appropriation and consumption (rather than production or accumulation) a successful person singularizes himself in the urban context, and according to autochthonous modes of action that are rooted in much older, rural, models and moralities. These turn him into a strong, autonomous “true man” and “patron.” The image of the hunter, with its explicit sexual connotations and with its specifically random, nondirectional temporality, in which good luck and uncertainty as much as rational planning play a major role, therefore continues to have a strongly epistemic power in the urban context. It offers the possibility of making and claiming identity and place in the urban context, and generates the specific ways in which the public good, in terms of resources and resource control, is imagined and managed.
THE (IM)POSSIBILITIES OF THE POSSIBLE | The construction of urban identity in masculine terms remains, nevertheless, ambivalent insofar as it evolves around only one of two opposing aspects of male personhood. It favors the vision of singularized, autonomous manhood, a model which seems to be idealized by many youngsters, to the detriment of another aspect that is an inherent part of more “traditional” notions of male identity, namely that of social responsibility. This second, complementary aspect highlights, for example, the elder’s capacity to weave the social network (often by means of the authority of his word) and give a tangible form to ties of reciprocity and solidarity. If, however, the city’s mode of action has become that of the single, autonomous hunter, how, then, can this urban self realization be inserted in a wider social network? How to achieve this insertion when gerontocratic structures of authority and control no longer apply as before, and when former strategies for inclusion, such as the creation of a tributary network, or the circulation of gifts between family members and allies, have lost much of their cohesive force in the urban constellation? Today where could one locate the possibility for the (re)making of the group, the family, kinship structures, or other, alternative cooperative units? What counters the disintegration of larger overarching structures and mechanisms of inclusion, containment and closure? Where are entities of social cooperation and control embedded?

As Foucault already pointed out, the accumulation of capital or goods and the accumulation of people are two processes that cannot be viewed
This seems to apply all the more in an autochthonous universe where wealth in things and wealth in people often reinforce each other or are even interchangeable. Given the specific nature of the accumulation of capital and goods in Kinshasa (and Congo in general), on which level, then, does the accumulation of people, the making of groups, remain possible in the city? As with the accumulation of goods, the only scale on which the making of the group in the city seems feasible is, again, the scale of the human body, of
the individual who can insert himself into a relational network in which every participant can situate the other in relation to his own place within the larger social body.

The entities available to do so remain in the first place family and kinship structures. Even though they have lost much of their capacity to generate cohesion in the urban context, this does not mean that they no longer form a counterforce which attempts to criticize or channel the energy of masculine excess and heterogeneity in alternative ways in the urban locale.

The fact is that there are few existing alternatives for the renewal of associational life. The encroachment of the churches on public space is an illustration of the force of their vision of the city at the center of a new order that will start on Judgment Day. Nevertheless, the most powerful social critique of uncontrolled prodigality and other forms of excess in the realization of the urban self does not, in my view, come from the reinvented kin groups that are the churches, for these have themselves a very particular, and in the context of the city often problematic, attitude towards wealth, consumption and accumulation. Rather than strengthening group ties, many churches propagate a strongly singularizing and individualizing drive, and thereby divide existing social entities such as the family, which is itself redefined in nuclear terms in the churches. And yet, it is precisely the broader network of the extended family which used to offer a certain social security and produce the strongest moral criticisms against divisional drives and against an egoistic rather than a socializing singularization. It has always been there that the shift from the socio-logics of the warrior, the hunter and the phallus to that of the elder, the
lineage and, by extension, the mother, the household, the womb and the stomach takes place. Although this unit has often become a rather problematic one, as the wave of witchcraft accusations involving children illustrates most painfully, it remains perhaps the only one, within the urban realm of the possible, that is capable of channeling the energy of capture and dispersal, and of refocusing it, bringing it, quite literally, home again; the only one, also, capable of recapturing and rescuing the masculine figure of the hunter (and hunting praxis as such) from the field of a disappropriative imaginary of sorcery and witchcraft. Even while in crisis, it is still the most important remaining unit to explore and redefine anew the rhythms of reciprocity, commensality, conjugal rela-
tions and gender relations in the urban context. Contrary to the public urban spaces and their modes of action, the forces in these fields spring from other, more basal sources, from much more feminine domains which mediate more than they are intermediate: the female domains of the household and, most importantly, the kitchen, the fireplace and the cauldron. The reappropriate of a male defined sexuality and its ensuing modes of action takes place in and through this intimate domain of the household. It is the household that forms the necessary complement of, and precondition for, any successful and lasting (social, political, economic) redefinition or the urban space as a gestational space.

Again, this is not to deny the ruptures and fragmentations that are currently reshaping the landscapes of kinship in Kinshasa. In the daily praxis that determines life in the city, the relational fields that make it possible for urban dwellers to redefine their lives in different terms are under a lot of strain and
have often become sites of struggle and conflict themselves. As illustrated throughout this book, the family unit, which materializes in space as a point of closure and containment while opening onto the possible insertion into wider social networks, has lost much of its capacity to do either. Its possibilities are becoming increasingly impossible. The city, therefore, is also the space where desire and longing remain unfulfilled, where dream and disillusion, or erection and impotence go hand in hand. Kinois, though spurred on by virile and potent dreams of self realization through capture, ejaculation and annihilation, are constantly annihilated themselves, reduced to the state of broken, hungry and diseased bodies, both by the conditions of pauperization that mark life in the city, and also by the nature of the urban imagination itself. “The male member is constantly erect and yet we are all impotent eunuchs,” as Kinois writer Vincent Lombume Kalimasi expressed it in an interview I conducted with him. This also means that these mutually exclusive but simultaneously experienced states ultimately define Kinshasa as a space of schizophrenia. The immaterial, corporeal infrastructure, the architecture of the urban imagination, which makes the city, and makes it work, is at the same time also, inevitably, the infrastructure of its madness in the confrontation with the material lack and absence that punctuate the urbanites’ daily life and discipline their bodies into misery.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE IMPOSSIBLE I: KINSHASA AND ITS UTOPIAS
Like every other city around the globe, Kinshasa too has produced its dreamers, visionaries and utopians. The internationally renowned, Kin based artist
Bodys Isek Kingelez builds futuristic, hypermodern alternative Kinshasas out of cardboard and colored paper. Mirroring Le Corbusier’s Radiant City, his largest model is named Ville fantôme, a modernist utopia within the paradigms of the industrial metropolis. Here Kingelez’ urban vision reveals itself as a utopia in overdrive, a Kinshasa for the third millennium, a future paradise full of architectural deliria in the form of luxurious towers and miraculously eccentric hotels. Between the airport and the city, the Bridge of Death separates the good from the bad souls. The latter are denied access to the city and disappear in an abyss that marks a division between the city and the rest of the world. It illustrates well the fact that Kinois utopia almost always embraces the dimensions of eutopia and dystopia simultaneously.

The same visionary, modernist but also religious and moralist overtones may be found, in an even more outspoken way, in the objects made by Kinshasa’s other utopian artist, Pume Bylex. Previously I referred to one of his works, Humanity taken Hostage, with its overt references to the Apocalypse. Bylex’s quest is one for perfection, for God himself is perfect and He will only choose the perfect on Judgment Day. To achieve perfection, Bylex uses mathematics (symbolized by the recurrent little black and white squares in all of his work, and by the number three which returns in all of his objects, as well as in his name). He also uses the modernist processes of industrial manufacturing (or a simulacrum thereof). For Bylex all of his objects and models should be reproducible, like industrial products, that is, made by what the artist refers to as “indirect emotion,” by Abstraction and by Reason, independent from the person of the inventor, and therefore more perfect than objects produced through “direct emotion.” Of course, his striving for perfection and his longing for a controllable universe put him in constant opposition to the city in which he lives and works, for Kinshasa is the epitome of imperfection, of the immediate and the concrete, of the irrational and the unexpected. All of Bylex’s works of art, therefore, whether large models and plans such as The Tourist City (la cité touristique) or small objects such as his visionary armchairs, clocks or shoes, are enclosed in little glass boxes, poetic utopias with little hope of breaking out of their form, and constantly in danger of being contaminated by the urban chaos and madness in which they emerge.

What Kingelez and Bylex have in common with Kinshasa’s architects and urban theorists (a rare species in this city without architecture or urban planning) is the utopian dream of abandoning the existing city, leaving it behind to construct a new capital alongside it. In interviews I conducted with Kinshasa’s leading urban planners and architects, this belief in the modernist city constantly returns, unaware of the fact that this construction of an imagined future for a new Kinshasa, this total break with the city’s past and its specific social practices, this denial of time, of history or, in the absence of an historical
awareness, of the urban collective memory, is bound to be a failure in the way similar projects, such as Brasilia, proved to be failures in the past. As with the alternatives proposed by the charismatic churches, the model for a better society is located in a spatial or temporal elsewhere, with no real location in the here and now of the city as it exists. Utopias remain locked within the realm of pure possibility. They represent possibilities that are materially impossible and therefore they are not, it seems to me, a great force for changing the (urban) reality.
In the preface to *The Order of Things* Foucault notes:

“Utopias afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical.”

In the same preface he contrasts utopias, that is sites with no real place, unreal spaces which have a relation of inverted analogy with the real space of society, with the notion of heterotopia. For Foucault, heterotopias are effectively enacted utopias, places where it is possible to think or to enact all the contradictory categories of a society simultaneously, spaces in which it becomes possible to live heterogeneity, difference, alterity and alternate ordering. In *The Order of Things*, this place is language: heterotopias “dessicate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source.”

In *Of Other Spaces*, a lecture Foucault first delivered for a group of architects a year after the publication of *The Order of Things*, he endeavored to give the concept of heterotopia a material referent. In every culture and every civilization, Foucault says in this short but beautiful text, there are

“real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.”

Leaning heavily on Bachelard and his poetics of space, he then goes on to identify some possible heterotopias: crisis heterotopias which spatialize states of crisis or the painful passage from one identity to the next (the boarding school, military service, the honeymoon trip), heterotopias of deviation (psychiatric hospitals, prisons, rest homes), the cemetery (as a space connected with all the individuals and all the sites of the city), the theater, the cinema, the garden, museums and libraries, fairgrounds and vacation villages, saunas and hammams, brothels and motel rooms, colonies and ships. All of these heterotopias are marked by their specific relationship to the poetics of space and time in a given society. They are spaces that place one in an elsewhere or a nowhere, that are capable of juxtaposing several otherwise incompatible spaces and sites in a single real space, that have the capacity to be heterochronic, to accumulate time or ground it to a halt; spaces also that are marked by specific systems of opening and closing, or that create room for illusion or compensation. They are, in short, the spaces that escape from the
order of things, its standard forms of classification and accumulation, if only because they constantly conjure up the aesthetic through their appeal to the imagination and the oneiric.

What would a heterotopology of Kinshasa look like? Where do the Kinois simultaneously contest the spaces in which they live, overcome the contradictions that shape their daily lives, and dream of another, mythic space? What spaces should we focus our attention on to better understand the multiple forms of deviance, transgression and excess that the urbanscape of Kinshasa is constantly generating? If, on the level of the general organization of the urban space, colonial Léopoldville was a heterotopia, it was certainly more of one for the Belgians than for their Congolese colonial subjects, for it allowed the colonizers to create a city that was “other,” that was as perfect and as meticulous as the reality of the Belgian metropole was messy and unfinished. Hence the fact that the colonial capital became such a huge playground for Belgian architects. But where, for the Congolese inhabitants of this city, are located the places of “im-possibility,” that is, the places where it is possible to live and imagine all the contradictory categories at the same time, and thereby to overcome these contradictions, even if just for a moment?

In various guises, these questions have been at the heart of this book. In one more attempt to answer them, I would like to return to an image with which I opened the introduction, and which has been meandering like a thin red thread throughout the chapters of this book: the image of the mirror. If
heterotopias exist through their capacity for simultaneity, the process of mirroring might help us to understand the nature of heterotopia, for mirrors offer a particular point of entrance to reflect on the possibilities of simultaneity. I described Kinshasa as a vast mirror hall, reflecting different visions of the city, fracturing the urban universe into a series of multiple but simultaneously existing worlds, originating at different points in history yet speaking to each other. I have also endeavored to ground the analysis of the mirroring process, of the possibility of simultaneity, in the autochthonous understanding and experience of that simultaneity, with its processes of doubling and undoubling between obverse and reverse, visible and invisible, day and night, or heaven and hell. As I have pointed out, it is precisely the quality of this local capacity for simultaneous multiplicity that is undergoing a major change in the urban sphere today.

Foucault opens the first chapter of *The Order of Things* with a long description of *Las Meninas*, the famous Velasquez painting which can be admired in the Prado. It is a complex painting, picturing the painter painting a number of young girls in his studio. While we do not see the painting in the painting, but only the back of it, as the painter is viewing us, the spectators, we see the painter’s back reflected in a mirror behind him. *Las Meninas* thus offers the peg on which Foucault hangs his reflection on the nature of representation, of the double, of visibility and invisibility, and of the process of mirroring itself. In *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault returns to the image of the mirror:

“I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror, I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.”
In Kinshasa, the specular often becomes very spectacular. I would suggest that Kinshasa’s basic heterotopia is not so much the object itself of the mirror, but rather the very process of mirroring, realized in all those spaces where the interplay between real and unreal, or visible and invisible is realized. This also means that the materiality of the heterotopia is of lesser importance. Kinshasa’s heterotopias (such as the stage, the bar, the body, the street, the funeral), as realized non places with fictional qualities, are simultaneously real and placeless, everywhere and nowhere, unfolding themselves in the here and now, and yet very transient and volatile. Not that these heterotopias exist as mere figments of the imagination. There is a very real relation with existing social processes: they are available and materially present, but at the same time without any real and lasting connection to place or location.

In Kinshasa, this exhibitionist and theatrical city where the art of performance is of vital importance if one wants to exist socially, theaters and stages are effective heterotopias during the time of such performances. Today, the city’s most important stage is undoubtedly the church. But once the prayers have died out, or the musicians have unplugged their guitars, these heterotopias revert back to the banality of the material fabric of the city. Bars, nightclubs and other crucial places in the context of Kinshasa are all such heterotopias. They can materialize anywhere. They move in and out of existence. They come into being in the oneiric time space of the night, itself the main mirror of the city, and then become mere houses again, in all their ordinary imperfection. And that imperfection is always there, as the shadow of the heterotopia, the nightmarish other half of the dream which is always only realized half way.

Unlike utopias, heterotopias do not, therefore, generate hope. What they do is something else. They offer a glimpse of the possibility of overcoming fragmentedness, the contradictions and ruptures that have scarred the face of the city’s existence. But they never do so for long. If the cemetery is a heterotopia because it connects all the individuals and all the spaces of the city, it is also a constant reminder of the changed and problematic nature of death itself. If the body becomes the main urban stage through which one can realize oneself, it also remains, simultaneously, an extremely vulnerable, contaminated and violated entity, a body in danger. If the mirror is heterotopic, it is also very often, in the context of the city, a broken one (which makes for the impossibility of one overarching vision of the city). As I have argued throughout this book, the processes of mirroring have become problematic in the context of Kinshasa because of the changes that have occurred in the possibilities of generating simultaneity. If heterotopias are the sociospatial anchors of an urban society that exists through the image, through appearance and through processes of mirroring and reflecting, they are also a constant reminder of the
fact that the praxis and rhetoric of the image have been deeply affected, and
that the mirroring profoundly distorts the relationship between image and
reality. If language, the sheer force of the word, is perhaps the most powerful
heterotopia through which the city imagines, invents and speaks itself, there
remains the sneaking suspicion, the unspoken doubt that there no longer ex-
ists a one on one relationship between language and reality, that the paths of
transfer between signifier and signified are undermined and that language it-
self has become a feeble instrument to explain and give meaning to the world
in which one lives.

And yet, in the end, words seem to be the only weapons one has to defend
oneself against the city. They are also the only tools, the most basic building
blocks at the disposal of Kinshasa’s inhabitants to erect the city over and over
again. In the Central African cultural universe which brackets the urban
world, words have always had a tremendous power. In these autochthonous
realities, one has to be able to manipulate the word, to know “what speaking
means,” as Bourdieu would say, in order to exist socially. The process of
masculine singularization which I described above, finds its ultimate realiza-
tion in a man’s highly valued oratorical abilities. Speech, both in its political
and aesthetic capacities, is what sets one man apart from the others. But male
individuation and self appropriation is only fully achieved by the simultane-
ous development of his relational and intertwining social abilities. And these
too are achieved through speech. In the cultural worlds of the Central African
savannah, words “weave” the social network and make public space. In some
of the many local languages spoken in Congo there is but one word to con-
note both “palaver” and the spool used to weave raffia threads into a tissue.
Speech is therefore always colloquy. It is an essentially social act, always a
speaking with others. And through their capacity to weave, words obtain a
more maternal quality as well. In a very real way, speech is gestational. It
makes “life ferment.” For a man to speak is to “awaken” the world, and give
birth to solutions to dissolve conflicts and strengthen ties of solidarity and
support. The legitimate public word shapes up especially as a demiurgical
act of social reproduction and of world making, a culturally constructed (mas-
culine) equivalent of female natural powers of physical reproduction and birth
giving. And just as the spool picks up the raffia thread and “puts it in a line,”
that is, shoots it from left to right and vice versa in order to weave and produce
texture, speech puts words in line, one behind the other, in order to produce
a sentence. Speech therefore, like weaving, is about ordering the world.

As I noted before, in the preface to *The Order of Things* Foucault located the
ultimate possibility of heterotopia emerging within language. His example is
Jorge Luis Borges’ famous Chinese Encyclopedia, with its incongruous classi-
fying categories for animals (animals drawn with a very fine camelhair brush,
animals having just broken the water pitcher, innumerable animals, animals belonging to the Emperor, and so on). The heterotopia of language is here the place, the non site, or the capacity, to create orders, to make the impossible possible or render it acceptable, to think the unthinkable, live the unliveable and speak the unspeakable. In a city where the ordering and accumulation of things rarely works beyond the simple architectures of the heaps of charcoal, loaves of bread or stacks of cassava roots for sale in the streets and markets, words provide the city dwellers with a potent tool to create other, alternative orders. In a city, also, in which the trans-substantiation of the Holy Spirit is constantly operating through the Word and investing the words of the believers with its force, it is not so difficult to believe in the sheer power of words to imagine the city anew. Words generate the quotidian poetry and prose of the city and form the foundation for urban culture, even if, as I have pointed out, they also form an intermediate zone where culture has often begun to drift away from its own codes, and where meaning has become destabilized. In this respect Kinshasa is a prayer, a mantric city. At every new beginning of the city is the word...

...AND THE WORD IS THE CITY

The city is a never ending construction. The city can never remain a passive victim. The city is, on the contrary, a place of possibility, the place that enables you to do and to act. We construct the city with our vices and virtues and therefore we have to accept the urban dwellers as they are, with their vices and virtues. The city is never or/or, it is and/and. The city is vice versa. Every city in the world is the depository of the nightmares and dreams of its inhabitants. It is an amalgam of the best and the worst. Never forget the worst. A city that is searching for its own identity inevitably generates incubi. Human beings are fundamentally dynamic, in a movement towards the light, towards the sun. That is inherent in how they break their way: one’s own dirt, one’s own suffering becomes a starting point to break a way towards oneself, towards something different, towards the divine. And the more we move towards that verticality the more we construct our city and acquire the means of its construction. When I look at buildings and skyscrapers, I ask myself: what do they mean for me? They illustrate mankind’s aspiration towards the divine. The sky is the symbol of that dimension. That is what defines freedom. Whether or not you believe in God is not relevant here, whether or not you define freedom as God does not matter. What is of primary importance is that longing for something higher. All architecture translates that longing for the vertical, even if that architecture is only a hut. Through the act itself of tracing our path, even if it is a path which leads us through hunger and suffering, we somehow arrive. And the city helps us to achieve that.
The city is a site of constant communion. It is not a place for anchorites and hermits. It is a place made of human beings, irrespective of who they are. It is a site of inclusion, made for serial killers as well as for drug addicts, for prostitutes, literate people, intellectuals, for all sorts of people. It is a site of dreams, where dreams encounter each other and become a single body. However, on the level of our own experience of that urban environment, once one plunges into the life of the city and participates in it, it inevitably diversifies and becomes multiple. There is no urban crowd, there are multitudes. There are also many different cities in one. My city is not the city of a street kid, of an abandoned child who sleeps along a dirty river. And yet that child lives in Kinshasa as well. My city is not the city of a priest who does not frequent bars, who does not drink but goes home to read his Bible after mass. My city is not the city of a prostitute who throws her body away in order to survive. There are so many cities. There are the cities that one would like to murder, there are the cities that one loves, and there are the cities that one gives birth to every day.

There is the city that exists in each of us, that each of us carries along. Everyone possesses his own imagined cities. And all these imagined cities wage war with each other in our imaginary. Some architecture is constructed, some exists only in our dreams. How many of us have not dreamt of living in an urban utopia? The question is: what helps these dreams to become reality, to materialize into real cities which one can physically traverse from one end to the other?

The fact is, we shouldn’t spit upon the city. The city is a womb. I have often engendered this city through my writing and my words but it gave birth to me first. One therefore has to accept the city, anchored as it is in dust and dirt. One cannot spit upon the mother, the woman. One has to make do with her as she is. One loves her. One has to put up with her rotten spots, with the bodies of dead dogs rotting away in the street. One has to make do with what one gets. That doesn’t mean that one has to accept or resign oneself to that dog rotting away. But first one has to ascertain that the dog is rotting away in view of the whole city. What other choice is there? The city has to be constantly created. And wherever there is suffering, there will be people encountering each other. No city in the world just happened. No city emerged in a final form. All of them were constructed. Cities have to be made, and they make themselves. That is the unavoidable fate of the city. In this sense, Kinshasa is also self generating. It is its own creator. Therefore it is eternal. There will always be people to create and recreate the city, to regenerate or to destroy it, and then start all over again. It is a city that will accept its history yet to come. There is no finished city. All there is, is a historical quest. All it takes is confidence in oneself and in the other. This is a city that still has to learn a lot, but I believe it is learning fast.
Maybe Kinshasa shouldn’t try to follow the West. We could not catch up with it even if we tried. We would do better to follow the last one in the race, the hungry one, and follow the rhythm of his footsteps, the time of that hungry one. Of course, hunger signifies a lack of freedom. Somehow we have lost the equilibrium between the physical question and the beyond that creates freedom. Ready to accept and eat about anything, hunger reduces one to mere survival. But beyond that hunger lies something else. Kinshasa is not only stomach. We have the capacity to open up to that something else, but we haven’t yet managed to surpass the problem of hunger, of death, of illness, of suffering. We haven’t yet overcome the rupture.

And then, hunger and death do not only signify closure, they also enable the creation of an opening, if not physically then at least mentally. There are such streams of energy running through this city and we have not yet sufficiently explored them. Hunger might help us to learn how to do that, it offers a possibility. Hunger is a good starting point for this incessant search for a beyond, for it reveals the paradox in which we are living: a country so rich, with water, rivers, sun, forests, and yet with inhabitants so miserable. There is a hiatus somewhere, a void, and this void needs to be filled. It has to be filled by us, the inhabitants of this city, the initiated, the shege, the expatriates, the multitudes of people that make up this city. The city belongs to all of them. And they all have to constantly reinvent their own myths, their own stories of the street, to keep going and to offer themselves a semblance of direction for this world that keeps slipping through their fingers. The city is indeed a never ending construction.

[From an interview with Vincent Lombume Kalimasi, writer, Kinshasa, February 2004]
NOTES
3 Africa on a Shoestring, 1999.
4 Foucault, 1975.
5 Bleys, 1996.
7 Donzelot, 1997.
13 See Hunt, 1999; McCulloch, 1995. On the colonial attempts to create more productive and strong laborers, the "tsanga-tsanga" race, in the labor camps of the Katangese Union Minière, see De Meulder, 1996.
15 For a detailed history of colonial architecture in Léopoldville and Congo see De Meulder, 2000. Personal reminiscences of a rapidly changing city are offered by Kolonga Molei, 1979. See also La Fontaine, 1970.
16 See De Meulder, 2000, chapter fourteen. See also de Saint-Moulin, 1970; de Saint-Moulin and Ducieux, 1960; de Maximy, 1984.
18 On the notion of villagization see Devisch, 1996.
19 Even before, between 1920 and 1940, small gangs of youngsters appear on the streets of Léopoldville. These gangs recruited members primarily amongst the children of policemen and soldiers of the Force Publique.
20 Gondola (1997: 310) mentions in particular two films that introduced Buffalo Bill to the youth Congolese audiences: the versions of Cecil B. DeMille (The Plainsman, 1936) and William Wellman (Buffalo Bill, 1944). Most popular, however, was Pony Express (translated as Le triomphe de Buffalo Bill), made by Jerry Hopper in 1953, in which Charlton Heston played the part of Buffalo Bill.
21 The fact that former rebel leader Kabila, imposing his “law” throughout the country in 1997, was referred to as “Sheriff” (and dressed accordingly, wearing a Stetson hat) is an immediate echo of 1950s Billism.
22 Today bana Lunda, young diamond diggers from Kinshasa and other towns in southwestern Congo who go to dig diamonds in the Angolan province of Lunda Norte, describe themselves as kunwalistes, “those who go forward” (from kiKoongo kunwala), echoing the Billies’ slogan tokende liboso.
24 Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]: 123.
25 For an example of this tendency see Biaya, 1997.
26 Gasché, 1986.
28 See Browder and Godfrey, 1997 on frontier urbanization and the creation of “rainforest cities” in the Brazilian Amazon.
29 The boomtowns of Tembo and Kahemba, in the administrative units of Kasongo-Lunda and Kahemba respectively, are a good example of these dynamics. In 1984, the ciité of Kahemba officially counted 10,522 inhabitants (quartiers Kahemba, Mobutu and Sukisa). Ten years later the population of Kahemba had multiplied tenfold, with small aircraft flying in almost daily with goods and people from Kinshasa.
30 Today the town of Kahemba is reducing in size again, due to the difficulties of accessing Angola since the end of 1998.
31 Ngulu means “pig” or “pork.” The name refers to an older mythology that found its origins in colonial times, when it was believed that the rare Congolese who were invited to travel to Belgium by missionaries and others, were killed there and returned to Congo processed as corned beef, which was then distributed to the local population. Not without irony, the system of paying a musician or preacher for a fake real passport and visa in order to travel to Europe refers to these older beliefs. The ngulu system was exposed in 2003 when Papa Wemba, one of Congo’s prominent musicians, was arrested on account of illegal human traffic.
32 Faa ku Mputu is also the title of a novel written in Lingala by Bienvenue Sene Mongaba (2002) in which he tells the story of his own journey to Mputuville.
34 On urban rumors see also Obrist, 2000.
35 Yoka, 1999: 15.
Kindokinisme is derived from the Lingala term kindoki, “witchcraft.” The use of the neologism is significant in that it illustrates how the unpredictable transformations of reality constantly seem to require new conceptual frameworks.


Baudrillard, 1983.

Malinowski, 1985 [1922]: xv.

Appropriately, Terra Morta is the title of a novel by Castro Soromenho (1941), in which he gives an almost sociological description of the reality of diamond and rubber exploitation in the colonial society of the Angolan sertão, currently known as the province of Lunda Norte. For a nuanced view on the chicotte as symbol of Belgian colonialism, see Demboure, 1992.

de Villers (1993) equally reminds us that the history of Belgian colonialism is much more complex and ambiguous than a one sided denunciatory interpretation allows for. On the Congolese section in the Tervuren Universal Exhibition of 1897 see Etamba, 1993; Jacques, 1897; Luwel, 1954. Apparently many more Congolese died during the exhibition. The organizers tried to conceal the fact of their death, but the news spread when inhabitants from Tervuren started a protest against the burial of “pagan” Africans in their churchyard. Following this protest, the bodies were buried in a collective grave. Only much later were the seven bodies of Ekia and his friends exhumed and reburied in their present graves.

See for example Mafikiri, 1996.


According to Radio Trottoir the “Golden Book” also contains the signatures of all the previous Belgian kings, starting with Leopold II. For an illustration of this see the painting by Shibumba in Fabian, 1996: 91. See also Fabian, 1996: 88; Ndaywel, 1997: 359–49.


Bhabha, 1994.

The story was covered by Le Monde (May 23, 1995) and reprinted by the Kinshasa based newspaper Le Soft: “Dr Fontaine, Américain et missionaire, homme-hippopotame, s’est caché dans la rivière Kwilu pour venir épouvanter Kikwit. Son comportement est si néfaste qu’il est chassé de la mission Vanga quand il reprend la forme humaine; il pique alors une colère et décide de se venger de la ville ingrate.” [Dr. Fontaine, American and missionary, man-hippopotamus, has been hiding in the river Kwilu to frighten Kikwit. His behavior is so destructive that he was chased from the mission of Vanga after he shifted back into his human shape. He then became so angry that he decided to take revenge on the ungrateful city.] One of the origins of the history of the oral transmission of the hippopotamus story may be traced to an actual event which took place in the mid 1980s, when an American party went for a swim in the Kwilu river and were attacked by a number of hippopotamuses. Several people, including some children, drowned in the tragedy, which was related to me in 1988 by one of the survivors, an American pilot working for the Protestant Mission Aviation Force. Around that same period, a Canadian Mennonite missionary, Mr. John Esau, had a boat accident on the Kwango river, in which two of his “boys” died. The missionary who, because of his strong build was nicknamed “the Elephant,” was charged with their death and subsequently had to leave the country. In the late 1980s I heard several versions of the story of an American who returned from Congo to the United States, where he shifted into the shape of a hippopotamus to frighten people along the Potomac river. Radio Trottoir also circulated other versions of the poison story explaining the Ebola outbreak. In these, state agents from Kinshasa were held responsible for spreading poisoned fish in the city’s markets.

Mamdani, 1996.

Terdiman, 1993. On the role of the Universal Exhibition within the modernist framework of the nation state see Harvey, 1996.

Lambek and Antze, 1996: xviii.

On nostalgia and globalization see Robertson, 1992.


Fabian, 1996: 269.

Perspectives et visions de l’œuvre

De gauche à droite la vision de l’envoyé spécial du diable: ici établit comme le commandant du dérèglement de la planète. Ce commandant au galon spécial est doté d’une puissance redoutable. A l’extrême droite; le diable, prince du ténèbre et amoureux du désordre, s’accroche sur la planète par son bec engrainé [sic]; pour exercer de toute son influence sur terre. Son bec engrainé lui évite également de se faire décroché du globe. Par sa langue rouge-vive, il lèche la planète pour la rendre lisse et légère; afin d’être très facile à transporter pour son commandant. Au centre du globe, l’homme est représenté comme “maître de l’environnement terrestre”, pourvu des moustaches pour jouer son autorité. Mais ici, il est complètement aveuglé par le Diable: ne distinguant ni la vérité, ni la réalité. Par ailleurs, le commandant est premièrement galonné d’un grade spécial; soulignant qu’il est complètement agréé par son maître. Et deuxième-ment, ses jambes sont en flèche pour traduire sa grande vitesse vers le désastre: c’est-à-dire, qu’il veut précipiter la planète vers la destruction radicale. Ses bras en aile (transportant le globe) au dessus duquel son maître se repose tout en s’y accrochant sévèrement. Les yeux du commandant sont grandement ouverts pour traduire ses cris interrompus en raison de stimulis musculaire. Ses dents en poignards d’attaque, témoignent qu’il cherche sans cesse à se débarasser de son passage toute barrière génante. Outre que ça, l’environnement qui cadre le diable et son envoyé spécial, est doté de part et d’autres; des champs de radars que le diable a imaginé pour entrer en communication avec tous les réseaux satellitaire que possède la terre.

Les perspectives notoires du commandant

Notes: Le commandant ou disciple du maître, présente en lui seul un aspect à triple formes:

1° La forme de “la panthère” pourvue de dents-poignards. Panthère dotée d’une antenne-corne (jaune dorée) lui permettant d’entrer en contact direct avec son maître (le Diable).

2° La forme de “sauterelle-migrateur” pour témoigner son insignation de pillard à vie (c’est-à-dire); qu’il terrorise la terre entière par son pillage qu’il se veut systématique.

3° La forme de “la girafe-ailée” ici, le grand et long cou de cette girafe lui permet de prendre son fourrage (ses victimes) à distance. Ses ailes sacrées et bleu-saphir nous révèlent sa promenade dans le néant. Et cette couleur choisie qu’est “le bleu” prouve à suffisance, sa fidélité aux interdits soumis du maître (le Diable).

Visions diverses

Les points métalliques incorporés dans le globe représentent les différents satellites de la terre. L’image des continents affaiblis, se détachant du globe.

74 See de Lannoy, Mabiala and Bongeli, 1986.
75 The religious movement which originated with Simon Kimbangu, a Kongo prophet, was considered an anti-colonialist resistance movement by the Belgian colonial administration. As a result, Kimbangu was imprisoned and died in detention. After his death, following independence, the movement flourished into a formal church under the guidance of Kimbangu’s sons. Kimbanguism was recognized as official national religion by the Mobutu regime. Since May 2001, after the death of the last surviving son of Kimbangu, the church has been headed by one of Kimbangu’s grandsons, a namesake of Simon Kimbangu’s.

76 In effect, the members of this and other similar movements, including King Misele’s, are constantly being harassed by the agents of the State. After some of the church’s local branches in Kinshasa, the Lower Congo and Kikwit had been attacked by elements of the army in September 1996 (attacks in which at least three church members were killed and several others imprisoned), it became increasingly difficult for me to continue to visit this church.
community, for I was suspected of gathering further information concerning the Dibundu dia Kongo on behalf of the State.


78 See Meyer, 1998 for similar examples from Ghana on the religious production of modernity.

79 In the mid seventies Mobutu announced his economic masterplan called *Objectif 80* which would help Zaire to become an economic superpower by 1980: “Première place: oui. Deuxième place: malamu. Troisième place: likambo te. Kasi quatrième place: non c’est non tokondima yango te.” (The first place: yes. Second place: good. Third place: OK. But fourth place: no, we can never ever accept that.)

80 See Fabian, 1996, painting 68, *La mort historique de Lumumba*.

81 Jewsiewicki, 1996: 113. Since then, Lumumba-Christ reincarnated in Laurent Kabila. When Kisangani fell to Laurent Kabila’s AFDL in March 1997, this was explained the next day by a Kisangani inhabitant as follows: “Jesus entered Jerusalem just like Kabila did in Kisangani. It’s a coincidence. But Kabila is suffering a lot to liberate our people.” (Associated Press Report of March 23, 1997 by Beth Duff-Brown). The fact that both Lumumba and Kabila were murdered and continue to be commemorated on the same day only strengthens the symbolic superimposition.

82 See Maffesoli, 1992.


84 For other examples of the “transfiguration of politics” see also de Villers, 1995: 43; see also endnote 81.


86 See Devisch, 1996; Schatzberg, 1988; Stewart and Shaw, 1994.

87 Taussig, 1993.

88 Battaglia, 1993: 430. See also Casey, 1987; Connerton, 1989.


90 Lambeek and Antze, 1996: xiii.

91 De Boeck and Devisch, 1994.

92 See also Nooter-Roberts and Roberts, 1995.


94 In the Angolan context, the technology of dismemberment also includes a practice known as *kuchaant* in the local Luunda vernacular, signifying the progressive slicing up of the living body.

95 See also French, 1994; Nordstrom, 1992; Scarry, 1985.


97 On connivance and zombification see also Stoller, 1995.

98 Labou Tansi, 1979: 17.


100 Djungu-Simba, 1994.

101 This text is also quoted in de Villers, 1992: 192–194. See also Kamandji, 1998.

102 “Nos morts des zones périphériques sont de vrais morts. Quand on les enterre, on les oublie. Et lorsqu’on se souvient, on oublie quand même l’emplacement de la tombe. Nos morts sont périphériques, nos cimetières sont périphériques, et nos salaires sont périphériques!”


104 Mbembe, 2001: 145.


106 See Appadurai, 1996; Bayart, 1996: 143.

107 See for example Gupta and Ferguson, 1997a/b; Olwig and Hastrup, 1997.


109 The material presented here is based on several periods of field research in Kinshasa (1999–2004), and more particularly in the context of prayer movements and healing churches, most of which had links with Pentecostalism and other “fundamentalist” branches such as Watchtower and Jehovah’s Witness, as well as Seventh Day Adventists. I frequented churches in the neighborhoods of Masina, Bandalungwa, Lema, Selembao, Ndili and Kintambo, and conducted interviews with children, church leaders, parents and other relatives of the children involved.

110 See for example Douglas, 1999.

111 The NGO *Save the Children* gives an estimate of 2000 children who are the subject of such accusations in Kinshasa. In my view the estimate is rather conservative in that it is based on an extrapolation of the number of children brought to the churches to be exorcized. However, it does not take into account the high turnover of children in those churches and the constant production of new child-witches. For the rest, the joining of children and witches is of all times and all places. While in Europe, before 1600, witches were mostly elderly people, children were increasingly accused of witchcraft after that date. Not only were children victims of bewitchment, such as in the case of seventeenth century Salem, Massachusetts, but they were also accused of
bewitching others. In seventeenth century Europe, children were regularly burnt as witches, as attested by Midelfort’s analysis of the Würzenberg witch trials of 1627—9, in which ten children between the ages of 6 and 20 were killed on account of witchcraft (see Midelfort, 1972: 179ff). The phenomenon of child-witches is not new to Africa either. For comparative material in recent years see for example Geschiere’s analysis of mbait, a reportedly new type of child-witchcraft which started to appear among the Maka of southeastern Cameroon in the beginning of the seventies (Geschiere, 1980). What therefore seems to be exceptional in the Congolese case that I am dealing with here is above all its expansive scale.

112 See Ferguson, 1999; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999; Augé, 1999.

113 For an insightful treatment of these themes in relation to the gift see Baudrillard, 1976 and, more recently, Godelier, 1996.

114 See Barthélémy Bosongo, “Les ‘enfants sorciers’, boucs émissaires de la misère à Kinshasa” (Agence France Presse, October 13, 1999). During the same period BBC2 Newshight devoted a whole program to the phenomenon of witch-children in Kinshasa. On March 28, 2000, APA (Agence Presse Associée) reported: “108 children abandoned by their families because of witchcraft issues have been presented to the press in the Center for Exorcism and Recuperation of Children (Centre d’exorcisme et de récupération des enfants), in Masina Pascal, during a celebration organized by the Evangelical Church of Jesus Christ in Congo (l’Église évangélique de Jésus-Christ au Congo). These children, aged between five and fifteen years (boys and girls), were exorcized and helped by the Reverend Kikutu Kamboma, in view of their functional reinsertion in society.” See also the Dutch NRC Handelsblad, March 24, 2000: “Mothers in Congo give birth to ‘witches,’” as well as Karine Ancellin Saleck’s article “the sufferings of child-witches” (le calvaire des enfants sorciers) on the Amnesty International website (March 1, 2002), and BBC’s Mark Dummett’s report from January 17, 2003: “DR Congo’s unhappy child ‘witches’.” Most recently (November 18, 2003), MONUC (Mission de l’Organisation des Nations Unies en RD Congo) published an article by Christophe Boulierac on its website: “The bad fate of so-called child-witches in RDC” (le mauvais sort des enfants dits sorciers en RDC).

115 For an interesting work on “emplotment” and the therapeutic use of narrative see Becker, 1997.


117 De Boeck, 2004

118 Lard derives from dollar, which is commonly spelled as dollar in Congo, but it also makes reference to the French word for “fat,” as in faire du lard, “to become fat.”

119 Undoubtedly, the word shege has West African roots. In Hausa shege means “bastard,” and it is a word parents use a lot to insult their children into behaving better, or working faster (Adeline Masquelier, personal communication).

120 On urban gossip in Radio Trottoir surrounding the sexual escapades of young girls (the so-called “séries 8,” those born in the 1980s) see Nlandu-Tsasa, 1997: 97ff.

121 Other popular pasteurs, religious leaders and churches in Kinshasa today include Soni Kafuta (of the Armée de l’Éternel, the Eternal Army), Soni Mukwenzé (of La Restauration, Restoration) the recently deceased Mutombo (of Ministère Amen), Mama Olangi (of the church CFMCI), Tata Ghonda (of Le Dieu des Africains, The God of the Africans), Pasteur Kiziamina, Dieu Mukuna, and the church Hidden Manna (Manne Cachée). On the appropriation of media technologies by charismatic and Pentecostal churches in Ghana and Nigeria see also Hackett, 1998. In 2003, confronted with the growing impact of these West African movies, the Congolese government temporarily banned them from the TV screens.

122 Although it falls outside of the scope of this chapter, this issue also raises all kinds of legal and judicial problems. Often the adult thus accused turns to a justice of the peace, who can only state his incompetence in witchcraft related matters. Contrary to some other African countries such as Cameroon (see Fisiy and Geschiere, 1990), witchcraft is not included in the Congolese penal law. Judges are therefore forced to step out of their legal role to adopt a more informal mediating position in the conflict in question. In doing so they adopt a role that comes much closer to that of the authoritative elder in the more familiar process of palaver and kinbased conflict negotiation.


125 See Lambek, 2000: 12.
In many respects the contract with the *mami wata* is the local version of Faust’s contract with his devil. As Berman (1988) has pointed out, the figure of Faust is itself central to the emergence and development of capitalism and modernity. See also Fisiy and Geschiere, 1991; Warnier, 1993.

It should be noted, however, that, contrary to exchange based models of kinship and social organization which have ignored the role of children, descent based models, beloved of English Africanists, have far less. Thus while they have not always focused on children as such, they devoted much attention to issues of transmission between generations, as in the analysis of rites of passage and the like.

"In this society, where cross-cousin marriage is the rule, a man gives his child to his sister and brother-in-law to bring up; and the brother-in-law, who is the child’s maternal uncle, calls the child a *mbongo ya cuisine*, or *kuteend wa kuteend*, "feeding of the child," making grow." (Mauss, 1967: 7). Compare with the French original: "Ainsi, l’enfant, que la sœur, et par conséquent le beau-frère, oncle utérin, reçoivent pour l’élever de leur frère et beau-frère, est lui-même appelé un *tonga*, un bien utérin [...]. Or, il est ‘le canal par lequel les biens de nature indigène [...], les *tonga*, continuent à couler de la famille de l’enfant vers cette famille. D’autre part, l’enfant est le moyen pour ses parents d’obtenir des biens de nature étrangère (*oloa*) des parents qui l’ont adopté, et cela tout le temps que l’enfant vit.’ [...] En somme, l’enfant, bien utérin, est le moyen par lequel les biens de la famille utérine s’échangent contre ceux de la famille masculine.” (Mauss, 1985 [1950]: 155–156).


Godelier, 1996.

*Fula-fula*: from English “full.” *Nzungu ya bana*: “the children’s cooking pot,” for the bus allows its owner to bring home some money in the evening to feed his children.

*Guia*: a document sold by UNITA along the frontier between Congo and Angola. Only with such a passport, obtained at a UNITA checkpoint referred to as *passe avancado*, could one enter or exit the UNITA controlled areas.

She refers here to the progressive intrusion of the Lunda Norte area by UNITA troops in the late 1980s. This UNITA presence developed into a war over Lunda Norte (*epaka Lunda*) after the Angolan presidential elections in 1992. Intense fighting led to a de facto division of Lunda Norte in 1994, when MPLA had assured itself of the control over the diamond mining town of Cafunfo, while UNITA controlled the areas around the Kwango river.

With the presence of UNITA the diamond trade also became increasingly dollarized. The dollarization of the diamond business led to a spectacular inflation of the living cost in Lunda Norte, where even wild tomatoes are sold for dollars. As Mado and others call it, the dollar has become “kitchen money” (*mbongo ya cuisine*), and US$ 1,000 is hardly sufficient to cover the cost of food for a week.

Most of the revenues of the diamond diving go to the *dona moteur*, although the divers earn good money as well. The least prestigious member of the group is the *muwetiste*, whose job it is to keep the pirogue or the small rubber boats on the same spot in the water with the help of long poles. The *muwetiste* also helps the divers to pull the sacks of sand and gravel out of the water. Divers who are not associated
144 Foucault, 1986.
147 On the city and the politics of propinquity see for example Copjec and Sorkin, 1999.
148 To operate a phonic necessitates a long and strenuous administrative trajectory and is a very expensive business for most Kinois. First one has to rent a place to set up one’s office (in 2003, this meant a US$ 150 deposit and a rent averaging US$ 30 to US$ 50 a month), buy some office furniture (US$ 200) and, above all, the necessary hardware. A pair of radio transmitters easily costs US$ 2,500. To that one has to add equipment to stabilize the electric current (US$ 100), a battery (US$ 80), a generator and the equipment to set up the antenna. On top of that, the use and exploitation of a phonic is strictly controlled by the government and is therefore subject to a whole array of taxes. Before one can start to operate a phonic there is a long and often unpredictable ride among the various administrative units involved.

From the Ministry of Communications (PTT) one needs to obtain an exploitation license (US$ 1,000) and a technical control card (US$ 500). These cannot be obtained without filling in certain application forms (US$ 50). Then the administration starts to “study the demand,” a study which necessitates an “access tax” (US$ 200). Once this process is completed, one is assigned certain radio wave frequencies (between US$ 30 and US$ 100 per frequency) and a radio wave configuration map. From the Ministry of Communication, the whole file is transferred to the Ministry of the Economy. There one has to pay for a national identification card (US$ 150 if the phonic is used for commercial purposes). In order to obtain this card, one has to pay a “motivation fee” of US$ 100. Even then, it might easily take a year before one obtains this card. In order to obtain all the documents in each ministry one has to address a letter to the service involved. Of course, this entails further expenses. From the Ministry of the Economy it goes to the office of Counsel for the Prosecution where one buys the appropriate forms (US$ 20) to obtain a number in the commercial register (US$ 150). With this number one addresses the National Intelligence Service (ANR) who will deliver a Conformity attestation (US$ 350 for Congolese citizens, US$ 1,000 for expatriates), renewable each year. Finally, the commune where the phonic is to be installed will first inspect the place, draw up an environmental report (US$ 80), deliver an authorization to start operating the phonic (US$ 100), as well as another exploitation permit (price unknown) and levy a small yearly municipal tax. As one can imagine, each of the stages of this long process is accompanied by complex negotiations embedded in a whole range of formal, semiformal and informal relations.

149 This is a point well made by Abdoumaliq Simone. See Simone, 2003; in press.
150 Lefebvre, 1991: 170. See also Pile, 1996.
151 Harvey, 2000: 99.
152 See Comhairé-Sylvain, 1986 on some of Kinshasa’s important women’s associations in the ’40s and ’60s. On the subject of the likolemba see also Bouchard, 2002.
154 See De Boeck, 1999 for a more elaborate analysis of patterns of expenditure.
156 Foucault, 1995 [1975]: 221.
157 Practices and discourses of sorcery easily blend in with the hunter’s universe, and bring out fundamental ambivalences inherent in the hunting practice. In some respects, the hunter’s solitary and autonomous character likens him to the sorcerer. Hunting, in all its aspects from the shooting of an animal to the cutting up and the distribution of its parts, is therefore also viewed as a model that refers to the anti-order of sorcery and witchcraft. Both sorcerer and hunter are engaged in actions of killing, trapping and shooting.

158 On Kingelez see Magnin, 2003.
159 Pume’s utopian project code name is “Byl,” a name composed of three letters of which the b is the second letter of the alphabet, the y the 25th and the l the 12th, together 39 (= 3×3×3). This formula includes Pume himself, for he is his father’s third son, as well as Christ, who died at the age of 33. “Ex” stands for exposition.

160 Interviews with Professors Fernand Tala Ngai and Romain Buluku Nsaya, Kinshasa, February 2004. For an anthropological critique on Brasilia see Holston, 1989.
162 Foucault, idem.
163 Bachelard, 1957.
164 Bourdieu, 1982.
165 For a more detailed ethnography of speech in southwestern Congo see De Boeck, 1998b: 38ff.
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover: Street child in the bar *Vis-à-Vis*, Quartier Matonge, Commune of Kalamu.
6 Portrait of a young girl accused of witchcraft, Commune of Selembao.
12 Sunken steamer on the Congo river.
17 View of downtown Kinshasa, Commune of Gombe.
18–19 The *Maisaf* bar, Avenue Kasa-Vubu, Commune of Bandalungwa. *Maisaf* is the abbreviation of *Maison africaine*, a shelter for Congolese students in Ixelles, Brussels.
22 Statue of king Leopold II and the feet of a statue which represented his envoy Stanley, Commune of Limete.
23 Statue of Stanley and his boat, Commune of Limete. Both statues were torn down and moved to two separate warehouses in Limete after Independence.
25 Mural painting: *Work: The Base of Progress*.
27 School blackboard: *Framework. The Punishments*.
29 Place des travailleurs (also known as Place Forecrom), Commune of Gombe.
32–33 Rond Point Victoire, Quartier Matonge.
37 Young musicians rehearsing, Commune of Mont Ngafula.
38 Chez Volcan. Body building, Commune of Barumbu.
42 Neighborhood in the Commune of Kisenso.
43 School complex and garden, Quartier Matonge.
44 Playing in the street, Yolo Nord, Commune of Kalamu.
48 Porte de Namur, Quartier Matonge, Kinshasa.
49 Porte de Namur, Matonge, Ixelles (Brussels).
51 Women selling food in street market, Binza IPN.
52 Old compound in the Commune of Barumbu.
60 Le Bloc, night life in Quartier Bisengo, Commune of Bandalungwa.
61 *Bar Kimpwanza*, Commune of Kasa-Vubu.
68 Interior of house, Yolo Sud, Commune of Kalamu.
74 Blackboard in a church, Commune of Masina.
78 Bar in the Commune of Bandalungwa.
90 View of the *Boulevard du 30 juin*, the Belgian embassy and the SOZACOM tower, Commune of Gombe.
93 Painting by Bodo.
96–99 Murals with religious themes.
104 Gathering of adepts of the Apostolic Church of John Maranke, in an abandoned UN refugee camp, Quartier Mpasa, Commune of Nsele.
106–107 Idem.
120 Bar *Saint-Tropez*, Rond Point Victoire, Quartier Matonge.
121 Barber shop with portrait of musician Ngiami Makanda (Werrason) in a priest’s outfit and with a leopard’s head.
123 Police office.
128 Blackboard *Les morts ne sont pas morts*, Commune of Lemba.
135 Funeral chapel in the street, Commune of Kintambo.
137 Undertaker’s, Commune of Selembao.
138 Children accused of witchcraft in a church, Commune of Selembao.
140–141 Portraits of children who are being exorcized in a church, Commune of Selembao.
144 Witch-finder, along the Bypass Road, near Cité Verte.
154 Aquarium, Commune of Lingwala.
159 Girl sleeping on tombstone, Cemetery of Gombe.
165 Central Market, Commune of Gombe.
166–167 Street children, Central Market, Commune of Gombe.
169 Girls meeting in a compound, Commune of Kintambo.
174 Announcement of a prayer meeting, Commune of Bandalungwa.
175 Church ELIM, The Light of the World, Matonge.
177 Prayer meeting at Mama Olangi’s, Commune of Limete.
Mural at the entrance of bar, Binza Gendarmerie.


During a Papa Wemba concert, Commune of Masina, May 2001.

Wrestling competition, Commune of Ndjili, Quartier 1.

La semence. Mural paintings.

Comic strips by Papa Mfumu’eto I.

Furniture for sale along the Bypass Road, Commune of Mont Ngafula, Quartier Masanga Mbila.

Selling furniture in the street, Commune of Masina.

Interior of colonial villa, Commune of Gombe.

Selling furniture, Binza Okapi.

View of the Congo river from Port Baramoto.

Tree in front of the Grand Hotel, Commune of Gombe.

Kimbanguist School, threatened by erosion, Binza Gendarmerie.

Public scribe, barber shop (with portrait of J.B. Mpiana) and parlementaires debout in the Eucalyptus woods along the Boulevard Lumumba, Commune of Ndjili.

Portraits of young musicians from the orchestras QBG International (Prince Shongo I, Pitchoi Bonpetit, Bijou Star Ami Simbal, Ousman Dirabolé, Delop Massapidi, Atueka Anaklé), Nouveau monde international (Jessy Ugbe, Otchoudi, Jackson Mangumbai, JR) and Wëka Musa (Gelor Dilou, Fiston Nzala, Linduku Munga, Gadens Ngeto, Tacle Mambo). See also photo on p. 37.

Accumulating heaps: shoes, lamp shades, second hand clothes, herbs for medical purposes, sunshades with religious inscription, wheel covers, bags of food (gifts from Italy and Belgium), charcoal, medicinal plants, cassava flour, white sand, gravel, money, bread and peanuts. (Photo of cambistes (money changers) on p. 250 by Filip De Bocck).

Portrait of artist Pume Bylex, Masina, Quartier Petro-Congo. April 2000.

L’avenir. Mural painting.

Children playing in the street, Yolo Sud.

Playing checkers, Mont Ngafula.

Making a photo portrait, Commune of Kimbanseke.
COLOPHON

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This book has been published as a sequel to the exhibition KINSHASA, THE IMAGINARY CITY. This project was commissioned by the Ministry of the Flemish Community for the Venice Architecture Biennial held from 9 September through 7 November 2004. The commissioner of the exhibition in the Belgian Pavilion was Katrien Vandermeere, director of the Flemish Architecture Institute (Vlaams Architectuurninstituut – VAi). The curators of the exhibition were Filip De Boeck and Koen Van Synghel. The presentation comprised photographic and video material by Marie-Françoise Plissart.

The FLEMISH ARCHITECTURE INSTITUTE (VAi) is a center for contemporary architecture. Its aim is to increase awareness of high-quality architecture among both the public at large and professionals, researchers, the media and government authorities. The VAi organizes a range of activities including talks, debates, guided tours and educational work for children and adolescents. Its support materials, developed in-house, include focused publications, study programs and websites. In cooperation with a variety of partners, the VAi seeks to stimulate critical reflection on topical issues in the architectural world.

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TALES OF THE INVISIBLE CITY
offers an original analysis of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s capital, KINSHASA.

The authors, anthropologist Filip De Boeck and photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart, provide a history not only of the physical and visible urban reality that Kinshasa presents today, but also of a second, invisible city as it exists in the autochthonous mind and imagination in the form of a mirroring reality lurking underneath the surface of the visible world. The book explores the constant transactions that take place between these two levels in Kinshasa’s urban scape. Based on longstanding field research it provides insight in local social and cultural imaginaries, and thus in the imaginative ways in which local urban subjects continue to make sense of their worlds and invent cultural strategies to cope with the breakdown of urban infrastructure.