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in the Margate Exodus Project**

Author

Balfour, Michael

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**Performing the promised land: the  
festivalising of multi-cultures in the Margate Exodus Project.**

What is a festival? It's something exceptional, something out of the ordinary ...something that must create a special atmosphere which stems not only from the quality of the art and the production, but from the countryside, the ambience of a city and the traditions. . .of a region (de Rougement, quoted in Isar 1976: 131)

The use of festivals as a way to promote cultural and economic regeneration has been widely used in USA and many European cities, particularly following the second world war (Levin, 1982: 10-18; Whitt, 1987; Hiller, 1990; Ley and Olds, 1988; 1992; Bassett, 1993; Hudson, 1995). International festivals such as Edinburgh in 1947, Dartington in 1948, the Festival of Britain in 1951, were attempts to use culture and the arts to promote optimism and 'provide a platform for the flowering of the human spirit' (Henderson, 1991: 26). The link between culture and new economies was also important with a conscious use of art to increase tourism and economic development. There are however obvious tensions between the aims of *economic* regeneration, with its focus on property development, tourism, investment in infrastructure, and *cultural* regeneration, more concerned with a specific communities self development and abilities to draw on the arts as a way to represent themselves and their stories. As Waterman (1998) notes: 'Prestige projects and place-marketing do not necessarily contribute to cultural regeneration and are more inclined to benefit the local middle class and cultural tourists' (64).

In the past 20 years there has been a remarkable rise in the number of arts festivals worldwide (Quinn, 2005). As urban centres have moved from nodes of production to service-orientated consumption, there has been a need to reposition and differentiate cities in an increasingly competitive world. Drawing on Paddison (1993) cities and urban areas have increasingly used entrepreneurial displays that employ arts festivals, conferences, and trade shows as key constituents in attracting investment needed for regenerating and restructuring old urban areas (e.g. the European City of Culture initiative). Cities compete with each other in generating ever more sophisticated place-marketing events and strategies that span across the calendar year. The impact of the competitive and economic nature of the festivalisation of culture is far from clear, and it has been argued that it can lead to 'serial reproduction' (Richards and Wilson 2004: 1932) and ironically, a certain homegenisation of place that plays lip service to local distinctiveness:

Now it's festivals, festivals everywhere. Big ones, small ones, wild ones, silly ones, dutiful ones, pretentious ones, phony ones. Many have lost purpose and direction, not to mention individual profile. Place a potted plant near the box office, double the ticket prices and—whoopie—we have a festival (Bernheimer 2003: 21).

The double bind of homegenisation and a top-down 'culture is good for you' approach to festivals is not the only tactic in evidence. A number of precedents exist for festivals

that seek to represent counter narratives and/or explore the particularities of local community interests. As Turner (1982) notes communal creativity, celebration, and festivals are significant ways for communities to express the close relationship between identity and place. While many arts festivals have been sited in major cities, there has been a corresponding growth and development in more regional contexts. As Frey (1994) has argued regional and decentralised festivals often emerged as reactionary attempts to represent other voices and perspectives often not represented by keystone arts festivals in the main capitals e.g. Avignon. And as Quinn (2005: 929) argues:

[These] festival initiatives have shown themselves to be highly reflective, as well as constitutive, of the resources, circumstances and people existing in particular places. They emerged in response to artistic needs lacking within that place and crystallised the key resources available there.

Clearly there is a strong genealogy with alternative and counter culture festivals from the 1960s and 1970s, in which grass roots social movements explored a range of themes through arts festivals, happenings and protests with themes of anti-war, feminism, environmentalism and gay rights. It's not the focus of this chapter to explore this period in detail; merely to note that there is a strong lineage of community based festivals that are driven by the imperatives of creating culture by, for and with local communities. The nature of the 'alternative' festival event is that it challenges the form and content of traditional arts festivals (in the mold of Edinburgh etc) in placing an equal emphasis on processes of community engagement and ownership and/or investment in the final outcome. The intent of these more localised festivals is to privilege the communal and participative dimension so key to the origins of festival, and to use the arts as a vehicle for the community to talk to itself, to reflect, to celebrate and to reinforce the distinction of place. A good example of this type of festival are the Caribbean carnivals, now found in most North American and British cities. The considerable economic and tourism benefits of these celebrations do not outweigh the strong connections they still have with their specific diasporic networks. The carnivals maintain their position as hybrid sites (Bhaba 1994) where 'cultural identities, notions of belonging and values systems are celebrated, contested and negotiated' (Quinn 2005: 935).

### **Diasporic and refugee festivals.**

Displacements of whole populations. Refugees from famine and war. Wave after wave of emigrants, emigrating for either political or economic reasons but emigrating for survival. Ours in the century of enforced travel...the century of disappearances (Berger 1992: 12)

The number of people forcibly uprooted by conflict and persecution worldwide stood at 42 million at the end of 2008. The total includes 16 million refugees and asylum seekers and 26 million internally displaced people uprooted within their own countries (United Nations High Commissioner for refugees [UNHCR] 2009). The settlement experience for many refugees in new host countries can be a very difficult time. 25-30% of refugees have recognised conditions such as posttraumatic stress disorder and a further 40% have experienced extremely traumatic pasts before arriving in Australia (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2006). 80% of entrants have not rented a house, paid a bill, gone to work or have had any concept of engaging with

institutions such as banks, real estate agents or government departments in the past 10 years (DIAC 2009). Significant settlement issues include: high unemployment, housing issues, English language barriers, effects of torture and trauma, and general health issues (DIMA 2006).

War and displacement create breaks from cultures of origin in which an individual's sense of self and identity has been formed and is embedded. Displacement can cause alienation from and questioning of basic assumptions about self and one's place in the world. Contact with other places, people and cultures challenges notions of our own culture as 'original' or 'authentic' – and presents ideas about new ways of life, identity and cultural expression. There can be a profound sense of loss with the destruction (often violent) of economic and social infrastructure, and consequently the cultural activities and values that once made life meaningful. However, cultural practices are embodied and reconstructed in sites of refuge, often to facilitate a sense of connection with history and previous lives. As such, theatre and performance activities in these contexts both express a sense of cultural dislocation and a means of rebuilding a sense of identity. There has been a growth in diasporic and refugee themed festivals over the last 10 years (Thompson, Hughes, Balfour 2009). Local government and community agencies have tried to find creative responses to settlement that promote a resource-based rather than deficit-based approach to the settlement of new arrivals into local cultures. Conquergood reports from his experience working as a theatre consultant in a Hmong refugee camp on the Thai border,

Refugee camps are liminal zones where people displaced by trauma and crisis – usually war or famine – must try to regroup and salvage what is left of their lives. Their world has been shattered. They are in passage, no longer Laotian, certainly not Thai, and not quite sure where they will end up or what their lives will become. Betwixt and between worlds, suspended between past and future, they fall back on the performance of their traditions as an empowering way of securing continuity and some semblance of stability. Moreover, through performative flexibility they can play with new identities, new strategies for adaptation and survival. The playful creativity of performance enables them to experiment with and invent a new 'camp culture' that is part affirmation of the past and part adaptive response to the exigencies of the present. Performance participates in the recreation of self and society that emerges within refugee camps. Through its reflexive capacities, performance enables people to take stock of their situation and through this self-knowledge to cope better (Conquergood 1988: 180).

Contemporary cultural theorists have highlighted the role of performance and arts festivals in creating identity on both an individual and social level – that a person can create and adopt new identities through acts of speech and performance in everyday life. In some of this work, there is a similar positive gloss given to the creative possibilities of the 'border' in bringing about new forms of identity and relationships between people

...these 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular and communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining society itself (Bhabha 1994: 2).

While refugee festivals and celebratory events are designed to acknowledge new cultures, there has been an equal emphasis on the need to create bridges with local communities. The focus of this chapter is the ways in which refugee and migrant groups have been dispersed into areas that are often characterized by low socio-economics contexts, and the resulting tensions that exist within complex, fluid and multi-ethnic communities. How do artists work within and transcend these complex environments? The *Margate Exodus* project serves as an example of how artists can employ a range of tactics to combine the needs of community arts festivals to work with local communities, but at the same time devise aesthetic strategies that transcend the micro-politics of ethnic tensions in a specific context.

### **Margate.**

In 1887, John Bartholomew's Gazetteer of the British Isles described Margate in the following terms:

Margate, seaside resort, Kent, in Isle of Thanet, 5 miles NW. of Ramsgate and 74 miles E. of London by rail. The place was formerly known as Mergate, meaning a passage to the sea... Margate is undoubtedly the most familiar seaside resort of Londoners, of whom many thousands visit the place every year.....Much has been done in the town for the convenience and comfort of visitors; piers and esplanades especially have been constructed at great expense. The town is well known for its fine hotels and its hospitals for the reception of invalids.

In stark contrast is Will Self's (2006) description of Margate 109 years later:

Next to the station stands the enormous, wrinkled digit of Arlington House, a Brutalist 20-storey block of flats that seems to waggle a warning at all asylum seekers: "Enter this land of promise, and you'll be banged up in here forever." Or worse, in the decaying terrace of the Nayland Rock refugee hostel. Once this was a luxury hotel, now it houses Roma on the run from central Europe, Congolese fleeing the meltdown of central Africa, Iraqis evading the maelstrom of the Middle East. Strange, that so many people escaping the dread gravity of these landmasses, should find themselves clinging on to the very tip of the Isle of Thanet, which in turn is like a cold sore on the Kentish lip of old England.

Thanet is the easternmost District of the County of Kent, United Kingdom. It has a population of 127,000 approx, the majority of who live in the three seaside towns of Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate. Thanet suffers from acute social and economic deprivation. The Audit Commission noted that 'Thanet contains some of the most deprived areas in Kent, including the two most deprived wards in south-east England, both of which are in the top 2% of deprived areas in England' (2005).

Margate has been a destination for different waves of migratory forces, and has high levels of refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants from all over the world. Margate's faded past as a promised land is echoed in the ageing grandeur of its infrastructure and buildings, 'an ideal context, then, geographically, historically and emotionally, in which to revisit the greatest migration story ever told' (Morris 2006: 15). Once a popular seaside resort in the 1960s and 1970s, Margate has been marred

with multiple social and economic problems, dwindling resources, and a shrinking tourism industry. Many former Victorian hotels and B&Bs have been converted into care homes and bedsits for an influx of immigrants, giving the resort the cruel nickname of Benefits-on-Sea. The transience of the population is reflected in one of the local primary schools having a 44% mobility rate (turnover of pupils) (TES, 2000). Tracy Emin (2008), the conceptual artist, grew up in the town and recently reflected: 'It's strange to witness the death of a town. In some ways there is a melancholy romance. It's like the tragic set of a film, but the sad thing is that the star is Margate. Margate has become Britain's tragic Norma Desmond from Sunset Boulevard, almost nothing can save her'.

Arts regeneration has been one of the key areas of investment as a way to redevelop and re-imagine the town. A multiagency partnership between Thanet District Council, Kent County Council, the South East Development Agency (SEEDA), the Arts Council England, the Government Office of the South East (GOSE), the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Partnerships and English Heritage was set up in 2005 and secured over £35m to kick start the initiative. The Partnership invested in cultural activities as part of the campaign to change perceptions and raise the profile of Margate, quoting a mission statement:

By 2015, Margate will become a dynamic, thriving and successful town. It will be a major hub and driving force of creativity and culture that excites and inspires residents and visitors alike. It will embrace and celebrate its traditions as a place of relaxation, leisure and seaside fun.

The partnership presents its regeneration plan making use of existing infrastructure of buildings and the coastline:

These natural assets, coupled with an embryonic creative sector, a large number of major development opportunities in and around the town centre, and the Turner Contemporary, all create the platform to place Margate firmly back on the map as a successful town by the sea and a thriving visitor destination.

In many ways Margate represents the quintessential site of arts regeneration. The place-making initiatives off beatification and cosmopolitanism – the attraction of outside 'creatives' and cappuccino bars – erode and displace character and local distinctiveness but bring with them cash, investment and kudos (city types slumming it in Margate for a kitsch experience and a visit to the new Turner gallery). This is not a celebration of what Margate is, but a re-branding of its history and an attempt to put it on the 'cool list'. It's deeper histories and its on-going attempts to deal with tensions derived from its ethnic diversity are skirted around and marginalized, in an attempt to present a frontality of experience driven by a contemporary vision of 'seaside fun'. The projected image and the actual reality construct a cultural chasm between economic regeneration and social regeneration. Each new cultural initiative walks the tightrope between social and economic inclusivity, balancing the need for outside perspectives and investment as well as the need to value and understand the local.

In this chapter I'd like to use the *Margate Exodus* festival as an example of a way to sneak up on the paradox of balancing both social and economic needs. The festival was a relatively small event, created early on in the rejuvenation plans of the town. In 2002,

Michael Morris, from the London-based international arts organization, Artangel, became intrigued by the possibility of commissioning a number of artists to develop a festival project exploring themes of migration in collaboration with the residents of Margate. The result was the *Margate Exodus* project, a 1 day outdoor festival. The festival consisted of a promenade performance, a rock concert, an outdoor photography show, and a 25-metre wooden Burning Man sculpture. In this chapter I will be exploring how Artangel used the festivalisation process to foreground the impact of the migration experience through diverse aesthetic means. The festival was designed as a way to initiate a dialogue in the town about the grander narratives of history and economic circumstance and how these impact on individual lives in distinct but interconnected ways.

### In the beginning

Thou shalt not oppress a stranger, for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Exodus, 23.9)

The festival day commenced in Margate's central shopping area, with a performance of a newly elected politician, Pharaoh Mann, giving his victory speech. The promenade performance then continued in a series of site-specific scenarios staged throughout the town, and filmed by British National broadcaster Channel 4. Penny Woolcock, the director, developed the story from the Exodus tale, and re-staged it in collaboration with a number of the town's residents, who acted, made costumes and props, or were part of the crowds following the actions. The festival continued in the evening with a cycle of *Plague Songs* at Margate's Winter Gardens. The free concert featured local singers and musicians performing their own versions of songs written exclusively for *Exodus* by Brian Eno & Robert Wyatt, Laurie Anderson, The Tiger Lillies, Scott Walker, Rufus Wainwright and others and who based the songs on one of the ten biblical plagues — Blood, Frogs, Lice, Flies, Death of Livestock, Boils, Hailstones, Locusts, Darkness and Death of the Firstborn. Each of the local singers and musicians had been working with a composer and voice coach over the summer in preparation for the performance. Over in the former Dreamland funfair, Antony Gormley's massive-scale Waste Man, created in collaboration with a team from Margate and the Isle of Thanet, was a 25-metre figure tightly packed with unwanted detritus. The spirit of Exodus threaded its way across the town with *Towards a Promised Land*, Wendy Ewald's large-scale banner photographs of children newly arrived in Margate. The photographs formed an audiovisual trail of the children's migration stories.

As a festival, the Exodus day existed as a hybrid event, part arts extravaganza brought in from outside and part community festival reflecting the distinctive and diverse nature of Margate. Interestingly as a festival it did not focus on one ethnic group, typical in other refugee festivals (Thompson, Hughes, Balfour 2009). Instead it took a universal approach to the story of migration as a common emotional experience that might 'cut across the divisions of race, faith, politics and circumstance' (Morris 2006: 16). The unifying experience of forced migration (economic and/or political) was what held the disparate elements of the project together. Given the simmering context of racial tensions in the town, this was both an elegant and progressive way to include the town in a conversation about itself and the different forms of migration it had experienced. By situating the exodus motif either in biblical history, or obliquely through images that included participants from UK, Ireland as well as Africa and Afghanistan, the artists tried to explore the experience and impact of dislocation in myriad ways.

The Exodus project can be seen to draw on the traditions of the community play movement, particularly from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (Kershaw 1992). There are strong connections here with localism and with responsiveness to community issues. Companies such as Medium Fair, Welfare State, EMMA (UK), Bread and Puppet (US) as well as, more recently, the work of Lyndon Terracini's development of regional festivals, provide a context for the Exodus project. There are also more extended lineages back to the 'town play' initiatives, that drew in people – not only actors – but a whole range of informal, voluntary labour, as a means of both maximising the 'localness' of the event and promoting inclusion. Like the earlier community play movement the *Margate Exodus* used a range of performance styles and modes with considerable sophistication in order to match the show for a specific audience. And developed carefully structured approaches to participatory practices that echoed influences as different as Ann Jellicoe, Augusto Boal, and the European experiment of Odin Theatre.

As an artist-led collaborative project *Margate Exodus* explored what Hauptfleisch (2007) defines as key elements in a festival, including diverse non-traditional and temporary spaces, the use of different forms (music, photography, theatre, film, ritual) and different levels of engagement (some audience members followed the whole day of activities, others saw only some of the events). The range of arts activities was important in situating the festival as a meta-event encompassing a series of individual but linked performances. The loose coalition of performances were meant to invoke meaning making that transcended one specific event and created a 'flow' of experience (Schoenmakers 2007: 34).

The *Margate Exodus* project attempted to make a connection between multiple ethnic communities. Its creators were not avowedly community activists, but were more interested in the affective challenges of staging projects in a marginalized space. In their previous work all artists were linked to work that either had strong participatory elements, employed community members, or were progressive public artists attuned to creating work for a broad audience. In structuring the *Margate Exodus* project as a series of distinct but interlinked events (sharing of place, community, theme) the artists created a complex 'poly-systemic' theatrical event (Cremona 2007: 5). Although conceived of as a whole, the project did not constitute a single event, but something more fractured and complex, a series of sub events containing a blend of competing but complementary activities. In this chapter I'd like to draw focus on two of these elements, Wendy Ewald's *Towards a Promised Land*, and Anthony Gormley's *Waste Man*, as I think they demonstrate how these artists sought to explore issues in an affective way to communicate the fragility of belonging to any one place, and the tentative nature of identity and migration.

#### Lives, words, pictures.

Children have taught me that art is not a realm where only the trained and the accredited may dwell. The truly unsettling thing about children's imagery is that, despite their inexperience with what adults might call rational thinking their images tap into certain universal feelings with undeniable force and subtlety (Ewald as quoted in Neri 2006: 30).



In *Towards a Promised Land*, Wendy Ewald worked with 22 young people who had arrived in Margate from diverse locations, including Iraq, Belarus, Egypt, the Congo, as well as London, Derby, Belfast, and Germany. Ewald is an experienced 'participatory' photographer. She strives to develop close working relationships with her co-photographers, helping them develop camera skills and a strong sense of ownership over the material. Her portraits are of the children taken from locations of their choosing around Margate as well as images of their possessions, selected from belongings brought with them. The possessions are designed to evoke memories of home and lives left behind, as well as the here and now. The images were used for an exhibition in the local library, and made into large scale banner images displayed along Margate's seawall, as well as smaller images shown in Dreamland Amusement Arcade, a cinema, a pub, a fish and chip shop, and a domestic home. A downloaded audio 'banner trail' around the multisite gallery was created, that included interviews and moving testimonies by the young people. Visitors followed a map and were guided by the stories of the children and the places and possessions they had chosen.

Ewald's participatory approach to making images began in 1969 with a project working with Naskapi children on a First Nation reservation in Canada. The raw beauty of the images the children created galvanized Ewald to explore more collaborative art projects, and she traveled and worked in Colombia, Mexico and India over the next decade. Increasingly her work became a fusion of aesthetics, skills empowerment, and cultural negotiation. This work led her to exploring binaries of difference, particularly around issues of race as with her noted project examining the effects of apartheid on Afrikaner children in Johannesburg and African children in Soweto. Part of her developing praxis, is taking the time to understand and negotiate the realities of different cultural norms. Her work in Islamic cultures (Morocco, Saudi Arabia) for example involved Ewald's in undergoing intensive cultural dialogue about what could and could not be represented, and how to explore different models of selfhood. During her career Ewald has striven to 'Articulate and integrate marginalized parts of the social body by educating those parts, via the reflective processes of word and image, to observe themselves then record and display those observations' (Neri 2006: 32).

The intimacy created in Ewald's work between artist and co-artist/participant is governed by a shared respect for the artistry in the process. The *Margate Exodus* project further developed her interest in complex cultural negotiations and translations. The process enabled the young people to develop skills and reflect on life in Margate and the experiences they had gone through, these included feelings of loss and hope for a new life. The negotiation of the portrait, and the selection of possessions, neatly encompassed the link between two versions of home: one lost, the other in transition. Ewald views teaching as an open praxis, 'a political act that enables people to understand the powers that use them and the powers that they use' (Ewald as quoted in Neri 2006: 33).

The visitor/gallery experience brought into relief the different experiences and feelings associated with the exodus theme: the children's excitement, sadness, longing, and anxiety of displacement. While some of the children disclosed the background to their exile, others did not. Within this ambiguity, the categories of refugee, migrant, asylum seeker, and transient became superfluous. The project deliberately explored the theme of exodus from the children's different experiences of enforced as well as economic and circumstantial relocation: 'All children have an ability to tell their stories in a very direct or revealing way. Their language is their own, and they don't censor themselves,

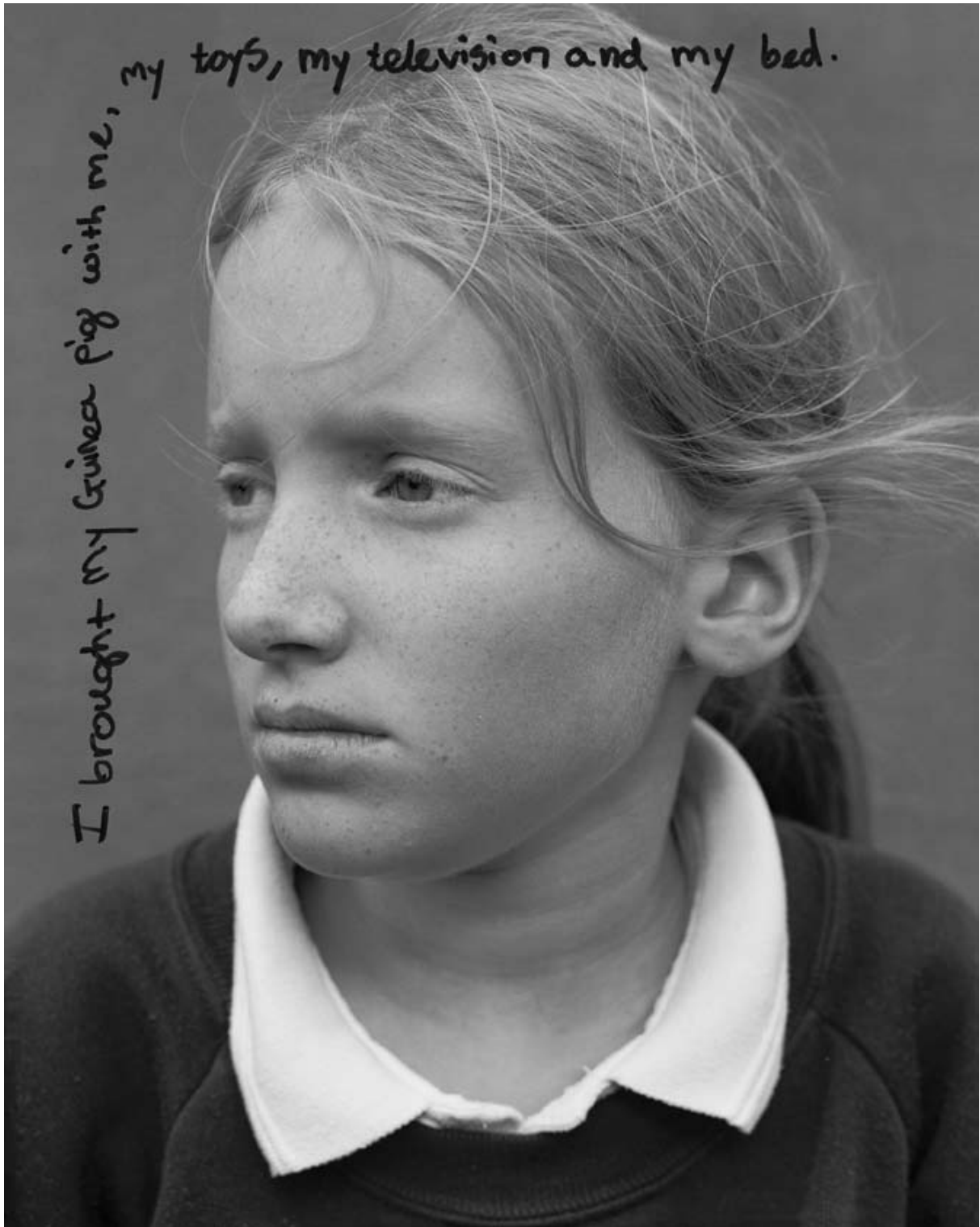
so their observations can shift from sweet to violent in a moment' (Ewald 2006: 33). For example, one of the accompanying words (part of the audio guide and printed gallery guide) for the children's images read as follows:

I thought it would be beautiful and safe here. I'm scared of bandits. I'm afraid of the police. Everyday there are police that pass by, always, "eee oow eee oow eee ou eeeoow". There's no space for playing here (Celeste, Born 1997, Democratic Republic of Congo; arrived in Margate 2004, current whereabouts unknown) (Ewald 2006: 59).

The diversity of cultural backgrounds of the exiles, ranging from Middle Eastern to Belfast, also helped to loosen expectations of what or who a refugee/migrant might be. It splintered the 'secure knowing' of the listener/viewer, and interpolated them in the stories as broad human experiences, away from categories and victim narratives.



Thierry Bal, 2006



The process of walking through the town, with the headphones, searching for the next image, also brought the context of the town into play. The children's commentaries talked about their favourite places in the town, or first impressions of arriving, as well as aspects about themselves. However, the listener/viewer following the map and audio commentary was involved in an active and dynamic way with the town, as they inevitably had to navigate unexpected changes and encounters. Myers (2008: 174), who has used similar site-specific modes of walking tours with refugee participants, describes the process, drawing on Ingold, as 'wayfaring'. Ingold (cited in Myers 2008: 174) distinguishes the ways in which wayfaring

relates not to 'placeless nor place-bound, but place making'. Myers (2008:176) states that 'These contexts and environments of enactment can be understood as relative and as developing, coming into being through a process of discovery and attunement of attention and perception rather than through a mental construction'.

The process that the viewer/listener undertakes while wayfaring their way to view the photographs around Margate, and listening to the children's commentaries, emplaces them in the contextual layers of the town. *Towards a Promised Land* demonstrated how the children have contributed to the formation of place, made accessible the ways in which their lives coexist and coinhabit the other identities of the town, and articulate 'a plurality of forms of place and provide mechanisms for passing on knowledge and experience to others in similar situations' (Myers 2008: 177).

Ewald's project seems to offer another tactic for dealing with the unwavering paradox of migrant representation. Although the children do discuss personal stories related to exile, the stories are contextualised within a complex set of frames that serve to disorientate a viewer/listener from secure knowing. The selection of stories from a broad cultural base, for example Belfast, London, Iraq, and Congo etc sets up questions about who or what is an exile. The content of the children's contributions ranges from discussions about special possessions, to significant (positive and negative) places in Margate, and episodic accounts of home and the journey to the UK. These stories surprise, and extend any fixed notion of refugee. The diverse locations of the images around the town (from the seawall to a fish and chip shop) force the viewer/listener to engage with and at times actively negotiate the plurality of place. The viewer/listener is therefore able to encounter the ways in which the children's stories and lives interpolate with other experiences and perspectives.

In Ewald's work the narratives of the children offer a collage of impressions of the town, likes and dislikes, favourite objects, reflections on different ways of being at home. The paradox of migrant performance is that it can imply the production of a secure map of experience, by fixing testimonial points and coordinates, which make an encounter with alterity more elusive. These examples offer tactics about how to 'sneak up' on the paradox, by exploring 'the other' in different ways:

This is (...) not necessarily so much about knowledge of the other, or information about their situation (...) as [it] is about the ethical quality of the experience itself, about a certain kind of affect. It is not perhaps even about, in the first instance, empathy or sympathy with the other, as these forms of relationship may be more about seeing in the other what is like oneself (what Levinas calls the Same). It is perhaps something more purely embodied than that, less explicit. (Burvill 2008: 236)

The imperative of the *Margate Exodus* is drawn from delivering an aesthetic festival project about a broad human issue, rather than responding to or being initiated by the needs of a specific community (refugee or otherwise). Nevertheless, it was determined by a social perspective, and as Cremona (2007: 14) notes, is typical of social-ethnic festivals in which artists and communities collaborate to 'juxtapose [themselves] to the prevailing culture in order to strengthen and confront it'.

The use of diverse places and transformed locations in Margate were essential factors in festivalising the everyday into potentially liminal environments. The spilling out of the *Margate Exodus* from the first street promenade performances to the children's blown up images on familiar buildings and landmarks are important indicators of its visibility and ability to temporarily transform the town.

The *Margate Exodus* deployed multifarious festivalising techniques to involve and engage the town in a conversation with itself. In Ewald's work there was the deliberate use of formal and informal spaces. The exhibition took place in a gallery, and enabled the children's work to be valued and appreciated in an official site. The spilling out of the images onto the side of the bingo hall, and also more intimate spaces (Fish and Chip shop, someone's house) provided an opportunity for more intimate and informal social spaces to develop in response to the work. The isolation of walking the audio tour, was combined with unexpected moments and encounters with locals, and free-flowing discussions ensued, provoked by the images and their positioning. Admittedly, these are small and transient moments of liminality, but still powerful in their own way. As small episodic moments that linked into the broader experience of the day, particularly the *Waste Man* event (more on this in a moment), they served to disrupt the normal everyday flow of existence in promising ways. What enhanced the potential of *Towards a Promised Land*, was its positioning within the broader festival events. Schoenmakers' (2007) distillation of the 'flow' concept as used by Csikszentmihalyi (1992) is defined to: 'indicate an experience in which the borderlines between activities may become less clear and become part of an integrated experience'. Williams (1974) discussed how the emotional experience of viewers who watch different single programs during a television night perceive the night as a whole event. This translates into the festival participant who may perceive distinct performances as part of an integrated meta-event. The sum of each makes up for a richer overall experience. Obviously the degree to which the organisers have collated a density of events contributes to the 'flow', just as the level of engagement of the participant/festivalgoer has an impact on the intensity of the experience.

The concept of flow is also related to the emotional experience of events, in particular, the way in which emotional energy is transferred between different performances. Zillman (1972) discussed the ways in which there is an excitation transfer even between events that have no casual or thematic connection. Therefore if there is a density of a events in a festival there is likely to be a flow of emotions between the diverse activities, building into a concentrated focusing (or 'flow') that minimizes disturbances and accentuates the 'playing culture' more acutely (Sauter 2007: 20). In the *Margate Exodus* festival this can be identified through the multiple forms and approaches to performance that saturated the town for the day. The intention of the organisers was to explore the nature of transience and belonging within the context of a mobile, fragile and somewhat tense ecology. The emphasis on aesthetic projects meant that these themes were explored in non-confrontational ways that were designed to be inclusive but not falsely unifying narratives. The festivals efficacy lay in the diffuse and ambiguous denial of moral certainties, and the exploration of what displacement actually *feels* like. Ewald did this very simply in the use of imagery, and the careful and bold placing of these photographs around the town. Gormley built on this sensuality of experience by creating the burning of the Waste Man and the fiery ritualistic culmination to the day. Although very different in process and outcome the events certainly created an opportunity to capitalize on the previous singular events, and complete the festival in an appropriately celebratory and affective way.

## The Waste Man

I have to say, the stated aims of Exodus - to call attention both to foreign incomers and the internal exile of Margate's disadvantaged - struck me as just a little patronising when I heard about them. Nor could I envision the burning of a lot of old chairs becoming the fire from which the phoenix of Margate's civic beauty would be reborn. But that was before I saw Waste Man in all his fleshly, wooden glory, towering up above the defunct rollercoasters of Margate's Dreamland Funfair. His peculiar, 3D collage of a body was reminiscent of a giant Arcimboldo, devised to remind us all that all is vanity (Self 2006).

Anthony Gormley's sculpture was created over 6 weeks with over 30 tonnes of waste materials collected by Thanet council and local people. The debris was deposited in 'Dreamland', an empty wasteland next to the sea that had been the former site of a vast funfair. Gormley's (2008: 62) sculpture was 'a sign of those who had been dispossessed or refused a place, standing up defiantly to be recognised'.





The process of constructing the *Waste Man* enabled a wide range of people to engage at whatever level they wanted. The work was a collective body made from the raw materials of people's home lives: – beds, tables, dining chairs, toilet seats, desks, pianos, and rubbish (all the limiting baggage of the householder), 'transformed into energy' (Gormley 2008: 62). Volunteers donated waste from the bottom of their gardens, the contents of their sheds, old furniture, as well as documents, photos, and mementos they wanted – for whatever reason - to see ignited. Unlike Ewald's process, in which participation and negotiation are key philosophical components, Gormley took a different approach. The process of local residents helping to build the *Waste Man* meant that the sculpture was filled with the town's debris purged from attics, sheds, and furtive hiding places. The expunging of unwanted objects and mementos, piled up into a beautiful and awe-inspiring structure that was then burned to the ground, seems to literally embody Margate's secrets and material secretions. The depositing of the waste had been an individual act. The residents had turned up with stuff in the boots of their cars, from wheelbarrows pushed across the town, and in large transit vans. The contents of the structure were implicated into the town's identity. The statue was not a representation of Margate or its community politics; it was an embodied performance of the town. The audience for the burning represented a full and varied demographic of Margate town. It was unusual to have such a range of people present for a single event. The burning became an odd form of communion – more than a collective response to something like a council-funded firework display – it was imbued with a certain wordless significance. The transition from following the play's promenade through the town to the Dreamland site moved from a performance about the morality of exile to a performance that created an embodied symbolism – a moment of shared collective emotion. Self (2006):



...with a sudden 'crack', smoke began to pour from his belly and lick up his chest. He was on fire - and so were we. I have no paradigm for what it's like to watch an enormous wooden figure burn - save perhaps the film of the Wicker Man. But without fear of hyperbole, let me tell you, it was a beautiful sight. The silence of the crowd transformed from being surly, to being awed, and we were all moved. Perhaps that was the mystery of the *Margate Exodus*? A voluntary exile, away for them quotidian ills of the early 21st century, and towards some deeper, darker, more chthonic place and time.





The *Waste Man* offers a possible instance of how an exposure to the other might be most effectively created as an indirect experience, an ‘ethical performance whose essence cannot be caught in constative propositions. It is a performative doing’ (Critchely 1992: 7).

As Burvill (2008) argues, these types of ethical performative encounters with the other often appear fleetingly. The openness and responsiveness to alterity are bounded by the more constant fixed ways of knowing. Performance might seek to dislodge or destabilise, but often these tactics fall short. In escaping the paradox of victimhood narrative and understanding refugee experiences, the *Margate Exodus* seems to set up a fresh contradiction, in that the meaningful, corporeal encounter with alterity is often accidental and momentary, therefore the closer the art moves to trying to create a compartment towards the other the quicker the meaningful experience disperses.

In constructing a festival about migration for a town with all the symptoms of dislocation and transience the artists were always going to be fighting against the fragmentary nature of its audience. The *Margate Exodus* festival was unlike other specialized or commercial festivals that give rise to a particular community that defines, or at least recognizes itself, in the very act of attending the event. These types of festival create the condition for *communitas* through the shared interest in, for example, the same genre of music (opera, hip hop, jazz, folk) that will cut across other diverse elements of the audience (age, gender, nationality). However, the *Margate Exodus* defined its audience by the very tensions that existed in the town, the issues of race and otherness, and a struggle over degenerating resources (housing, schools, even a sense of national identity). Self (2006) rightly called attention to the potential of the festival to be patronizing, ‘It hardly seemed likely that the furious - often quasi- fascist - denizens of Thanet were going to respond to the art-house filmic conceit by throwing their arms around the inmates of Nayland Rock in a gesture of human solidarity’.

One of the areas of efficacy that might be expected in 'others festivals' is the degree to which diverse individuals are brought together to form a single homogenous group and be enriched by a temporary *communitas*:

This type of festival goes far beyond purely commercial aims, and often seeks out to 'eventify' salient aspects of the life of a particular society, or to celebrate the culture, beliefs or value system which distinguish it from other societies. Warstat shows how the festivalising process in working-class celebrations in Germany after World War I was aimed at inducing a community framework, in order to secure adhesion by conferring a sense of belonging (Cremona 2007: 11).

Cremona (2007: 11) further notes that the ways in which the community prioritises particular aspects of its culture influences the focus of an event, for example the Little Karoo National Arts Festival emphasises the 'verbal aspect of the productions, which is a way of reaffirming and regenerating interest in the language and the culture behind it'. The festivalisation of culture tends towards a process of identification and (re-) construction of a specific group, and can have an isolating effect on individuals who do not identify or feel connected to the group. The 'art-house conceit' of the *Margate Exodus* festival may have and probably did alienate some of the Margate population. Artangel's tactic was to ensure a diversity of art forms from popular culture (local rock bands) to the crowd-pleasing spectacle of the *Waste Man*. The profile of the artists and the presence of film crews also lent a certain prestige to the town, a sense of 'putting us on the map'. The preparation leading up to the festival was also critical in amassing a growing participation and ownership over elements of the event. Although *Margate Exodus* was never conceived of as a community festival, its component parts all shared a differing need for local contributions.

Perhaps the real efficacy of *Exodus* lies in its bold approach to traversing the complex terrain of multiculturalism in its most concrete and hardest manifestations. The deliberate grounding of the festival in a town like Margate, with its simmering racial tensions brought on by years of immigration, was always going to be a disavowal of the myth of one culture for all, or as Hauptfleisch (2007: 41) argues: 'the rather antiquated idea that there is some kind of 'universal' norm of what constitutes art and culture across the globe, but the notion that there can be a single cultural system in a country'. The ideal of *Exodus* was not to construct a festival for all, or to reflect an aspired-for ideal of a diverse population becoming a unity-culture through a festivalising process, but to reflect on the shared experience of the modern malaise of forced and economic dislocation:

Depending on one's definition of it, multiculturalism is - increasingly - a basic condition of nationhood in the vast majority of countries and any attempt to attain nationhood must deal with the complexities posed by a diverse population. So too must any festival seeking to express the 'soul' of the particular nation. Hauptfleisch, 2007: 42)

Hauptfleisch refers to this new complex as a cultural poly-system, borrowing a term from Even-Zohar (1979), to refer to a web of interlinked but different cultural systems. The emphasis is on distinctive cultural, social and religious systems existing in complex co-existence with each other. The added complexity with multiculturalism is that within

each Diaspora group there are complex relationships with its own value systems with tensions between traditional and hybrid forms of culture influenced by its displacement from homelands.

Hauptfleisch (2007) uses the poly-system term to investigate the multifarious and competing elements of a festival, regarding each individual event as something that may disturb as well as feed into an overall thematic conceptual conceit. The poly-system is therefore more likely to be a series of 'linked sub-festivals - an uneasy composite of (potentially) competing activities' (Hauptfleisch 2007: 42). If we accept that festivals deploy meaning through fragmentary and complex systems of interpretation, then the *Margate Exodus's* spread of activities has a double benefit, one to critique any unifying principle of migration, and second to explore connections and experiences diffusely and ambiguously through diverse aesthetic languages.

Self (2006) draws attention to the ritualism in Gormley's *Waste Man*, and reminds us of the deep connection between the origins of the festival as a holy or religious activity that generated the conditions for *communitas*. The trope of *communitas* is easy to invoke, less easy to identify and understand. Nevertheless, in intention at least, the feast of migration stories (photographs, performance, music, ritual and symbolism) was designed as an intervention into the everyday. The festival was like an agnostic series of medieval mystery plays stripped of narrative and morality but celebrating and exploring the theme of transience in a community that was defined by its own chronic sense of dislocation. The *Margate Exodus* was an exploration of the human residue of modern border controls and economic migration. The festival presented, through multiple art forms, the eddy's and circulating promiscuity of mass migration, and linked it back to biblical and historical movements. It represented these universal themes through contemporary individual stories, snap shots and macro case studies of how the network of national and transnational globalised forces create victims and forced travelers in search of security and stability. The *Margate Exodus* project importantly attempted to create a connection not simply through promoting a singular culture (or even a single type of migratory story e.g. refugee) but in linking the theme to the ways in which everyone in Margate was subject to the same forces. This was a key consideration for the local 'white' population and the tensions that waves of new arrivals had created. The generalized theme broadened its base and its range of encounters and interactions from a festival that was for its own audience (a specific ethnic group) to one of cultural interaction and (to some extent) exchange (an appeal to the experiences of multiple ethno-cultural audiences).

## Conclusion

Klaic, Bollo and Bacchella argue that festivals can and should serve a social function as well as an artistic and commercial one. They suggest that a festival:

enables the residents to create a new vision, a way of looking at the place where they live from another point of view. It can improve the quality of communication among the residents and enhance the mutual understanding of social, ethnic, age and cultural groups (nd: 48).

The *Margate Exodus* provides an important example of a performance festival that

helped to create/reinforce the efficacy of local communities and at the same time impact on the perception of the area within and outside of the area. Drawing inspiration from a long tradition of community arts festivals, street plays and the original tenets of carnival and celebration, Margate Exodus, commissioned artists who could both create art and connect it with the local context. The festival positioned the residents as participants *and* spectators, an essential element if concepts of urban regeneration are to take root. Festivals that have a social intention need to be characterized by multiple levels of engagement. Far too often the economic priorities of regeneration supplant local distinctiveness with a glossy veneer of cosmopolitanism. There is a marginalization of cultural practice that may reflect multiple meanings and the conflicting realities of in-situ communities. In the case of the Margate Exodus the balancing of community participation with a strong and innovative aesthetic agenda can be seen to at, the very least, facilitate a dialogue about the local and global impact of mass migration (we are all travelers...). In doing so the festival may be viewed, albeit tentatively, as having contributed to an affective construction of hope, that could be shared, discussed and owned by those residents who accepted the invitation to re-imagine their sense of place.

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