

# The Poolitical City: “Seeing Sanitation” and Making the Urban Political in Cape Town

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**Abstract:** In an urbanizing world, the inequalities of infrastructure are increasingly politicized in ways that reconstitute the urban political. A key site here is the politicization of human waste. The centrality of sanitation to urban life means that its politicization is always more than just service delivery. It is vital to the production of the urban political itself. The ways in which sanitation is seen by different actors is a basis for understanding its relation to the political. We chart Cape Town’s contemporary sanitation syndrome, its condition of crisis, and the remarkable politicization of toilets and human waste in the city’s townships and informal settlements in recent years. We identify four tactics—poolitical tactics—that politicize not just sanitation but Cape Town itself: poo protests, auditing, sabotage, and blockages. We evaluate these tactics, consider what is at stake, and chart possibilities for a more just urban future.

**Keywords:** urban politics, sanitation, social movements, Cape Town

## Introduction

As the world urbanizes, inequalities are deepening. Just as we are seeing a new intensification and spread of urbanization, so too are we witnessing the emergence of new configurations of the urban political. Vital here is the increasing inequality in urban infrastructure conditions. In this paper our aim is to critically examine urban political tactics in order to understand whether and how they reconfigure the urban political itself.

Our contribution emerges through critical reflection on one case study in which fundamental questions are posed for urban social justice. This is the remarkable politicization of sanitation in Cape Town in recent years. We argue that this politicization, a new moment in the longer histories of protest across the city (Benson 2015; McDonald 2012; Thompson 2014), entails not just the jostling of different political claims and tactics, but the stretching and reconfiguring of the urban political itself. In particular, we highlight the crucial role of four “poolitical tactics” in forging this urban political: *spectacle*, *auditing*, *sabotage*, and *blockage*. None of these four tactics are new in themselves. What’s new, we argue, is the way in which they reconfigured Cape Town’s urban political and challenge the wider urban condition.

Our argument rests upon the societal nature of sanitation as a networked problem. By this we mean, to echo Maynard Swanson’s (1977) account of the emergence of apartheid in South Africa, that sanitation in Cape Town exists not

so much as a specific service delivery problem (although it certainly is in part that), but as a *sociopolitical syndrome*. What Swanson's account of the "sanitation syndrome" reveals is that the question of addressing excess human waste in Cape Town was inseparable from the question of race (linked here to spurious notions of contamination and disease) and social segregation, and with that the development of urban planning as a means of the reorganization of urban space.<sup>1</sup> While these particular racialized geographies and logics of contamination took a certain shape in Cape Town, this historical rationale of dividing colonial cities is not, of course, unique to the city but to a great deal of the global South (e.g. Anderson 1995; Kaviraj 1997; Legg 2008; McFarlane 2008).

Sanitation in Cape Town, in other words, is always already more than sanitation. It is a deeply historical process of racialized segregation that can be traced back to forms of early settler colonialism across the continent and beyond (Fanon 1967). This historical experience has shaped the post-apartheid city in powerful ways, and here we connect Swanson's (1977) sanitation syndrome to Hart's (2014) characterization of South African politics as in a state of post-apartheid *crisis*. This crisis is made most visible through ongoing service delivery protests, including around sanitation, that remain part of everyday urban life in the country over two decades after the fall of apartheid.

Despite significant state investment since the transition to democracy in the 1990s, including the delivery of hundreds of thousands of housing units and utility connections across South African cities (Jaglin 2008; Parnell et al. 2005), it quickly became clear that municipalities could not take on the challenges on their own. By 2004, the realization that municipalities would not be able to stop or meet the growth of informal urbanization in cities such as Cape Town (with over 200 settlements; Mels et al. 2009) meant the state began to allocate resources to informal settlement upgrading, in many places for the first time. This new policy orientation brought forth a new stage of protest and contestation from social movements and community groups in informal settlements that challenged the state around services and related issues such as party political conflict, corruption and flawed tendering processes. This included the formation of national organizations such as *Abahlali base Mjondolo* (Huchzermeyer 2011; Pithouse 2009) and more localized groups such as the *Mandela Park Backyarders* (Desai and Pithouse 2004; Legget 2003; Silver 2011). This post-apartheid crisis and the associated contestations of course link to longer struggles from the colonial era onwards concerning the urban political, particularly land and housing that have reinforced spatial fragmentation and racial division in Cape Town (see for example Cole 1987 on the struggles in the Crossroads "squatter settlement" or Lester et al. 2009 on the spatial legacy of apartheid in relation to township and informal settlement formation). But the post-apartheid crisis is also distinct in important ways.

This is a crisis in which seemingly specific concerns such as delivering adequate toilets or long promised housing to townships and informal settlements and the more generalized abilities of citizens to shape the service delivery agenda (Thompson 2014) can be seen as symbolic of whether South Africa can realistically be called "post"-apartheid and whether the African National Congress (ANC) genuinely has the will and capacity to undo historical sociospatial injustice. This

crisis has been at its most intense at a municipal level. As Hart (2014:5) suggests, local government “has become the key site of contradictions” in the post-apartheid state, and constitutes “the impossible terrain of official efforts to manage poverty and deprivation in a racially inflected capitalist society marked by massive inequalities and increasingly precarious livelihoods for the large majority of the population”.

Given that toilets and sanitation more generally are intimately tied to basic rights and questions of dignity bound up with the Constitution of South Africa (Parnell and Pieterse 2010), sanitation goes to the heart of the wider post-apartheid urban crisis. Hardly surprising, then, that sanitation has become the lightning rod and latest focus for a broader politicization of contemporary Cape Town with an estimated 500,000 (from 3.74 million) residents across the city, mainly based in informal settlements, experiencing inadequate services (Mels et al. 2009; SJC 2014). It is in this sense that we talk about a shift from the “*poolitical*”, which we take to be a politics ostensibly concerned primarily with sanitation delivery, to the “*political*”, a politics that is more squarely identified with Cape Town’s political-economic, racial conditions, and sociospatial trajectories.

We take *poolitics* to be the making political of human waste. Given that human waste is always already political in Cape Town, what matters here is the *particular ways* in which it is politicized. *Poolitics* emerges from the way in which sanitation is seen, and specifically with how ways of seeing sanitation come into contestation with other ways of seeing sanitation. There is always more at stake here than just sanitation, vital though that in and of itself is, and the constant spillover of the *poolitical* into the wider political is at the heart of the four tactics we examine.

The “*poo*” in *poolitical* emphasizes the politicization of human waste, and as we will see the materiality of human waste and the reception of that materiality is an important part of the making of the *poolitical* and its transgression into the wider urban political. The *poolitical* emerges from conflict over different ways of seeing distributions of the body, the infrastructural, and the sensorial, but in so doing becomes a question of dignity, race, gender, citizenship, history, and the prospects of urban social justice. While there are connections here to debates in urban political ecology and around the meaning of the political (e.g. Gandy 2014; Lawhon et al. 2014; Swyngedouw and Kaika 2012), our focus is on the relationship between “*seeing*” and the *poolitical/political*. Indeed, what often gets underplayed in those debates is precisely how conflict between different ways of seeing in the city serves to reshape the nature of the urban political.

In late 2014 we undertook research on Cape Town’s contemporary sanitation syndrome that had been so publicly and controversially drawn out by so-called “*poo protests*”. Our aim, through a series of interviews and site visits across the city, was to understand how different actors—the municipality, non-governmental organizations, social movements, private organizations, technology providers, residents in different parts of the city, the media, and researchers—framed the politics of sanitation. How did different groups understand what the problem was? What solutions did they identify and why? We sought to identify the key actors, their motivations and actions, and to understand how this process that seemed so powerfully politicized—sanitation—was differently seen, and thereby constituted as *poolitical*, and how that connected with urban politics in the city more widely.

There is a great deal of important scholarship on new urban political formations that we draw inspiration from in making our arguments and that we hope to speak back too. In recent years much of this work has been concerned with the politics of occupation from the “Arab Spring”, Occupy and the Indignacio movements of 2011, to protests over democracy in Hong Kong in 2014. This work charts not just new political struggles, but new political questions and forms of deliberation (e.g. Butler and Athanasiou 2013; Merrifield 2013, 2014), and there is of course a much wider literature on the politics of urban activism and social movements globally (e.g. Featherstone 2013; Iveson 2014; MacLeod and McFarlane 2014; Nicholls 2011) and in South Africa, both before such global uprisings (Desai 2002; Ngwane 2003; Pithouse 2008) and through emerging urban political formations such as RhodesMustFall and FeesMustFall mobilising around decolonization on and off University campuses (Mbembe 2015). We are inspired by the attempt in these literatures to locate new trajectories for contestation and struggles for urban justice, new understandings of the urban condition, and new ways in which the political is being forged. And yet, the question of how the urban political is itself reconfigured through the coexistence of ways of seeing, and how they shape multiple political tactics, is often under-examined. Our hope is that our account helps to draw this vital theme out further, given that political struggle for more just cities depends not just on understanding the ways in which the urban political is contested, but how its terms are remade.

## Seeing Sanitation

What do we mean by “seeing sanitation”? We have in mind an expansive understanding of “seeing” that refers to how sanitation is differently perceived. Our emphasis is on how different actors understand the problem of sanitation, i.e. the distinct conceptions of sanitation at work, and how those particular conceptions lead to different forms of politicization, with often distinct tactics.

While, in the broadest sense, we know what sanitation is—the safe disposal of human waste—in practice it is a radically pluralist notion. We see it surface variously as a problem of gender (Molotch and Norén 2010), caste, race and ethnicity (Jewitt 2011; Swanson 1977), religion (McFarlane et al. 2014), as a vital space for securing or generating livelihoods (Satterthwaite et al. 2005, 2015), as a technological challenge of meeting a global crisis (Mara 2012), as a behavioural challenge in relation to cultures of hygiene (Fewtrell et al. 2005), and so forth. This openness is further complicated by questions about whether the key problem in these respective debates is one of sanitation, or resource distribution, or cultural politics around gender inequalities, or everyday habits, or political will and capacity, and so on—and this is before we get to the specificity of location: city, informal settlement, village, or provisions at various in-between spaces such as railways or commuter routes or temporary provisions from emergencies and occupations to cultural festivals. Sanitation is radically unstable, and understood as a multiplicity in which different issues and spaces are perceived as key by different actors—hence, “seeing sanitation”.

By “seeing”, we are of course invoking Scott’s (1998) well-heeled notion of “seeing like a state”. We also have in mind Corbridge et al.’s (2005) work on “seeing the state” and Magnusson’s (2011) elaboration of “seeing like a city”. From this work we make four points about understanding “seeing sanitation”: legibility, simplification, multiplicity, and context. Scott’s account of how the state makes society legible and simplified is important for our purposes for two reasons. First, and most straightforwardly, Scott shows how the power of the state is in large part caught up with how it sees society, i.e. with how it makes life legible, standardized, measurable, and amenable to intervention. As we shall see, the process of counting, mapping, budgeting, and delivering sanitation services is a process at the heart of the poolitical struggle around sanitation in Cape Town. For example the claim, often made by the City of Cape Town (CCT), that 97% of the city is covered by adequate sanitation, is a figure heavily disputed by residents and activists. As Parnell and Pieterse (2010:153) put it, that “you need to be ‘seen by the state’ before benefiting from it”.

Second, one of the key challenges in relation to sanitation in Cape Town is precisely the lack of state simplification of what people should expect as state provision. An important question is that of “progressive realization”. In South Africa socio-economic rights, including to housing, adequate standards of living and health, are subject to the notion of progressive realization in which, “access is not always provided as universal from the outset” (Chenwi 2013:742). The South African Human Rights Commission (1996:184[3]) has a clear mandate to assess progressive realization:

Each year the Human Rights Commission must require relevant organs of state to provide the Commission with information on the measures that they have taken towards the realization of the rights in the Bill of Rights, concerning housing, health care, food, water, social security, education and the environment.

However, the current guidance does not specify particular forms of technology or a minimum acceptable provision, but on the progression of infrastructure over time and in “the face of resource constraints” (Chenwi 2013:742). While municipalities that fail to demonstrate progressive realization can be held to account by citizens, the Human Rights Commission, and ultimately the Constitutional Court, the ambiguity at work here has helped to shape a contested and often bitter poolitics in Cape Town. The lack of clarity plays an important role in how sanitation is seen by different actors and, through the conflict of those different ways of seeing, pooliticized.

Third, however, seeing here is about more than the presence (or absence) of state practices of simplifying and making legible. Magnusson (2011) links “seeing” to how we might understand the political itself. To “see like a city”, Magnusson (2011:12) argues, is to see a politics of different and often connected forms of governing that must inevitably be complex, provisional, and uncertain. To see like a city “is to accept a certain disorderliness, unpredictability, and multiplicity as inevitable, and to pose the problem of politics in relation to that complexity”. Similarly, to see sanitation is to focus on how multiple actors perceive sanitation, and how those perceptions enter into the politics of both sanitation (poolitics) and the city itself. Rather than equating seeing to state simplification as Scott does, then,

Magnusson positions seeing with recognizing and working through the range of relevant agendas in the city. This dual role of simplification (lack of clarity on provisions) and complexity (multiple actors and ways of seeing) is important for our account. To see sanitation in Cape Town is to see the expression of different poolitical tactics that enter into the reconfiguration of the urban political.

Fourth and finally, seeing, as Corbridge et al. (2005) argue in their ethnography of how the Indian state is seen, is shaped by context and history. Ways of seeing do not emerge from the ether. “Sight”—ways of understanding entities like the state—is “learned and based on past experiences”, and that learning and experience is about both formal and informal relations and expectations of the state (Corbridge et al. 2005:24). Sight, then, is relational: “Sightings are always complex and take shape against the sightings of other individuals, communities and institutions ... The issues they engage, moreover, are very often deeply contested, and point in the direction of diverse political agendas” (Corbridge et al. 2005:45). And given that they are relational, they are formed not just through the multiple authorities jostling for position in the city, à la Magnusson, but also “over the airwaves and on computer screens, as well as in paper copy, memory, speech and other direct interactions” (2005:45).

Seeing sanitation is a relation of legibility and simplification, complexity and multiple tactics, and is shaped by contexts and histories. When it comes to sanitation in Cape Town, we will argue, seeing sanitation is always already political and more than just a service delivery problem. What we call poolitics emerges from ways of seeing as they come into contestation with other ways of seeing sanitation.

## Poolitical Tactics

We examine four key tactics through which sanitation is pooliticized in Cape Town—or poolitics: *spectacle*, *auditing*, *sabotage*, and *blockage*. These are not the only ways in which sanitation in Cape Town is seen and pooliticized, but they have been the most important tactics and they have been important to the reconfiguration of the urban political in the city. There are, for example, various forms of upgrading or material improvisation by civil society groups, often working with the state in providing sanitation improvement that we do not discuss here. Our focus is on the key tactics that constitute the poolitical scene in the city. We selected these tactics on the basis of interviews with key actors across the city (residents, policy makers, activists, NGOs, and others), based on fieldwork conducted in November–December 2014.

In each case, the role of space and time is vital and in two broad ways. First, poolitical tactics emerge from and target particular urban places (from local sites to the city in general). Second, they reflect and produce particular imaginative geographies of the city. For example, some state officials emphasized that there are informal settlements where providing sanitation facilities is next to impossible, because local politics means that the facilities will be demolished. Or consider the director of one NGO, who argued that there are townships and informal settlements that exhibit a “politics of entitlement”, and there are those that expect little or nothing soon from the state and instead, as he put it, “get up off their arse”



and try to improve their sanitation situation. Whatever we might make of such claims, the point we are making here is ways of seeing and making poolitical tactics have a geography—material and imagined—that is vital to the form they take.

Swanson (1977) argued that the conflation of racial prejudice and an erroneous construction of the Black body as a contaminant in relation to the plague led to geographical segregation. This informed an aggressive strategy of displacement and separation. For example, many Blacks in Cape Town were forcibly removed under the Public Health Act to Uitvlugt (later forming the settlement of Ndabeni), a sewage farm on the Cape Flats (Swanson 1977). In our account, the geographical legacies of apartheid have not been dismantled, and continue to structure provisions, but the state is now forced to confront a democratic context in which it is expected to progressively address these geographical inequalities. This shift in the sanitation syndrome constitutes a distinct poolitical context from the pre-apartheid syndrome Swanson narrates.

But poolitical tactics are also temporal, because with changing events and concerns the nature of the tactic itself often varies, and it is partly for this reason that tactics are able to play a role in reconfiguring the political field. Temporality here, like spatiality, is more than just a passive medium for politics, but is instead constitutive of it, from moments of spectacle like the “poo protests” we discuss next, or the slow structural violence of infrastructure inequalities of the post-apartheid urban condition that shape the emergence of tactics, to the shifting nature of poolitics in line with municipal and national electoral cycles, or the often slow space of provisions or incremental self-management or forms of audit activism (more on this below).

However, a caveat here. We are not arguing that particular processes necessarily have particular kinds of temporalities, as if in a deterministic relation. While the “poo protests” appeared “fast” and were partly about shock, they have emerged from a long history of frustration and disobedience, and the movement they gave rise to—Ses’khona—is also engaged in “slower” forms of poolitics such as meetings to build awareness and membership. Similarly, while the Social Justice Coalition, which as we shall see is an important part of the narrative, develops a slow poolitics of auditing, they are also invested in poolitics that moves at a faster clip, for instance in activists chaining themselves to the railings of public buildings, or organizing protests at city centre public toilets that take the form of huge queues.

## ***Spectacle: Revolting Geographies?***

We said, “no more should protest happen in the township, but in the CBD—it is that place that brought this legacy”. (Ses’khona activist)

We begin with Cape Town’s infamous “poo protests”: the throwing of shit<sup>2</sup> by residents of informal settlements into targeted sites of the city, including the airport, a main arterial road, the Provincial Legislature, and the Mayor’s car. In the poolitical realm, the tactic of spectacle is a tactic of the senses, utilizing a cultural poolitics of disgust and contamination, inverting the notion that shit belongs with poor urban peripheries and out of sight by casting that shit where it has

absolutely no business being: the spaces of the elite and often hyper-sanitized city. Here is a tactic predicated on what Mary Douglas (2003) called “matter out of place”. One that connects senses, body and city, a tactic not just of shock but of urban critique, a critique of the political-economic trajectory and racial political geographies of a city in one of the world’s most unequal countries.<sup>3</sup> As Steve Robins (2014a) notes on sanitation politics in Cape Town, here was a form of protest that depends not on, say, the slow campaigning of holding the various levels of the state to account around service distribution, but on the fast and shocking potential of spectacle.

The poo protests gave rise to a poorly understood but popular and relatively new social movement in Cape Town: Ses’khona (meaning “We’re here”) People’s Rights Movement. The movement started with residents in informal settlements who were angry that the municipality in 2011, and in the lead up to the municipal elections, provided communities in the poorer parts of the city with open air toilets, i.e. toilets with no walls. While the City of Cape Town claims to have conducted consultations with residents on how to spend the budget for sanitation, such an affront to dignity—a keyword in South African debates given its deep links to the racism of apartheid and longer settler colonial histories—infuriated many residents and gave rise to what was termed the “toilet wars” (Schnitzler 2013).

A focal point of this politicization was in Makhaza, an informal settlement in the township of Khayelitsha. In the run up to the 2011 elections ANC Youth League (ANCYL) activists accused the ruling party at the municipal and provincial level (still in power today), the Democratic Alliance (DA), of racism in the Western Cape High Court through the Human Rights Commission, using the open toilets as evidence. The DA is a relatively new political party dating from 2000 that emerged from a group of white-dominated parties broadly opposed to the National Party (if not offering active support for liberation movements like the ANC) and stretching back to the 1970s. The Western Cape is the only province governed by the DA and not the ANC, with the City of Cape Town municipality being the largest city area under the party’s control. This gives rise to a constant questioning about potential racial prejudice. The open toilets—which have been facetiously referred to as the “loo with the view” (Robins 2014a:493)—were “improved” by the City of Cape Town using walls of corrugated iron, which ANCYL activists tore down amidst claims of DA insults on the dignity of the predominantly black poor, demanding concrete forms instead (Robins 2014b).

The ANC had been using the open toilets to considerable political advantage in the lead up to the 2011 elections, but that changed when it was reported that 1600 unenclosed toilets existed in Rammulotsi township near Viljoenskroon in the ANC-controlled Free-State Province, built in 2003 (Robins 2014a:490). For the Social Justice Coalition (more on which later), the toilet protests were fast being turned into “political point scoring” between the ANC and the DA, given that many of the protests were led by ANC Councilor Andile Lilli (Robins 2014a:496). As one activist argued—and this is a common view held in the city about both political parties —“People are suffering because of these political point scoring and grandstanding”. And yet, the open toilets symbolized more than mere politicking. “It would seem”, Robins (2014c:104) has written, “that the historical processes of racial capitalism



were condensed and congealed into the spectacular image of the open porcelain toilet”.

A key moment of recognition, and an important victory for sanitation-based rights campaigners, came in 2011 when the Western Cape High Court intervened in the debate. In September 2010, Mrs Beja, a 76-year-old woman who had been attacked and stabbed on her way to an unenclosed toilet in Makhaza, filed an application against the City, and in April 2011, Judge Erasmus of the High Court handed down judgment against CCT and the Province. He ordered CCT to enclose 1316 toilets in the Silvertown Project (which includes Makhaza) (Robins 2014a:488). The judgment stated that by building 225 unenclosed toilets in Makhaza in 2009, CCT had violated the constitutional rights of citizens of the settlement, and also mentioned the lack of provisions for disabled people.

Protests and campaigns led to the decision in 2011 by new Mayor Patricia de Lille to fund maintenance services (through national funds from the Expanded Public Works Program) for sanitation in informal settlements with an initial investment of R138 million (£6.5 million) per year, in the form of a janitorial service aimed at maintaining the neglected infrastructures. However, like the open air toilets, this too was an underfunded provision. Janitors working in the Barcelona informal settlement were given restricted hours and therefore less pay than the previous contract. In protest janitors went on strike against the portable flush toilet provider, Sanicare, and some janitors dumped bags of faeces and garbage on the highway. After a month or so without the “buckets” being collected, the conditions in Barcelona were terrible (the bucket system and its inadequacies is described in detail in Taing et al. 2013). A local street committee member (and later Ses’khona leader in the area) described the situation: “There are maggots in the buckets after two days. It is very dangerous. When the toilets were not picked up, health professionals came as lots of children [were] going to hospital”. The community decided to act and ANCYL activists known through their involvement in Makhaza—and who would later go on to form Ses’khona—were invited by community members to Barcelona to discuss what to do.

Residents in Barcelona and elsewhere became increasingly frustrated, both at the situation itself and the apparent refusal of the state to engage with them. In desperation, they decided to deal with the excess of shit by transforming it from a symbol of post-apartheid failure into a poolitical weapon. A Ses’khona activist describes how the idea for the “poo protests” originated from the residents of Barcelona:

They said to us the situation is overwhelming ... Their view was—our kids will die, get disease, get everything from faeces. We are going to take these buckets to N2 [the main road leading to the airport] and dump them so rich people have to travel over them like our kids do ... We felt if community is strongly believing in a solution we must support them.

The protest on the N2, he went on, was “chaotic” but “happy” until the police arrived, firing at and arresting people, and violence ensued. A CCT official in the Informal Settlements section described the aftermath in which the CCT “vehicle was burnt out, the trailers were vandalised and seven of our people were hospitalised”. Following the protest activists and residents in Barcelona regrouped

and discussed options. There was a feeling that the N2 had been the wrong geographical target because it was not focused on elites—after all, one Ses’khona leader told us, “our brothers and sisters that use this route, councillors use it, our sisters working in the kitchens are also using it, people use taxis everyday”. Instead, the next protest was the State Legislature in the central city. The hope was to speak to the Premier and if there was no response to target the offices of politicians. The 11 activists who went could not get access, so they called the media and then emptied the buckets over the steps of the Legislature.

This act operated at multiple levels: first, at the level of the urban sensorium—so that the politicians could appreciate “how it smells in ... Barcelona” and about “the way we live”. Second, and through the media, to raise awareness about the sanitation struggle—“it made a lot of headlines, the impact we wanted”. And third, to prompt the state into dialogue with the activists (the activists wrote to the Premier following the protest). CCT and Provincial politicians and officials responded by vilifying the protests and refusing to engage with the activists, who were dismissed as merely agitating for the ANC in what the DA called a campaign to make the city ungovernable.

The protests continued: the next target was the hyper-sanitized space of Cape Town International Airport, “because it is one of the things that government is grandstanding about—as if they don’t have problems”, in the words of one Ses’khona leader. The airport is a site linked to elite Cape Town’s image of itself as globally dynamic and successful, together with its importance in the tourism sector (McDonald 2012). The nine Ses’khona protesters involved in that airport action were found guilty and given suspended sentences by the Bellville Magistrate’s Court for contravening the Civil Aviation Act being used by the authorities to criminalize what was a powerful act of civil disobedience. The punishment was potentially draconian: the protestors could have served 15 years in prison. But if the state believes that its legal revanchism will work, there is little to suggest that the movement will go away, and it may even grow in light of the guilty verdict. As a leading activist told us, there is going to be more protest, and it may not be peaceful.

In addition to this punitive legal response, the state has responded in ways that reinforce the sensorial poolitics at play in the poo protests. For example, in what must be assumed to be an attempt to appear engaged with the problem, Mayor Patricia de Lille visited Barcelona in June 2013 to inspect sanitation conditions, but in an affront to residents and without seemingly any sense of irony, she wore a mask for the one hour that she was there. As a local leader and Ses’khona activist from Barcelona suggested, “if she can’t stand five minutes then why do we have to stand it for three months [waiting for buckets to be collected]?”.

For the poo protestors, sanitation is seen not just as a question of insufficient toilets and undignified provisions (poolitics), but as a problem of urban political economic and racial inequality (politics). Seeing sanitation in this way conflicts with how the state sees sanitation, and leads to the politicization of sanitation through poo protests. But these activists also see sanitation in other ways. For example, a director of an eco-sanitation company in the city told us about how Ses’khona leaders met with him to discuss possible alternative sanitation delivery through

various new technologies. In addition, Ses'khona's work goes beyond the fast spectacle politics. They are involved in other forms of action, such as joining clergy in visiting wealthier neighbourhoods in the city and knocking on doors to try to raise awareness about sanitation inequalities and to gather further media attention, or in the hard work of building the 50,000 members the social movement claims to have.

The pooliticizing of the urban sensorium is not the domain of Ses'khona alone. Other voices take quite different approaches that seem to have been at least partly inspired by the actions of Ses'khona. For example, in 2014 a group of art-based activists emptied buckets of shit from Khayeletisha onto a plush city centre gallery floor, to disrupt the sanitized space and force a confrontation with the sensorial power of shit. In 2015, student activists at the University of Cape Town threw shit over a statue of Cecil Rhodes as a part of a campaign to expel the material reminders of imperialism and racial subjugation off the campus—that campaign later turned into a student occupation of university buildings and forced UCT to remove Rhodes. If these acts depend, again, on a poolitics of spectacle, others take different approaches to the sensorial city.

Take, for instance, a Christian theological activist based at St John's Parish and at a community project called The Warehouse, in northeast Cape Town. For this activist, drawing on theological interpretations to the poo protests (see also Conradie 2014), there is little poolitical traction in throwing poo at government buildings. More important, he argued, is to get your hands dirty—to immerse yourself in the lifeworlds of the urban poor, and to work with an ethic of care for those who are treated like shit by the state. This ethic of care, he added, is a Christian ethic of unqualified support and is akin, argued the activist, to parents' care for their children, which also involves sanitary care. The activist welcomes the inventiveness of the poo protests in bringing these issues to the Cape Town publics but felt such actions tend to disappear into party politics or self-promoting activists embroiled in media spectacle, rather than the quiet, slower and in fact much dirtier work of helping fellow citizens in the daily lives of their communities. Here then is a different way of seeing sanitation which argues for an intimacy with shit—he compared it to a parent tending to a baby—on an ethical level of support rather than political level of critique.

### ***Auditing: Speaking the State's Language***

Our objective is to make government accountable. (Social Justice Coalition activist)

We move now to auditing, a very different poolitical tactic. While this is a slower form of activism (Robins 2014a), we would not want to set up a dichotomy of the main instigating groups of these tactics in which "Ses'khona = fast" and "the Social Justice Coalition = slow". In practice both groups utilize different forms of temporality. Nonetheless, the process of auditing has become SJC's main form of political intervention in sanitation issues in the city, and has involved using the language of the state to hold it to account through a monitoring of toilet conditions

in Khayelitsha. The SJC has a history in campaigning for human rights, and was formed in 2008 as a response to xenophobic violence mainly against Southern African migrant communities across South Africa, including Cape Town, that left dozens dead and thousands displaced.<sup>4</sup>

In the political realm, the tactic of auditing entails seeing like the state (Scott 1998) and to engage in what Robins (2014a:107) describes as, “the more mundane technical and bureaucratic work of making the state responsive to the needs of the urban poor”. Here, seeing sanitation means to engage with the municipality on the terrain of data, standards and measurement and to speak the language of the technical document, the city engineer and a statistical, mundane geography of maintenance, operation and repair. In speaking a language of the state, SJC maintains a distance from both political parties. One senior SJC activist explained: “We need to see beyond boundaries of politics ... we want to talk about people, rights and life”. If Ses’khona is a politicization of the city, SJC is a politics of citizenship.

The SJC is a mass member organization working with Ndifuna Ukwazi (Dare to Know), a technical support NGO. The SJC rose to prominence in the sanitation debate through the auditing of toilets in the 2010 Safe and Clean Sanitation campaign.<sup>5</sup> The campaign is predicated on the mapping and auditing of toilets in Khayelitsha and the publication of data through reports detailing the often unsanitary conditions and long delays in repair and maintenance faced by residents (see SJC 2014). For instance the 2014 audit undertaken in parts of Khayelitsha found that 49% of toilets were “dirty” or “very dirty”, with one in four flush toilets not working and 50% of interviewed residents reporting that janitors never cleaned the toilets in their area (SJC 2014).

In early 2015 the auditing was further developed through the piloting of real-time data monitoring and reporting by Ndifuna. This allows residents to instantly communicate faults to the municipality. This is an important advance on the current reporting system set up by CCT, which requires having phone credit or walking to the few public phones in Khayelitsha and often paying for an expensive call while kept on hold. The SJC real-time system is about “bringing [the] city to the people’s doorstep, [we] want them to have access to report issues without using their own money”.

SJC/Ndifuna see sanitation as a rights-based struggle for citizen provisions, meaning that there is always a shift from inadequate provision and maintenance (poolitics) to a larger questioning of urban inequality and the role of the state (politics). For example, one of the contested issues that the auditing has examined is the different actors involved in maintenance. This has consisted of two elements. First, provision of chemical toilets has been contracted out to a private company, Mshengu Services. This privatization of public services in a R140 million contract has become fraught, and one SJC activist accused the CCT of “running away from accountability”. The SJC/Ndifuna auditing of Mshengu Services, particularly in relation to maintenance of the toilets, led to an investigation by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC).<sup>6</sup>

Second, and following on, the auditing has raised questions about the level and flow of money. For example, the fact that janitors are funded through a national scheme—the Expanded Public Works Program (EPWP)<sup>7</sup>—rather than the City itself,

and on short-term low-wage contracts at that, has fed debate around CCT's commitment. SJC has been careful to lay blame for poor maintenance not at the feet of exploited janitors but at the CCT itself. As one janitor put it to us, "CCT has the money". These two processes underline the need for the data that the SJC is collecting, and remind us that collecting data always impinges on the political terrain of what the post-apartheid state does and does not deliver its citizens.

SJC/Ndifuna does not reject the poolitics of the spectacle mobilized most prominently by Ses'khona. Instead SJC/Ndifuna draw on moments of spectacle as a way to highlight and move forward the primary tactic focused on ensuring that the municipality delivers the socio-economic rights established in the Constitution. Reports detailing sanitation conditions or reactions to municipal budgets are launched through public mobilizations, including civil disobedience spectacles such as members chaining themselves to railings in front of the Mayor's office in 2013. The process of holding the municipality to account has been met with negative reactions from the local state and very public disagreements (especially across social media) about the way in which the auditing is produced, disseminated and used. Of particular frustration to the municipality has been the perceived holding of data on faulty toilets to be published months after collection in the audit reports, rather than instantly informing the appropriate department.

Despite the hostility between CCT and SJC/Ndifuna, the objective of the auditing work remains focused on improving maintenance through creating a working relationship. As an activist from Ndifuna reflects, after a visit to meet Indian organizations undertaking similar work:

We will get there. One of things I learnt in India is that government was once against social audit process, at some point they understood NGOs only doing this to work with government and make sure spending goes on what it should.

This reveals a commitment to a slow politics of change.

### ***Sabotage: Whose Infrastructural Violence?***

We are preaching for flushable toilets, nothing else. (Ses'khona activist)

The third poolitical tactic we see in Cape Town is infrastructural disruption and damage through sabotage. Sabotage has a long history in the anti-apartheid struggle, particularly between 1961 and 1963 with the launching of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC and the initiation of a campaign against the apartheid regime through targeting economic infrastructure such as pylons and political infrastructure like pass offices. Such political strategies have found new forms in contemporary Cape Town in which the sanitation infrastructure has been intentionally damaged and destroyed. This poolitical tactic could be understood as another means in which the poolitics of the spectacle emerges, but in practice it is more than this. Sabotage in the Cape Town context is a way of materially articulating the grievances that some of the city's population feel in relation to sanitation issues in the absence of productive channels of communication with CCT.

In June 2014 over 100 toilets were broken by residents in the Kosovo informal settlement in Philippi as an explicit rejection of a particular form of sanitation technology delivered by CCT. These toilets were toppled over and then destroyed in front of watching residents, CCT officials and the media. The toilets were portable 100 litre containers surrounded by a concrete wrapping, but for some residents they represented little more than a different form of the hated apartheid-era bucket toilet system and a municipality unprepared to give them the dignified sanitation as per their Constitutional right. The sabotage spread beyond toilets. Days after the incident in Kosovo the electricity substation for the area was destroyed, cutting electricity to 5200 households.

This poolitical tactic of sabotage elicits a strong response from CCT. The Kosovo incident was described by CCT as “unprecedented vandalism and destruction” (City of Cape Town 2014). A senior official at the Water and Sanitation Department appeared dumbfounded in an interview: “Why vandalise? ... you tell me, something I can’t explain, rationalize. It doesn’t make sense”. The point, of course, is that while vandalism describes the deliberate destruction of property (Oxford Online Dictionary) sabotage is a more precise term as it can be understood as an explicitly political statement that reflects in this case how residents see sanitation. The act was planned; it was not conducted in the dead of night by a few individuals, but by large groups of (mainly male) residents, who invited the media. “If you’re going to bring toilets”, a Ses’khona activist told us, “we only want flushable”. Sabotage is a poolitics of refusal and a militant determination, even at the cost of incremental improvements within the community, to secure particular toilet technologies. It calls into questions the notion of progressive realization at the heart of the Constitution, and as such spills beyond poolitics to act as a wider political attack.

Issues of vandalism feature prominently in the public discourse of CCT officials in depictions of the challenges they face in maintenance and operation.<sup>8</sup> As a senior official at the Water and Sanitation Department asserts: “Vandalism and theft is astronomical. They will fit system today and [it will be] gone tomorrow”. Such claims are of course disputed, but we do not dispute that acts of vandalism do sometimes occur. However, according to opponents of CCT even technological faults are conflated with vandalism. An SJC activist argued to us that such accusations are a “dead argument: people do vandalize infrastructure but it is minimum ... [CCT] say immediately that even [a] blocked toilet is vandalism”. Activists offer a counter-argument to the language of vandalism and apportion of blame to local residents by the state. Instead, they point to the inadequate investment, delivery and maintenance by the state as itself a form of state-led infrastructural vandalism.

### ***Blockage: Externalizing Responsibility***

It is not about toilets in my opinion. (CCT official)

The state is, of course, a different kind of actor from the activists and residents described in the preceding three tactics. But we insist on the need to position the state as another actor pursuing poolitical tactics in Cape Town and in the forging



of the urban political, albeit an actor that is more powerful, multifaceted and complicated than the others. The poolitical tactic here deployed by CCT is to appeal to the blockages caused by social and material conditions in order to externalize responsibility. In interviews with officials at CCT three key blockages were presented as reasons for the slow progress in sanitation conditions in some informal settlements and townships: community negotiations, land, and maintenance. Together, these issues reveal how CCT officials see sanitation and, by disputing other ways of seeing, pooliticize sanitation.

The blockages that officials talked about are inter-related. As one official put it, these challenges are not just about money or even about toilets, but about the sociopolitical challenges of urban development in South Africa:

If you give me a billion rand now I can't service informal settlements, there are other issues. Space, density, community, land ownership. It is not about toilets in my opinion. The question is how we going to deal with it in relation to other constraints?

Officials described the challenge of Cape Town being in the "spotlight" as compared to South Africa's other cities, adding that the Western Cape is the only large metro area not run by the ANC. The DA frequently trumpets the City of Cape Town as a relative success in providing services and infrastructures, quoting for example a 97% provision of sanitation coverage (City of Cape Town 2013) (the SJC argues that the figure ignores the reality of sanitation access, conditions and maintenance). The claim that Cape Town is a success story works at multiple levels for the DA.

First, it is an effort to position the party as not only actively concerned about poverty but in fact more effective at dealing with it than the ANC; second, it is folded into an implicit dismissal of the suspicion that the party still harbours racial prejudices; and, third, the idea is used as an explanation for why migration (especially from the relatively poor Eastern Cape, purposefully underdeveloped during apartheid) has become a "problem" that contributes to poverty and prevents CCT from keeping up with the demand for delivering sanitation and other provisions. Here we see a reconnecting of historical geographies of apartheid and discourses of contamination from the black Other (Swanson 1977), in which contemporary geographies are folded into cultural archives and processes of uneven development (and this is replicated in different ways in many postcolonial cities; Fanon 1967; Said 1979).

While this way of seeing sanitation does not determine the perceptions of municipal staff working on sanitation, townships and informal settlements, it shapes the context in which sanitation is discussed and pooliticized amongst officials. Beyond the Constitutional instruction for the state to provide infrastructure and services through progressive realization, there are two broad aims for state sanitation provision to informal settlements in the city.

The first is the temporary provision, the basic supply provided through the Water and Sanitation section of CCT, and this is set at one water tap to 25 households and one toilet for five households. The second is the technical definition of upgrading for informal settlements, which is set as a one water tap or toilet to one family level. Officials argued that it is extremely difficult to meet these because of one or other of the three blockages.

The first blockage is community leadership. Community negotiations were identified by officials as time-consuming and disruptive for sanitation provision. One official working on sanitation and water in informal settlements estimated that his team spent “maybe 80%” of their time in different forms of community consultation: which leaders to speak to when providing sanitation, who to keep happy in order to ensure systems can be maintained, and so on. In some areas, negotiations can become conflictual. Municipal staff who are associated with providing inferior provisions or with the payment dispute for sanitation janitors have been attacked, and the municipality has provided police escorts to neighbourhoods where there had been flashpoints. In Barcelona, for example, it is claimed municipal staff would only enter to maintain sanitation when women from the area assured them that they would be protected.

Part of the difficulty for the municipality here is keeping track, with fairly minimal staff, of community leadership shifts, overlapping responsibilities and conflict within these communities. In some areas, it will be clear that democratically elected local councillors are key; in others it will be traditional leaders, landlords, NGOs or activists, or perhaps a mixture of these, holding multiple histories of opposition and complicity, social networks and outlooks (see Harber 2011 on the myriad of power relations existing in the informal settlement of Diepsloot). Sometimes, one official said, it can take two or three years just to get people on board to construct toilets. There may of course be more at work here: it does not appear likely that all CCT staff are necessarily committed to understanding local leadership processes, and the idea that dense and largely black neighbourhoods are opaque or even unknowable itself has long colonial routes entrenched by the cultural and physical geographies of apartheid.

The second blockage alleged to reduce provision is land availability and the capacity to develop informal settlements located on private land. Land is crucial for reducing poverty in South Africa, not just for housing but for transport, commercial and industrial development and public services (Parnell and Pieterse 2010). One of the reasons there has been such a significant growth of backyard dwellings in Cape Town is because the poor are restricted to apartheid-era land allocation systems (Turok 2001), a set of conditions that exacerbate the ongoing spatial legacies of apartheid and are further reinforced by the environmental protections that prevent building in areas of vacant land (Cape Town is a World Heritage Site for its plant life) (Parnell and Pieterse 2010).

In cases where land is privately owned, the municipality may eventually calculate that the only practical option is to buy the land in order to control service and infrastructure provision. For example, in Sweet Home Farm, an informal settlement in Philippi which has been inhabited for over 20 years, CCT gave up on negotiating with the private landlord (who officials claimed was refusing enhanced sanitation) and bought the land “at huge cost”. In some areas, however, for example in flood zones, the only long-term option CCT sees is to relocate the residents, which of course is an often protracted, emotional and highly charged process.

Sometimes the land problem is to do with private ownership or even another state agency—e.g. the informal settlement Los Angeles is on a nature reserve—in other cases the challenge is to do with what officials call “land invasion”. For

example, the occupation of the informal settlements of Marikana and Lwandle forces vis-à-vis the Constitution some kind of minimum state provision of services on an at least temporary basis, but state officials insist that it is unfair on other neighbourhoods who are “legitimately” in the queue ahead of these “invaded areas”. This process both subverts and underlines the need for the auditing that SJC is developing, i.e. one with greater flexibility in accounting for the changing conditions and needs of people, land and housing in the city.

While the municipal logic here clearly fails to engage with the longer-term under-servicing of poor neighbourhoods, and constructs a false division between the “deserving” and “underserving” poor, state officials are bound within limited budgets and capacities and forced to make some form of decision about how to distribute resources. What complicates this further still is the accusation by some activists that the DA links invasion to migrants from the Eastern Cape, and that this is a racist logic of incoming and poor Blacks. Municipal officials cannot escape these discourses, and so the operations of technical specialists are always already poolitical operations.

Whatever we think about the claims around “legitimate access” and “migrant invaders”, it must surely be a minimum requirement of any notion of social justice for sanitation in South Africa that the pressure on and fast-changing nature of urban land and its occupation cannot be taken as sufficient reason to persist with gross socio-spatial inequalities. The discourse surely needs to shift towards one of more sustained distribution of land and resources rather than a form of divide and rule predicated on occupation, temporality and the migrant figure (Parnell and Pieterse 2010).

The third blockage is the maintenance of infrastructure, repeatedly mentioned as the key challenge for sanitation services. This links in particular to the claim that residents “vandalize” provisions, which was attributed to a range of reasons for perceptions that provisions are not good enough to people selling materials to pay for drug habits to the more generalized sense that violence is simply a part of life in South Africa given the history of apartheid.

The appeal to blockages, then, is how CCT sees sanitation. It is a useful appeal for municipal officials as a poolitical tactic in that it externalizes responsibility for a lack of progress, and can shift over time and space (here the problem is community negotiation, there it is land, over here it is maintenance, and when we get done with one another arises, shifting the poolitical frame ...). Given that these blockages spillover beyond providing toilets to questions of local leadership, land politics, migration, and violence as an alleged part of life, the poolitical realm rapidly enters into the making of the wider political realm.

A caveat here: the state, as Parnell and Pieterse (2010:157) argue in relation to Cape Town, cannot be “treated as an uncontested and monolithic force”, but is “replete with contestation and contradiction”. As they show, the local state needs to have the capacity and data as well as the will and the money to deliver infrastructure, services, and housing at scale. The municipality, as they argue, needs to be able to subsidize and create adequate institutions for the provisions of daily life. The officials we spoke to are committed, on the frontline and do not make the budgetary decisions to allocate and distribute resources. Municipal officials are

not equivalent to city politicians, even if officials are restricted to their role as “programmers” for the DA’s particular (limited and stuttering) “will to improve” (Li 2007).

## Political Stakes and the Urban Future

Where do these different tactics leave Cape Town’s contemporary sanitation syndrome? In 2015, the city allocated less than 2% from its water and sanitation capital budget to informal settlements, while continuing to invest vast sums in maintaining services to wealthier neighbourhoods (Davis 2015). While temporary and permanent toilets to informal settlements are funded through separate budgets, there is a long way to go in terms of state support for infrastructural justice. The colonial segregation that was to precede the apartheid regime was the architecture of the sanitation syndrome Swanson examined in 1977, but while these previous eras of infrastructural governance have ended, they have not been dismantled. Processes of segregation, of disproportionately protecting and servicing minority white neighbourhoods, services, infrastructure and opportunities, remain painfully visible in the city today.

There are other resonances with Swanson’s account, including the associations made by some municipal and national officials between “insanitary” spaces and practices in townships and informal settlements and race, where the implication is that the inadequacy of sanitation is the responsibility of residents and not the state. These narratives hover over the edge of the comments made by officials, or reported in the media, or occasionally heard in the street. Health and disease outbreaks such as plague may no longer be explicitly invoked in connection to Black bodies, but the tendency to attribute blame to Black bodies does resonate with Swanson’s account of the sanitation syndrome.

But the contemporary sanitation syndrome is different from the past. People now live in the constant shadow of failed promises. The architecture of the contemporary sanitation syndrome is one of failed service delivery promises and frustrations over democratic inertia. The poolitics of sabotage no longer subverts an apartheid state but a democratically elected one. The practice of auditing and demanding accountability cannot be ignored by the state and media, and the poolitics of spectacle is able to rapidly circulate through various media locally, nationally and globally.

The different tactics at work here do not play out equally for all parties. What is at stake in all of this is the health and wellbeing, and therefore livelihood and education, of ordinary residents in informal settlements and townships in the city. There is lots more at stake besides. For the leaders of the poo protests, imprisonment. For residents damaging infrastructure, the ire of the state and police and perhaps some of their neighbours. For state officials, the frustrations of slow progress and, in some, albeit rare cases, fears for their own safety. Given these stakes, it is vital that we consider the possibility of a more just urban future for sanitation.

Four sightlines seem to us particularly important. First, we may well see the visceral material politics of sabotage increasingly articulate growing anger across the poorer areas of the city, in ways that focus attention on the continuing forms

of racialized oppression through infrastructure and which force increasingly punitive responses by the local state. It is vital that social movements are able to connect with these acts and lever the frustration into a wider politics of the city.

Second, and following on, we see most promise in the tactic of auditing for creating collaborative forms of infrastructure governance in the city in which wider publics become involved in operation and maintenance. The SJC auditing opens up the possibility to reclaim the state by speaking and seeing as the state does, but in a way that commits to radical redistribution. There are examples in other contexts of a kind of convergence between state and activist priorities around practices such as auditing or enumerating, such as in Mumbai (Appadurai 2002; McFarlane 2011).

That said, such practices of working together are also risky, and we are not naive about the possibilities here. For example, the residents who activists speak for and with could feel betrayed—rightly or wrongly—by a seemingly closer relation between state and groups like the SJC. If the tactic is unsuccessful, the consequences for the organizations involved are considerable; the finances and energies expended, the hope created amongst members for change and the redundant technology invested in.

Third, the nature of engagement between the state and activists will be important for future sanitation delivery and for the wider urban political condition in the city. Our discussion of the state and blockages reminds us that there needs to be, on the part of activists, at least some recognition that the state—despite its faults, the enduring apartheid legacies and its neoliberal orientations—is multifaceted, that there are potential openings in which activists need to show understanding of the challenges the state faces and a willingness to build some form of working platform. There are lots of examples of this in Cape Town—for example Slum Dwellers International’s work is predicated on finding ways of working with the state on informal settlement upgrading projects. As one SDI activist put it to us, it is sometimes important to find ways of “being in the room” rather than shouting from the outside. Many activists understand this, of course, but in the to and fro of political contestation this is a lesson easily cast aside.

For the CCT, the failure to engage constructively with activists, and especially with auditing, will mean losing a potential ally that could help materially transform sanitation conditions. Creating relationships with committed activists is of course difficult for officials who often need to appear beyond the political fray. And yet such forums are possible, and there are numerous examples from Mumbai to Porto Alegre and beyond where meaningful progress has been made (McFarlane 2011). Here lies a new way of seeing sanitation for the local state: as a collaborative process of co-producing knowledge, data, access and maintenance. Such a relationship also requires the state to find an ethic of engagement with activists.

Fourth, and finally, it is likely that different tactics will remain necessary at different moments. For this reason, while we see greatest potential in auditing tactics, we see a need for an openness to a poolitics of experimentation, rather than simply endorsing one approach as necessarily more effective at all times. There will be moments when a repooliticization of conditions is required and where auditing, collaboration, or sabotage hold little promise, and here imaginative tactics like the poo protests will prove invaluable.

## Conclusion

The tactics we discuss in this paper have implications for how we understand the urban political today both in Cape Town and beyond, and in three key ways. First, analytically, our focus on “seeing”, by examining how different actors frame and politicize urban inequalities, is a useful move for understanding urbanism more widely. How is urbanism understood as a problem, and by whom, and what solutions are being offered? Seeing, as a relation of simplification and complexity, shaped by context and history, is an analytically useful approach for understanding what is at stake and for whom in contemporary cities.

Second, in terms of content, the four tactics we highlight—spectacle, auditing, sabotage, blockage—are at work in different ways across the world. Think for instance of the spectacle politics of mass demonstration and occupation that reverberated across the planet in 2011 and 2012 (Merrifield 2013). Of attempts by social movements to hold international capital or states to account through evermore available data—from Wikileaks and Transparency International’s disclosure of corrupt money through the London financial district to surveys of the power of urban real estate markets by housing activists. Of ongoing forms of sabotage of fracking infrastructure by First Nations (Klein 2014) or of Israeli power cables during the Gaza onslaught. Of efforts by states to explain away cuts to urban services and infrastructures through a logic of “unavoidable” austerity or structural adjustment. Together, they powerfully illustrate the diversity of tactics being mobilized by various urban actors and how they are opening up new political possibilities in often very different ways.

Third, the nature of the struggle in Cape Town, that constituted not just a service-delivery question but a larger process of remaking the urban political in the city, will become increasingly important in cities globally. While so much of what happens in Cape Town is context specific—a neoliberalizing post-apartheid city with a developmental state (McDonald 2012)—there are insights in this story for the constitution of urban struggle more generally. Cities are becoming more and more unequal, and that is expressed materially in basic infrastructures. As sanitation becomes ever more commodified (Satterthwaite et al. 2015), we will see more movements around it which ask a bigger question: if the state cannot provide a basic form of urban provision, then what kind of city do we have? And so we see movements such as Mumbai’s “Right to Pee” gathering strength, or campaigns against water and sanitation privatization in South America creating new constellations of resistance, contestation, and political action. Linking these campaigns to wider calls for spatial justice and the democratization of cities becomes a crucial task in turning the tide against wider urban inequality, particularly in an era of enormous (and real-time) production of spatialized urban data (Kitchen 2014) in which the state can be held to account in new and powerful ways.

We live in turbulent global times in which urbanization and urbanism are increasingly central to the political. In a moment when citizens are able to mobilize, communicate and challenge in new data-driven networks of activism, city governments will be forced to create political space to learn from and react constructively to urban social movements like SJC and Ses’khona rather than marginalize and criminalize them. The consequences of failing to address these politics are stark; material inequalities will continue across the infrastructures that mediate



urban life, perpetuating and exacerbating anger against municipalities and other state actors whilst forging new experiments for equality and justice.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See for example a series of legislative measures, including: 1866 Pass Law; 1913 Black Land Act No 27; Public Health Act 1919; and Housing Act 1920.

<sup>2</sup> We use terms like “shit” and “poo” both because activists themselves do, and because we do not wish to “sanitize” the nature and politics of what is going on here.

<sup>3</sup> South Africa is ranked as the fourth most unequal society in the world according to the Gini co-efficient, a measure for ranking income inequality.

<sup>4</sup> The movement’s politics emerged also in relation to Treatment Action Campaign’s (TAC) AIDS campaigns of the early 2000s (see Robins 2008).

<sup>5</sup> An important precedent for SJC is the success of the Treatment Action Campaign in its use of the Constitution to challenge the South African state in order to access antiretroviral drugs for HIV patients (see for instance Heywood 2009). Both movements involve some of the same activists.

<sup>6</sup> Mshengu were awarded a contract worth R140 million to service the 5000+ chemical toilets across Cape Town’s informal settlements between 2010 and 2013. Whilst the City of Cape Town has admitted to SJC/Ndifuna assertions through the auditing work that the contract has not been fully delivered by Mshengu, it has failed to hold the contractor to account and has even awarded it with further work since the original contract.

<sup>7</sup> The EPWP is a South African government programme aimed at providing income/poverty relief for the unemployed through temporary work paying around R75 per day, with money allocated to municipalities across the country.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance the issuing of the 2009 Theft and Vandalism Report by the Water and Sanitation Department documenting over 10 cases of large-scale “vandalism” (City of Cape Town 2009).

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