

# *Offscreen: Making It and Faking It*

Kim Gurney

Introductory reading compiled by Catharina Gabrielsson

# Reading of Kim Gurney's *Offscreen: Making It, Faking It*

Compiled by Catharina Gabrielsson

There are strong cinematographic meta-dimensions to this piece. Not only because it's structured like a film script, but also for what it conveys about the production of films, like a *mise en abyme*. The Spectacle, first brought up by Guy Debord, may well at this time constitute the naval for our medialized and screen-transmitted perception of reality. But there is obviously more to it than that. I am reminded of the Japanese film *After Life* (1998) by Hirokazu Kore-eda that, much like 'Offscreen . . .', centres on the frantic activities going on behind the scenes, the 'loading space' of magic. Shot in what looks like a dismal social service centre, *After Life* follows the activities at a waystation for the souls of the recently deceased. Once a week, a group of bewildered newly-dead arrive at the station. They are taken care of by social workers, who encourage each person to identify his or her happiest memories. These form the cue for a team of set designers and

film makers, who go about replicating the chosen memory. At the end of the week, the recently deceased watch the films of their recreated memories in a screening room. As soon as each person sees his or her own memory, he or she vanishes to whatever state of existence lies beyond and takes only that single memory with them.

*After Life* is a celebration of the emotional and emancipatory power of the moving image. It's linked to the ingenuity and skills of the crew who with very little resources, in just a few days, manage to shoot the scene that will allow the soul to pass on into eternity. Kore-eda's expression of the essential magic of film resonates with Ingmar Bergman's description in his autobiography, where he accounts for his sense of wonder and awe at first encounter with the *laterna magica*. But by also focusing on what goes on behind the scenes, Kore-eda explicitly forwards an understanding of

the prerequisites for the making of this magic. In 'Offscreen . . .', the magic is evidently of a radically different kind: not the unforgettable moment that saves a soul, but the banal ephemerality of a one-minute commercial where most of the efforts are rendered futile, meaningless or lost. But it has the same joyful approach to the collective, and to collective work, collaborating for a common goal. The narrative (if we may call it that) touches upon the face of one after the other, who all have their trajectories, their particularities and skills, entering at significant moments to do their bit.

Kore-eda's rendering of the messiness behind the scenes – the makeshift props employed to transmit an unforgettable ride in an airplane, for instance – carries implications for the definition of art. Shifting offscreen is a shift towards labour, expanding the limits of what counts as art – the 'work of art'. It meddles with the terminology of Hannah Arendt, for whom 'work' is the highest category of human endeavours, elevating us from the toils of biological existence that she calls 'labour'.<sup>1</sup> There is a gesture of radical generosity to this shift that, in Gurney's case, comes with the method of carefully observing, engaging, documenting and composing the various assemblages that are in question here: the intensities of sites, places, materials, objects, and people wrought together in 'Offscreen . . .'; the 'constant mashup of uncanny objects [that] offer a landscape

of surprise'. And, similar to Kore-eda's *After Life*, 'Offscreen . . .' puts forth the significance of 'the kind eye that grants both people and things a second chance'.

There is an inversion going on here. In that way, putting backstage frontstage points to issues that have less to do with the definition of art, and more to do with the politics of visibility and invisibility that resound in Western culture. Pulling the drapes in front of the 'loading space' is not only addressing the question of labour, but also the concealing of labour. It's a theme that underpins modern architecture, making an appearance in eighteenth-century Britain – as the landed gentry planned their houses to ensure the invisibility of servants<sup>2</sup> – and pops up again, on a different scale and register, in contemporary places of leisure and consumption where service and maintenance are kept out of view. In the current phase of so-called post-industrialism, the abyss of production has been pushed to such a distance that the conditions of labour can be safely ignored. By inverting the gaze, 'Offscreen . . .' carries a charge that is both aesthetic and political. It resonates with the architecture of theatre in contemporary design practice – such as the work of Haworth Tompkins in the UK and Patrick Bouchain/Construire in France. Haworth Tompkins's work at the National Theatre combines the production of new workshop spaces with the opening up

of backstage space to the public; and thereby the opening up an aesthetics of the found, of accretion, of mark and trace is prioritized. It's a strategy that ultimately proposes that architecture (the total architecture of the institution, not just as a space of theatre itself) is articulated as if in process (if the 'trace' does not become over-aestheticized and precious, as it sometimes does), and ultimately performative, formed and reformed with each theatrical event. In the work of Bouchain, the reclamation of 'backstage', and an aesthetics of the as-found, is directed at the notion of preserving previous traces of labour – evidence of the industrial past and the of the lives that were defined by it.

'Offscreen . . .' affords a view of the potentiality of the forgotten, ignored or abandoned. It captures the immanence of what Ash Amin once called 'the ordinary economies of the city', factors that are enfolded but downplayed in Gurney's script.<sup>3</sup> Lapses in town planning, lingering land use, investments held back, speculations awaiting the moment to strike from the undercurrent to people willing or desperate enough to take a job where they can get it. As long as there is work, the production of dream worlds keeps racism and capital at bay. As long as there is work, there is space for those improbable assemblage of things that weren't meant to fit together. There is a sense of relay and resonance across spaces here, of the mobility of materials

artefacts and labour. I am reminded of how certain sound artists write of the connectivity of sound in its vibrational effects, of sound's ability to transfer through boundaries and connect spaces. Sounds, smell, trades, flows of energy: a constant fluctuating mobility affected by pressure. The physical pressure of spraying, glue and smells linger throughout the text.

There is a sense of hope in how 'Offscreen . . .' shows how people keep going (and what keeps people going) in constant dynamic adaptations to failures in infrastructure, the fallacies of economies and policies, and transformations in technology and media that will change the livelihoods of millions. This tracing of people, practices and objects conjures up a logic of intensities, or ecologic – a levelled plane of immanence where the spatial hierarchies between on and off stage cease to exist simply by following the lines of production, appearance and use, reuse, reappear-ance and reproduction in that 'cyclic' motion that is addressed and delicately placed in the middle of the script. The doubling of realities, the intersecting of thinking, building and projecting realities complicates the notion of time. It's a doubling that not only concerns production, postproduction and film, but also a doubling between the reader, the author, the reality of the set and the hyperreality of cinema or film.

We're brought to this place through a mix of reportage, ethnographic inquiry and internal monologue – simultaneously observing and thinking it. The systemic and meticulous retracing of sequences and spoken words creates a feeling of things happening in real time, as if to joyfully exaggerate the imaginary of consumption society. The enthusiasm of advert languages; the humour in the original phrasing of the interlocutors; the making of objects destined for destruction, but which, at the same time, are destined to destroy another one's imaginary. But the voice of the author of this film script, composed of five major shots, remains mysterious. We do not literally hear her voice, but perhaps it is there, and perhaps it's ultimately to do with the question of perception. As if there is someone speaking silently from a cellar hole, I would think, or a man-hole, whose voice is distributed through underground channels. It makes sense to think of it as a decentred subjectivity, a consciousness or 'mind' able to move around freely and take up that body one instance, another one the next, giving voice to an array of actors. I know this is a misreading, but the question of 'self' or 'voice' are real, tangible and hard aspects to deal with when working with a radical empiricism, practicing the art of paying attention. If the allegedly neutral position adopted by 'objective' research shuns the question of ethics, the documentary approach adopted here puts ethics centre stage.

- 1 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
- 2 Robin Evans, 'Figures, Doors and Passages', in: Robin Evans, *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (London: Architectural Association, 1997).
- 3 Ash Amin, 'The Ordinary Economies of Cities', in: Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (eds.), *Globalization, Institutions, and Regional Development in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

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Text and images by Kim Gurney

A Storyboard

## **Shot 1**



An Easter Island statue beside a large silver brain marks a cornucopia of objects outside Props to the Stars, neighbours to Sets & Devices. Over time, these two props have shapeshifted around the yard, taking up a variety of poses while breaking down to reveal their spongy innards.

ACTION: We open on a drive to Paarden Eiland, a Cape Town industrial node, to source steel from a manufacturer. This square tubing will create the armature for a new setbuild: a six-metre-high tiered cake that, once complete, will support a range of costumed film characters in a high-kicking song-and-dance routine to advertise a comparative insurance calculator. The scene will culminate with a confetti bomb set off by the special effects workshop two doors down from Sets & Devices. But all that razzmatazz under bright studio lights is yet to come. I am seated in the front of a pickup as Nawawie Mathews narrates the extreme pressures of the set-building business: 'If we are late, it's the end of us.' Sets & Devices is geared up for big builds, he adds later. They relish the impossible and get the most ridiculous lead times on projects. 'Over the years we have done some amazing stuff in the shortest possible times,' he adds. A life-size elephant with flappable ears that can host a crowd of partygoers on its back? Check. A giant cheese that will dwarf a human actor to make them appear mouse-sized? Check. A period house that will rock and crumble on a rotating axle into the sea? Check. Mathews agrees that a lot can happen in postproduction, but to get the real look and feel, nothing beats an actual setbuild. At Macsteel, 70 lengths of 25 square tubing of 1.6 thickness is added up by Billy, with tattoos on her arms and a wealth of experience in engineering. Back at the workshop in Salt River, off the key spine of Voortrekker Road that joins the city centre with its northern suburbs, a team of nine full-time staff will make a circular base from this square tubing, brace it and reconfigure. Mathews already has the modular build in his head. The bottom tier will be in quarters; the second tier in halves; the third and fourth tiers full, he tells me on the journey back, light, smaller and easier to carry and assemble. They may arrive on site to find the location is on the tenth floor, for instance, so the build must always be nimble. Mathews should be at mosque now, it is nearly 12:30 on a Friday but 'it's between me and my God' when a deadline kicks in. It evens out in the end, he adds, catching hours here and taking them there. Today: 'I'm kicking in.'

Back in the office, Mathews sketches things on the computer. His job is largely client-facing and then overseeing aspects of production and quality control as well as pitching in with the physical build – usually metal- or woodwork. It all begins with translating an initial sketch from clients into something more technical and three-dimensional and this is where the digital sketching comes in. Mathews was a pipefitter and boilermaker who trained in mechanical engineering before running a clothing manufacturing company until cheaper imports gave that a knock. He is wearing a T-shirt that reads *afterthefall*, in reference to recent nationwide student protests about decolonization and financial access, pushed-up sunglasses, combat pants and flipflops. The desk is cluttered and the waste basket is full. Behind his head is a framed piece of textile: blank canvas. The fan is on. Both landlines are down. And they have a crappy little website, he adds, but it makes no real difference since they operate on word of mouth. 'Most places nowadays, they have these fantastic websites, but when you go there and actually deal with them, the service is shoddy. The quality is poor. So we are not big on the social media pages.'

Tomorrow, they will sort the plywood to make the tracking board, which is the cladding for the tiered cake, from white 6-mm MDF. They will use wide-flanged pop rivets spaced to look like part of the detail. The boards will not be riveted until they are on site. They will lay this all out as an octagon. Cut the circle in four and four again. The very first act in this complex puzzle is to inscribe a 6-m-diameter circle on the concrete workshop floor and then from this layout to work out the angles for the board. With some pace, the build kicks in. Mathews kneels down with chalk in hand to draw that very first shape. He makes recalibrations in his head and on his cell phone calculator, then drills in a screw to mark the centre point. The team sets up the skeleton using tape measure, string, a square pencil and drill. The rods from Macsteel get offloaded and replaced with some rugby poles made earlier for another commercial, stacked for delivery. A bench is spray-painted. Things wind down. It's Friday and people want to get home.



## Shot 2

**ACTION:** Initially, the cake was supposed to rotate, but budget and time constraints ultimately keep the design stationary. The commission expands to include a door that must look like the door in a set – a painted flat, in film parlance – that will swing open for the key character, a meerkat, to step forward into another world. A cherry tree gets added to the wish list, in a riot of pink blossoms, and a manhole cover on a raised platform. Later, it is decided a real tree at the filming location will better stand in and the fake tree is cancelled; they build it anyway to possibly sell on as a prop.

The entire setbuild of cake, door, tree and manhole cover should take ten days of regular working hours to complete, the team estimates. The production process is a complex, hierarchical and border-hopping one, since 90 per cent of the originating clients are based overseas, explains Bobby de

Beer, manager of Sets & Devices. He runs his business with an unlikely combination of steely resolve and a kind eye that grants both people and things a second chance. The work is very cyclical, driven primarily by seasons and exchange rates. South African summer is silly season when the workshop is a productive din and eerily quiet in the brief lulls between jobs. A regional drought given front-page coverage helped make those lulls in 2018 deeper. The set builders are not good at waiting. They find a multitude of odd jobs to do instead: renovating a house, turning the legs of a table, welding chairs, assembling a replica sofa. Some have specialist mechanical skills and they use them, often tackling things no-one would touch, as De Beer puts it – straightening the chassis of a write-off or remodelling a motorbike from scratch. But when a new job card walks in the door, an adrenalin surge is palpable. The deadline is always short and immovable.



### Shot 3

ACTION: The art director for the shoot, Ninon de Klerk, also runs Artappel prop house opposite Sets & Devices in a parent design company called Artichoke. De Klerk, an architect by training, is a major and long-standing client, and she pops in and out of the workshop to confer on the build's progress. The cake armature is at its heart. The rolled steel must be cut in the correct dimensions and welded together. This is a specialty for Luke Lentin – welding and sheetmetal work. He says: 'In this kind of a job, we can't help but work under pressure because they want everything *yesterday* . . . My part of the deal is getting it done as soon as I possibly can because I do the skeleton. That has to be done quickly and perfectly because people have got to build on that.' Lentin has been with Sets & Devices about 20 years now. On his feet all day, he ends his shift with a grubby face from the metalworking visor and supported by a crutch for a sore knee. He always wears blue jeans and a long-sleeved shirt on his tall and lanky frame. His fingers stick out of cut-off gloves that keep the shape of his hand when he sheds them onto the tabletop. Recalling a previous build that was memorable, Lentin draws with his finger in the dust of the table to demonstrate the shape of a giant cheese so large it had to be transported on the back of an articulated lorry. He is one of the first to arrive in the mornings, driving his old Mercedes-Benz and bringing along his colleague Aristote (Ari) Manza, who also lives in the northern suburbs.

Manza is tall and slim, a runner who is training for the ultra-marathon. When he arrived in South Africa in 2013 from the Democratic Republic of Congo, he couldn't speak any English but is now conversant. 'I love it,' he says of his work. 'I enjoy it, every part. I am making good relationships with everyone. Each and every place I am going I am meeting different kinds of people.' Manza is a dexterous set builder who learnt his carpentry trade from his father and his father before him: 'That is what we are doing back in our family – grandfather, father, brother, uncle.' Manza is also a deft sewer and sets up an impromptu station one day, making new seat covers

for a car. He bends over a long train of black material flowing to the floor wearing a red and white long-haired wig and black puffer jacket with a red scarf looped in an elegant knot at his throat. Two powerful globes illuminate the unlikely installation. When Manza leaves the company for broader horizons in Belgium later that year (2018), his sewing station remains behind. His description of set building suggests iterative design thinking. 'That is what we are doing. We make something smaller, put it together and it grows – like the cake.' He thumps his knuckles of his one hand into the other four times to drive home his next point. 'With sets, when the pressure comes, you have to push. You have to push.' Manza wears a soft blue cap, like a butcher's, perched on the top of his head, and pitches in with the build.

Over the ensuing days, the team constructs the cake armature in interlocking pieces. Exact measurements and design recalibrations are sketched with a pencil on scrap paper or directly onto wood surfaces. While building the cake skeleton, the team also assembles a stage for a student play on the side. Its elevated platform is reached by a ladder. The revolving door also starts to take shape. It goes through three versions of working drawings. The door gets hinged into a frame but one side will not close. Some wood is sliced off. The pediment is made with wood and Perspex; budget constraints mean different solutions for things. The pediment needs to be more arched. Some glue and paint are used to age it. Later on, the alignment of the bricks is out of whack. After some argy-bargy about tools, the design is finally resolved. The bricks get pulled off and put back on again. The recalled tree is complete. Some real foliage is attached to its branches as a final flourish. At day's end, the set builders cool themselves off with a high-pressure air hose. Brett Blake, set builder and de facto workshop foreman, opens a beer and passes it around.

**Shot 4**

ACTION: The circular steel frame is lying on the floor with clamps placed at equidistant intervals along its perimeter. Later, the team puts the entire construction together and welds it in place. Everyone peels off into subgroups to get the jobs done. Offcuts and dust accumulate in the workshop, so does banter. The radio is broadcast from an old sound system in the kitchen. The chef, Liso Mkiva, who doubles as a proficient set builder, daily rings a brass bell to summon the crew for lunch.

The cake's tiers have special wooden hoists that secure them for welding. The welding torch and angle grinder are going all day. Blake is the locus. Today, his trilby has a feather in it and when the day is done, he hangs the hat on the gas tank of the welding machine. A large cylindrical white tube is cut and then painted by Xolile Siyana to create the cake's centrepiece. The team tests the structure for stability. When complete, the steel armature is disassembled into its component parts while work begins on the tracking boards. The wood must be cut to size and painted, ready for cladding on site.

Blake joined the set-building team around 2010. He used to work in the car industry, doing vehicle bodywork and related mechanics. That industry took a knock with the global financial crisis in 2007-2008 and he moved on, ending up at Olympic Trucking down the road before joining De Beer. It's give and take in the workshop, he says. You learn a lot and get to show people a lot as well. 'Also, I've met some amazing people just working here. Because the place just attracts . . . good energy. People come around, artists, and it's been really nice. I've helped out with projects, if I'm not busy.'

Each day is full of subplots, says Mathews, and they require constant recalibration. There is also physical risk involved. Lentin has a bandaged left index finger and blood is seeping through the seams. Pushed a wrong button. He self-bandages and swears by the power of spit. 'Works like a bomb.' Then he makes himself a special glove, replacing the index finger with the thumb from another glove to accommodate his swollen digit, and carries straight on.

The final touch to the tiered cake is Vuyani Alfred Ramayana on hands and knees, trimming the edges of the cladding. It is strenuous and sweaty work. The cladding and its corresponding armature are finally colour-coded so they can get pieced back together on site. Two of the smaller circular steel tiers are positioned on edge while the trimming goes on. Lentin gets between them and mimics a hamster scabbling inside a wheel, paws going.

**Shot 5**

ACTION: The cake has left the workshop. Cape Town Film Studios is about 35 kilometres from Salt River, wedged between polar socioeconomic conditions: the sprawling township of Khayelitsha and the leafy winelands of Stellenbosch. The studios are easily visible from the N2 motorway leading out of the city, landmarked by large pirate ships built for the TV series *Black Sails*. Its five studios are larger than aeroplane hangars. The CEO stops via Segway by the latest addition to this infrastructure and remarks upon the studio's high-end soundproofing. He seems a bit put out that the only sets allotted to this prize space are a wooden door on wheels and a manhole cover. The team carefully transfer those sets on site, 'carrying the egg' as they call it. But even now, new instructions are coming in. A different coat of paint needs to be added: the door must be charcoal and glossed while the bricks need more ochre. Another bit of reconstruction has to happen

so the door can move flush to the ground when it swings open. Broken telephone, is how De Beer puts this last-minute work, and it takes some doing. At lunchtime, there is an impromptu football match outside. Later, when all the extras have arrived, the director sits in a chair and a man with a megaphone instructs the assembled cast to rehearse ad nauseum a scene they will later film. A line of interested observers are perched on the few available chairs and dozens of extras take up the floor. In this rehearsal, a two-dimensional meerkat puppet on a wooden stick dances through the doors with his human puppeteer to a jingle that soon becomes a vicious earworm. Lights! Cameras! Action! And a line about Tuesday being payday. A woman stands behind each door, to pull them open on cue, and gets the timing slightly off. They are supposed to open on the *i* of night but are opening on the *gh* instead, the megaphone intones in a British accent. 'I know it's silent . . . so don't wait for the *gh* ok?' Silence! . . . Lights! Camera! Action!

### Shot 6



ACTION: The clinching scene is the singing and dancing cake. It's assembled by the Sets & Devices team in the Stage 5 film studio next door. They use a metal detector to find the armature to attach the cladding. Professional riggers use a crane to set up lights and hoist a green-screen curtain from roof to floor. They navigate aerial walkways that interlock just metres from the ceiling. Safety checks find the cake wanting and the set builders must source planks over four metres long to better secure the structure. That done, De Klerk attaches a skirt of blue fabric around each cake tier fringed by a row of LEDs. A rigger tests a two-dimensional meerkat on the top tier, then a three-dimensional puppet, then a stick with green squares, a silver ball and a colour chart. The cake is now ready. Bring on the fruit! And a series of actors file in one by one. After dress rehearsals with a French dance instructor, feet and music reverberating around the cavernous interior, it is time for the full fruit ensemble. Film characters including Marvel's Deadpool are interspersed with gladiators. There is an astronaut, a deep-sea diver with an old-fashioned helmet, women in bonnets, men in military regalia, all doing synchronized high kicks. And 5-6-7-8. *Rolling!* Four high-pitched beats repeat, and 5-6-7-8. The dance begins again. The camera rigging lowers. *Aaaaand CUT!*

From a perch at the back of the room, multiple views of the cake are visible through camera screens. Large crosses in viewfinders are echoed by orange crosses on the greenscreen curtains. The walkie-talkie orders the director a flat white ('a proper one'). Video replay at the corner table is agreed: they should soften the blue of the sky. Trial runs resume followed by confetti discussions. One man has his hands in the air with his fingers coming down like spiders to show how the confetti should rain. The technical crew scurries between marked boxes packed and unpacked like Russian nesting dolls. Pozzy drive. Action box. Rope box. Every piece of equipment is modular or on wheels. CREW identifiers hang around necks. In the far corner, the manhole cover on its raised square platform waits, balanced upon paint cans, for its 15 seconds when an actor will jump onto it as a

kind of landing pad. A man has injured his finger and comes to the on-call medic at the back of the room. The medic has just attended to a woman who also injured her fingers digging in Cape Flats sand for a side scene. 'Are we going to get this into third gear or what?' a voice interjects for the final take. Gravitron, the special effects team, co-ordinates a confetti bomb to explode at just the right moment.

### Shot 7



**ACTION:** The breakdown of the cake takes place on-site, with angle grinders, over a weekend while the main shoot moves location into the city centre. There, Gravitron fakes 2,500 square metres of snow for a street scene. Cleaning up all the wet paper is the hardest part. Eight casuals and four crew start at 2 p.m. and end at 11 p.m. As snow goes it was a fairly easy setup, says Michael Mostert, a pyrotechnician and coordinator at Gravitron – it was just big. There were over 500 extras involved in that shoot, he adds. Mostert says the best part about the job is that every

morning you eat breakfast in a different location. 'Sometimes you're in the city centre on Heritage Square, sometimes you're in Kogel Bay and you can see the dolphins in the surf . . . You are shooting in the mountains, you are shooting here and there, so it's always different stuff all the time. But you also need to concentrate on what you are doing.' Indeed, Cape Town has become a popular filming destination – in part because it can stand in for so many other kinds of places, according to a statement from the Cape Town Film Commission. This global range is reflected in the upstairs reception office at Cape Town Film Studios. A row of clocks marks major international time zones: Los Angeles, Toronto, New York, London, Berlin, Cape Town, Mumbai, Beijing. Downstairs, a series of makeup rooms have large mirrors framed by naked lightbulbs. Outside, the broken-down cake gets stacked in pieces onto a flatbed truck and carted back to the Sets & Devices workshop.

### Shot 8



ACTION: The blue cloth that was draped around the cake – *High Class Quality, Made in China* in gold lettering on its fringe – sits in a crumpled heap on a pulley in the Salt River workshop, and then disappears. The metal stage in its modular parts migrates outside to the porch where it soon earns a second skin of rust. It languishes adjacent to the manhole cover, which keeps company with an abandoned swing. The reject tree, which never made it to the film shoot or the prop house, shifts around the washbasins where various accoutrements hang from its branches like a magic inveigler until its fake bark peels away. The metal skeleton then joins its retired compatriots sitting on the porch. ‘We keep a large stock of materials for just-in-case. If it has to happen in a hurry, then you have it in-house and can use it,’ says De Beer of the graveyard of former sets in the workshop’s backyard. Sure enough, the cake is reincarnated a couple of months later when its metal armature is welded by Lentin into two new leases of life: burglar bars for a studio and roof tresses for a newly built shed.

### Shot 9

ACTION: The commercial takes about two months to appear on the client’s website. It is 60 seconds long. The cake features for two to three seconds cumulatively. The team at Sets & Devices has not seen the end result. In fact, nobody shows much curiosity during the build or after about where the set is going or what it will do once it gets there. ‘We tend to be a bit laissez-faire about the whole thing,’ says De Beer. ‘Very often we have done builds for a commercial and [when we see it] we don’t notice our build anymore. So we have lost interest in that.’ The advert is called *Hooray*. It celebrates a full year of a movie ticket deal – hence its journey through the seasons with the cherry tree representing spring. Watching the final storyline from the polished end-point is uncanny. Everything is back to front. The revolving doorway features early on. It is indeed cast as a stage flat, which mimics a film studio. The animated singing meerkat that walks through the swinging doors is a marketing character for a rewards programme that gives movie tickets in exchange for buying a product using a comparative online tool.

As the director's storyboard describes it, 'the door has acted as a magic portal and now instead of being in the studio, we are outside, in the real world'. That real world is an apocalyptic film where soldiers high-kick to the sights and sounds of warfare artfully wired up by Gravitron. The advert is structured by zooming in on particular objects that become something else, creating transitions from one scene to the next. The open end of an assault weapon becomes the end of a megaphone the meerkat uses in front of a romantic scene. The manhole cover triggers a reverberation that segues into an epic crescendo of the singing and dancing film characters on the cake, showering confetti onto Cape Town's city centre.

The final frame of this fantastical scenario pans out to reveal the starring meerkat is in fact watching a musical on the cinema screen, with a friend. And with that final frame, we understand: everything we have just seen was make-believe.

#### Research interviews

Brett Blake, 22 February 2018, Sets & Devices, Salt River

Bobby De Beer, 9 May 2018, Sets & Devices, Salt River

Luke Lentin, 20 February 2018, Sets & Devices, Salt River

Aristote Manza, 28 March 2018, Sets & Devices, Salt River

Nawawie Mathews, 8 February 2018, Sets & Devices, Salt River

Michael Mostert, 14 March 2018, Gravitron, Salt River