

# SPACE AND TRANSFORMATION: THE STRUGGLE FOR ARCHITECTURE IN POST APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

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The title and this essay, 'Space and Transformation – the struggle for architecture in post-apartheid South Africa' derive from the 2nd Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture delivered in Ghent in 2015. Its source as my topic is located in the intersection of three interrelated trajectories. The most obvious is the issue of my disciplinary grounding and the locus of intellectual thought, that of architecture and the complexity associated with the production of space, particularly under conditions of change. The other is the life work and philosophical teaching of this extraordinary man Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela and the third is the condition of the world, and South Africa in particular, as we experience it today at what appears to be this unique historic intersectional moment of globalization and expansive technological shift within our nations' democratic emergence.

The essay draws on texts derived from other disciplines, such as literature and philosophy, particularly those that have relevance to conditions of the South, but resorts to the spatial disciplining associated with design. In so doing it reflects on architectural projects produced during the first decades of democratic rule. Most of these projects fall within the realm of human settlement, and have been selected in order to demonstrate transformation relative to the lived reality of ordinary South Africans, especially those marginalised and dispossessed by apartheid legislation. A semi structured longitudinal analysis has been conducted so as to reflect on the relations between the agency of design and the instrumentation of architecture as practice in determining spatial transformation.

**KEYWORDS:** MANDELA, SPACE AND TRANSFORMATION, POST-APARTHEID, RE-RITING ARCHITECTURAL TYPE, DESIGN AGENCY, LAND, HOUSING, SOCIO-SPATIAL INFRASTRUCTURE, RE-BUILDING COMMUNITY.

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## Prologue

This essay is derived from the 2nd Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture delivered in Gent on the 12th of November 2015 under the auspices of the Embassy of South Africa to Belgium, the Luxembourg and the European Union [ambassador Mxolisi Sizo Nkosi], the Office of Internationalisation Policy at Ghent University [academic director prof. Guido Van Huylenbroeck], and of GAP – the Ghent Africa Platform, the body within the University of Ghent that assembles researchers working on Africa related issues, represented by prof. Johan Lagae – and to whom I owe the honour of having been invited to have delivered that prestigious lecture.

It is pertinent that the essay is being published in the year 2018, marking the centenary of Mandela's birth. Nelson Mandela is an individual who committed his life to struggle and the emancipation of [black] people in South Africa and across the globe. His be-

ing in the world, whether as a 'free' man or a prisoner of conscience, embraced many significant events that have informed the coming into being of a 'democratic' South Africa. All of this is accountable to him having transcended his subjective individuality through dedication to the higher cause of humanity, as something for which he was prepared to die.

## Introduction

Space is fundamentally political. It represents the physical manifestation of a particular set of power relations. One of the primary and most enduring legacies of apartheid is its spatiality. Whilst apartheid and other forms of discriminatory legislation have been relatively easy to repeal, amend and replace within the legal framework, it is far more difficult to erase its affective modalities. The consequence of these discriminatory policies were both politico-economic and socio-spatial. They were negatively discriminatory in effecting a radical racialised segregation of people as individuals, families, and communities. Consequently, not only was this 'setting apart' the consequence of racialised politics, but more importantly, it produced the effective genocide of local cultures – culture as everyday and celebratory practices and as ways of becoming in the world that had relied on the social cohesion of community in very particular and different constitutions of time-space. Apartheid, and indeed colonialism, slavery and the entire modern project, is predicated on the exploitation of one set of human beings for the benefit of another. It is a project that has therefore been detrimental to the whole of humanity. It denied the development of many through the exclusion of the Other, as a primary and non-negotiable constituent within the human project. In this architectural design remains fully complicit.

In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela relates of how, at the age of nine, upon the death of his father, Gada Henry Mphakanyiswa, he was taken by his mother, Noqaphi Nosekeni, from Mvezo to Qunu, to live at the Great Place, Mquekezweni, the royal residence of Chief Jongintaba Dalindyebo, then acting regent of the Thembu people – and who was to become Mandela's benefactor and guardian for the next ten years of his life [Mandela, 1994].

Perhaps one of the most significant experiences that Mandela gained in this time was with regard to the practice of leadership and concomitant governance within African culture. Observing the regent, Mandela's primary impression was of a man who exercised power in a manner that enabled his subjects to speak in order that all who wanted to might be heard. The foundation of self-government resided in the ordering of a horizon of inclusivity amongst the leadership, in order to maximize inclusive participation in a genuinely democratic manner. The regent would only speak in conclusion, so as to confirm any agreement reached, or alternatively, in the event of irresolution, then to enable a further gathering and meeting of equal minds. Genuine leadership demands a form of governance that enables and empowers consensus amongst people of difference. And it is probably here, in Qunu, that Mandela develops his interest in an alternative or humanist politics, one engendered and practically informed by the application of the African tradition of Ubuntu.

Under white occupation, being fundamentally anti-Ubuntu and intolerant of difference, colonialism's contestation of local practice[s] constituted the 'arrested development' of people and their pre-existent traditions and customs. Indigenous approaches to land and settlement, to space and to ways of being and of becoming in the world were ruthlessly contested and ultimately violently overwritten and obliterated by the introduction of so-called rational and scientifically based norms and standards, as non-negotiable measures of western thinking.

It is therefore not surprising that the issue of identity and of cultural practice are considered fundamental to post-apartheid restitution. This constitutes one of the most uncomfortable truths about post-apartheid South Africa; the inability and a certain unwillingness to grapple directly and effectively with the depth of the problem of reconstituting a sector of society that has been effectively decimated by what constitutes a sophisticated form of warfare. Exclusion, as ultimately manifest in the pervasive and enduring 'poverty, unemployment and inequality' are the lasting effects of this. This is Africa's postwar disaster – a disaster that in fact both required and deserved intervention by the global community, in a manner not dissimilar to the Marshal Plan that underpinned the rehabilitation of post WW II Europe. Any critique of Africa and its post-independence struggles, cannot be separated from the gains of its European Colonisers. The history of humans must necessarily be foregrounded in the trauma of some against the wealth of Others.

It should also not be surprising that in South Africa today, a sustained demand for radical and immediate decolonization has entered into the heart of the discourse of our local politics. Currently this trajectory is being driven by the new 'born free' generation; those born after the demise of apartheid, but yet to gain access to the substantive benefits of an open, free and democratic society.

Today the demand for equal access and opportunity to education is mirrored in the lives of ordinary citizens who still suffer the deep reaches of colonialism's alienating effects. Not only is this a precept of the Freedom Charter's demand that 'The Doors Of Learning And Of Culture Shall Be Opened!' [Freedom Charter, 1955], but it reflects directly on a central tenet of Mandela's philosophy in his belief that 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world' [Mandela, 1994].

We cannot speak about space and transformation if we do not address the exigencies of social justice and spatial equity. Land has now become central to demands for restitution. Land, not simply as commodity, but Land in the form of the enablement of sustainable livelihoods that permit all citizens to participate reasonably in the post-apartheid promise of 'a better life for all'. This is the essence of a participatory democracy, that is the proactive engagement by a nation in order to maximize inclusion in the affairs of the state – and that support the type of activities that are conducive to building active citizenship. Universally Land, or reasonable access to it, seems to be a non-negotiable prerequisite for this to occur in an egalitarian manner, and Zimbabwe, notwithstanding the political machinations that have undermined its independence, represents a clear example of the consequences of failure in addressing critical dimensions of decolonization.

And yet, spatial transformation has only recently entered the formal policy framework

of the South African government; chapter 8 of the new National Development Plan for 2030, the NDP, otherwise known as ‘make our future work’ [NDP, 2011], is directed at effecting redistributive justice through infrastructure delivery as an interventive strategy that intersects across all aspects of the built environment toward, in particular, transforming human settlements.

One of the most enduring and deep and broadly experienced legacies of Mandela has been from the energy devoted to the development and adoption of the Constitution for the new democratic dispensation. The Constitution of South Africa [Constitution, 1996] is a document that was driven by Mandela, in the lead up to national independence and the dawn of a democratic dispensation on 27 April 1994. Based on the people’s struggle document, The Freedom Charter of 1955 it was promulgated in Parliament by Mandela on 18th December 1996, coming into effect on 4 February 1997, and has become to be recognized for its comprehensive inclusivity. The absence of its real effect on ordinary people and communities on the ground remains elusive. For some, access to the benefits of the Constitution rests with an elite who have the means to engage in legal battle. With the re-emergence of NGOs and advocacy groups in support of the cause of the poor, South Africa is repositioning itself to re-engage with a more meaningful approach to and implementation of, its constitutional, legal and policy frameworks.

Whilst the Constitution provides the supreme law for the state in South Africa, the NDP provides an equivalently cogent and critical policy context for thinking about implementing a South African project of transformation. However, in contradistinction, the country is singularly lacking in its capacity to implement. Somehow we lack the ability to translate [new] knowledge sets into practice, thereby rendering the sophistry of our policy and planning discourses as impotent. This is perhaps where the project of education, that was so close to Mandela’s thinking, becomes supremely relevant. The emancipatory power of education is to be realised in the capacity, not so much to solve problems, but to think about the world in new and different ways. When we begin to question ‘what might be possible under a given set of circumstances’ [Low, 2004] then life might change in South Africa, and the very particularity of our history, memory and traditions might regain substantive implication for imaginative interpretation of our past, in order to alter the circumstances that we have come to dwell within.

Yet leadership in the task of re-framing of education in South Africa seems lost. A loss most powerfully manifest in the techno-managerial approach to both the structuring and delivery of education which is akin to ‘transforming’ toward something that fosters the transfer of skill sets as opposed to empowering for critical thinking – and that therefore effectively renders graduates as cogs in the service of capitalist consumerism. The net result has been in a form of national hegemonic exchange with the ANC party conflating itself with the State predominantly through the deploy of its own cadres. Lacking the necessary experience and insight, these cadre are unable to engage with the responsibility of their newfound positionality – to the extent that the fabric of the state has begun to collapse. This is an outcome that aligns with neither the vision nor the legacy that Mandela would have imagined.

### **Apartheid continuities | spatial transformation**

In the absence of an economic revolution there can be no radical or real change. We should not be surprised by the common chorus from the masses in their persistent reflection on a perceived absence of sustained change in their daily lives. ‘Transformation’ has remained as an order of the day, with Radical Economic Transformation [RET] emerging as a new sound bite for the masses violent responses to their enduring ‘unemployment, poverty, inequity’ – a condition that has now come to characterize the South African experience of being poor. Predominantly slow in its pace and marginal in its location and effects, we have contended with a weakening State and a more anxious and severely demanding citizenry.

Nevertheless, in the realm of space, and in its transformative reconfiguration, we can discern evidence of productive resistance in the form of ‘counter-currenting’ [Low, 2010]. This is evident from individual project-based interventions in township environments where architects have consciously deployed their design agency in the interest of engaging with a future past. This only occurs predominantly in the experimental space afforded by smaller non-mainstream projects. Here process can be privileged over the haste of product, and critical reflection in action enables evolutionary adjustment, a quality endemic to transformation. The results are in projects which might be termed hybrid by virtue of the complex differences each one attempts to negotiate. An examination of the process of accretive change reveals consistent shifts in professional practice. A gradual decentralization of power and inclusive beneficiation of all participants has arisen from co-production across and within disciplines. A common thread is evident in the resurfacing of the NGO, CBO, PSO as mediating agent between the state and communities; [re-]building community has become a precondition for effecting sustainability and resilience in the built environment, and going green implies parallel social engagement [Low, 2018].

### **Tradition | modernity | tradition — and the re writing type**

‘Spatial order is one of the most striking means by which we recognize the existence of the cultural differences between one social formation and another.’ Bill Hillier/Julienne Hanson; *Social Logic of Space*. [Hillier, 1985]

Can democracy operate effectively in the face of extant hierarchic power structures? Spatial configuration represents an effective measure of this condition and is capable of reflecting upon transformation or change. If power indeed changes, then, so too should space. What then might the order of post-apartheid space might be?

Whilst evidence of spatial transformation exists, apartheid space remains predominantly intact, awaiting far more radical change in our society. Where spatial change is evident, it emerges as a response to contestations of the ‘socius’ [Graafland, 2010] whereby the inadequacy of functional typologies and their racialized constructs have become reimagined. The task of architecture lays in a radical re-writing of space, both typologically, through individual buildings and morphologically as urban or rural terrain.

South African society however still remains caught between an adherence to two opposing cultural practices; one of tradition and the other of modernity. Tradition, as aligned

with pre-colonial cultural practices of tribal collectivism, and Modernity, as aligned with western coloniality and its extractive capitalist practices. The extremes which set tradition and modernity apart have served to perpetuate the status quo, inhibiting effective societal change.

Philosophers such as Ricouer and Hoontonji have posed the critical question of: ‘How to become modern without losing touch with sources?’ [Ricouer, 1965]. This is as much a socio-political question as it is a spatial one. In other words our situation is not so much about exchanging one hegemony for another – but, formulated differently, the South African condition presents a clear challenge to speculate about a new order, one that matches a contemporary hybridizing society and of how to situate modernism in the heart of tradition, or perhaps rather – how to re-situate tradition at the forefront of modernism? What we do know and understand about architecture and design is that its actions can never be neutral.

In fact, its practice involves some of the most discriminatory behaviour known to humankind. Whether it be the global organization of slavery, the genocide of the Jews, the occupation of Palestine or the colonial practice of apartheid in South Africa, space has been deployed in the service of setting one group of people against another. When we draw a line, we create a boundary and we set things apart. We are forced to discriminate [Low, 2004].

Some questions that arise then, are ones of, in whose interest and to what purpose do we discriminate?

How is it possible to discriminate positively, constructively, or even productively?

What is the configuration of space in a world that strives for equality, for opportunity, for spatial equity and social justice?

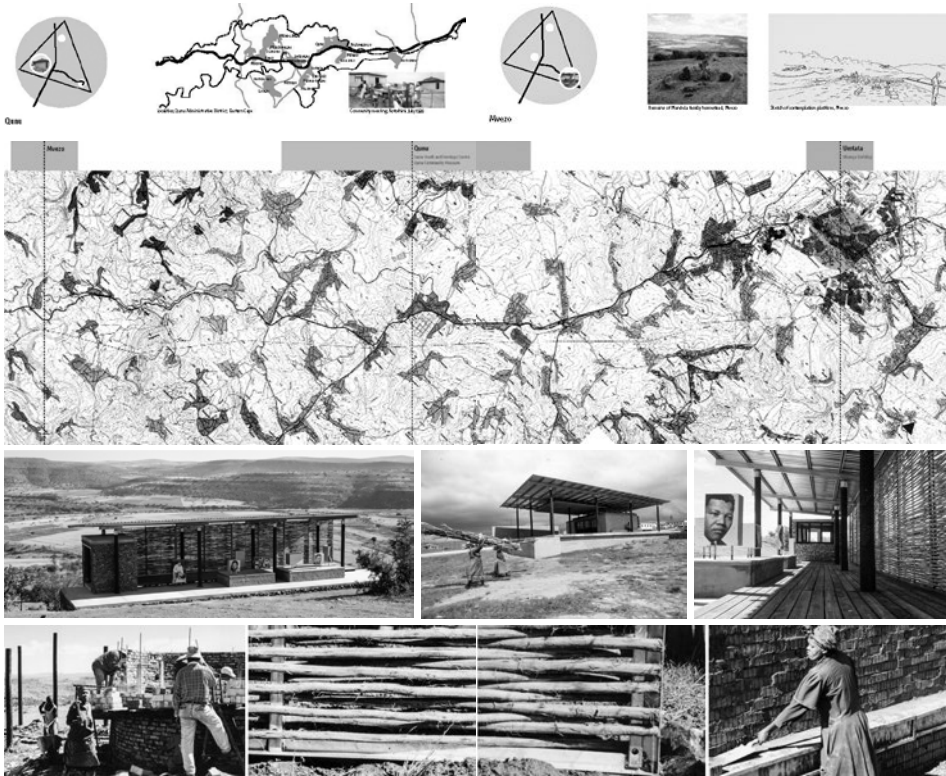
Within the realm of African tradition, the modern convention of singular authoritative authorship remains contested. The traditional emphasis on co-production privileges a process toward new structural content intended upon ensuring critical difference. This, as de-centred practice, implies participation within a horizon of interconnectivity. It hearkens back, forward, to reclaim origins and the relationality of the San, as first people’s, in their cultural practice of Becoming.

In his treatise on ‘Modernity at Large’ Arjun Appadurai, the Indian theorist, identifies the necessity for the Production of Locality. He views this within a process that he considers as being relational and contextual, and not necessarily spatial or scalar [Appadurai, 1996]. By inferring a third typology or a hybrid, he infers a bridging between cultures of a particular time-place. This approach embraces all complex constituents in producing a situated modernism [Low, 2014], thereby effecting what I would term as transcending modernity by means of tradition. In this manner, the necessary task of re-writing the world into its contemporary being, demands critical praxis, capable of rendering new narratives, to inform reconfigured settlement arrangements.



## Rural | Urban Interface — the Mandela Museums

Mvezu, Qunu and 'Mthata Area, Eastern Cape, South Africa



**Figure 1:** Nelson Mandela Museums, Eastern Cape [all images courtesy of Cohen Judin Architects].

An early architectural intervention that approximates this re-writing of architectural type, is manifest in the Eastern Cape province through the design and implementation of the Nelson Mandela Museums [Cohen Judin, 1996-8]. Intended on bringing Mandela to the people in his home area, this project was conceived of through the introduction of an additional layer of infrastructure into a poor rural community. Implemented toward the end of the twentieth century, at Mandela's birth place Mvezu, his later dwelling place Qunu, and in the provincial capital 'Mthata, it exemplifies what spatial transformation might represent when design agency is critically deployed in seeking out new socio-spatial relations within the context of South Africa's generally overlooked rural/urban interface. Culture and Infrastructure have been imaginatively co-conceived of, through the intervention of a series of pavilions. Inserted into this rural landscape they function as a new cultural fieldwork capable of mediating building with landscape. As a series related of interventions, embedded within the agricultural terrain, their critical cross-programming accommodates multiple functions for – exhibition, for water provision and agri-support,

for sheltering in their shade, for taxi pick up and drop off, for play and relief, and for pride and privilege.

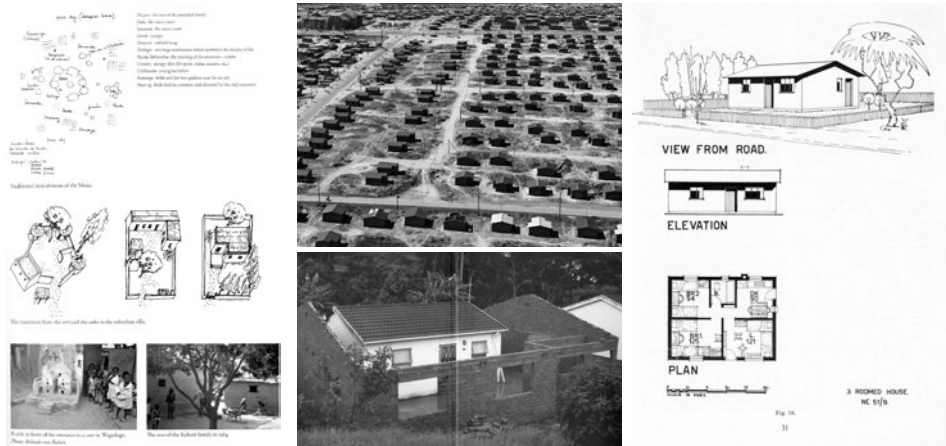
Operating as a network of places within this neglected landscape, their built realisation significantly relied on the creative incorporation of local labour, through the utilisation of traditionally available materials and skills. The designed deployment of these affords an intervention that grounds the modernist pavilions to local conditions, whilst simultaneously mediating urban with rural, to create a viable hybrid typo-morphology or what might be termed as the possibility of a contemporary vernacular.

This unconventional fusing of culture with infrastructure affords a generosity of temporality often associated with site specific interpretation – impermanence being a pre-modern attribute endemic to the San and other nomadic or unsettled communities of the South. In a sense Europe has therefore now become subsumed within an African landscape of interconnectivity, thereby engendering multiple inversions of the historic colonially constructed relation between settler and indigeneity, to resituate tradition or local culture as lead in the production of this hybrid. The rural and vernacular speak back to the metropole in a manner that is consistent with Mandela's appreciation and value for a didactic connection with the origins of tradition. However, and perhaps more significantly, this initiative intervenes in a manner that values the rural as a continuum of the urban, and therefore as integral and critical to the problems of migration and population growth. We need to re-conceptualise South Africa as a site of spatial of continuum rather than becoming entrapped in the popular segregatory discourses around urbanization per se. Rural regeneration is a critical component in the task of transforming the spatial legacy of apartheid, and given its grounding and rootedness in tradition, it is something that we ignore at risk to an authentic and sustainable transformation.



## Implementation otherwise: there shall be housing, security and comfort

[Freedom Charter, 1955]



**Figure 2:** A tradition of homesteading post 1994 RDP state housing Apartheid modernity NBRI-NE51/9.

The ANC came to power on the basis of its Reconstruction and Development programme [RDP], a significant policy manifest deployed as a means of translating the Freedom Charter in preparation for governance. Given the magnitude of South Africa's housing problem, particularly in the urban areas from which black citizens had been excluded, Mandela had already effectively promised everyone a house.









On becoming President of the Republic, Mandela's first cabinet included many struggle stalwarts. From the outset it was apparent how unprepared and inexperienced the ANC were in governance. Joe Slovo was appointed as the first Housing Minister and the '1 plot – 1 house' approach to housing delivery became a measure for rapid delivery on an equitable basis across the multiple differences that represented the previously disenfranchised South African citizenry. The RDP house, a unit based on the National Building Research Institute [NBRI] of the apartheid government's strategy for 'Bantu housing', became the unit of delivery. Its spatial configuration establishes an autonomous and inflexible unit, incapable of accommodating either local cultural practices of dwelling nor future change and growth over time

Whereas the Government of the Republic of South Africa has delivered approximately 4 mil. housing units during the first two decades of its rule, this strategy has, to a large extent, appropriated and replicated the past. The RDP unit's autonomy, combined with its central siting on the allocated plot, makes for a housing fabric of independence. Characterised by suburban sprawl, mono-functional environments, and the absence of requisite humanizing social infrastructure, many developments have surfaced as Cartesian ghettos, notably on the periphery of the larger cities. They are impossible to extend or modify, and require destructive intervention – to the point of demolition in certain in-

stances – in order to accommodate local needs for additional space and flexibility for changing needs.

Yet, despite the failure and problems associated with this form of housing delivery by Government, discernable evidence exists demonstrating the possibility of innovation through alternative approaches. Numerous counter responses have emerged from across the spectrum of built environment actors, notably from marginal citizens themselves, the NGO sector, and private sector developers, but also from within certain government and local authorities. These projects and their modes of production demonstrate the remarkable capacity of individuals and communities in building and caring for themselves, especially under conditions of adversity. These efforts present a veritable source of knowledge from which government, educators, NGOs and communities could respond and creatively interpret. The projects present themselves as sites of spatial transformation with enormous potential for research learning. Furthermore one can claim with confidence that this production is something that Mandela would not only have recognized and praised, but that he would have directed government to substantially engage with improving housing design and its delivery, whilst [re-]building community.

**Implementation 'otherwise': toward mediated co-production**

<p>NBRI / RDP STATE HOUSING SUBSIDY NATIONAL +/- 4 MIL. UNITS</p>	<p>RDP / PHP PEOPLE'S HOUSING PROCESS VICTORIA MXENGE-LANSDOWN RD</p>	<p>SDI / RE-BLOCKING INSITU INFORMAL UPGRADE SHEFFIELD ROAD</p>	<p>DAG-SHAC / ORGANISED INVASION OCCUPATION OF STATE LAND STELLENBOSCH</p>
			
<p>COMMUNITY STANDARD PLANS STATE CLOSED REPRESENTATION / POVERTY</p>	<p>WOMEN'S SAVINGS GROUP EDUCATOR + ARCHITECT COCT / PGWC BUILDING COMMUNITY / MODEL DEVMT</p>	<p>INFORMAL COMMUNITY SDI / CORC + UNIV/ARCHITECT COCT / PGWC SERVICES / COMMUNITY / UPGRADE</p>	<p>INFORMAL COMMUNITY DAG / PROF-SERVICE ORGANISATION SHAC / STELLENBOSCH HSING ACTION LAND ALLOCATED</p>
<p>PRASA-RDP+ / LEGALISED OCCPTN MANSEL RD DURBAN - E'THEKWINI</p>	<p>PGWC-RDP+ / STARTER HOME WELTEVREDE VALLEY CAPE TOWN</p>	<p>VPUU / LIVE-WORK UPGRADE CO-PRODUCTION HARARE - KHAYELITSHA</p>	<p>JHC / SOCIAL HOUSING INNER CITY RENTAL BRICKFIELDS - JHBG INNER CITY</p>
			
<p>INFORMAL COMMUNITY COMMUNITY ARCHITECTS E'THEKWINI / PG KZN LIVE-WORK / COMMUNITY / SMME</p>	<p>INFORMAL COMMUNITY WC-PWD / HOUSING ARCHITECT COCT / PGWC BACKYARD RENTAL / COMMUNITY</p>	<p>SMME COMMUNITY SUN / SUSTAINABLE URBAN N'HOODS COCT / KW LIVE-WORK / COMMUNITY / VIOLENCE</p>	<p>RENTAL CONSULTANT ARCHTS JOHANNESBURG HOUSING COMPANY INTEGRATED DEVMT / STARTER</p>

**Figure 3:** Mediated Co-Production: An overview of two decades of post-apartheid housing alternatives – where design agency complements social process to effect community [re-]building.

Projects built on the margins in the post-apartheid housing terrain represent a veritable site of creative experimentation. This is due to the numerous pre-existent conditions that have historically informed shelter production. The sustained limitations of the State through its stubborn singular approach have marginalized the imagination in mainstream delivery. As prodigious builders, Africans have always enjoyed the ownership over the means of their shelter production. This is a characteristic endemic to vernacular practice. Given the scale and complexity of the problem, particularly within urban settings, this creativity has been complemented by community initiatives that seek to foster self-reliance. Self-Building, Back Yarding, Land Occupation, Live-Working, and Communal Living, all represent the flowering of new forms of non-nuclear family habitation, have provided the impetus for questioning the ANC State sponsored RDP single family unit. Delivering at scale has required sophisticated skills to negotiate the potential conflict between multiple stakeholders, and supported the emergence of a reinvigorated NGO sector, as well as of new forms of professional practice, foregrounded by a capability to mediate participation.

### **RDP – PHP | BNG/ SHS**

Within the first decade of democratic governance, the ANC had amended official Housing Policy to incorporate two significant developments. On the one hand was the Peoples' Housing Process [PHP] designed to recognize and direct collective housing subsidies toward any community who was willing, prepared and capable to engage with its own housing delivery. On the other there was a more ambitious shift toward a redefinition of housing as human settlement, with the new Breaking New Ground [BNG] policy and its complementary aspiration of Sustainable Human Settlements [SHS, 2004]. The former PHP is exemplified in the highly acclaimed Victoria Mxenge project; based in a community comprised of Eastern Cape migrant women, with unique capacity to save, construct and manage their own human settlement. The outcome is predicated on the delivery of individual shell structures, implemented on a house by house basis, prepared for occupation, yet also capable of gradual upgrade from the inside, where women have great agency, toward the outside with equal dexterity. The production must be measured, not so much in the physical form of settlement, but more so, through its intangible, yet resilient, community social infrastructure produced in parallel. Today Victoria Mxenge operates as a consolidated and evolved Urban Commons, consulting and assisting in the housing sector across Cape Town and the rest of South Africa.

BNG/SHS was first tested at the Joe Slovo settlement on the N2 highway leading out of Cape Town. It involved the establishment of Thubelisa Homes, a Government directed implementation and management agency capable of mediating public-private sector investment and testing new prototypes that accommodated collective affordable housing complete with select community facilities. Now in its final phase it has undergone five iterations, each building upon, yet challenging the other, with mixed levels of success – and presenting itself as a case study for research reflecting in assessing SHS/BNG.

### **SDI/RE-blocking**

Shack Dwellers International [SDI] has made a significant impact on most South African peri-urban landscapes. When governments fail to deliver, people resort to their own initiatives. Shacks are physical manifestations of a dire necessity for shelter. With the backlog of at least 1 mil housing units, together with many more families living in sub-standard backyard conditions, South Africa has experienced a surge in the development of informal settlements. Predominantly implemented through illegal occupation, informal settlements are unregulated and their communities endure significant stress due to lack of planning regulation and an absence of municipal services, significant poverty and unemployment, a lack of social support amenities, and an absence of public open space, landscaping and etc. To a large extent they should be classified as inhumane settlements. SDI employs an upgrading approach in informal settlements known as re-blocking. It operates within existing settlements intended on humanizing them through infrastructure upgrade. A number of strategies are deployed in concert in order to achieve this and of which the co-production between community, local government and a local NGO/CBO seem to constitute a non-negotiable triad. The SDI linked NGO acts as mediator and offers a managerial and socio-techno assistance in negotiating an agreed mode of upgrade. Establishing the ground knowledge around the settlement is done collaboratively and establishes a data base set of information around demographics, household and shack sizes and income. Occupant's concerns relate to issues around adjacency [neighbours], location [economic opportunity], as well as to open space, service position and future growth potential [horizontal & vertical]. The engaged surveys encourage user participation, building confidence through attention to detail in terms of establishing the correct interpretation of different household needs. Finding a comfortable fit in the interrelationship between socio-economic need and affordable physical form with the reconfiguration of specific units requires patient skill and design imagination.

### **PLFI/preparing land for (organised) invasion**

In the face of the uncertainty associated with government and developer failure, sustained delays, inferior quality, corruption and etc ..., the vast majority of the poor remain excluded from accessing shelter through state mechanisms. Illegally occupying empty land close to cities is a common global phenomenon across most decolonial urbanizing contexts. This approach, whilst illegal, demonstrates initiative from marginalised people and constitutes the productive capacity of those with limited means to participate in the construction of human settlements. When enacted spontaneously, with little coordination, the resultant settlement requires considerably more resources, time and effort to formalize in post-occupancy. If managed through an orderly process that foresees formalization as part of temporal growth, then social and physical investment can add to sustainable communities. Balanced densities, diverse typologies, public space and collective amenities as well as municipal servicing can all become prefigured and agreed upon amongst occupants. This is an approach that is shunned by ruling parties, yet presents a critical and viable opportunity to advance human settlement at scale and speed, within the exigencies of seemingly permanent socio-economic constraints – and potentially leading toward formalisation.

**RDP/starter homes**

Weltevrede Valley in Cape Town, Pelip Housing in Red Location, New Brighton outside of Port Elizabeth, Mansel Road in Durban and Brickfields in downtown Johannesburg, each demonstrate a particular trope of spatial transformation through their designer's response to contesting the autonomy of the RDP housing unit. Careful observation of everyday practices affords genuine capacity to accommodate local need and realised a set of locally produced responses to the post-apartheid housing issue. The cumulative effect of these challenges has spoken back to the status quo and contributed toward shifts in housing policy and practice. Government's then new SHS/BNG Housing policy [2004] owes its existence to counter moves spoken from the GroundUp.

**VPUU/JHC**

The Violence Protection through Urban Upgrade [VPUU] project adopts a model of co-production by deepening the co-operation between community, state and donor agency with facilitation by an NGO intermediary. Intended to intervene across existing established settlements where crime and violence are prevalent, public infrastructure is identified as a means of contributing toward neighbourhood stabilisation. Commencing with in-service training for local community participants, empowered to work within the project, critical sites and programmes are identified to be inserted in the existing fabric. The interrelations between social and physical interventions contribute to provide a binding layer of public infrastructure. Active boxes, live-work units, youth after hour activities and other facilities are inserted into the project at previously designated danger points. Their interconnection through well-constructed pathways that are lit at night responds to the need for 24/7 safety, especially in the case of vulnerable women and children. The strategy is predicated on collective participatory decision making which, when replicated in other contexts, achieves the same by other means; eg. an informal settlement would gain water points, children play-learn spaces, etc.



## Reblocking by Insitu upgrade | empower shack



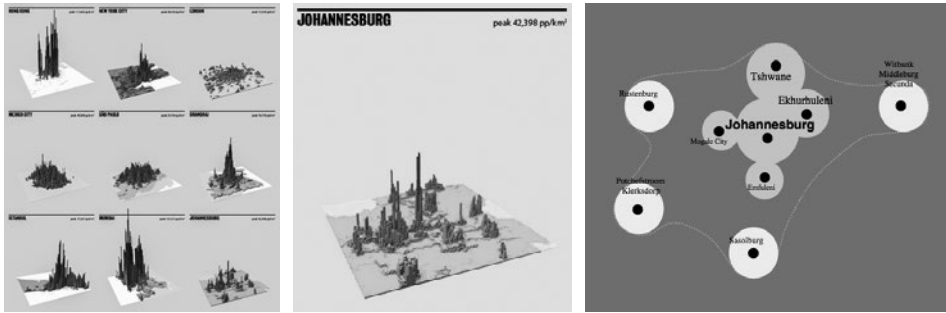
**Figure 4:** Empower Shack. Section BT, Site C, Khayelitsha, Cape Town – UTT/ETH-Z.

Today, efforts to reblock informal settlements are under critical advancement through their integrative combination with more formal processes. Empower Shack, an experimental informal settlement upgrade project at BT Section at Site C in Khayelitsha, 35km outside of Cape Town is a current example of the renewed approach. Designed by Urban Think Tank [UTT] in collaboration with the Swiss Institute of Technology [ETH-Z] in Zurich, it brings together multiple transformational strategies to demonstrate a more radical, nuanced and hopefully a resilient approach to the housing question. The project offers genuine capacity to maintain a community, whilst radically upgrading its informal settlement. Reconfiguring the site, offering an open formal housing unit, capable of adaptation, cross-programming whilst capable of accommodating the non-negotiable need for non-nuclear, diverse and plural household types [Low, 2018].

Piecemeal in its approach, the project is indicative of a process oriented method to human resettlement. Commencing with a pilot project, it has now expanded, developing through four discrete phases to the current stage – providing 72 formal units on a piece of land previously occupied by some 60 shack dwellers. The opportunity for economic activity, for social title, for flexible occupation, combined with clear delineation of areas for effecting owner and collectivized improvement, intimates toward success. Despite its design ambition, the scheme is driven by rigorous research, and is predicated on enhancing a practice of self-reliance, a dimension of human development that Mandela's generation comprehended as a means toward freedom, independence and participatory citizenship.



## The MegaCity and the issue of rapid African urbanization



**Figure 5:** Johannesburg: a polycentric city | Gauteng: a multi nodal city-region in the making.

The 2002 8th Venice Architecture Biennale, curated by Ricky Burdett from the Urban Age Programme at the London School of Economics [LSE], was organized under the rubric of ‘Living in the Endless City’. The Biennale surfaced key statistical information and their spatial implications for the future of the city. One of the most intriguing revelations was the multi-centred nature of South Africa cities, developed as a direct by-product of apartheid spatial planning, and establishing a phenomenon replicated across all scales of urban settlement. The Gauteng City Region is a large metropolitan conurbation comprised by three metro areas and a number of sub-cities, all of which are subject to rapid urban expansion. The ‘left-over’ space between places is to a large extent a consequence of apartheid spatial segregation. However, it is also the logical site for local growth, which, if disciplined by a visionary plan with appropriate infrastructure for cross-regional integration, holds the possibility of producing a new form of city – structured as a continuous terrain, interconnected by infrastructural tissues, yet defined by the networked place-nodes, of differentiated primary functions and local significance.

Establishing a new scale of city can afford unique opportunities for redress of spatial inequity; the marginalized periphery may become embedded within the city as region, enabling a new re-appropriation of land as distributed within the MegaCity and strategically located for productivity. The creative intersection between movement and mobility, living and working, with food security and environmental sustainability could produce a re-combinative infrastructure capable of advancing South African Cities into the 21st century. A new and reconfigured order for the [African] MegaCity needs to be conceived of in parallel with the tyranny of policy planning – which has driven the modern city to destruction [Low, 2015].

Rem Koolhaas has previously identified Lagos as a unique urbanising site that transcends the modern western model of city making. His prognosis is that to study the African cities is to suggest a paradigm for a possible future. How well this resonates with Mandela’s conception of the uniqueness of African agency, particularly when informed by African educated minds [Koolhaas, 2000]. Writing back to the world out of Africa, through local spatial innovation in the realm of city making, collectively considered as a high point of

human civilization, would meet the magnitude of achievement that Mandela anticipated in liberation.

After 25 years of so-called democratic independence South Africa has not as yet overcome the spatial legacy of apartheid. Most gains may be considered to be measured in quantitative [numbers of units delivered] and spatial transformation as a substantive project, with qualitative outcomes for community building and dwelling in comfort, remaining predominantly absent for the agenda. Within this context the demand for land restitution and inclusive economic participation by those suffering from poverty, unemployment and inequality is evident from a generally growing unrest across the country.

Nevertheless, there do exist clear signs of successful efforts to challenge that inheritance. On the one hand there exists a well-developed built environment industry, capable of engaging policy, planning, design and implementation. On the other, since 1994, this sector appears to have become more fully embedded with the western hegemony in leveraging capital for profit as opposed to that of social gain. The tension between the state, at the various levels of government, and communities in all their multiple representations, is evident in the sustained everyday conflict over delivery and demand. Land, as spatial resource with amenity, has become recognised as critical to national transformation. In a society traumatized by the ravages of a dehumanising system of relentless discrimination, it is unsurprising that a grassroots resistance has taken so long to gather significant momentum.

Where success is evident it is in the smaller focused programmes where new forms of instrumentation can emerge and nurture careful [urban] renewal. This success evidences creative alignment across the numerous strands of human endeavor necessary to integrate the complex systems that inform the contemporary production in the built environment. Concomitantly, 'ubuntu', in the form of co-production has become a key indicator for success in an increasingly fragmented and globalising world. Emblematic of the co-operation between communities of difference, this tendency signifies a spirit that would have pleased Mandela. Design thinking represents a unique form of human agency. It identifies the discipline of architecture and enables the synthesis in the face of multiple and competing knowledge sets. When creatively deployed, with empathy, in the interest of humanity, and not solely for profit, then not only is space transformed, but society can be too.

## Conclusion

In an early 1982 image produced by the late professor Ivor Prinsloo, then Director of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Cape Town, for the cover of *Architecture SA*, the official Journal of the South African Institute of Architects [SAIA], a projection of possible hybridity is presented as a challenge to the spatial disciplines. Premiated on an interpretation of Laugier's primitive hut, this collage sets up a terse dialogue between the extremes of two speculative origins of architecture.

Sameness and difference are co-constituted within a single image, bound together under the spectre of light in the form of the constructed rainbow; the rainbow being the

metaphor by which the prospective diversity of the new South African nation has become colloquially associated.

What we are grappling with in the quest for space and transformation is as to what might constitute the order of a non-western modernism in a post-colonial state? Of how it might yet still be possible to reconcile the irreconcilable, as exemplified by the extremes between poverty and entrenched entitlement, traditional and modern practices, or at the very least, of how their differences might co-exist? Or, perhaps more acutely, of an understanding as to whether, in fact, we might require a more radically reformative and entirely new spatial practice? This is not a phenomenon that is unique to South Africa. It is, of course, a condition that permeates all contemporary dimensions of human action, particularly in the post-colony, being globally engaged in negotiating the reconfiguration of hegemony from the hierarchic toward the networked.

What South Africa has more recently uncovered is a realisation of the impossibility of managing change. Historically the magnitude and scale of bringing an unknown order into being is aligned with revolution – something in the buildup to freedom that Mandela had consciously and deliberately mediated against. Yet, 25 years after the advent of democracy, we remain trapped in a fragmented process of resistance to transformation, and lacking in real progress toward inclusive participation and an empowered capacity for self-reliance being transferred to the previously marginalized.

Our challenge remains to establish a new, inclusive socius, one that must necessarily preempt [spatial] change, through a more radical means than transformation. Mandela's legacy leaves us with a consciousness of the fact that unless the lives of the historically excluded are radically changed to enjoy equal access to social justice and benefit from spatial equity, then architecture and all our politicking will remain meaningless. For Mandela the humanist, tradition places value on a life well lived, above that of material achievement, yet, tradition also recognizes the necessary dialectic and reciprocal relation between these extremes. Lest we forget, Mandela was a radical activist, one who placed his life at risk in the service of struggle. Failure to achieve these simple needs would have driven Mandela to embark on a different path to change, and it would most certainly have excluded the negotiative tolerance of 1990's.

It is time for architecture, and spatial practitioners to directly engage with this project. It is after all within the domain of their privilege.



**Figure 6:** Tradition and Modernity: Hybrid Africa.

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