



*Emergence in the self-organizing city*  
*A multi-functional intervention*

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Emergence in the self-organizing city:  
A multi-functional intervention

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Submitted in fulfillment of part of the requirements for the degree Magister in  
Architecture (Professional) in the faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and  
Information Technology, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

November 2007

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## Introduction

“The building of cities is one of man’s greatest achievements. The form of his city always has been and always will be a pitiless indicator of the state of his civilization. This form is determined by the multiplicity of decisions made by the people who live in it. In certain circumstances these decisions have interacted to produce a force of such clarity and form that a noble city has been born. It is my premise that a deeper understanding of the interactions of these decisions can give us the insight necessary to create noble cities in our own day.” (Bacon, E. N. 1968. *Design of Cities*. New York: Viking)

When first considering Bacon’s explanation on the origin of a city, it might seem that an accidental process or rather, product is implied. City form as the accidental conglomeration of space haphazardly grouped together to sustain the interaction between city inhabitants.

However what Bacon is describing in terms of city form and growth is an evolutionary process deeply embedded in the interactions of the inhabitants and consequent feedback of these interactions into the city as a whole. He illustrates city form as an emergent product of the inhabitant’s daily interactions. The city can then be understood in terms of a self-organizing system where the higher-level activity is more than the sum of the lower-level activities; where the city as a whole is the emergent product of social interaction. If it is possible to understand the form of the city as a product of these evolutionary processes then this insight can be utilized to formulate tools or guidelines with which emergence in a city can be guided in order to create a “noble city”.

page 12: figure 001  
Ratanama butchery, cnr. of Bloed  
and Prinsloo Streets. (Author)