



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

A PUBLIC PARLIAMENT

A study in politics, public space and people in the Capital City.



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A Public Parliament: A study in politics, public space and people in the Capital City.

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Stanza Bopape Street, Pretoria.

25°44'28"S; 28°12'42"E

Declaration of authenticity

In accordance with Regulation 4(e) of the General Regulations (G.57) for dissertations and theses, I declare that this document (which I hereby submit in partial fulfillment of the degree Magister of Architecture Professional) is my own work and has not been submitted by me for a degree at any other institution.

I further state that no part of this document has already, or is currently, being submitted for any degree, diploma or other qualification.

This document is substantially comprised of my own work. Where reference is made to the work of others, the extent to which the work is used has been indicated and fully acknowledged both in the text and in the list of references.

Suzette Elizabeth van der Walt

In acknowledgement

I would like to thank:

My Mother – for always being my number one fan.

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The Red Table – for being there, however sporadically, for 6 years and many more. And Omphile – for the last few; for staying.

All the people who have taught me and changed my life. Teachers, lecturers and friends. Nothing I have learnt has left me. Even though some of it only made sense much later.



...and thus, my friends, what the architectural profession lacks is an understanding of its own social importance. This lack is due to a double cause: to the anti-social nature of our entire society and to your own inherent modesty. You have been conditioned to think of yourselves merely as breadwinners with no higher purpose than to earn your fees and the means of your own existence. Isn't it time, my friends, to pause and to redefine your position in society? Of all the crafts, yours is the most important. Important, not in the amount of money you might make, not in the degree of artistic skill you might exhibit, but in the service you render to your fellow men. You are those who provide mankind's shelter. Remember this and then look at our cities, at our slums, to realize the gigantic task awaiting you. But to meet this challenge you must be armed with a broader vision of yourselves and of your work. You are not hired lackeys of the rich. You are crusaders in the cause of the underprivileged and the unsheltered. Not by what we are shall be we judged, but by those we serve. Let us stand united in this spirit. Let us – in all matters – be faithful to this new, broader, higher perspective. Let us organize – well, my friends, shall we say – a nobler dream?

*Elsworth Toobey in The Fountain Head
(Rand 2005:251)*

Abstract

South Africa is on fire. The dream of a rainbow nation has gone up in flames with the buildings being burned by those protesting an unjust system of governance. The people have begun to take back the power from those they elected to empower them, taking matters into their own hands.

Architecture cannot be autonomous in the face of a society in flux. Architecture in South Africa can be used as a tool to accommodate the lives of a people in search of an identity that is free of post scripts. Post-colonial, post-apartheid can no longer be South Africa's identifiers. And rainbow washing will not do. South Africa needs to live up to its claim of being a democracy. The role of the architect is not apolitical one, but not autonomous of politics either. If South Africa is a democracy, what might its cities look like?

This dissertation investigates the nature of democracy and its manifestation in space, making the claim that truly public space is the space in which democracy manifests— it is largely ungovernable, unpredictable and entirely in the hands of the people. The scheme therefore hopes to celebrate the value of public space by identifying a public space that does not fulfill its potential, and introducing a programme that utilizes the democracy of public space and contributes to it.

The scheme is placed in the premise of Pretoria as singular capital of South Africa (an issue that has been under debate since the formation of the union). This creates a need for the accommodation of programmes currently spread across the three capitals. One such a programme, the one in question, is that of parliament where democracy is tested by those in power. The site in question is one that has been a part of the political discourse in Pretoria for some time; The Union Buildings Estate, where protestors often gather to antagonize government.

The acknowledgement of the Union Buildings as the face of government sees the project, the parliament, brought to the foreground, located in the street where it is made public and accessible. It is an object made to be owned by the people and, should they feel the need, destroyed.

Suid Afrika is aan die brand. Die droom van 'n reënboognasie waai weg in die rook van geboue wat daaglik afgebrand word deur mense wat teen die waargenome onregerdige regeeringsproses protesteer. Suid Afrikaners het begin om die mag terug te neem van die mense wat hulle aangestel het om hulle te bemagtig.

Argitektuur kan nie self-regerend wees tydens die onvoorspelbaarheid van ons huidige samelewing nie. Suid Afrikaanse argitektuur kan gebruik word as die huisvesting van 'n bevolking opsoek na 'n identiteit, een sonder voorskryfte gedikteer deur die verlede. Postkolonialisme en post-apartheid kan nie verder die identiteit van Suid Afrika bepaal nie en die suiwering deur middel van 'n reënboog sal ook nie deug nie. Suid Afrika moet nou beny dat dit wel 'n demokrasie is. Die rol van argitektuur is apolities maar staan ook nie buite die politiek nie. Indien Suid Afrika wel 'n demokrasie is, hoe sal sy stede en dorpe lyk?

Hierdie skripsie ondersoek demokrasie en die uitbeelding daarvan in ruimtes, en stel voor dat die enigste werklike demokratiese ruimtes slegs publieke ruimtes is; aangesien werklike publieke ruimtes nie beheer of voorspel kan word nie en daarom slegs deur die samelewing beheer en bepaal word. Die projek skep waardering vir die publieke ruimtes deur goeie publieke ruimtes te identifiseer wat nie tot hul reg geskied nie en 'n ooreenkomstig program voor te stel wat die demokratiese neigings van publieke ruimte vuur en aanmoedig.

Die projek is gebaseer op die stelling dat Pretoria as enkele hoofstad van Suid Afrika verklaar moet word, 'n aangeleentheid wat al gedebateer word sedert die vorming van die Unie van Suid Afrika in 1910. So 'n verklaring skep die nut vir die inkorporeering van die oorblywende hoofstede se take, onder andere die parlement. Die parlement is waar demokrasie daaglik beproef word deur die regering. Die terrein wat gekies is vir die taak is ook al jare deel van politiek teenstredigheid, naamlik die Uniegeboue en gronde. Dit is tans waar protes gereeld plaas vind en word gesien as die gesig van die regering.

Die aanvaarding van die Uniegeboue as die regering se koppelvlak lei tot die besluit om die parlamentsgebou tot voetsoolvlak te bring, waar dit bereikbaar en toeganklik is vir alle vlakke van die samelewing. Die gebou word die besitting van die samelewing en kan dus deur die publiek beskerm of uitgewis word; soos hulle besluit.

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources; it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.

David Harvey, Geographer and Urbanism Theorist
[Harvey, 2008]

Preamble

This document discusses a speculative design scheme that is located within a conceptual and urban framework/vision that was developed for the broader precinct. The framework/vision was developed to address the current climate of the context (politically, theoretically and spatially).

The framework/vision document will be referred to throughout this dissertation and for that reason it is recommended that the reader familiarizes him/herself with it before reading this document. The full document can be found as an addendum to this dissertation.

This investigation results from a personal manifesto of sorts, a prediction not of architecture as a form of social engineering that can active changed people's lives but rather as acknowledgement of the potential for architecture to establish conditions that promote the thriving of the human spirit. In architecture as in all things we see, we first see ourselves. We use the self as the measure of all things. Sometimes when facing architecture we look ourselves dead in the eye. This is chance. If we design in a way that accommodates this chance, we reduce the distance between makers and users, between architecture and life.

The speculative scheme and this accompanying document, stems from a personal investigation into issues of democracy and identity of self and of others and of self in relation to others. It is therefore interlaced with the personal thoughts and musings, speculations and hypotheses that developed from, or acted as fuel to, the investigation. This document illustrates the development of these notion into architecture by means of sketches by the author. The drawings included, though often incomplete or inaccurate, document the thought processes as they occurred - and often a thought is abandoned mid-sentence or mid-sketch.

This document thus also serves as a documentation of a process over time. Care has been taken to present ideas as they occurred, however, occasionally thoughts have been stretched across numerous sections or repeated as reminder to the reader. Therefore it is important that despite being viewed as a collection of thoughts and ideaas, each drawing or musing needs to be viewed in light of the entire document. Similarly, this document needs to be viewed in its context of the continuum of architectural and political theory, without which it holds no meaning.

Instead of portraying newness, true architecture makes us aware of the entire history of building and it restructures our reading of the continuum of time (Pallasmaa, 2012)

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Addendum



Figure 1 - *Liberty* (a work by graffiti artist, Faith47) , Cape Town
(photograph by author, 2012)



equal before the law





If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.

Desmond Tutu

Chapter 1:
PRELIMINARIES

1.1. The People vs. The Government

The United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* implies the unity of all nations of the world under ideas of freedom and the implicit idea of democracy (UN, 1848). This global ideal sees countries who adhere to drastically undemocratic processes being ostracized and excluded from the rights and privileges awarded to those affiliated with the United Nations. It would thus stand that democracy is the global standard, in varying scales.

South Africa, globally, still triggers memories of Apartheid, the social evil known world-wide as having produced Nelson Mandela who is heralded as a savior for all across the globe. Despite his name being mentioned by political candidates to evoke liberal nostalgia, the era of Nelson Mandela and the rainbow nation is over.

2015 marked an upswing in the dissatisfaction with authority in South Africa. Largely led by the student youth of the country, a war on post-colonial remnants and systemic oppression was declared and government was caught completely off guard. There was a mass onslaught of protests for which everything was made viral by the suffix *must fall*. In the history of our young democracy the government had never been so vehemently antagonized.

But the issue of *The People vs. The Government* was not unique to South Africa. Upon investigation and with the right focus it was possible to identify examples of civilians using their democratic rights to express their dissatisfaction with government. These displays of dissatisfaction ranged from the *Edward Snowden*s of the world, who reported misuse of government resources (and was imprisoned for treason as a result) to the Icelandic public successfully sacking their entire government and employing new representatives (Savastio 2013).

This focused the investigation to question democracy at its core. If the departure point would be Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address then democracy implies the governance of the people, by the people (Wikipedia 2016). Since everyone cannot be actively involved in all instances of decision making, democracy manifests in a system of representation and participation. We participate by electing officials to represent us in governance of us. What then, occurs when waves of protest and civil disobedience sweep over the democratic world? This implies that the scale of representation sits intersecting the container that houses democracy – and the container moves along the scale, so at any one time there is a varying amount of participation and representation – when the government pulls too far in one direction, we become actively involved and thus representation is pulled more directly into democracy.

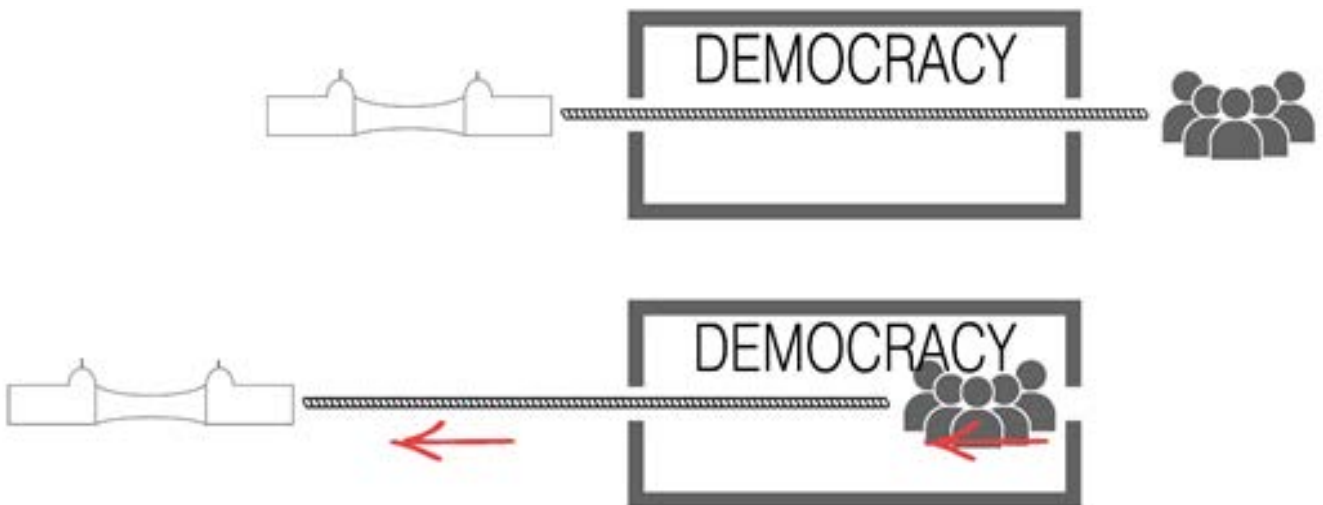


Figure 2 - The moving container of democracy (diagram by author, 2016)

1.2. Pretoria the Capital City

Some writers (Young 1990) see *the city as a site of difference, seeing this as providing new possibilities for democratic communities* (Watson and Studdert 2006: 2), which is what lead this exploration to its locality.

The presidential *State of the Nation Address raised the issue of dissolving South Africa's 3-part capital city distribution* which suggests the petition for Pretoria as the country's only capital (BusinessTech, 2016). This will not only be of practical benefit to the country (economically and logistically) but will also serve as a stronger statement of national identity.

Capital cities, specifically African post-colonial capital cities, are the site in which the state projects its power. It does so using symbols of power which most often manifest in the naming of streets, erection or removal of monuments and the layout of the city; its government institutions their architecture and public space. To a large extent capital cities are the manifestation of a state's ideologies (Therborn & Becker 2012: 1-2).

If Pretoria is to be the capital of South Africa and because South Africa is a democracy, then Pretoria ought to be democratic

1.3. Democracy Embodied: The importance of good public space

Kingwell (2009) describes public space as the place democracy lives. It is considered *political air* (Kingwell 2009:3) and is further described as being not only the physical pauses in fabric for recreation and release but it is said to *also mean something larger and looser: the right to gather and discuss, to interact with and debate ones fellow citizens* (ibid:7).

From this, the importance of public space in defining a capital as democratic becomes evident. A study into the public spaces, parks squares and active streetscapes becomes critical in establishing whether or not Pretoria is democratic and to what extent.

The Project for Public Spaces (pps.org) quotes William H. Whyte as saying; *The street is the river of life of the city, the place where we come together, the pathway to the center.* PPS advocates for the recapturing of the streets as public spaces as opposed to purely vehicular circulation routes. In his MArch Prof dissertation, Ahmed Alkayyali (2011) states that South African public space has lost its value due to incoherent town planning and has thus begun to relocate to the streets (Alkayyali 2011). He mentions public space being seen as the public interface of a city (according to Carr et. al (1992: 3)) and suggests that Pretoria's public interface lies in its streets. Evidence of this movement comes to mind in the number of street vendors on sidewalks and traffic islands in Pretoria. Trade is considered an effective creator of public space, as Watson and Studdert (2006:3) remark, markets can offer possibilities not only for local economic growth but also for people to mingle with each other and become accustomed to each other's differences in a public space. Perhaps the inherent chaos of a post-colonial city under reclaim is one of the best things to happen to the city's public space?

Despite the inherent emerging nature of these informal markets and their resilience in the face of metro police raids and evictions, they cannot alone be the creators of public space in the city. The lack of well-functioning public space (albeit a park or a sizeable sidewalk) renders the city as achieving below its potential in terms of a democratic city.

Da Costa and Van Rensburg (2008b) advocate for event driven solutions to reactivate the city – acknowledging that architecture and the urban fabric is only given real value by its use, and that to fix inherently social issues, the city must create social space where these issues may be dealt with and unpredicted outcomes may formulate themselves. It is this simultaneously non-descriptive and adaptable public space that is truly the manifestation of democracy – *spaces that contest functional hierarchies can be defined as being democratic, where experience is not subordinate to a dominating requirement of use* (Da Costa and Van Rensburg 2008b).

This sentiment served as a departure point for the precinct and larger city framework.

1.4. Democracy Housed: The role of Architecture

How does Architecture facilitate Democracy?

With the creation of an urban system of democratic public spaces, the role of architecture in the creation of a democratic city comes into question, but the generation of relevant programmes that allow architecture to become a dynamic interface between spatial hierarchies within the urban realm (Da Costa and Van Rensburg 2008:51).

This tests the hypothesis that architecture could facilitate democracy and will therefore stem from an investigation into architectures successes and failures to facilitate democracy and to determine a valid solution for the question.

The Union Buildings, the perceived seat of government, sits meters behind intraversable terraces a vast lawn and on the street edge a fence with a very small gate provides entry to the lawn. The would-be public lawns are used as outdoor recreation space but the few visitors on the lawns in comparison to the density of the surrounding neighborhoods raises the question of whether the lawns are being used to their full potential as urban public space. This could be because of the fence and gate scenario, or perhaps the sheer scale of the lawns serves to intimidate rather than welcome visitors.

With regards to the current protest-filled political climate, the union buildings is being manifested as the destination for marches of protest. The urban vision outlines this and accommodates such marches in the dedicate protest route framework. The proposal of a change in function by the Union Buildings to house the administrative features of legislative parliament serves in making the site a more apt destination for a march of protest.



Figure 3 - The 9m tall statue of Nelson Mandela was introduced to the site on reconciliation day in 2012 (Author, 2015)

Pause

Reflection

I am not quite a born-free. I was a Pretoria Minute born child. Not that I had ever heard of the Pretoria Minute until many years later. I started my pre-school education, officially, when my family moved from Pretoria to the Eastern Cape. I started preschool in 1995 drawing the South African flag, singing the national anthem and knowing that Nelson Mandela was the president of South Africa. To me there had never existed a world before this.

My 7 year old sister at the time would occasionally refer to the old South African flag whenever we came across it on old documents or in photographs in the many museums my mother took us to as children. I believed that they had just wanted something more colourful and that's how we ended up with the image that is imprinted in the eyes of every school going child from day one.

Perhaps my difficulty to seek an academic definition for democracy is because the term has become a non-negotiable to my generation. Much as how capitalism seems to have no viable alternative; we are taught about profit and self-gain in every subject at school – literature included stories of children using entrepreneurial instincts to help their families out of poverty due to retrenchment and family illness. In mathematics you always have to sell your apples to a friend, you would never simply give them away.

Every turn of the schooling system preaches democracy, so much so that we see no alternative option. We believe in freedom and autonomy and individualism as a basic human right. Even in present turmoil of the political and civil landscape the idea of democracy embodies this blind faith in freedom and autonomy as though it were a right. Despite disputes and disagreements on a variety of matters South Africans genuinely believe in democracy. They have faith that democracy is the system, above all else, that will maintain and ensure the liberty of all South Africans which is an idea held as true as any faith in a higher power.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau introduced this idea when he postulated that all societies need a religion to hold them together. At the time he introduced the idea he felt that Christianity, which was the prevailing religion in Europe, was dealing too much with matters of the heavens and the afterlife and thus postulated the need for a civil religion. He believed that if all members of a society held the same principles as true and had faith in a system then there would be political unison and the society could progress (Rousseau and Frankel 1947).

In a post-Apartheid South Africa, Democracy is held as a sacralised political system, one that people believe in as an absolute truth. It is important to clarify the origins and extent of political religion, the commentary below aims to shed light on the idea.

Response - Political Religion vs. Civil Religion: Religious Politics

The following is in response to the explanation of Emilio Gentile of the concept of Political Religion and the criticism against the idea.

Civic religion is often heralded as a national good in democratic pluralist society. Gentile (2005:20) suggests its value as a tool of analysis of political systems and national ideals, suggesting that critics of the idea fail to see the value as analysis tool.

Gentile(2005:21) raises the point that theologians and Christian intellectuals often fiercely oppose the religious character of political and civic religions claiming the potential evil of such systems (e.g. Nazism) results in very dangerous territory. There is also contestation with regard to the definitions of political religions as opposed to civil religions – some believe

the ideas are the same and others believe they are worlds apart. The debate resurfaced, particularly in post-Vietnam war America when sociologist Robert Bellah (1976 pp.1.21 in Gentile 2005:20) publicized an article on the topic saying few have realized that there actually exists alongside of, and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America. Bellah (1976 pp.1.21 in Gentile 2005:20) proposed a definition that eliminated debate by suggesting there is a distinct religious dimension to politics – this is what he believed was meant by civil religion. With time, and possibly the gradual secularization of the global academic community, the idea of civil religion has become less criticized and is acknowledged as a valid observation (especially in places like the USA)(Gentile 2005:24).

Political religion, as opposed to the idolization of the people which is the case with civil religion, deals with totalitarianism – where the state, a political party or one reason reigns supreme.

It must be noted and emphasized that Gentile (2005:28) criticizes the scholars that deal with (and criticize) political religions, perhaps due to personal agnosticism/atheism. He argues that in simply declaring totalitarianism, a political religion implies regarding a political entity as godly/sacred and does not replace a god/divine being. This is most evident in the political religion scenario of the Nationalist Regime in South Africa, which used churches to reaffirm nationalist values. Church and state were both seen as moral authorities, one in support of the other. The truly religious were the first to use the term and did so to create a term that embodied their criticism of totalitarian systems, saying only a truly divine entity should be regarded as highly as totalitarian systems regard political entities.

The sacralisation of politics is manifest in the way the ideal of politics was conceived, experienced and represented by its supporters, in their style of life as well as in their attitudes towards the adversaries and opposing ideals. Modern political movements are transformed into secular religions when they: (a) define the meaning of life and ultimate ends of human existence; (b) formalise the commandments of a public ethic to which all members of these movement must adhere; and (c) give utter importance to a mythical and symbolic dramatisation in their interpretation of history and reality, thus creating their own 'sacred history', embodied in the nation, the state or the party, and tied to the existence of a 'chosen people', which were glorified as the regenerating force of all mankind. (Gentile 2005:29).

It is important, also, to state hereby the difference between a civil religion and a political religion. Political religion aims to overrule all other beliefs in the name of a political ideal. It often condones violence in the enforcement thereof (Gentile 2005:30). Civic religion, however, encompasses an overarching goal of citizens that hold it true above all else. It implies that despite having differing political views, an entire society holds true a specific ideal that they believe is for the greater good of all people (Gentile 2005:30)

The fact that South Africa is in a state of unrest and is marked with displays of unrest and disagreement on a daily basis but is not descending into civil war is testament to the religious nature of our belief in democracy. Disagreement and debate are the sacraments of democracy.





Figure 4 - The South African flag is a daily part of children's lives, the *rainbow-washing* of a very unresolved story (CNN, 2013)