Exploring 'place-making,' city squares & other places: Cape Town's pre-apartheid spatial politics

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This paper explores the theoretical problems, contradictions and limits that architecturally-oriented 'place-making,' and the 'city square' typological thrust of place-making, evokes. The first part of this paper is a sketching out of some of the key architectural theorists and ideas in relation to form, space and place. It points to the limiting understanding of place-making essentially as an act of enclosure whose centring spatiality purports to be a 'healing' instrument through which the excesses of modernism and apartheid's 'space' might be redressed. As a counterpoint to the humanist positions of Norberg-Schulz and Kevin Lynch, the potential for 'place' to be the nexus of asymmetrical power relations is also investigated; place is set in contrast to the possible liberating potential of 'the city'. The final section of the first part of this paper looks at Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual schemas of 'smooth' and 'striated' space in considering the conservative function of architecture in society. The second part of this paper examines three pre-apartheid places in Cape Town, namely, Wells Square in erstwhile District Six, the Roeland Street housing scheme, and the Cape Dutch manor house Groot Constantia. These case studies demonstrate the limits and efficacy of place-making theory in dealing with the complexities of ideologically-loaded contexts. Groot Constantia's 'object building' imageability produced it as a flattened place that was filled with normalising and conservative identities such as nation and race. On the other hand, the spatially fractured Wells Square was erased from District Six because of its dangerous potential as a Deleuzian 'smooth' space. Finally, the Roeland Street scheme confirms the power that modernist space had in limiting the liberating potential of the spatiality of the pre-apartheid city. I conclude by using the ideas in both parts, as well as ideas about power and visuality as a means to reflect on what I think are important issues when it comes to form, space and place.
Key words: Pre-apartheid, city squares, place-making

Este texto explora los problemas teóricos, contradicciones y límites que evocan las nociones de 'creación de lugar' y 'plaza urbana' como tipología esencial en la construcción de lugares. La primera parte del ensayo presenta algunos de los teóricos clave y sus ideas, en relación con forma, espacio y lugar. La creación de lugar se destaca como un acto de interiorización, cuya especialidad centralizada pretende ser un instrumento de 'cicatrización' a través del cual los excesos de la modernidad y el 'espacio del apartheid' puedan ser reparados. Como contrapartida a las posiciones humanistas de Norberg-Schulz y Kevin Lynch, se investiga también el potencial del 'lugar' como vínculo de unión de relaciones de poder asimétricas; el lugar se destaca como una potencial vía de liberación de 'la ciudad'. Finalmente, la primera parte del texto examina los esquemas conceptuales de 'espacio suave' y 'espacio estriado' apuntados por Deleuze y Guattari, en relación con la función conservadora de la arquitectura en la sociedad. La segunda parte del ensayo examina tres espacios del pre-apartheid en Ciudad del Cabo: Wells Square, en el District Six, el esquema de las viviendas en Roeland Street, y la casa solariega de Groot Constantia, de estilo colonial holandés. Estos ejemplos demuestran los límites y la eficacia de la teoría de la 'creación de lugar' sobre las complejidades inherentes a contextos cargados de ideología. Ello se muestra en la imagen de Groot Constantia como un 'edificio-objeto' que produce esencialmente un lugar plano, que se llena con identidades normalizadas y conservadoras como nación y raza. Por otra parte, el espacio fracturado de Wells Square fue eliminado de District Six debido a su peligrosa capacidad como un 'espacio suave'. Para concluir, el esquema de Roeland Street confirma la capacidad que tiene el espacio moderno para limitar el potencial liberador de la espacialidad de la ciudad pre-apartheid. Concluyo utilizando las ideas de ambas partes, al igual que los conceptos sobre poder y visualidad, como medios para reflejar lo que considero aspectos primordiales a la hora de analizar forma, espacio y lugar.
Palabras clave: pre-apartheid, plaza urbana, creación de lugar

In my experience[1] as an architectural student and educator 'place-making' has been privileged over 'form-making'[2] in South African architectural pedagogy. In fact, courtyard buildings and city squares – arguably the stock tools of place-making proponents – tend to be held up in South Africa almost as a panacea for apartheid's ills. In the first part of this paper I will attempt to set out some ideas as to why these impulses prevail, and at the same time point to some of the potential theoretical problems, contradictions and limits that this physically-oriented 'place-making' and typological attitude might evoke. In order to understand how place-making in general, and city squares in particular, can come to be viewed as essential to post-apartheid spatiality we must include in our explorations the relationship between space, form and place

in forming places, in other words, we need to investigate the logic of space in the physicality of place-making. Furthermore, this paper not only reviews how place-making can come to carry so much cultural cache in South African schools of architecture, but also explores more critical views on place-making that might be helpful in shifting our understanding of 'place-making' into more nuanced and problematised readings. This critique is carried through into the second part of this paper which considers the case of three pre-apartheid places in Cape Town, namely Wells Square in erstwhile District Six, the Roeland Street housing scheme near District Six, and the Cape Dutch manor house Groot Constantia, where the logic of physically-oriented placing-making is both confirmed and overwritten by other forces. I will use the ideas emerging from both parts of this paper, as well as ideas about power and visuality as a means to reflect on what I think are the limits and limitations when it comes to physically-oriented approaches to place-making.

Mapping out ideas of form, space and place

'Place' is an ideologically loaded word. 'Place' has come to us, especially in South Africa, as a conceptual device through which the excesses and abstraction of modernism's 'space' – hence apartheid's spatiality[3] – might be redressed. With the spluttering of orthodox modernism, a late-modern[4] revision occurred that identified the universal and universalising 'space' of modernism to be a culprit generating general disaffection in society. In this shifting paradigm modernist space was disparaged as being homogenous (although segregated through functional zoning), Cartesian and undifferentiated; quantitative before qualitative. Aldo van Eyck famously characterised the late-modern humanist-oriented shift thus: "whatever space and time mean, place and occasion mean more, for space in the image of man is place, and time in the image of man is occasion." (in Hertzberger, 2001: 193) It is, however, particularly through the qualities of enclosure and formal differentiation that Modernism was understood to have 'failed' this 'Man' who was the focus of architecture in the 1960s. Christian Norberg-Schulz (1980: 189), architecture's most prominent place-making theorist, notes in *Genius Loci. Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*:

> *Spatially* the new settlements do not anymore possess enclosure and density. They usually consist of buildings 'freely' placed within a park-like space. Streets and squares in the traditional sense are no longer found… The urban tissue is 'opened up,' the continuity of the urban 'walls' is interrupted, and the coherence of the urban spaces damaged. [original emphasis]

City squares and clearly-defined streets as walls, then, become for Norberg-Schulz exemplars of an architecture that can redress this ill-formed environment. However, this does not mean that all buildings "'freely' placed within a park-like space" are harmful. It should be noted that 'object buildings,' when placed as pavilions in a natural or park landscape achieve a positive differentiation in an otherwise homogenous landscape and hence do not present a problem; more problematic – and as Roger Trancik identifies in *Finding Lost Space* (1986:1) – is the proliferation of object buildings in contemporary urban environments that do not form a cohesive group and yet at the same time do not differentiate themselves as singularities.[5] It is not difficult to see how South African township environments were understood to be small-scale and dispersed versions of the spatiality of the modern capitalist city or even the large-scale housing blocks of the welfare state (Japha, 1998). These environments can be contrasted with the tight-knit, low-scale streetscape of more traditional towns which were considered to be less 'alienating.' In effect, what Norberg-Schulz promotes as place-making 'healing' is the literal figure-ground inversion of the modernist city whereby object buildings are inverted into courtyards or city squares in a tightly enclosed wall of background buildings. The move by

1960s theorists and architects such as Christopher Alexander and Aldo van Eyck to a humanist, place-based architecture resonated with South African architects and university lecturers who hoped to combat the apartheid state through socio-spatial intervention. But, how can it come to be thought that this simple 'inversion' of the space of modernism/apartheid be able to 'heal' the alienation of modern/apartheid society?

As the title of Norberg-Schulz's *Genius Loci. Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* alludes, this seminal book owes much to the philosopher Martin Heidegger. Norberg-Schulz uses key concepts from Heidegger such as 'dwelling' or 'to dwell' to illustrate how space and form can impact peoples lives and offer them a kind of healing for the damages modernism and modern living has done. In effect, 'dwelling' or 'to dwell' is a life given with material and physical coordinates, a sort of architectural territorialisation where the walls of a street or a city square literally offer the greatest security and reference for a public life. He states: "We may conclude that dwelling means to gather the world as a concrete building or 'thing,' and that the archetypal act of building is the *Umfriedung* or enclosure." (1980: 23) It should not be difficult to see how well-formed or 'walled' city squares are exemplary of the idea of 'enclosure' and hence 'dwelling'. Moreover, Norberg-Schulz notes that "human identity presupposes the identity of place" (1980: 180) and this "identity of place" is easily given through clear distinction and demarcation between spatial structures. In phenomenological terms, the 'home' (a homeland, a home town, a square, a street, a house), if spatially identifiable and distinct, becomes a familiar, stable and comforting datum to be returned to in the uncertainties of life. It is obvious that for architects concerned with South Africa's homeless, and here we can include the 'homelessness' of the apartheid and post-apartheid government-implemented housing stock, Norberg-Schulz offers an attractive theoretical model to guide socio-spatial intervention. 'Dwelling' is an obvious antidote to the rootlessness and migrancy that apartheid subjected its 'second-rate' 'citizens'[6] to. Within the limitations of such architecturally-oriented place-making theory then, it seems that the clear physical demarcation of space uncritically becomes a 'solution' to the socio-spatial problems of apartheid's legacy.

With a particularly urban analysis that compensates Norberg-Schulz's somewhat bucolic soft focus, Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960) proposes that 'good' cities – cities we feel at home in – are cities with good form. Mostly, 'good' form is taken to be legible form, where particular typologies are identifiable such as 'edge', 'node', 'landmark', 'square', etc. For Lynch (1960: 4-5), differentiation in the visual field is crucial to the legibility and hence ease with which a city can be read:

> A good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security. He can establish an harmonious relationship between himself and the outside world. This is the obverse of fear that comes with disorientation; it means that the sweet sense of home is strongest when home is not only familiar but distinctive as well.

Formal clarity acts as a sort of 'closing off' where typological singularities begin to emerge; streets are clearly differentiated from city squares and both require a homogenous 'wall' of background buildings to define their edge. As Norberg-Schulz (1980: 69) notes, "In most settlements… we find that the naming of the urban spaces reflects the existence of distinct man-made places which have a structurally determined identity." Norberg-Schulz (1980: 58) suggests that "the cultural importance of defining an area which is qualitatively different form the surroundings, cannot be overestimated." In other words, the body of the city should be carved up into clearly defined distinctive nodes that are easily differentiated from the general

background mass of the form and space of the city – a body with organs if you will. From Lynch and Norberg-Schulz it is easy to surmise that the role of the architect and the urban designer is to provide 'good' form wherein communities can be stabilised, allowing 'dwelling' to take place and thereby produce happy, non-alienated and non-conflicted human beings.

In short, clearly defined street edges and city squares have become important tools aimed at overcoming apartheid's debilitating socio-spatial structure. What theorists such as Norberg-Schulz and Lynch propose is that the form/space nexus has a direct and instrumental impact on human agency. This follows a long line of instrumentalist reasoning from a basis in Marx's materialism, through Victorian theories of moral degeneration, to the 'machine for living in' propaganda of early modernists like Le Corbusier. Here we are talking about the form of space and the space of form, in what can be called the logic of space. This, then, is the crux of the matter when it comes to place-making because it suggests that there is an essential condition to form and space that is activated through the peculiar 'up/down,' 'front/back' binaries of the human body. In other words, form and space have a universal logic that implements a sort of force-field on humans and hence can in some way determine their conduct. Is there any validity to this idea?

Francis DK Ching's (1979) classic First Year architecture student's textbook *Architecture: Form, Space and Order*, contains a set of drawings that identify these key characteristics of form and space. As indicated in these drawings, form generates an imperative spatial condition, leading to spaces being: internally oriented (and hence centred); passages (and hence dynamic); and radial from a central form (and hence repelling). These essential conditions of form and space can be further understood as city-scale typologies such as squares, streets and pavilions, which are again formal models. It is clear from Ching that a courtyard or a square has a literal centring spatial function that through Lynch and Norberg-Schulz (1980: 12) readily translates into a kind of social-cultural centring. Furthermore, the walls of a square or courtyard – if scaled correctly – are important because they define the limits in which the public life of the city might be gathered; the walls frame, and hence legitimise, the public togetherness that the city is supposed to establish. City squares become defined as functional outdoor rooms with a sense that particular and clearly-defined activities might take place within them. It is not surprising, then, that place-making proponents tend to promote the city square as the typology most suited to 'healing' architecture where social and cultural divisions might be overcome. Moreover, in the South African context, with its divisive past and diverse people, the city square is seen to offer the promise of a utopian post-apartheid togetherness where the enclosing walls of the square delimit the segregations of the past whilst framing the 'togetherness' of the Rainbow Nation. In these terms, a poorly-defined city square with 'bleeding' edges cannot delimit and hence legitimise these activities; 'place' is subsumed within the abstract Cartesian 'space' that rushes in through the gaps. It is interesting to note that despite the general anti form-making sentiment of place-making proponents (form is evidence of the immoral excesses of society where a humanist spirit and ethical concern for place-making is ignored in favour of egotistical constructs and egotistical constructions), form, nevertheless, plays a crucial role in the establishment of place.
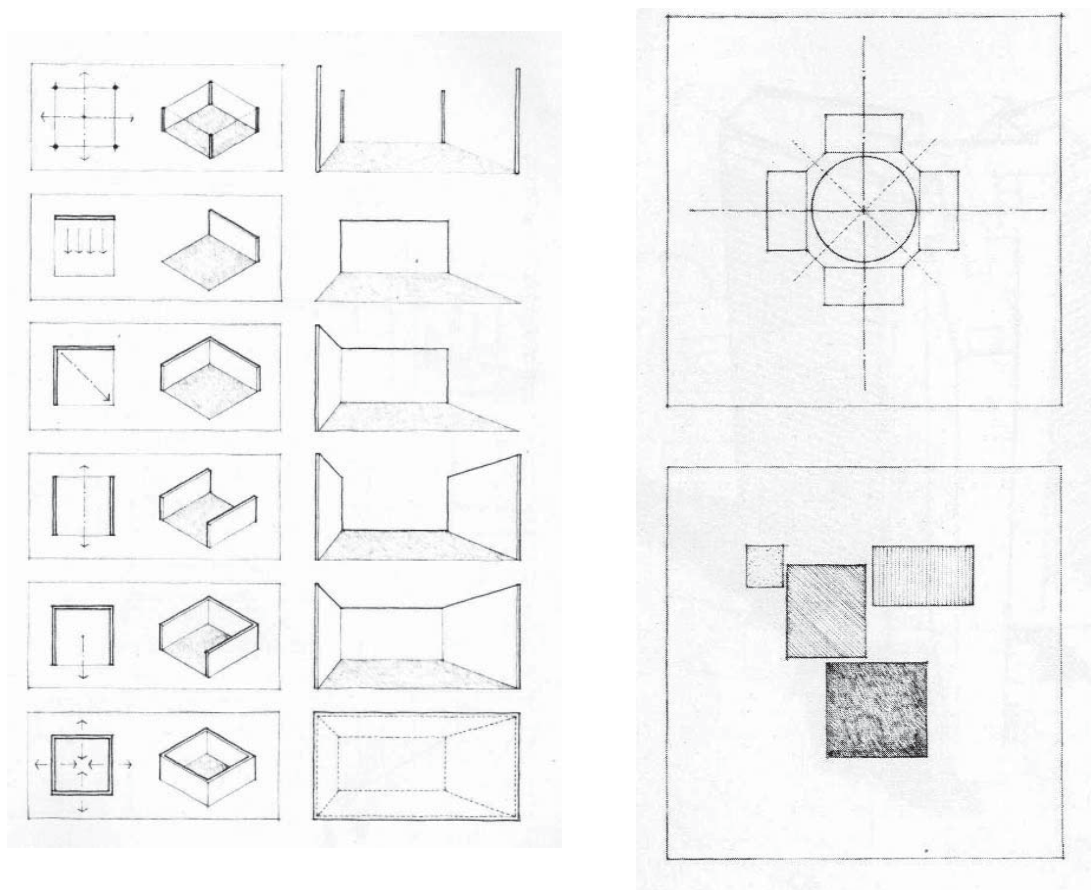
Figure 1
Logic of space. Source: Francis DK Ching (1979).

As we have seen above, place-making proponents such as Norberg-Schulz and Lynch ascribe a lot of power to the instrumental physicality of form and space in the construction of place. Yet, this paper aims to highlight the limitations and contradictions to such a typological approach. Indeed, *Genius Loci* is more nuanced than perhaps I have characterised above. It might be argued that spaces truly become places when their typology is overwritten by character, which again is one of Norberg-Schulz's key concerns (1980: 12). Spaces that transcend their typological definition are understood to be places; a place might be defined as the particular instance of a type of space. For example, a square in Cape Town might be differentiated from a square in Rio by the orientation of the sun, the material of the floor, the surrounding buildings and their height etc. Yet, character is an elusive conceptual category. As we will see in the second part of this paper it can be used to overwrite spatial and place-making logic in the service of power. Nevertheless, in place-making discourse it is seen as a positive attribute that helps the 'user' of a space orientate themselves in the city by being able to differentiate – that word again – particular places that are essentially of the same typology. In effect, character is the positive identity that helps shift a typology of space into a distinctive place. These distinctions between say, public squares, that share the same typology but have a different character, then, are understood to add value and richness to peoples' lives, allowing the homogenising alienation of modernist space to be overcome. Yet, as we saw at the beginning of this paper, for Norberg-Schulz and Lynch the ideal of *enclosure*, definition and differentiation in the built environment are the essential first steps in making 'place' where character might be understood to particularise that place.

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As a final differentiation we might say that spaces become places on the determining effects of the humans inhabiting them and the events that take place in them. At a more theoretical level, Henri Lefebvre (1995) suggests that people 'produce' space through their representations in space; in this way space is not homogenous and abstract space of modernism but is already loaded, modulated and differentiated in as much as 'time' is experienced in many different ways by humans and different cultures. In this sense, Cape Town's Grand Parade is still filled with the bodies of the thousands who welcomed Mandela on his release from incarceration. For cathartic events, the function of the square – a large space facilitating public gatherings – rides roughshod over the importance of place-making 'character' in defining the 'healing of a nation'. At its most basic, characterless instance then, a city square might simply form the backdrop to the events that take place in the space, thereby not overwriting or over-determining the ideological significance of those events. But for how long? The purple dye of Greenmarket Square has long since faded since the 'purple shall govern' anti-apartheid protest on 2nd September 1989. In some ways the events in space that produce the identity of a place might be more elusive than the overarching architectural identity gained from Norberg-Schulz's notions of character and place. Greenmarket Square as a place can be returned to again and again, but 'the purple shall govern' protest can now only be found on the internet. It is tempting, nevertheless, to suggest that city squares can act as positive social-spatial entities – healing architecture – simply by making room for large-scale democratic events rather than for their special character as places *per se*.

In an attempt to sketch out a more nuanced understanding of place-making and city squares, we seem to have become a bit distracted from our main concern which is to explore how particularly architectural 'place-making' concerns have dominated architectural pedagogy in South Africa, and what the limitations, problems and contradictions of this approach are. This next section will examine theoretical positions and ideas that are more critical of place-making ideas and concomitant ideas about enclosure with regard to city squares.

More critical ideas on place-making

If, as we have seen, 'place' has come to us as an ideological construct through which modernism's 'space' might be inverted, then there is a further ideological basis to 'place' that theorists such as Hilde Heynen (1999), Neil Leach (1999: 51), and Kim Dovey (1999) have pointed to. In contrast to Norberg-Schulz, their approach to place is on the basis of a critique where 'place' and 'place-making' is viewed with suspicion. For example, the general anti-urban sentiment in both Norberg-Schulz and Heidegger's writing has been noted by Dovey (1999: 58) and Leach (1999: 153). For Heidegger, 'authentic' dwelling seems to be best located in the bucolic ideal of the Black Forest peasant house. Heidegger's ideas of localism, regionalism, and politics of a community rooted to the 'soil' gave fuel to a nationalism that targeted the nomadic and the rootless (gypsies and Jews) in the holocaust. In other words, 'dwelling' might be seen as a socially and culturally conservative closing off that restricts chance encounters of strangers and difference, two key characteristics of 'the city.' Furthermore, it is in Foucault's (2000) 'heterotopias' that the messy vitality of a city starts to operate contrary to the clarity in form and space that Norberg-Schulz and Lynch desire. In a more critical reading of city squares – the supposed locus of freedom, democracy and togetherness – clearly defined edges and boundaries allow greater control over the activities taking place in the square, establishing that people are either 'in' the square and hence legitimising the actions therein, or 'out' and hence excluded from concern. In the afore-mentioned 'the purple shall govern' protest, people who were in Greenmarket square were purposefully sprayed with purple dye so that they could be tracked down and arrested as they tried to slip away into the more fluid spaces of the city. City squares

are not necessarily the 'healing' democratic places that are hoped for, and can often become, the locus of power rather than democracy or the crystallising of the *genius loci*.

Interestingly, theorists concerned with the relationship between space and power such as Foucault (1984) – and more recent advocates such as Heynen, Dovey and Leach – do give credence to the importance of form and space in the production of power, Foucault's (1990) analysis of the panopticon being exemplary of this. Yet, rather than giving the logic of space a final determining effect in the power relations of society they see it as having a suggestive force that can be denied or ignored by any sentient being; clearly, a city square cannot 'demand' public togetherness but it certainly might facilitate it better than a kitchen. Nevertheless they do subscribe to understanding the power that space can have over people's opportunities and prospects – the spatial politics of apartheid South Africa being the clearest example of this. Here the logic of boundaries, separations and distance was an effective instrument in the control, subjugation and exploitation of people on the arbitrary basis of skin colour. Those that critique 'place' as the locus of power, then, nevertheless give limited credence to the logic of space as laid out so clearly by Ching.

There are, however, even more critical ideas that suggest that place-making should be engaged with in a more sceptical manner. The French theorists Deleuze and Guattari (2002), although not addressing a particularly architectural issue, explore the differences between what they call 'smooth' versus 'striated' spaces in *A Thousand Plateaus*. As a caveat, it should be noted that they use this binary opposition as a metaphor for differing attitudes to life; in other words, the binary is explored as a conceptual device. Although not stating things directly (as is their style) the text favours the openness of smooth space, suggesting that Deleuze and Guattari see themselves as nomads in a smooth world, open to chance encounters and radical and unforeseen events. Unlike in clearly demarcated city squares where 'public' functions can be mapped and ascribed, in these deterritorialisations anything can happen. Smooth space is in effect un-mappable and unknowable as Cartesian space, whereas striated space is a space of co-ordinates, identity and control where people and objects can be accounted for and contained. It is easy to see that the place-making ideals of Norberg-Schulz and Lynch are exemplary of striated space. Admittedly, Deleuze and Guattari (2002: 474) acknowledge that "we must remind ourselves that the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly reversed, returned to a smooth space." Yet, in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari it is not difficult to see then, that a 'Venetian' might spend their whole life trying to escape the weight of 'Venice' preferring to undermine its shaky foundation and disappear into the sea.[7] Here, well-formed identities – the striations of 'place' or 'nation' – are the oppressive forces that subjugate individuality, and deny the potentials of 'becoming' through the overwriting stasis of 'being.' The ideas of Deleuze and Guattari act as a kind of warning against notions of a healing architecture, because they suggest that by setting things apart and by giving form, architects are the primary agents of territorialistation and hence, conservative power.[8]

In summary, if Norberg-Schulz and Lynch promote place – city squares for example – as a healing device, and Foucault, Heynen, and Dovey critique space and place as potentially problematic political devices, then Deleuze and Guattari would imply that the entire architectural program of setting apart means it is always implicated in conservative politics. Needless to say, ideas of space and place are contradictory and complex. I would like to unlock more of this complexity and further contradictions by looking at specific place-making examples which seem to work in a way contrary to the ideas of city squares and the formal logic of space that we have engaged with so far.

Background to the spatial politics of pre-apartheid Cape Town

I would now like to look at three places in pre-apartheid Cape Town in an attempt to understand the limits of the logic of form and space in place-making, and how 'place' becomes an instrument in uneven power relations. In effect, the complexities of the three case-study places – Groot Constantia, Wells Square and the Roeland Street housing scheme – problematise the spatial logic of physically-oriented place-making theory. Groot Constantia, the archetypal Cape Dutch homestead, is essentially a pavilion building that has accrued a huge positive cache as a 'place' in Cape Town. Wells Square, on the other hand, is a lost memory as part of the 'removed' space of District Six; its typology as a square was part of the 'problem' that was identified by the City of Cape Town. This led to its eradication and the implementation of the Roeland Street scheme as its replacement. Groot Constantia, Wells Square and the Roeland Street Scheme need to be seen as part of a larger and more complex story;[9] in pre-apartheid spatial politics Groot Constantia, and the Cape Dutch architecture it was thought to exemplify, became the locus around which white and particularly English power could coalesce. On the other hand, places like Wells Square and District Six were taken as evidence of the 'sub-human' nature of England's colonial 'others.' These places – contrary as they were to the logic of architectural place-making theory – became representational icons that strengthened English hegemony in pre-apartheid South Africa.

Figure 2
Groot Constantia gable (Source: Author).

Groot Constantia and Cape Dutch architecture

Settler mythology reveres Jan van Riebeeck as the founder of Cape Town, whilst his successor Governor Simon van der Stel is generally considered to be the founder of the Cape as a European colony. It was Van der Stel who developed the town of Stellenbosch and encouraged the establishment of Free Burghers colonists who were free from the yoke of the Dutch East India Company. It is easy to see how Groot Constantia, the home of Van der Stel, was revered as the symbol of the birth of South Africa. As I have shown elsewhere (Coetzer, 2007b), the front gable of Groot Constantia became the icon through which South Africa's identity was represented to the rest of the British Empire at the Empire Exhibition. As Martin Hall (1994) has shown, this gable was mistakenly understood to be the origin of a genus of gables that were built around the Cape Peninsula during the eighteenth century. Yet when Groot Constantia was almost destroyed by a fire in 1925 the restoration revealed that the gable had been constructed during the early nineteenth century when Hendrick Cloete was its owner. During and after its reconstruction, Groot Constantia seemed oddly resistant to this revisionist history and its gable somehow retains its double symbolism as the father of all other Cape Dutch gables and as the work of the 'father of the nation,' Simon van der Stel. Even today the revisionist history that quite rightly seeks to give voice to the slaves who were fundamental to Groot Constantia (and indeed South Africa's early history) battles to find representational space in the face of the dominance of this gable.
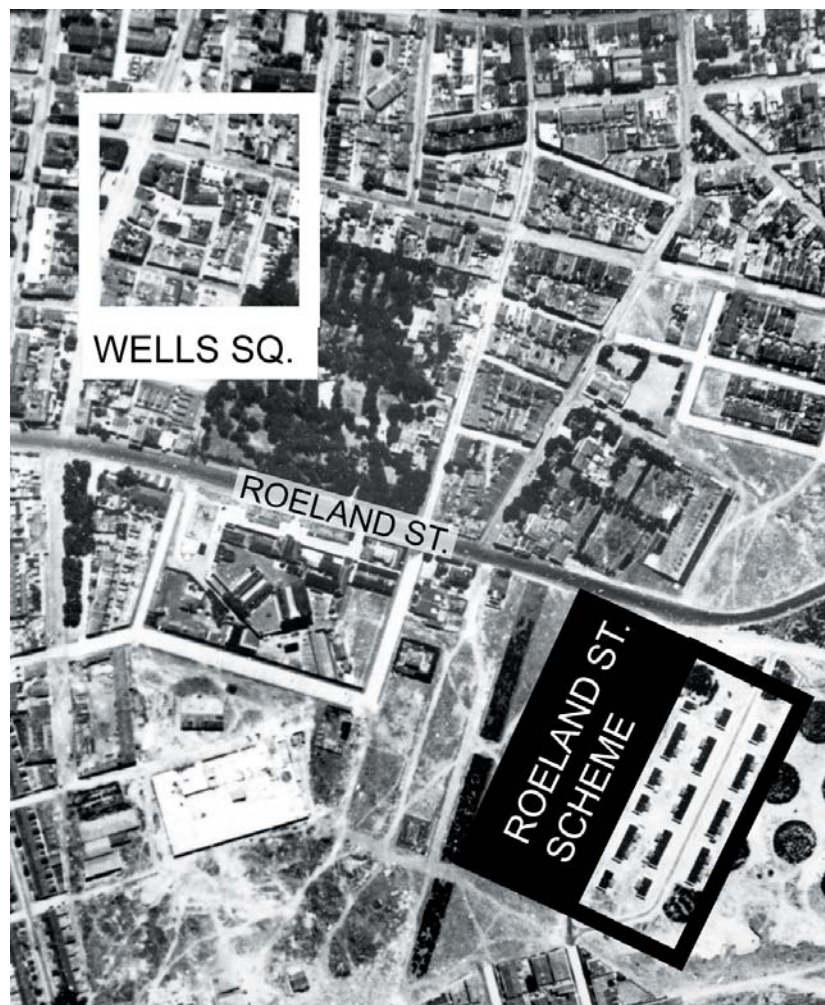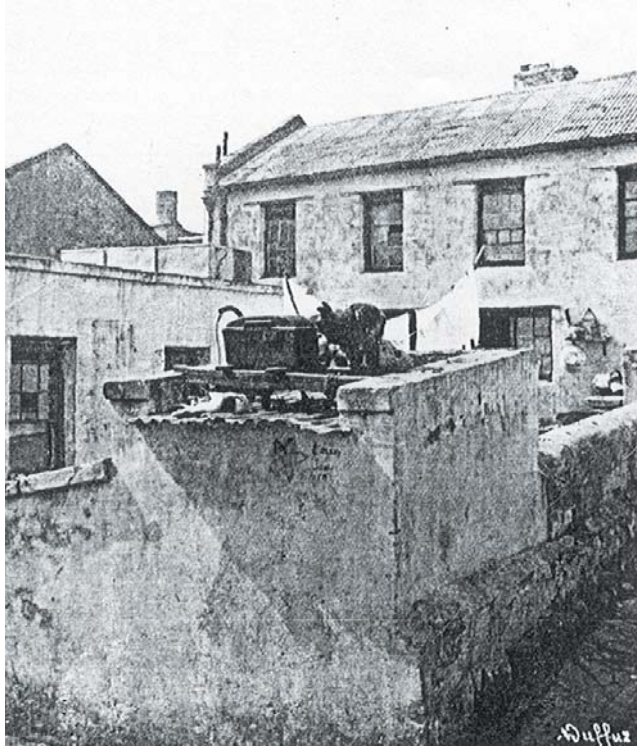

Figure 3
1926 Aerial photograph of District 6, Cape Town (Source: City of Cape Town and Author).

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Figure 4
Wells Square (Source: *Architect, Builder and Engineer,* 1(3, October) 1917).

Understanding the power of the typology of the 'object-building' might go some way to help explain the 'survival' of Groot Constantia as icon. To paraphrase Roland Barthes (1990: 3) – the only time you are outside an object building is when you are inside it. It seems safe to say that it is the gable's peculiar visual singularity – flat, frontal and delimited – that allowed it to be reproduced, firstly, through representations such as drawings and photographs and, secondly, through built reproductions in the Cape Dutch revival movement that gripped the elite of Cape Town at the beginning of the 20th Century. Here Groot Constantia's gable was set in a number of wealthy and important city 'fathers' homes and important governmental buildings as exemplars of a colonial possession of 'place.' In other words, rather than becoming a non-place by repelling space as the drawings of Ching might suggest, the object building becomes an exemplar of place through its iconic representation. Here, the visual – and what Foucault (1981) refers to the 'discourse' around it – has a real power to overwrite spatial logic and become a sort of flattened place that essentialising spatial logic cannot account for. Of course

the axiality of Groot Constantia and its gable resonates with the logic of hierarchy, authority and power that it came to represent, but in the proselytising of place it is a city square or a courtyard that is seen as holding the greatest place-making potential. One might even go so far as to say that the anthropomorphism of Groot Constantia – its gable-face and extended arms – makes the slippage from building to authority almost seamless. Here, then, is an example of how in Deleuzian terms object buildings work as striations – points of focus and reference – in space and, to extend the metaphor, Groot Constantia acted as a point of reference and power in territorialising the geography of settler history.

It is easy to suggest in line with Walter Benjamin (2007), the character of the place – the peculiar phenomenology of Groot Constantia – is the aura that is lost with the proliferation of its image. Furthermore, the self-contained imageability of object-buildings allows their infinite reproduction as symbols of place that become more important than the place itself. In other words, Groot Constantia as geographic place overcame the limited range of its originating homestead territory through its iconic imageability. Flat as they are, images of Groot Constantia were filled with settler mythology and hence became instruments in a play of power that helped legitimise pre-apartheid colonial policies.

Wells Square and the Roeland Street scheme in District Six

Contrary to Groot Constantia, Wells Square in erstwhile District Six is absent from popular memory. It was removed from the space of Cape Town in the 1930s, decades before the apartheid-era forced removal of the 'slum' of District Six began. Like much of what was called 'old Cape Town,' Wells Square was occupied by poor people who rented property from unscrupulous rack-renters. While the social conditions of these parts of Cape Town – such as overcrowding of rooms, prostitution and gambling – played a part in the development of slum clearance policies,[10] it was also the physical character of the neighbourhoods that became a rallying point for early forced removals from District Six. Like other dense urban areas in the world at the time, modernists considered their lack of light and air a serious problem. However, there were more vague concerns that went along with these scientific motivations for slum clearances, firstly on its visual appearance and secondly on its spatial qualities. I would like to refer to both of these in my investigation of the nature of Wells Square as a problematic place.

Unlike Groot Constantia, which could be 'captured' in one image, notions of Wells Square as a place were vague thanks to its typology as a square. As we will see, its fractured space made its imageability even more difficult – it could never be reduced to a visual singularity. Nevertheless, the visual nature of judgement is reflected in official archive documents that often make reference to 'eyesore' buildings as the basis for their declaration as slums. In fact, until the Slums Act of 1934 there was much fluidity in the rationale for the declaration of slum dwellings and that nebulous of place-making concerns 'character of a place' played a negative role in this. 'Unsightly' buildings were often conflated with the poorer or undesirable social classes and whilst these buildings might have been structurally sound they were nevertheless expropriated and torn down. Even in the first year of the act there is evidence of inspectors reports simply stating "the building presents a neglected and unsightly appearance"[11] which was the basis of buildings being declared a slum. For example, when defending an attack by the owner's legal representative over his motivation for declaring a building a slum because of its balcony being "dilapidated, dirty and unsightly," the Medical Officer of Health stated: "I have examined it and it is ugly",[12] as if that would suffice.

Figure 5
Wells Square, Thom's Survey c.1890 (Source: Cape Archives 3/CT-4/2/1/1/1333).
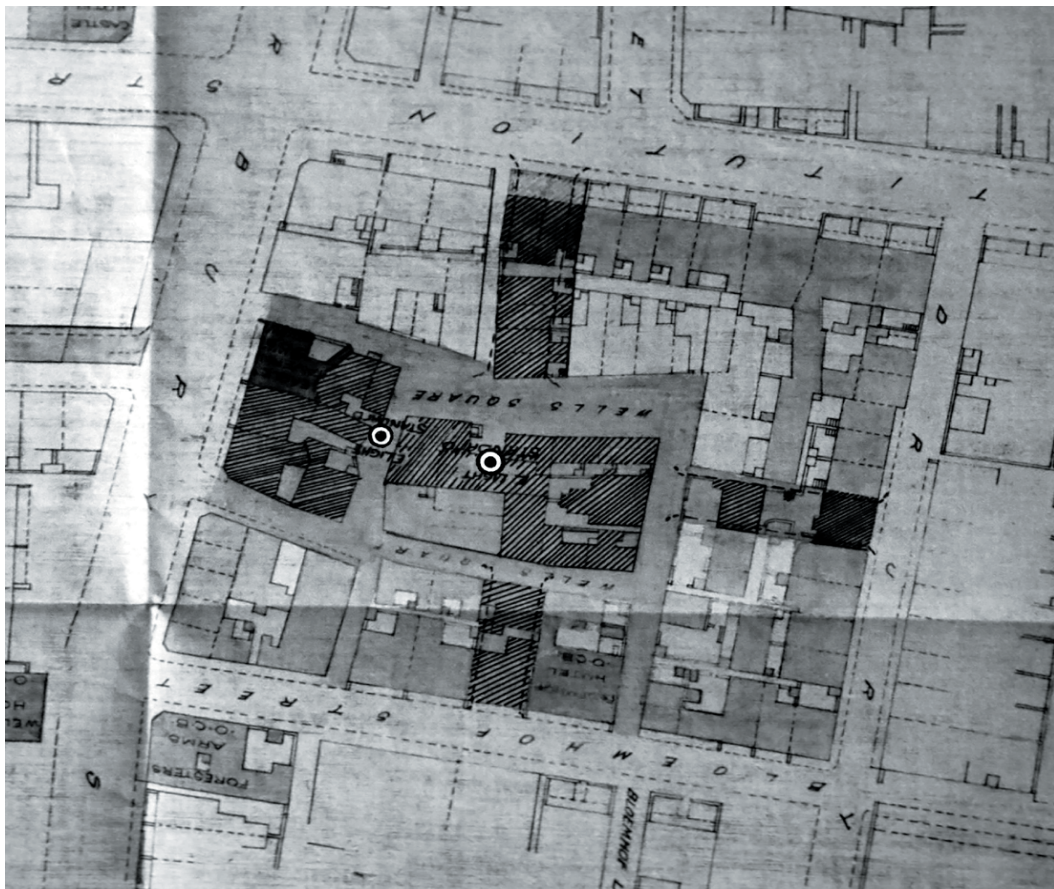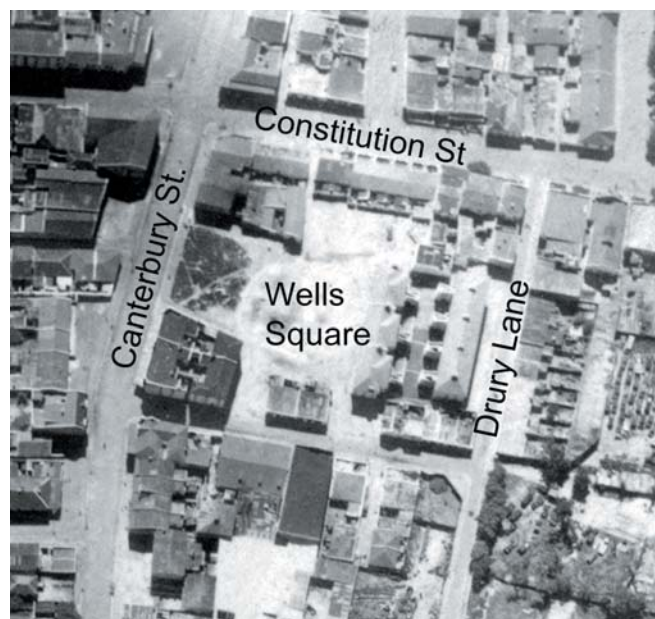

Figure 6
'Opening out' Wells Square 1916, hatching indicates buildings to be removed. Note the two proposed street lights (Source: Cape Archives, 3/CT-4/1/5/1008).

In order for a dwelling or a building to avoid being declared a slum, the owner was allowed a three month period in which to attend to an itemised schedule prepared by the City Engineer in conjunction with the Medical Officer of Health. A typical element on these schedules was that external plaster walls were to be "steel trowelled true and smooth".[13] Although this was not categorical evidence that the external appearance of buildings were to be remodelled simply for aesthetic reasons, it does substantiate the idea that this was an important part of the slum clearance program. In contrast to the reverence by which the rough lime-wash plaster of Cape Dutch homesteads such as Groot Constantia were held, this is perhaps a clear example of the anti-urban sentiments of the administrators of the city, keen on bringing order and regularity to 'unsightly' neighbourhoods which stigmatised its poorer inhabitants.[14] Here we see the elusive concept of character at work, clouded on the one hand by prejudices against groups of people and urbanity in general, and brightened on the other by romantic notions of a bucolic history and historical personalities.

More importantly, Wells Square was exemplary of the disordered and fractured space that had emerged as part of the Victorian *laissez faire* city. The photos of Wells Square, published in *Architect, Builder and Engineer*[15] in an article titled 'Hotbed of Horrors,' illustrated the problematic surfaces of its buildings but they could not capture the quality of its fractured space which was hidden behind double-storey buildings. In fact, it seems fair to say that the inability to reduce Wells Square to a visual singularity had much to do with its proliferation as a vague, liminal space of becoming – an unknown territory to be feared for its cataclysmic potential. Its hidden interior and yet its permeability proved fundamentally threatening not only to the general public but also the police.[16] Most of the illicit activities associated with Wells Square were attributed directly to the characteristics of its spatial structure which allowed gambling, prostitution, and illegal alcohol consumption to take place. As an indicator of how the typology of the square was problematic in this instance, a city councillor suggested that "if the area were opened out the evil would disappear".[17] The attempt to 'open it out' was to render the fractured space of the square along the lines that place-making proponents might desire – clearly defined as a single space by enclosing walls and clear entrances rather than with permeable broken spaces and edges where bodies might slip away and go unaccounted.

Figure 7
1935 Aerial photograph of Cape Town (Source: City of Cape Town and Author).

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Whilst the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1919 galvanised the city into mapping out the interior of Cape Town's homes, they had, since 1915, been mapping out Wells Square in an attempt to territorialise what to them was, in Deleuzian terms, a smooth space. By the beginning of 1926 the Council had only bought four houses and demolished two in the Square itself, whilst only three had been bought in Canterbury Street.[18] Eventually, Wells Square was cleared and low-rise suburban-house-style 'flats' called the Bloemhof flats were built along Drury Lane in the early 1930s.

Instead of looking at the Bloemhof flats I would like to focus on the project that was introduced at the first Wells Square clearance meetings which became known as the Roeland Street scheme. This project was, in effect, the opportunity to produce the 'correct' housing model that could be the antithesis of Wells Square. The design for the Roeland Street scheme showed many similar attributes to other Garden City housing scheme proposals at the time such as Maitland Garden Suburb.[19] It is interesting to note that the city's Housing & Estates Committee referred to the Roeland Street scheme as a 'village,' underlining its anti-urban basis despite, or rather, because, of its proximity to the city centre.
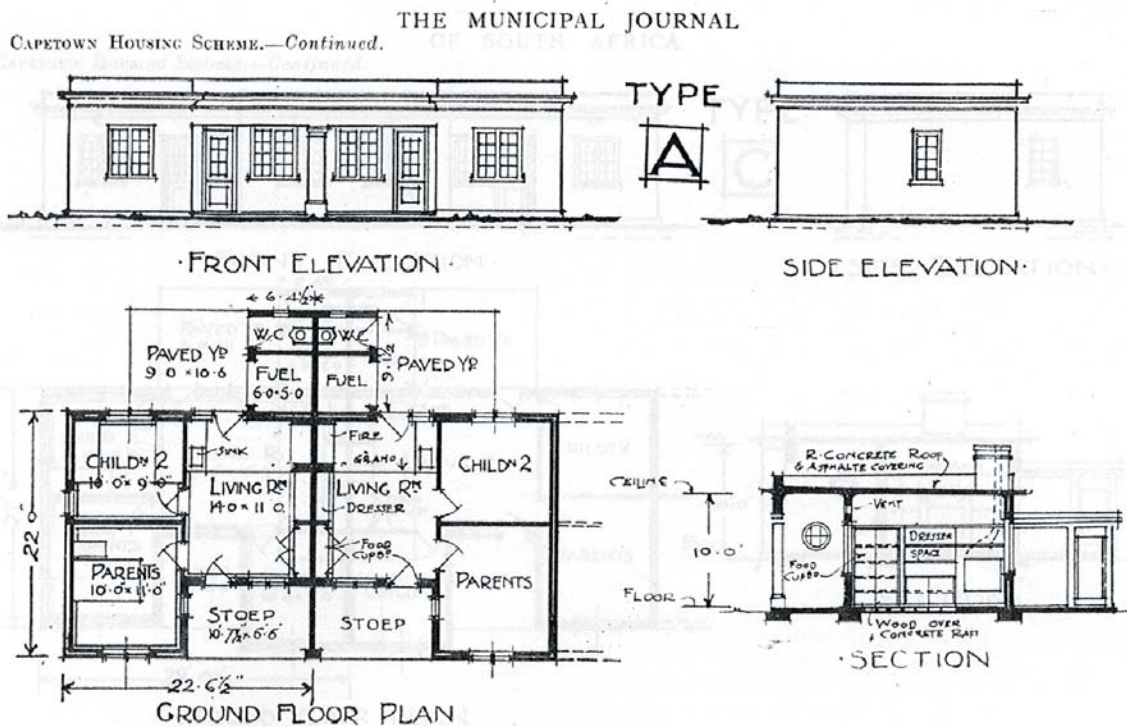

Figure 8
Roeland Street house design (Source: Municipal Journal of South Africa, July, 1919).

Two architects, John Perry and Fred Glennie won the competition to design the houses for the Roeland Street Scheme. Perry, who also went on to win the initial layout of the Pinelands Garden City, had visited Wells Square a few years before as a consultant to the Municipal Reform Association, advising them on the physical problems of the area.[20] It is interesting to note the type of cottage Glennie designed. Although without gables, it seems to carry much of the design attributes of workers' housing on a Cape Dutch homestead or a dwelling from the Bo-Kaap, as if Glennie was making reference to the past 'feudal' world. Although there is no evidence to confirm it, Glennie's design does seem to be a fairly close approximation of the building pictured on the right of Langschmidt's *In Old Cape Town*, c.1855. Yet, if one looks at the densities of the Roeland Street scheme c.1926 compared on the one hand to the environment

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pictured by Langschmidt, and on the other to that of Wells Square, the contrast is abundantly clear: whatever romantic historical vision may have driven Glennie in his design, it was to be set within the low-density, anti-urban ethos of the Garden City Movement. Consequently, the aerial photograph of 1926 depicts the Roeland Street buildings as positive objects set starkly against an almost bleached non-place, whilst Wells Square presents itself as an objectless, evolving, and internalised space more akin to the fabric of Old Cape Town at the start of the nineteenth century. Perhaps it goes too far to suggest that at the same time Cape Town architects were using Cape Dutch elements divorced from the rest of the homestead (Groot Constantia's central gable) to act as signifiers of status and colonial possession, so Glennie was divorcing the workman's dwelling from its dense urban environment to signify the workmen's lower 'feudal' status and dispossession from the uncontrolled and internalised spaces of the city that Wells Square exemplified.

The Roeland Street scheme worked as the literal inversion – a turning inside out – of the uterine space of Wells Square by pushing the forms into the ground until they conceptually 'popped up' and out into the space of the square itself. In this new bleached place in which these object buildings were a 'less than' version of the iconic Groot Constantia, identities and social impulses could be controlled and sanitised without having any of the iconic and positive power that Groot Constantia possessed. In effect then, the form of the Roeland Street scheme exemplifies the alienating space of modernism that place-making proponents have sought to overcome. This scheme sets up a binary of either being inside or outside, without the possibility of occupying a fractured in-between space like that formed by Wells Square. In other words it is an unequivocal territorialising that can, at all times, account for the location of the people it was designed to manage. Once again, in Deleuzian terms we might think of the Roeland Street scheme as a striated space, clearly locating and allocating people and events in an internalised and demarcated, un-nomadic space.
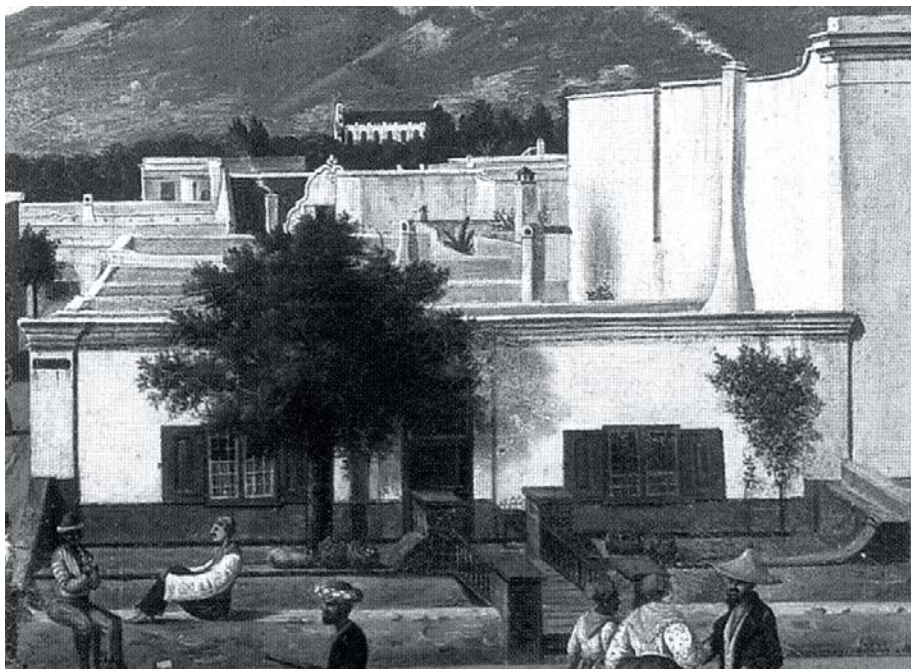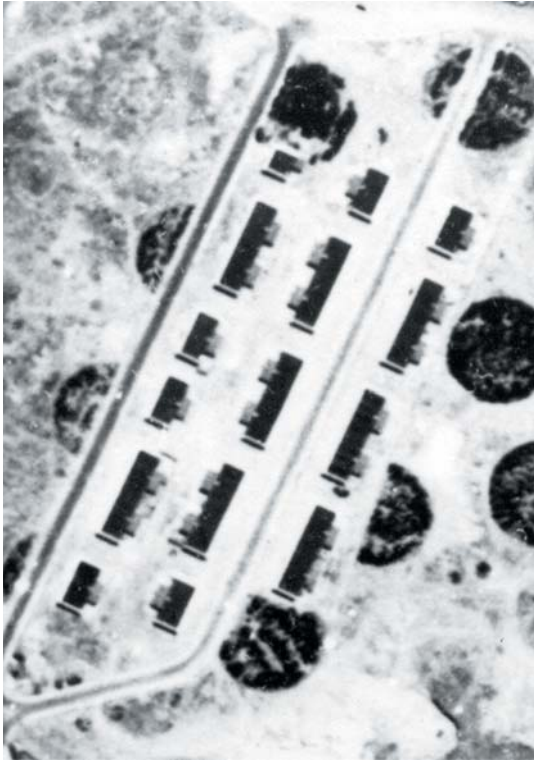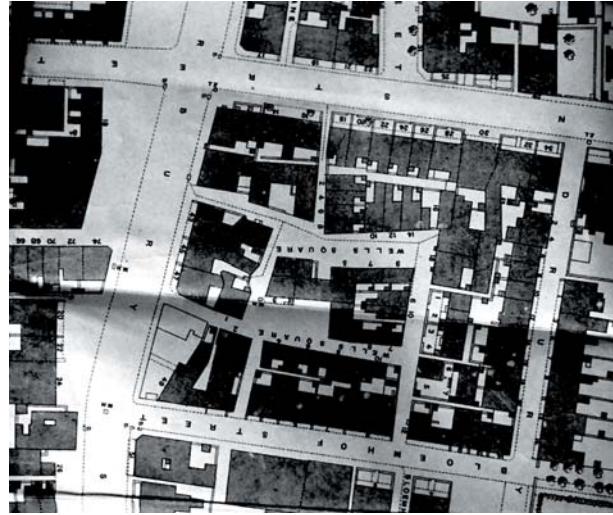

Figure 9
Langschmidt, *in Old Cape Town*, c1855 (Source: V. Bickford-Smith, 1998).

Figure 10
1926 Aerial photo (Source: City of Cape Town).

Figure 11
Thom's survey of Wells Square, c1890.

In following the likes of Foucault (and Heynen, Dovey and Leach) then, a concern for power offers us a more critical framework through which to view place and space than the well-intentioned ideas of Norberg-Schulz and Lynch. The Roeland Street Scheme seems to ratify place-making concerns for physical enclosure as opposed to object-buildings as a way of producing a potentially more democratic, less alienating space. On the other hand, the example of Wells Square illustrates how implementing a city square, that *sin qua non* of place-making, can, under asymmetrical power conditions, lead to the oppression and control of a sector of the population; Wells Square as a fractured space seemed far more democratic and liberating. Above it all, Groot Constantia becomes an ideologically-loaded 'place' precisely because its object-building physicality allowed its easy multiplication as image. The examples of Groot Constantia, Wells Square and the Roeland Street scheme prove that architectural typologies – the logic of form and space – *are* suggestive of particular instrumental potential but that these can be overwritten or overcome by other concerns through discourse, ideology, images and other non-spatial instruments. These lessons suggest that simplistic ideas of architectural enclosure as being a panacea for apartheid's social-spatial ills are questionable and need to be engaged with in more nuanced and critical ways.

Conclusion

In conclusion then, what can we learn from these ideas about space, place and power in a more general sense? I would like to make a number of proposals that will hopefully move place-making ideas from the normative and simplifying notion of clearly-defined streets, courtyards and squares as healing spaces. These proposals might point to ways of dealing with the complexity of spaces and places by engaging with issues of power, the possibility of deterritorialistion, and a balance between place as identity and being and space as liberty and becoming.

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1. both place as space – such as Wells Square – and place as symbol – the object building of Groot Constantia – have ideological potential as 'place' but they are quite different in their valencies.

2. object-buildings are pinch-marks – the striated space of Deleuze and Guattari – in the otherwise undifferentiated surface of landscape or city. They are easily personified and symbolise 'a people' due to the bodied relationship they instigate. They accrete ideology and power in part through their very nature as imageable buildings. Object-buildings are the symbol-vessels in which normalising and conservative identities such as nation and race can be poured.

3. places such as squares or clearings are ideological in as much as they set things apart and form a clearly-defined striated space. Such places often frame rallies or public events but are by their spatial disposition ideologically 'weak' – there is no object-building that can act as the symbol for normative cultural identity – and yet they do construct positive identities through their particularity as place. Furthermore, the clear definition of boundary and enclosure might produce binaries of 'in' or 'out' which might provide greater normative control over these spaces. Nevertheless, it is their very spatiality that makes them difficult to represent and hence difficult to flatten into symbol. This is especially true for fractured spaces where presence and territoriality is even more illusive. As a result they are open to being constantly remade through new narratives that invite invention and reinvention in acts of becoming.

Notes

1. As a student at the University of Natal, Durban, and later at the University of Colorado, Denver, and the Bartlett School in London; and as a lecturer at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and the University of Cape Town.

2. In contrast, I have witnessed, at many portfolio exams and project reviews, students or their work being dismissed pejoratively as 'formalist' or 'just form-making'.

3. See for example, Derek Japha (1998).

4. See for example the rise of Team X as recounted in Kenneth Frampton, (1992: 269) or Colin St John Wilson, (1995).

5. For a local exposé of this kind of "edge" city environment see Lindsay Bremner (2006).

6. The irony of the origins of the word should not be missed.

7. Norberg-Schulz (1980: 21) suggests that we identify ourselves primarily through the city we originate from.

8. For another disparaging view see Denis Hollier (1992).

9. As I have laid out in my Ph.D., see Nicholas Coetzer (2004)

10. Nicholas Coetzer (2004) Chapter 5.

11. [CAmin]3/CT-1/5/13/1/1, SCSC: 1934.10.22, evidence concerning No.115 Castle Street.

12. Cape Archives, City of Cape Town minutes, 3/CT-1/5/13/1/1, Slum Clearance Special Committee: 1935.02.25, Evidence concerning No.36a/38 Constitution Street.

13. Cape Archives, City of Cape Town minutes, 3/CT-1/5/13/1/1, Slum Clearance Special Committee:1935.02.11, Work schedule for 23 & 25 Wells Square.

14. See Nicholas Coetzer (2007a).

15. *Architect, Builder and Engineer,* vol.1, n.3, (October, 1917)

16. For a similar reading of London's slums see Robin Evans (1997).

17. Cape Archives, City of Cape Town minutes, 3/CT-1/4/7/1/1/8: Public Health and Building Regulations Committee, 1916.10.25.

18. Cape Archives, City of Cape Town minutes, 3/CT-1/4/7/1/1/26: Public Health and Building Regulations Committee, 1926.02.11.

19. Nicholas Coetzer, (2004), Chapter 8.

20. Cape Archives, City of Cape Town, 3/CT-4/1/3/97 (31/3): Improvements to Wells Square 1915 – 1918, 1917.05.18.

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