UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

OCCUPYING THE VOID

A Women's Forum in the Pretoria CBD

Kira Bester
2015

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master in Architecture (Professional) in the Faculty of Engineering, Built
Environment and Information Technology, University of Pretoria.

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Location:
321 Pretorius Street, Central Pretoria,
Pretoria, Gauteng
-25.747816, 28.194235

Function:
Women's Forum and Public Arcade

Research Field:
Heritage and Cultural Landscapes

Year Co-ordinator:
Arthur Barker

Study Leader:
Rudolf van Rensburg

OCCUPYING THE VOID

Architecture of the Feminine

EKSERP

Hierdie skripsie dokumenteer ondersoek ingestel op die argitektuur van die Vroulike. Dit is nie moontlik om definitiewe voorbeelde van die manlik en vroulik in argitektuur voor te gee nie. Hierdie is abstrakte konsepte en moet verstaan word as hoogs subjektief, beinvloed deur kulturele, geslag, agtergrond en gelowige aspekte. Deur analise van teoretiese interpretasies van die Vroulike gevind in argitektuur word die maniere waardeur vrouens ruimte inneem en ontleed ondersoek tydens 'n soektog na interpretasies wat menigte letterlike interpretasies van assosiasies tussen die vroulike en argitektuur omlei. Hierdie leesstof sal gebruik word om besluitneming te beinvloed gedurende ontwerp.

Gedurende apartheid het die Vroue Beweging 'n verenigde doel gehad om die oppresiewe kragte van die regering te beveg. Sedert die val van die apartheid regering is die beweging ontmantel en sukkel om te mobiliseer om sodoende as verenigde groep aangespreek te word. Hierdie voorstelling het die intensie om n atmosfeer van dialoog en identiteit vir Suid-Afrikaanse vrouens te skep deur middel van n ontwerp wat vrouens die moontlikheid voorsien om ruimtelike verhoudings te onderhandel op hulle eie terme.

Daar is eindelose maniere waarop die idee van die vroulike geinterpreteer kan word met betrekking tot argitektuur. Die ontwerp benadering interpreteer dus die informasie en laat die vroulike toe tot ekspressie deur die ontwerp van ruimte wat vrouens die moontlikheid gee om ruimtelike verhoudings te onderhandel op hul terme tussen die tussenin spasies binne die gebou.

Deur konseptuele ondersoek is die Leemte geidentifiseer as n ruimte wat dimensie skep vir die herskryf van strukture van sosiale interaksie. Die inherente karaktertrek kan slegs verken word as die Leemte verstaan word as n spasie ontbreek van streng definisies waarin n dimensie van moontlikheid geskep word en in die proses vrouens verleen met n ruimte om die natuur van hul ruimtelike verhoudings te definieer op hul terme.

Om erkenning te gee aan die meervoudigheid wat so duidelik in (sosiale) ruimte is is om erkenning te gee aan "die ander" - dit wat geignoreer word. Deur die "Leemte", gevind in die ruimte, in te neem en deur die fokus op die tussenin te plaas word n ruimte ontwerp vir die onderhandeling van ruimte sowel as identiteit en gesprekke binne in die gebou deur die geleentheid om die verhoudings tussen bewoners te herskryf.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation documents an investigation of an architecture of the Feminine. It is not possible to give definite examples of the feminine and masculine in architecture. These are abstract concepts and it must be understood that notions of the feminine are highly subjective, influenced by aspects such as culture, gender, background, context and religion. Through an analysis of the theoretical interpretations of the Feminine within architecture, the ways that women occupy and decode space is examined while seeking interpretations that bypass the many literal interpretations that are often associated with the Feminine and architecture. These readings will be used to inform decision making during design. During Apartheid, the Women's Movement had a unified goal of fighting the oppressive powers of the current government. But since the fall of the Apartheid government, this movement has been fractured and has not been able to mobilise to address needs as a unified group. The proposal intends to foster an atmosphere of dialogue and identity for South African women by creating space that that gives women the possibility to negotiate spatial relationships on their terms. There are a vast number of ways that notions of the feminine can be interpreted with regards to architecture. The design approach thus interprets this information and allows the feminine to be expressed through the creation of space that gives women the possibility of negotiating spatial relationships on their terms, in the in-between or interstitial spaces in the building.

Through conceptual investigations, the Void is identified as a space that creates a dimension for rewriting existing structures of social interaction. This inherent characteristic can only be explored if the Void is understood as a space that lacks strict definition in which it creates the dimension of possibility, providing women with the space to define the nature of their spatial relationships on their own terms. To acknowledge the multiplicities that are evident within (social) space is to acknowledge 'the other' that has been ignored. Through occupying 'the Void' that is represented by the site, and by placing focus on the interstitial and in-between spaces in the building, a place is created for negotiation of spaces as well as a place for identity and discussion within the building through the opportunity to rewrite the relationships between occupants.

ONE   TWO

THREE

FOUR

FIVE

Shrine:
A Discussion of the New Memorial

Feminism and Women in South Africa:
An Assessment of the Experiences of Women in Contemporary South Africa

Gender, Space, Architecture:
The Feminine in Architecture

The Women's Living Memorial

Architectural Analysis

Programmatic Analysis

Feminism and the 'Other'

African Feminism and Western Feminism: A Discussion

Black Women in South Africa and their Specific Case of 'Otherness'

Conclusion

Feminine Readings of Architecture

Woman as the Creator of Architecture

Feminine Uses of Space

Representation of the 'Other' in Architecture

NINE   TEN

Composition: **Appendix**
Technical Resolution

Prologue

An Introduction

'I have become convinced that the implicit assumptions that we make about space are important and that, maybe, it could be productive to think about space differently.'

Doreen Massey, For Space (2001:1)

AN INTRODUCTION: FOUNDATIONS FOR THOUGHT

The origin of this dissertation stems from an inquiry into a series of architectural and programmatic concepts that became apparent with the construction of a Women's Museum towards the end of 2014. Located on Lillian Ngoyi Square, previously Strijdom Square, the building presents an overpowering yet generic approach to the creation of architecture in such a prominent part of the city. The intention of the building is to represent the marginalised and sensitive topic of the mistreatment of women during the Apartheid era, which requires an investigation into the politics of gender and its subsequent translation into a public architecture of memory in South Africa. This missed opportunity of architectural exploration provides the springboard for investigation. This dissertation is an exploration of an alternative reading on space which is used as the foundation for an approach to the making of architecture, seen as a container of space and social phenomena. If space and social phenomena are a consequence of social relations, and if those social relations are constitutive of power plays and political qualities, then gender relations serve as a fundamental social quality through which to explore the notions of space as 'stretched out' social relations.

It is through this alternative reading of space that power relationships in society will be unpacked. The subsequent expressions through architecture will then be explored thorough notions of the feminine and how they are represented in architecture. These findings are used to underpin the creation of an architecture that examines space-making in the contemporary South African context. Focus is placed on the way that society codifies the space that it occupies, influencing the types of spaces that are created and how they are used.

CHAPTER

ONE

Normative Position

An Alternative Perspective on Space

'The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history (...) The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.'

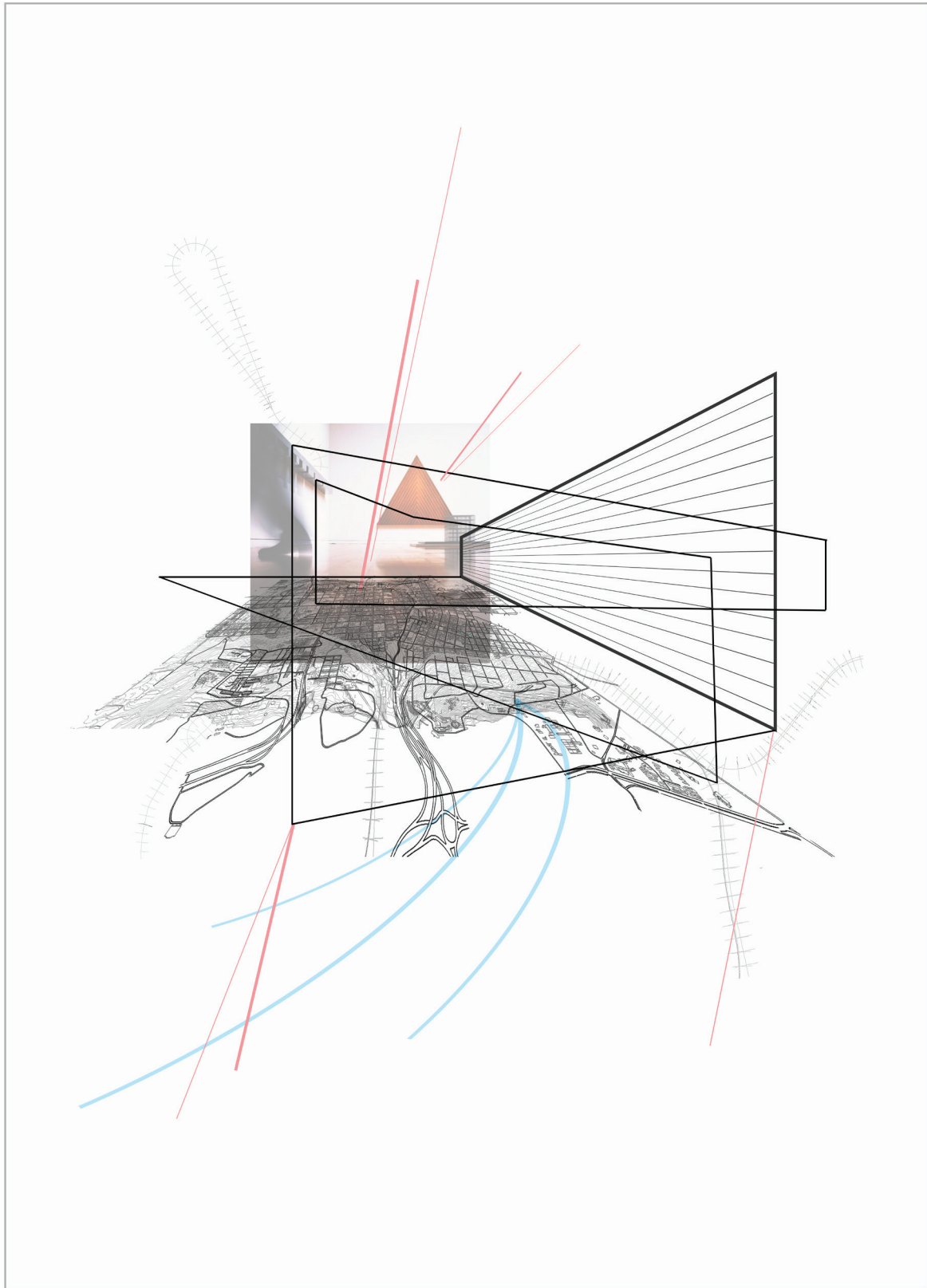- Michel Foucault, Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias (1984:1)

Figure 1.1   Space as a product of social relationships
         (Source: Author, 2015)

18

INTRODUCTION

'Social relations are inevitably and everywhere imbued with power, meaning and symbolism. To view space as a social product is a view of an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification.'

Doreen Massey, For Space (2001:185)

For space to be understood as a product of social phenomena, a new perspective on spatial theory is required. The understanding must move from Euclidian interpretations of space towards notions of space as multiplicitous, simultaneous and subjective. This allows for an interplay between the user and the space instead of the modernist and previous perceptions of space a static physical object. In order to understand how gender roles play out in space, a shift is required regarding the way that space is understood. As explained by Doreen Massey (2001:5), space is imbued with power, symbolism and meaning, requiring a shift in understanding from space as a static, objective entity to a dynamic realm of interrelations, simultaneities and constant production. Spatial feminism draws its origins from this change in perspective and is therefore an examination of how the power plays within society are made manifest in space. As an introduction into these altered perspectives on space, Massey (2001) tells the story of the city of Tenochtitlán in current day Mexico. This story provides the foundation for a critique on contemporary views of space.

A SPATIAL ALLEGORY

In 1519 AD, the city of Tenochtitlán was the biggest in the world. It was the capital of the Mexica-Aztec Empire, located in the southern tail of what is now Mexico, and had been the location of centuries of power struggles (Massey, 2001:3). The current empire consisted of a coalition between three city-states: The Tenochtitlán, Texcoco and Tlacopan. They had joined together after a civil war against the previous ruling empire of the Azcapotzalco. The new empire intended to be equally powerful across the three city-states, but the Tenochtitláns had quickly overpowered the others to establish themselves as the dominant military power (Massey, 2001:3). During the Tenochtitlán's reign, neighbouring groups had become tired of operating under constant subordination and were looking to realign the power struggles once more.

The arrival of Spanish armies, led by Hernán Cortés,meant that the city of Tenochtitlán was about to become the location of another battle for power.

After two years of negotiation, miscalculation, bloodshed, retreat and readvance the Spanish finally achieved their goal and Cortés conquered the city of Tenochtitlán (Massey, 2001:4). Like many colonies, the Aztecs were heavily influenced by their new rulers.

Christianity was introduced and Spanish instituted as the main language. Confronted with the introduction of foreign diseases, weapons and agriculture the Aztec culture began to disappear. The massive city remained under Spanish rule until it was emancipated through the Spanish American wars of independence in the early nineteenth century. What remains today is a new culture, heavy with Spanish influence. Most of the Aztec culture has disappeared. This type of story is not new or novel. Numerous accounts exist of colonial powers bringing technology, religion and 'civilisation' to a 'primitive' nation. But what is specific to the story of the Spanish conquer of the Aztecs is that there are representations evident of the contrasting perspectives of the land that was conquered. At the time, maps were drawn up by both the Spanish and the Aztecs; comparison of which provides insight into the ways that each culture viewed and understood space and place. Spanish depictions of the city of Tenochtitlán are similar current Western perceptions of space. It depicts an aerial view of the city as an island in Lake Texcoco, surrounded by water and connected to the mainland. The city was laid out in a grid pattern with many canals running through it, The temple district

20

Figure 1.2   The city of Tenochtitlán.
(Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Murales_Rivera_-_
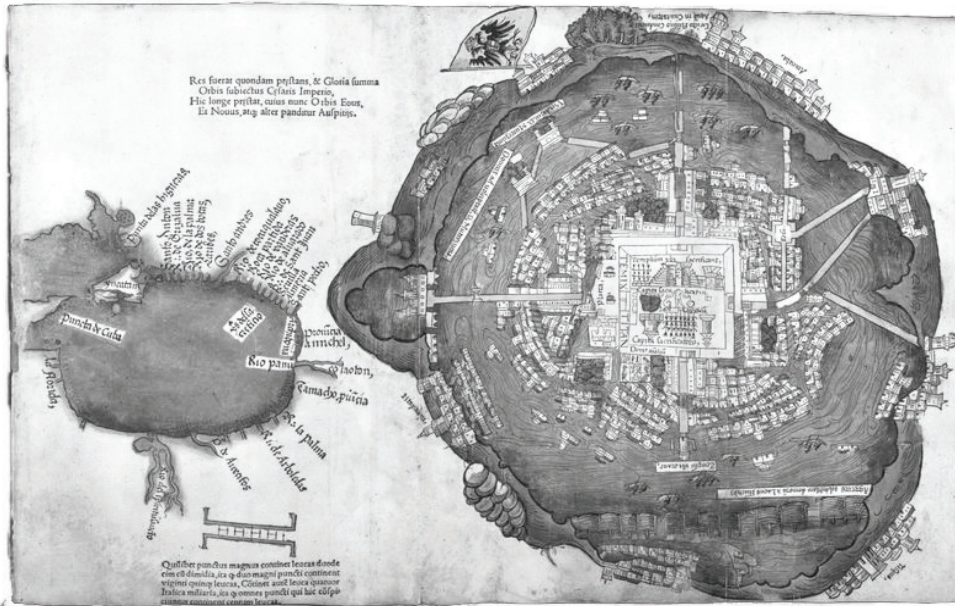Markt_in_Tlatelolco_3.jpg)

Figure 1.3 Spanish depiction of Tenochtitlán. The city is drawn from an aerial view (Source: http://publications.newberry.org/aztecs/s2i1.html)

Figure 1.4 Aztec depiction of Tenochtitlán. The maps tell stories that are intrinsically linked to their location. (Source: http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic200562.files/xolotl_1-2.jpg)

is indicated in the middle of the city and surrounded by housing. This portrayal is emperical and rational.

The Tenochtitláns depicted their places in different ways: Their depictions steer away from Euclidian notions of space and instead intertwine space and place with the additional concepts of time and event. Here, place is intrinsically linked to the events that unfolded within it, therefore, intrinsically linked to the time that they occurred. '*The manuscript is read by locating the origin of the footprints and deciphering the place signs as they occur on these iteneraries*' (Harley, 1990:101).

Through a discussion of these contrasting readings of space and place, Massey (2001) discusses the fundamental ideas that still underlie the interpretations of spatial geographies today. She uses the story as an example of how these 'voyages of discovery' described space as something to be crossed and conquered. This is a perspective that differentiates and divides the players within space: Cortés is coined as the active maker of history, existing in the present. The Aztecs, on the other hand, are designated as the objects within the story; a primitive people who passively await the arrival of the Spanish

who will bring new technologies and the religions that will save them (Massey, 2001:4). This creates an implication that 'other' people, places and cultures are merely phenomena found 'on' the surface, lying in anticipation of our discovery of them and therefore lacking in their own historical trajectories. It is through this perspective that we disregard the histories and individual trajectories of 'other' cultures (Massey, 2001:5).

Lefebvre (1974:273) argued that space is perceived in terms of left and right, and high and low rather than the dimensions of abstract, geometric, space. He continues to state that a geometric understanding of space only occurs when we abstract our natural perception of it. This abstraction of space underpins current global perceptions, allowing for divisions to be created between 'us' and 'them'. These are approaches that influence the current global movement and why they so often seem to benefit only some while at great disadvantage to others (Massey, 2001:7).

Descartes formulated notions of space on the basis of extension. He viewed space as an element that is measured along three dimensions, in terms of co-ordinates, planes and lines within Euclidian geometry. Descartes' notion of space underlies the

'I have become convinced that the implicit assumptions that we make about space are important and that, maybe, it could be productive to think about space differently.'

Doreen Massey, For Space (2001:1)

perspectives demonstrated in the maps drawn of Tenochtitlán by the Spanish. But, as represented by the Tenochtitlán maps, this perspective separates people from the space that they inhabit: '*Space, like time, has been understood in a narrow, calculative, mathematical sense, which is divorced from our experience of space in our everyday dealings with the world*' (Elden, 2004:92). In presenting space within Euclidian principles, we inevitably reduce it to '*something that is quantitatively measurable, calculable, numerica*l' (Elden, 2004:92). Heidegger (1971:212) contrasted these perspectives of space by propagating that space should be understood as the vessel for the relationship of all material objects. Space is a lived experience and should not only be viewed and understood in terms of its Euclidian geometry but as a container of life and all of the phenomena that it encompasses. This includes the tangible and intangible subjective connections between the human and the inanimate. Space is subjectively experienced through the lens of culture and societal practices. Heidegger (1971:213) explained this through the example of the poetic dwelling of man, '*this notion of dwelling, wohnen, is precisely this way of inhabiting the world in a lived, experienced manner instead of one of calculative planning*' (Elden, 2004:98). But through acknowledging the social implications of space, we also imbue it with a political nature. '*The way we imagine space... carries with it social and political effects*' (Massey, 2001:4). Every society produces their own space due to their own specific political and social structures that negotiate the nature of the place. Power relations are played out within a spatial field and such a project of a spatial history is therefore inherently political (Elden, 2004:98). Lefebvre suggests that '*there is a politics of space because space is political*' (1974:192).

Considering these alternative perspectives, Massey discusses new perspectives to be adopted. She calls for space to be viewed as a consequence of social relationships and, therefore, in constant production.

Alternative understandings of space are proposed:

First, that space be recognised as the product of interrelations, as constituted through interactions.

Second, that we understand space as the sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity. To understand that various trajectories coexist. This can be described as coexisting heterogeneity.

attributing it with an inherent political nature. One of the fundamental political dichotomies that exists within society is that of gender relationships and it is through this geometry of power relationships that architecture and space will be explored. Architecture is always imbued with political agenda and it provides a visual narration of a culture. Whether intended or not, architecture provides commentary on the values and views of a culture, made evident through habitable form. The principles of Fordism and Modernism have been interpreted spatially with '*hierarchical,*

'*The built environment is an expression of an established social order, meaning that space and the relationships it sustains reflect and reinforce existing gender, race and class relations in society*'

(Weisman, 1981:65).

And thirdly, that we recognise space as always under construction. Space is a product of relations between. It is always in the process of being made; never finished or closed (Massey, 2001:9).

From this understanding of space, architecture becomes the vessel. Architecture embodies the spatial and expresses the social and political values of societies. Through its very existence, architecture creates boundaries which divide and exclude,

functional differentiation and serial repetition of the specialised units' (Schumacher, 2000). As has been discussed, there is a need to move beyond the representation of space as hierarchical and static, to that of space as fluid and multiplicitous. Many forces are at play simultaneously and it is important to reinterpret them in spatial terms so as to inform how we, as architects, understand and make space.