ESSAY 4

CRITICAL RE-FLECTION

POST-DESIGN

A PRE-*RAMBLE*

(not the end, but the beginning)

This dissrtation felt like the battleground, before the battleground.

An important battleground upon which the student-architect sought to scrutinize the disposition of architecture through the lenses of lived and academic experience. The underlying aim has always been to pave an understanding of the world – upon which a critical position as architect may become visible.

Architecture is not the answer, dare I say?

Regrettably, this reflection begins with critique over the lack of willingness for transformation in the architectural profession. This was rendered more as an observation of the unforgiving incompatibility of my process against that of the building-centric ideal of architecture upheld by institutions and practices alike, than as something pertaining to the outcomes of the design project itself.

Soberingly, the expectation of producing a built object, to justify the MArch(Prof) outcome as being adequately complex enough to be considered a valid architectural response – has simulated and made visible some of the significant hurdles that lie ahead as obstructions to transformation in practice.

Operating in this environment has been a reminder of how self-inflated the importance of this narrow definition of the profession is - ironically at the expense of the industry's relevance.

In an industry
fixated with architectural answers: dare she, the architect, pose a question?

which excludes in order to defend its relevance: dare they, the outsider/other, suggest an answer?

In a world
where the built output of the 'act of shaping our environment' is construed as an artificial, time-defying, symbolic commodity: dare they, the socio-economically marginalised city dweller, visibly shape urbanity in the image of transience and scarcity?
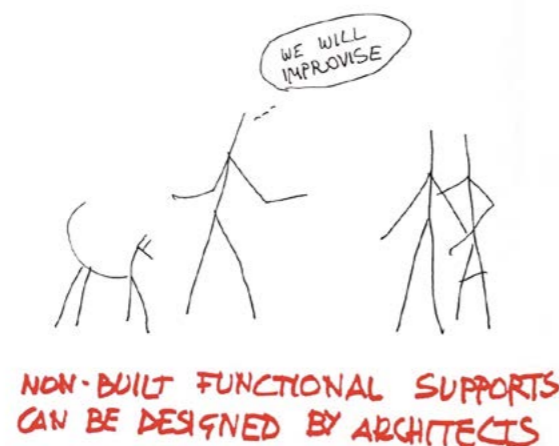
Figure 4.1.1. (previous spread) *Exploring the in-between dwelling spaces as part of the iterative design process* (Author 2021).

Figure 4.1.2. Non-built support functions can be designed by architects, an excerpt from Architecture without Building (Friedman 2012).

The process promises conflct; it knows exactly how to set off a brewing existential crisis.

This process has proven that we cannot deny the merit of the architectural process, and the power it holds in making things visible on more than just a spatial level.

"Exciting but plagued by relentless conflict" is perhaps an honest reflection of my own individual experience of the research and design process – the conflict brought about by the incessant reminder of a common truth:

the
ordained architect's act of shaping an artificial environment
is both
admirable
and
increasingly
shameful.

Why do we build?

Why is building so harmful?
Why do we build walls?
Why is paradise a walled garden?

What does society expect from the architect, and what does the architect enable society to expect?

It is telling that even in an MProf academic environment, where we, as future architects of a rapidly changing world, who are subsequently meant to nurture new ideas and ways of thinking - are required to limit and distort our contributions as to not comprimise the integrity of what is arguably not a sustainable definition of architectural practice.

As architects, we disregard that which does not fit on the self-proclaimed pedestal that defines "architecture" – limiting its definition and potential to that which is built.

Impressions from the research and site engagement process support this notion, further highlighting how futile it is to qualify the architect as "expert" based primarily on technical profiency. We are groomed to fit the mould of conventional practices that dont even have the room to employ us

A year spent confronted by the baneful consequences and limitations of the built environment – especially with respect to the role architecture performs in spatially preserving the legacies of harmful socio-political ideologies – only added ammunition to my firm belief that architecture is a social product.

WE WILL IMPROVISE

NON-BUILT FUNCTIONAL SUPPORTS CAN BE DESIGNED BY ARCHITECTS

This is not a question of what constitutes "good" or "bad" architecture. It is a question of what architecture is to begin with.

In a world where causes and effects of socially constructed scarcity and the physical consequences thereof are mutually exacerbated, bringing with it the insecurity, conflict, and transactional cultural models that propagate injustice, exploitation, and division (often secured by way of architecture) – one is compelled to question whether we are worthy of this responsibility.

Do we allow ourselves the room to seize agency over the default values and agendas our projects serve?

Is there space to better understand the relationship between architectural norms, and the social systems they are constructed from?

This became the project's point of entry with respect to the polarised and fragmented context of Moreleta Park, where gated communities, are confronted by the emergence informal settlements. To assist in this, the project asked: "how does the social construct of scarcity manifest itself in the architecture of Moreleta Park?". The theoretical and contextual explora-

tion, both individual and collaborative, can be considered a success, as it had assisted in satisfying the primary intention of framing a position and architectural intention which transends its application as a masters mini-dissertation. The angle of enquirey, which draws a parallel between socially constructed scarcity, time, power, the act of "dwelling", building, divided cities, the schism between policy and practice, and socio-spatial dichotomies of sprawling cities - has proven and a valuable and necesarry lens through which further research on gated communities and informal settlements could be undertaken.

This experience has:

- established and motivated a strong direction for my future contribution as an architect, guided not by a decidedly full-proof recipe or answer to what the architecture of our city should be, but rather, how to look at the world, so that I am better equiped to produce positive architectural gestures.

- proven, persistently, the inherent power of collaboration, as a tool for reciprocal knowledge tranfer, a way to foster long-lasting connections with other architect-humans, and as a generator of more authentic design-research responses.

Figure 4.1.3. *Reflecting on the architecture* (Author 2021).

In order to galvanise the translation of the exciting, emerging theories and findings of the research, the project asked: "how can the co-making of architecture transform the relationship between scarcity and architecture to promote spatial healing in the polarising context of Moreleta Park?"

Finding it within myself to justify any kind of physical, built, architecture has always been a challenge. The historical, theoretical, and architectural context of this project lends itself to my belief that architecture is robbed of the opportunity to "live" in harmony with our ever changing phsyical and social contexts, when it rejects the inevitability of it's death. As much in the discipline/profession of architecture as in the architec-

ture we create, we need to rethink our compulsive inclination towards of self preservation.

The notion that the architect's intervention can be framed as an answer is incredibly dissonant when viewed against South Africa's complex urban potential.

Architecture is not the answer, I do dare say!

At the conclusion of my masters year (2021), I stand firmly by my third year (2018) normative epiphany - and increasingly so.

Architecture is not the answer. It is the act of making things visible by asking questions through interventions.

The resulting architecture, is but one of many possible gestures that could embody an architecture of scarcity. By seeking to engage with the essence of what motivates us to shape the world the way we do, the proposed architecture and technology meets Moreleta Park's spatial exclusion and polarisation with design gestures that are relational, rather than transactional.

The opportunity of scarcity, became the rethinking of the gated community.

With this deep contextual and personal probing, **a valuable lesson on the futility of simply demonising the gated community,** was learnt - providing itself as one of the major drivers of the architectural response. This may seem counter-intuitive, given that the architectural intention and process of this project advocates for those marginalised by our city; outside the confines of these urban walls.

In reality, such a shift in thinking is incredibly valuable towards more realistically achieving spatial justice. To consider the often misplaced motivations behind such problematic defensive gestures in relation to scarcity and architecture, within the design itself, allowed the proposal to resemble something that would be more positively received by those most likely to oppose change (those in favour of gated communities). It becomes the starting point of the architectural strategy, whereby the act of compartmentalising space is utilised, but subverted to secure the interests of those on the outside.

From the developer's point of view, space is divided, and boudaries are etched.

On a less obvious spatial and programmatic level, the hidden complex conditions already present within the context, that hold the potential to propagate more integrated cities, are un- covered and harnessed. The power to dissolve these boundaries lies contently at the mercy of time and change - in the hands of those living within the architecture.

On a technical level, this necessetates a phased, multi-scalar approach, whereby each layer is distinguishable and materialised differently as a function of its respective lifespan; ultimately designed for (instead of actively opposing) its eventual demise.

I believe there exists a large amount of room for exploration, optimisation, improvement, and resolution of the final design outcome (or rather, the most recent iteration at the time of examination), especially on a technical and systematic level.

I do, however, walk away from this project feeling more secure about my potential role and contribution as an architect - having paved a way to (mostly) reconcile my own intentions with the expectations of the industry.

Until my next architecture induced existential crisis, I depart through this "pre-ramble" to the rest of my career.

Thank you for sharing in these ideas.

Figure 4.1.4. *Excerpt from rapid speculation* (Author 2018).

And in general, depending on who hears it, the meaning which is received is different anyway because words are symbolic, and my symbols are not your symbols. (but perhaps this makes it more Meaningful?)

Why are we then striving for homogeneity?

Perhaps we are trying to bridge a gap between our understandings of symbols.

Which we interpret as misunderstandings.

But this imposes once again a sort of "disharmony" with life (and death) and time and CHANGE and the fact that sameness/constant/uniform representation as a means of asserting uniform meaning is not possible; it is a Myth.

Constructs aren't real; it finds life in how it manifests in the Everyday.

Alexia, 07.09.'18.

"All things fall and are built again and those that build them again are gay." WB YEATS LAPIS LAZULI (1936)

Is this gap really a wall? or it is perhaps a street that we perceive as a wall...

Missed opportunities....

Is the wall evil!?

So, what is my role as an Architect?

Given the expectation stowed upon me by society: ?

To help people realise the refuge / paradise / utopia they seek.

They need us to preserve and Fortify this to truly dwell, to feel content.

We chase after symbols indicative of this "contentness"

people = dwellers

architect = person + specialised knowledge? not necessarily - anyone can make!

But we wish to make (complex, permanent things)

(There's nothing wrong with this!)

Terrifying Excess

GIVEN THAT THIS ISN'T EVEN MORE THAN A FATALISTIC CONSTRUCT.

THROUGH ASKING QUESTIONS.

Questions are more important than answers. Architects ask Questions

people don't really need architects to truly dwell.

How can I make dwelling more accessible / attainable in the minds of people.

We are not as concerned about attaining paradise as we are about preserving our claimed pieces of it.

Because it "stands" against time. certainty = security. security through forts, because we do not trust the intentions of people and nature's forces.

ARCHITECTURE IS LITERALLY NOT THE ANSWER.

all its beauty, in all its ugliness

Architecture of Scarcity: Essay 4