

# Space as ritual: rethinking spatial strategies in the African city

Rudolf J. van Rensburg and Mary-Anne Da Costa

Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria

Email: rudolf.vanrensburg@up.ac.za; dacosta.maryanne@gmail.com

In this paper it is argued that contemporary architectural and urban space has become impoverished through the hegemony of a formalistic approach in architecture and urban design, and Modernism's separation of subject and object. This has resulted in the loss of the (human) body and bodily experience as determinants in the spatial production of the African city. In addressing these issues a temporal dynamic reading of spatial construction is suggested, supported by new strategies in analyzing spatial conditions and taking account of the social event as a constituting influence.

**Keywords:** Architecture, place, space, urbanity

## Ruimte as ritueel: 'n Heroorweging van ruimtelike strategieë in die Afrika stad.

In hierdie artikel word geargumenteer dat kontemporêre argitektoniese en stedelike ruimte verarm geraak het as gevolg van die oorheersing van 'n formalistiese benadering in argitektuur en stedelike ontwerp, en die verwydering wat as gevolg van Modernisme tussen objek en subjek ontstaan het. Die gevolg hiervan is die verlies van die (menslike) liggaam en ligamlike ervaring as bepalende faktore in die ruimtelike produksie van die Afrika-stad. Om hierdie kwessies aan te spreek word voorgestel dat 'n temporele, dinamiese beskouing van ruimtekonstruksie nodig is, ondersteun deur nuwe strategieë waarvolgens ruimtelike omstandighede wat sosiale gebeurtenis as vormende invloed in ag neem, geanaliseer kan word.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Argitektuur, plek, ruimte, stedelikheid

The defining theme of the following argument refers to the relationship between body and space. The intention is not to engage in a phenomenological discourse but to support an essential relational value in the body-space association. Human beings as bodies dwell in and inhabit space. The space referred to implies the internal space of architecture and the external space of the urban environment, both associated with the public realm. It is argued that the Enlightenment project initiated the alienation between body and space, resulting in the physical determinism of post-human Modernism. To reintroduce the body to space, current methodologies that rely on spatial analysis and understanding based on formal qualities alone must be contested and replaced with strategies that integrate form, temporality and event. This is especially pertinent in the African context where Western norms have had a pervasive formalist influence on the spatial structure of cities.

## Appropriating Western urban discourse in the African context

In addressing the issue of African identity, Mbembe (2004: 3,4) refers to the concept of Nativism as a form of culturalism preoccupied with questions of identity and authenticity. In the face of the "malaise" that resulted from the encounter between Western and African cultures, this current of ideas claims to return to a "mythic Africaness". Mbembe questions the validity of Nativism, describing it as a "philosophy of travesty", a "jumble of dogmas and doctrines", producing a spectacular contradiction in African modes of thought. Ahmad (1992: 9) concurs with this sentiment:

Cultural nationalism resonates equally frequently with 'tradition', simply inverting the tradition/modernity binary of modernization theorists in an indigenist direction, so that 'tradition' is said to be for the 'Third World', always better than 'modernity', which opens up the most obscurest positions in the name of cultural nationalism.

Against this background and in the absence of authentically original and substantiated "indigenous" discourse regarding the subject, a pertinent critique of the spatiality of the contemporary African city is problematic but necessary.

Ironically, many relevant and objective sources of theory are European in origin. For this reason and because of the persistent influence of Western attitudes in African urban production, such sources have been critically appropriated and repositioned in support of the following argument. This has become possible within the context of current urban discourse where the methods of conventional compositional urbanism are being challenged and subverted. Although this debate might not be entirely relevant within an African context, the aim of overturning the Modern hierarchies established between form and programme resonates within this context.

### **Post-humanism and contemporary African urbanism**

In his apology for a Marxist-inspired Post-humanism, Michael Hayes (1992: 115) traces the origins of anti-humanist theory to Modernism. According to Hayes the Modern subject is no longer viewed as the originating agent of meaning, but as a variable and dispersed entity whose identity and place are constituted in social practice. He quotes Siegfried Kracauer (1884-1972), the Modernist architect and sociologist, in defence of his position:

The world is split into the diversity of what exists and the diversity of the human subject confronting it. This human subject who was previously incorporated into the dance of forms filled by the world, is now left solitarily confronting the chaos as the sole agent of the mind, confronting the immeasurable realm of reality. [The subject is] thrown out into the cold infinity of empty space and empty time.

This repositioning of the subject can be traced to the seventeenth century, the advent of Modernity, and the Cartesian separation of mind and body. The resultant dualism between mind and matter “served to drive a wedge between the scientific explanation of bodies in space and what has become the strictly ‘mental’ categories of purpose and will” (West 1996: 12). The effect on the experiential realm was a fundamental alienation between the experiencing body and the world, which was now conceived of as a separate entity. In this Rationalist dualism, the mental is given prominence over the physical. This mindset informs Post-humanist thinking in architecture and urban design, reducing spatial production to a rational construct in which the “irrational” of the experiential realm assumes a secondary position.

Although the noble intentions informing and directing the social imperative of early Modern architecture and urbanism are beyond doubt, it is argued that Post-humanism, in eventual service of consumerism, has resulted in the dehumanising of these two disciplines. The abstraction of built form towards the creation of “objective” and universal spaces of consumption and the suppression of authentic cultural identities have resulted in the loss of the (human) body as reference in the production of space.

More recently, the institutionalisation within architectural academia of Structuralist theory and its derivatives has supported this tendency to the exclusion of socially based theories (Harris 1997: 2). The reason for Structuralism’s dominance is obvious: as a pedagogically efficient technique, it has the capacity to be employed on a purely formal level, removed from the intellectual and political critique of consumer society inherent in socially based theories. The hegemony of Structuralism coincides with the virtual abandonment of social and political ambitions in architecture and urban design. Textual “readings” of the architectural project and a pervasive tendency toward formal hermeticism has exacerbated the alienation of architecture and urban design from the bodily and lived experience. The dominant influence of this Euro-centric mindset, through the agency of initially colonialism and subsequently globalisation, is apparent in the spatial production of contemporary African urban environments. In addressing the spatial deficiencies that exist in African cities, possibilities of reintroducing the body to space must be considered.

## **Recovering the body in space**

The human body needs to be recovered in spatial production, to become both subject and object, where architecture and urban design is based on bodily experiences rather than only bodily needs (Borden 2001: 11). For a true understanding of place, the body must be allowed to confront constructed space. This engagement cannot only happen through visual experience and ocular comprehension. The reuniting of space and human/bodily wellbeing allows for a union that has been increasingly disregarded by the formal solutions of contemporary architectural and urban practice (Frascari 2002: 260). For the body to be restored in space, Lefebvre (1991: 36) proposes the restoration of the sensory, sensual and the non-visual in architecture. This coincides with Pallasmaa's (2005: 11) concept of a "life-enhancing architecture" of which the body is not just a spectator but to which it inseparably belongs.

This requires contesting the fixed interpretation of space that is allied to the precedence given to formal solutions in current architectural practice. The contemporary urban theorist Doreen Massey (2005) suggests three propositions in this regard: firstly, to recognise space as the product of interrelations, from the global to the intimate. Secondly, to understand space as a sphere that allows for the existence of multiplicity, and thirdly, to acknowledge space as always in a state of incompleteness and in the process of being made. This infers the concept of space as temporal condition.

Massey (2005: 29) advocates an interdependent understanding of space and time in opposition to the broad assumption that space is of lesser importance than time — with "less gravitas and magnificence". This is because current patterns of thought consider the material as more significant and convincing than the abstract. An additional condition for genuine spatiality emerges: to erase the assumption that space is simply the opposite of time. This does not suggest that space and time should be identical but rather that they are co-dependent equals.

When the existence of space as a temporal condition is not acknowledged, it is reduced to a static state. Space as a temporal condition suggests that territory is not constituted through isolation and separation but rather through time. Spatial differentiation is defined by events occurring within space although it remains geographically static (Massey 2005: 29,30,188). This opposes Western concepts by contesting the notion of fixed boundaries. Boundaries are blurred: introverted spaces are externalised and the distinction between the prohibited and the permitted is erased. Spatial definition is expressed differently, by replacing static boundaries with flexible and elastic edges, allowing public and private spaces to be adjustable and variable. The premise of discontinuity between community and individual, and their concurrent spaces, is abandoned. In this scenario the African city becomes a spatial construct in which distinctions between spaces are maintained through connections rather than disjunctions (Massey 2005: 66,84). Territoriality occurs temporarily, as streets and public and private spaces are variable and adjustable, allowing public space to be continuously occupied in different ways. This self-organising system recognises the citizen's right to inhabit a flexible and mutable city (Koolhaas 2001: 661,674).

## **Considering new spatial strategies**

The complexity of contemporary African urban conditions not only requires reconsidered design strategies and tactics, but also new ways of understanding and interpreting the circumstances concerned. It is necessary to query the validity of the figure-ground relation that has dominated the understanding of the urban fabric, and to propose new tools, methodologies and techniques through which to analyse and intervene in the complex contemporary urban environment (Manau

2005: 62). Cuthbert (2007: 177), in his critique of the major contemporary theoretical sources in urban design, supports this opinion stating that major proponents have failed to engage with any substantial theory in the cognate disciplines, including the social and human sciences. Instead, urban spatial theory focuses almost exclusively on the formal architectural and thus static aspects of urban design practice. He criticises the more influential texts, including Rowe and Koetter's *Collage City* (1979) and Trancik's *Finding lost space* (1986), for sustaining the "normal practice of recycling the concepts and practises of Modernism, all of which embraced the philosophy of physical determinism" (Cuthbert 2007: 194).

This attitude presents itself in the limiting physical reading of urban spatiality by means of the figure-ground. Figure-ground theory represents a two-dimensional concept allied to the idea of *Gestalt* where opposites define one another: positive and negative, solid and void. In urban design the figure-ground concept constitutes the fabric of the city, where a formally harmonious ground plane may be arrived at through a balance of spatial relationships and contexts, to generate requisite variety within a larger whole (Cuthbert 2007: 193). In the figure-ground relationship space is emphasised, heightening the visual impact of the public realm and allowing a figural reading of the void. The founding example of this type of spatial representation is Giambattista Nolli's (1692-1757) map of Rome of 1748 (Leupen 1997: 19).

As a spatio-investigative tool, Nolli's mapping of Rome represents a formal, analytical method, developed for an entirely different economic, social and political circumstance. His methods and conventions of documenting the urban landscape are not adequate to visualise and understand the temporal spatialities of the contemporary city, especially in the African context. That which constitutes the complexity of the current African urban realm has transcended the visible - the composition, material and form - towards the invisible such as attitudes, perceptions and transactions. The implementation of the figure-ground study implies a clear distinction between form and void, and in turn produces the by-products of "control space" and "residual space" (Koolhaas 2000: 193). This abstract and purely visual method of understanding the city reduces the three-dimensional realities to a two-dimensional and graphic representation of urban spatialities.



**Figure 1**

**Nolli's Plan of Rome, Sector V including the Piazza Navona and the Pantheon, at the time of Benedict XIV, 1748. (Leupen et al, 1997: 19)**

The urban dweller has evolved into a new type of "urbanising agent" - a term employed by Kahn (1995: 200) - who creates new social and human landscapes in accordance with the need for reconsidered forms of urbanity, characterised by an open system in which a truly social, democratic and ethical existence is possible (Manau 2005: 62). If African cities, and

more specifically those in South Africa, are to be transformed to represent a more equitable spatial structure, these qualities must be introduced. An appropriate method of reading and intervening in the contemporary urban fabric is dependent on an understanding of the new relationships between architecture and the city, and the juxtapositions, interconnections and distribution of forces it produces, as well as the areas of high activity together with the voids — the unproductive, obsolete and undefined that constitutes the urban landscape (Simeoforidis, 2000: 416).

This landscape refers to the functioning matrix of connective tissue that organises objects and spaces, as well as the dynamic processes and events that move through them. This is the urban landscape as active surface structuring the conditions for new relationships and interactions among the objects it supports. What is implied by this landscape is the extensive and inclusive ground plane of the city that accommodates objects, infrastructure and space. It is the surface that supports the range of fixed and changing activities of the city. As such the urban surface is dynamic and responsive: “like a catalytic emulsion the surface unfolds events in time” (Wall 1999: 233). In comparison to the static and figurative spatial understanding supported by the figure-ground representation of the urban landscape, the mapping of this surface requires the consideration of the (human) body and time as essential constituents in its genesis.

A suitable method with which to map the urban condition must take cognisance of the fact that human behaviour, expressed through a set of social, political, and economic processes, is shaped by territory and its spatial surroundings (Wolch & Dear 1989: 3). In the context of the socio-spatial dialect, territory is defined as “geographically-organised human activity”, or “human landscapes”, created by agents operating within a specific social structure (Wolch & Dear 1989: 7). The objective is to diverge from the abstract and reduced method of comprehending the urban condition, to an alternative understanding that human behaviour and social practices are inherently spatial, and that the organisation of space is a social product. Urban space cannot only be understood as figure, but rather as a social landscape that is not defined only by physical boundaries but also by human boundaries that outline the possibilities and limitations of human behaviour. Architecture, as urban agent, can only intervene as a condition and a social negotiator once a full understanding of the human and social landscapes exists. (Koolhaas 2000: 12).

Dewar (2004: 40) states that urban practices in South Africa are failing to meet new sets of social and cultural needs, and that current thinking continues to be based on an historically based and biased assessment of human needs. For this reason current urban interventions need to be critically reviewed. Architectural solutions that aim to fill in gaps, increase densities, mix land uses and stitch the fragmented city together, can only partly resolve this deficiency. The problem is often non-physical and cannot be solved through physical interventions (Cuff, 1989: 343). Architecture is no longer the single determining factor within the city, and can only support the complexity of the city on a limited level. It is not the prerogative of architecture to create values or impose them on the city, but instead it should allow the life of the city to take its own form. Forty (1995: 314) warns that if the task of reintroducing identity, community and continuity into the life of the city was consigned to architecture alone, the emphasis will remain on formal and aesthetic solutions, undermining the conditions conducive to the establishment of an affirmative contemporary social urban culture.

Consequently, there is a need to search for a different way in which to conceptualise urban spatial problems. Attali (2000: 270) proposes a reconsideration of the city beyond architecture, suggesting a blurring of the boundaries, implied in a physical sense but also those existing between the design and the social disciplines. Architecture within the urban context should not be an autonomous project, a display of design aptitude or the individual’s aspirations manifested in overly symbolic monuments. Conversely, it should enable a complex condition

in which the life of the city is framed, expressed, structured, given meaning to, separated and united, facilitated and prohibited. An alternative approach to architecture as urban intervention, proposed by Borden (2001: 20), should unite the perceived and the lived with both the micro and macro scales of the everyday realm of the city. From this, architecture will emerge as a coalescing condition that may effectively co-produce the complex spaces necessary for multi-dimensional social activity.

### **Formulating design strategies**

The urban context presents opportunities for a multi-disciplinary approach to its design and management, allowing the city to become a multi-scalar landscape (Borden et al, 2001: 4). The complex contemporary South African urban condition, constituted through its diverse cultural identities, demands strategies capable of tolerating contradictory impulses and with the capacity to capture a layered society with all its perceptions, patterns and structures (Caples & Jefferson 2005: 6). Pertinent strategies must assume that an inequitable access to resources exists. This refers not only to the physical realm, but includes the capacity to engage with meta-levels of meaning and identity, and the abstract interpretation of the urban context.

Feasible strategies, which will allow the South African city to (re)claim its identity, will have to address the issue of diversity among its social groups who experience the complex negotiations between diverse socio-cultural values and perceptions on a daily basis. In redefining its identity, the city must surely reflect an African world-view based on community, democracy, participation, transparency and humanism. Its urban spaces must be able to accommodate humans as social beings who belong to a self-organising and multi-faceted society. This can be achieved by crossing contemporary needs with heritage without resorting to theme-park visions and pastiche.

Strategies should incorporate processes of rebuilding, incorporating, connecting and intensifying what already exists. This implies processes that acknowledge the African city as layered entity. These layers, representing temporality, are both indigenous and foreign, not to be abandoned but rather to be improved upon by adding new layers that open it up to an unknown future. As Massey (2005: 153) demonstrates:

...for instituting democratic public spaces, necessitates operating with a concept of spatiality which keeps always under scrutiny the play of the social relations which construct them. 'Instead of trying to erase the traces of power and exclusion, democratic politics requires that they be brought to the fore, making them visible so that they can enter the terrain of contestation.

It is important to create an open urban system founded on a social and collective space where a heterogeneous society is able to express itself. This shared space should be impermanent, capable of readily accommodating the unintended and spontaneous and of resisting prescriptive appropriation. This will allow for immense programmatic potential.

This potential is contained in the creative potential at the interface between different cultural groups. It refers to the discourse of difference and the public domain that must become central to the discussion of public space in the African city. Mouffe (2000: 43) advocates an "agnostic pluralism" where the public sphere is conceived of as a site of difference and disagreement, but offers opportunity for the disenfranchised to stake their claims. Such spaces must allow identities to be formed through agnostic confrontation, while social engagement is encouraged to create new coalitions and hybrid identities. Sennett (1992) supports this concept, arguing that the "disorderly" urban spaces of mixing make new social transformational possibilities visible

and generate cultures of engagement, inclusion and hybridisation that work against exclusivity and tribalism.

### **Flexible infrastructure: Lagos as case study**

The West African City of Lagos, the capital city of Nigeria, is en route to an appropriate contemporary reconfiguring and is an example of an African city that represents the flexibility and layering of space referred to previously. It demonstrates a legitimate African urban expression, achieved by inverting essential characteristics of the so-called Modern city while supporting an equitable existence for its inhabitants. It is a city that is characterised by energy, intensity, spontaneity, incongruities and juxtapositions (Koolhaas 2000: 652).

Contributing towards the indeterminacy of Lagos's urban condition is its flexible infrastructural system. This has been categorised by Shephard and Comaroff (2002: 144-145) as consisting of three main components. The first is referred to as "parasitic" infrastructure, due to its ability to modify and manipulate the existing formal infrastructure in order to provide more services than the authorities are able to. The second is described as "mobile" infrastructure and relies on cars, trucks, buses, bicycles and mammy-wagons to take care of waste, power, transport, shopping, telephonic communication and factory production. As a result, infrastructure in Lagos has become *unmappable*. The third and last category is "nodal" infrastructure, where services and goods are centralised and compacted into points that service a wide area.

Lagos is by no means unique in the African context, but as an evolving urban centre it has succeeded to a greater degree than many cities on the continent in achieving a productive contestation of prevailing Modern and Euro-centric norms. As such it presents a prototype of possibilities and may be regarded as a credible precedent in reconfiguring the way in which African cities function. The lesson to be learned from Lagos is that cities can be viewed less as distributions of locations - form – and more as forces and flows that move diverse components around, and from which, because of continuous reactions, integrations and symbioses, a creative transformation occurs constantly. This approach will allow the uninterrupted formation and transformation of conditions on an urban surface that consists of enabling infra-structural networks.

### **The social and ethical function of architecture in the urban realm**

It has been argued that the role of architecture in the urban realm must be reconsidered. The referred issue in this regard has been the question of form and the contestation of a formalistic approach to the production of space. In an era described by Müller (2006: 67) as the "crises [period] of the traditional concept of form and the understanding of planning", image has been employed to revive architecture. Müller views the aestheticization of architecture, in the Hegelian sense, as a means of deconstructing the material independence of the discipline. Aestheticization becomes the "mediation" between the tectonics of architecture and the experiencing body, making architecture more "palatable" and, ironically, something to be consumed. The sustainability of consumption-orientated architecture is questionable. Conversely, returning to the urban context and appropriating Müller's concept, it is suggested that architecture itself, rather than its image, could be considered as a spatio-cultural mediator. Such a reading allows architecture to assume an "in-between" position and undermines its iconic status. Under this premise architectural production is no longer dominated by formal concerns, but is freed to re-assume a social and ethical function on a spatial level, while possibly inferring cultural identity through place making.

According to Henri Lefebvre (1991: 107), all disciplines are involved with and affect on space. His *Production of Space* (1991), although not strictly speaking an architectural theory, contains a spatial theory to be appreciated as a mediation between architecture and social practice. To this extent space is defined as a social product. Social space is particular to the degree that it is distinguishable from the absolute space of philosophy and the purely physical space of nature. A strong but unexplored linkage exists between the environmental design professions and the larger social order. For architecture to serve a social and ethical function, it needs to be broader in its intentions and resist the tendency to be viewed as a self-determining practice. The ethical and social function of architecture is to bring to mind the values of a society and to recover and reinterpret society's existence, in order to progress towards the realisation of an ideal situation (Harries 1998: 291).

According to Melvin (2005: 8) the root of spatial problems is located in social issues and architecture has a limited capacity in its resolution. De Carlo (2005: 23) argues that the concept of architecture as pro-active agent in societal change is outdated, but that it can “provoke situations” and “create atmospheres” where it can be used to produce an expression of society. The significance of architecture does not lie in the material elements that it is composed of, but rather in the effect it has on the experience of its users and the realisation that what exists within the boundaries of architecture is a social collective, and not an experience of atomised individuals.



**Figure 2**  
**A social collective participating in a social event. (Da Costa, 2008)**

Harries (1998: 287) views architecture's ethical function as unavoidably public, where its role is to create a centre for community. The production of elaborate works of architecture is not conducive to this. Cuff (1989: 340) suggests an interrogation of architectural interventions: “What function does this architectural object have in the establishment of an urban community? Does the building type assume any role or serve a common ethos? Does it reflect and renew the social order? Does it insert any meaning?” By implication meaning cannot be predetermined by the individual or completely incorporated in the initial design phases. The collective determines meaning. Architecture, within the urban realm, needs to be expanded from a conventional notion of building to a condition clarified by De Carlo (2005: 22): “A building is not a building. A building, in the sense of walls, floors, empty spaces, rooms, materials, etc., is only the outline of a potential: it is only made relevant by the group of people it is intended for.” It is a social construction that enables a variety of uses. It is an interface and an open system that connects with the city. It is the materialisation of a condition, programme, concepts and strategies, and not the materialisation of form. Form then becomes the manifestation of these principles.



## Reactivating the African city

The contemporary African city requires a process of reactivation, whereby event-driven solutions would supersede form-driven solutions. The term “event”, borrowed from Bernard Tschumi (born 1944-) — Swiss architect and theorist — refers to the concept of “experienced space”, which - more than a perception of or a concept of space — is a process, a way of “practicing” space, an “event” (Hayes 2003: 9). By conceiving of space as movement, time and flux, the city can be recovered as a social and collective spatial landscape where public interaction is maximised and social exclusivity is undermined.

An event-driven solution often implies a non-architectural solution (Ruby & Ruby 2005: 4). Such a solution is made up of two components. The first is the ability to address perceptions of the city in terms of social, cultural, political, economic and physical issues. This is achieved by enabling the social aspect of the city and exposing it through the implementation of public events. The second element refers to the urban condition, represented by the city’s public spaces and their influence on public events. Gehl (1987: 11) divides public events into three categories, each of which makes different demands on the physical environment. The first category refers to “necessary activities”, which are more or less compulsory and are only marginally influenced by physical conditions. The second is defined as “optional activities”. External activities fall into this category and only occur when open spaces are in an optimal condition. The third category includes all “social activities” and depends on public interaction. Social events evolve from the first two types of activities. When streets and city spaces are of a poor quality, the level of activity is reduced to a minimum. Therefore, by improving the quality of urban space the city’s existing activities, which occur purely out of necessity, can be enhanced and translated into stimulating events of interaction and recreation.

A viable city is one in which architectural space augments urban space and where social, inter-cultural and *counter-spatial* activities can occur effortlessly. In reactivating the African city, existing spaces must be reprogrammed as democratic places that support different levels of social events. Spaces that contest functional hierarchies can be defined as being democratic, where experience is not subordinate to a dominating requirement of use. “It is a place where its users can simply just be” (Forty 2001: 203). Once the reactivation of the city -supported by flexible public and private relationships and an equitable exposure to resources - is initiated, architecture can reposition itself to originate programmes instead of being in service of externally enforced programmes (Ruby & Ruby 2005: 5). In this condition architecture is enabled to act as a dynamic interface between spatial hierarchies within the urban realm.



**Figure 3**  
**Menlyn Park Shopping Centre, Pretoria. Privatised public space programmed for consumption.**  
(Da Costa, 2006)



**Figure 4**  
**An unprogrammed public space as urban surface in Barcelona, allowing variable events to occur.**  
**(Da Costa, 2005)**

Given the difficulty of fully comprehending present urban realities in an African context, it stands to reason that any prediction of how the city might operate in the future is even more problematic. It is suggested that a deterministic attitude be aborted in favour of a more open-ended approach that accepts the indeterminacy of contingencies. Such a process would begin with redefining and re-conceptualising the urban condition as independent of an absolute definition of time and space as currency and encompasses a dynamically temporal and spatial understanding of democracy and sociability. An African city, in accordance with Koolhaas et al (2000: 653), is one that does away with the conventional notion of ‘city’, where the public realm is continuously occupied in different ways and spaces are dynamic and flexible, constantly regenerating themselves. It suggests the blurring of previously absolutely defined boundaries, allowing variable and impermanent patterns to occur.

## **Conclusion**

Before it can be proposed what an African city should be, it is necessary to contest traditional modes of analysing the urban condition, aiming towards new methodologies that include a temporally dynamic reading of the urban realm and which foster an understanding of the socio-spatial relationships in the city and contest the dominance of physical determinism that informs current architectural and urban design interventions. The aim would be to overturn the pervasive tendency towards formal hermeticism that has exacerbated the alienation of these disciplines from the bodily and lived experience. Once the city is understood from a social and temporal point of view, it becomes obvious that the design and planning disciplines do not play the most important role within the urban realm. They must act in concert with social, economic and political disciplines in uncovering and responding to the spatial problematic of the African city. This does not imply that these disciplines are irrelevant, but that they should be re-evaluated, redefined and reprogrammed to become conditions in which they hold social and ethical functions, and where they have the ability to reactivate the city by reintroducing the body and reinstating the lived experience as central concerns. It is suggested that this can be achieved by means of three interrelated design strategies.

The first is to rethink and contest accepted norms of urban structuring based on efficient mobility and consumption. It calls for the reinstatement of the public spaces of the street

(route) and square (place) as spaces of un-programmed public enjoyment and congregation. To this end, static and deterministic models that impose hierarchy must be reconsidered towards conceptualising alternatives that allow for the fluidity of movement and event in which experience supersedes expediency.

The second is the reconsideration of the relationship between the architectural object and space. Western modes of spatial definition privileges absolute boundary conditions resulting in *thin* or impermeable edges. Edges have the capacity to become transitional or in-between spaces. In creating thresholds, the edge as finite boundary is contested and is extended to become place. Such a strategy also implies undermining the importance of the architectural object in absolutely defining or imposing on space. The in-between creates conditions that allow events to determine spatialities.

Allied to this is the third strategy through which territoriality is contested. By blurring the edges a more equitable interrelationship between the public and private realm becomes possible. Architectural space is not confined to the interior but may extend to become integrated into public life. Experiential differentiation replaces physical separation.

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Rudolf J. van Rensburg is a full time lecturer at the Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria. He holds both Bachelor and Masters degrees from the University of Pretoria. He is currently the course co-ordinator for design and theory in the undergraduate programme. His research interests are architectural design pedagogy, architectural theory and city-form theories.

Mary-Anne Da Costa holds a MArch degree from the University of Pretoria. She has been a guest lecturer at the University of Pretoria in both the under and post-graduate programmes in the Department of Architecture. Her research is focused on contemporary urban theory and its application in an African context.