

Architecture and the othe[r]jeal

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This paper presents a reading of the Northern Cape Legislature (by Luis Ferreira da Silva Architects, 1998) as a form of Magical Realist design, where the limits of established design (i.e. contemporary architecture) are extended through the inclusion of numerous extraordinary elements, which refer to extraordinary contexts. Following Wilson (Zamora and Faris, 1995: 219-233), it will be argued that literary Magical Realism relies upon a spatial structure, where narrative components of the magical and of the real are presented as though they inhabit different realms, or spaces, albeit intertwined. This narrative/spatial analogy allows for easy translation into motifs of architectural design. The paper will present a theoretical discussion on Magical Realist literature and architecture, and will discuss Magical Realist strategies that inform the Northern Cape Legislature, namely: propinquity, hesitation, hypertrophy- metamorphosis, and imaginative conversation.

Key Words: Northern Cape Legislature, Magical Realism, Post-Apartheid, Public Architecture.

EXtraordinary, and for which the Merriam-Webster dictionary online has the following: “going beyond what is usual, regular or customary” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/extraordinary>). We may note the combining of two separate words, extra next to ordinary – extra as supplement to ordinary, a transformation into the extraordinary. If we may entertain some word substitution: ‘Ordinary’ may be associated with ‘Real’ – i.e. that which we ordinarily take to be the case. ‘Extra’ may be associated with ‘Other’ – i.e. that which is in excess of what we ordinarily take to be real. From this we may combine the two words to produce the term OTHERREAL. Introducing brackets enables us to highlight either side of this combination, hence: Other[Real], stabilises the real against its other – and we might say that Realism is the aesthetic form that follows from this ontological frame. [Other]real, by contrast, emphasises the other, as distinguished from the real – and we might look to Surrealism for an aesthetic that works with this ontological frame. In either case, however, we have a self-referring couplet – the one term existing as a boundary to the other.

If we now place brackets around the R’s that are common to both words – othe[R][R]jeal – we get the brief suggestion of a moment, or space in-between. Condensing this arrangement to form othe[R]jeal, we have allowed the one to side, or encode itself into the other – such that our former duplicity of Real/Surreal has become somewhat blurred. This play on words introduces the representational structure that is discussed by this paper. And, we shall be using this structure to generate a reading of the Northern Cape Legislature (NCL) – a reading that shows this building to be a form of Magical Realist architectural design, and I hope to demonstrate the wider significance of this interpretation.

Concerning magical realism

The term Magical Realism may be traced back to art critic Franz Roh’s use of the word, who in 1925, used it to describe a new form of realism that came into existence in the wake of German expressionism (Roh 1929) (figure 1). Quoting from the Oxford Dictionary of Art, Roh proposed Magical Realism as a stylistic category with which to,

describe the aspect of *Neue Sachlichkeit* characterized by sharp-focus detail [... however ...] in later criticism the term has been used to cover various types of painting in which objects are depicted with photographic naturalism but which because of paradoxical elements or strange juxtapositions convey a feeling of unreality, infusing the ordinary with a feeling of mystery (Chivers 1988: 305).



Figure 1

Portrait of the Composer Josef Matthias Hauer, by Christian Schad, 1927 (Joachimides 1985: plate 169).

Whilst Wikipedia, defines Magical Realism as, “an artistic genre in which magical elements or illogical scenarios appear in an otherwise realistic or even ‘normal’ setting [...] widely used in relation to literature, art, and film. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_realism)

In its later development, Magical Realism is associated with the work of various Latin-American visual artists (Figure 2), and in literature, with the rise of the post-colonial novel – in the work of Magical Realist writers such as Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie and Gabriel García Márquez. Louis Parkinson Zamora, and Wendy B. Faris’ edited book, “Magical Realism, Theory, History, Community”, provides a seminal collection of essays, written by sympathetic critics of this genre (Zamora 1995). In their introductory essay, Zamora and Faris, synthesize the perspectives offered by the book, and provide some thoughtful comment as to the cultural and political significance of this style. Distinguishing realism from Magical Realism, they explain that, “realism intends its version of the world as a singular vision, as an objective (hence universal) representation of natural and social realities – in short, that realism functions ideologically and hegemonically” (Zamora 1995: 3).

And, by contrast to this kind of singularity,

Magical realism [...] is not centralizing but eccentric: it creates space for interactions of diversity. In magical realist texts, ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption: magic is often given as cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinize accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, motivation (Zamora 1995: 3).



Figure 2
Self Portrait with Monkeys, by Frida Kahlo, 1943 (Day 1981: 91).

Zamora and Faris go on to observe that Magical Realist texts often draw upon, “non-Western cultural systems that privilege mystery over empiricism, empathy over technology, [and] tradition over innovation” (Zamora 1995: 3). In doing so, Magical Realist literature widens its field of reference to include histories, subjectivities and form of cultural discourse that were formerly silenced by the hegemonic impositions of our colonial past. Significantly, Magical Realists, writing from the margins, have adopted the literary form of the Western, realist novel, but in a way that subverts the common understanding of Western realism, through the inclusion of other (magical) elements. For this reason, Zamora and Faris, characterise Magical Realism as a mode of literature well suited to,

exploring – and transgressing – boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic. Magical Realism often facilitates the fusion, or co-existence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction (Zamora 1995: 5-6).

And, hence:

Magical Realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all-at-onceness encourages resistance to monologic political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures (Zamora 1995: 6).

The Northern Cape Legislature

The NCL, designed by Luis Ferreira da Silva architects was the result of a national design competition, of 1998. This extraordinary building was built under equally extraordinary circumstances. In writing about this highly experimental project, I have felt the need to step back from an overly moral-aesthetic kind of criticism. My concern, in this paper is *not* to divine

good from bad, but rather an attempt to understand, and through understanding to produce an equally experimental and imaginative reading of this scheme.

Situated some four km from the centre of Kimberly, the open, semi-desert like terrain of the selected site used to serve as a former apartheid style buffer strip, and was chosen for the new legislature as part of a symbolic and developmental attempt to meditate between former black and white residential sides of the town. The design brief required that, “the buildings should [...] reflect the cultural aspirations and characteristics of the Northern Cape” (Independent Development Trust 1997: 19). Notably, in this regard, the brief outlines a wide range of contextual reference, for example, reference is required with respect to the natural, cultural and political heritage of the region, and more specifically with respect to the local fauna and flora, the archaeology of the area, pre-colonial settlement patterns, Stone Age heritage, rock engravings, vernacular architecture, as well as cultural and political history of the region, and no less that 51 historical sites are noted in the brief. (Independent Development Trust 1997) The architects’ winning response demonstrates what may be describes as a cosmopolitan design, one that has allowed for a wealth of complex, and at times incommensurable inclusions. In their written report to the Dubai international awards, where they entered this design, the architects explain that, “[a]n attempt to literally portray any single theme found in one’s examination of the context, ran the potential risk of alienating some other equally valid ingredient. We, therefore, sought to create buildings that made allowances for all readings” (Luis Ferreira da Silva).



Figure 3

NCL seen from Parliament Avenue, by Luis Ferreira da Silva, 1998 (photograph by author).

Travelling down Parliament Avenue one gets an early glimpse of the NCL nestled amidst long grasses and low lying trees (figure 3). The dominating forms of the tower and assembly appear etched against the sky, with angled profiles not unlike the cactus plants that abound in the landscape. One has the sense of a naturalistic expression, one that grows from the semi-desert landscape, with its parched soil, near infinite horizon – intense, still and sublime. Moving forward, Parliament Avenue curves to the left for axial approach into the complex. Passing the front guarded check point, one gains direct access into the part circular space of the People’s Square, defined by the presence of the snaking members of parliament building to the left, the out stretched wings of the façade of the assembly at centre, and the frontal solidity of the premiers building which is offset to the right (figure 4). To ones rear, the space is held by a grand, sweeping curve of the amphitheatre, which cunningly allows cars to ramp down to basement

parking, entering on one side and circulating round to an exit on the other in a porte-cochere like motion. Standing in this space, one has the sense of a stylised semi-desert landscape, with a wind swept motion of space that flows out between the building fragments, an on, into the semi-desert expanse of the surrounding site. Gazing at the extraordinary architecture one is struck by the bold and liquid architectonic forms, the rich layering of facades, and upon closer inspection, one notices the populist use of decorative iconography (figure 5). The architecture of the NCL is perhaps suggestive of a Baroque like expression, and to which we must add that numerous commentators of Magical Realist literature have noted the affiliation that exists between Magical Realism and the fabulous density of the Baroque style. The Cuban novelist, Alejo Carpentier in his essays “On the Marvellous Real in America” (Zamora 1995: 75-88) and “Baroque and the Marvelous Real” (Zamora 1995: 89-118), for example, addresses what he takes to be a “uniquely American form of magical realism” (Zamora 1995: 75).¹ Whilst, Faris associates Magical Realism with “[a] carnivalesque spirit” (Zamora 1995: 184) and “a baroque mode of overextension” (Zamora 1995: 185).



Figure 4

The Peoples Square, NCL by Luis Ferreira da Silva, 1998 (photograph by author).

Consideration of the architects design process helps to clarify the remarkable spatiality of this scheme. Kevin Johnson, of LFS, explained that their design process was influenced by traditions of the Sangoma – an African shaman – whose divinatory practises involve the throwing of bones.² Johnson describes how at an early stage of their design process, the brief was translated into a group of separate building. Working, intuitively with Platercise, the architects gave shape to each building mass and then threw the pieces onto the ground. The pattern so formed was copied but oddly, it did not seem to work. So the Platercine was thrown a few more times, the patterns studied, rationalised, and finally translated in the form of the plan (figure 6). The plan encodes an aestheticised memory of this Shamanistic practise. The loose scatter, might also be interpreted as a sculptural way of capturing the fluidity of pre-colonial architecture, such as the archaeological finds at nearby Dithakong (Maggs 2004) (figure 7).



Figure 5
The extraordinary architecture of the NCL, by Luis Ferreira da Silva, 1998 (photograph by author).

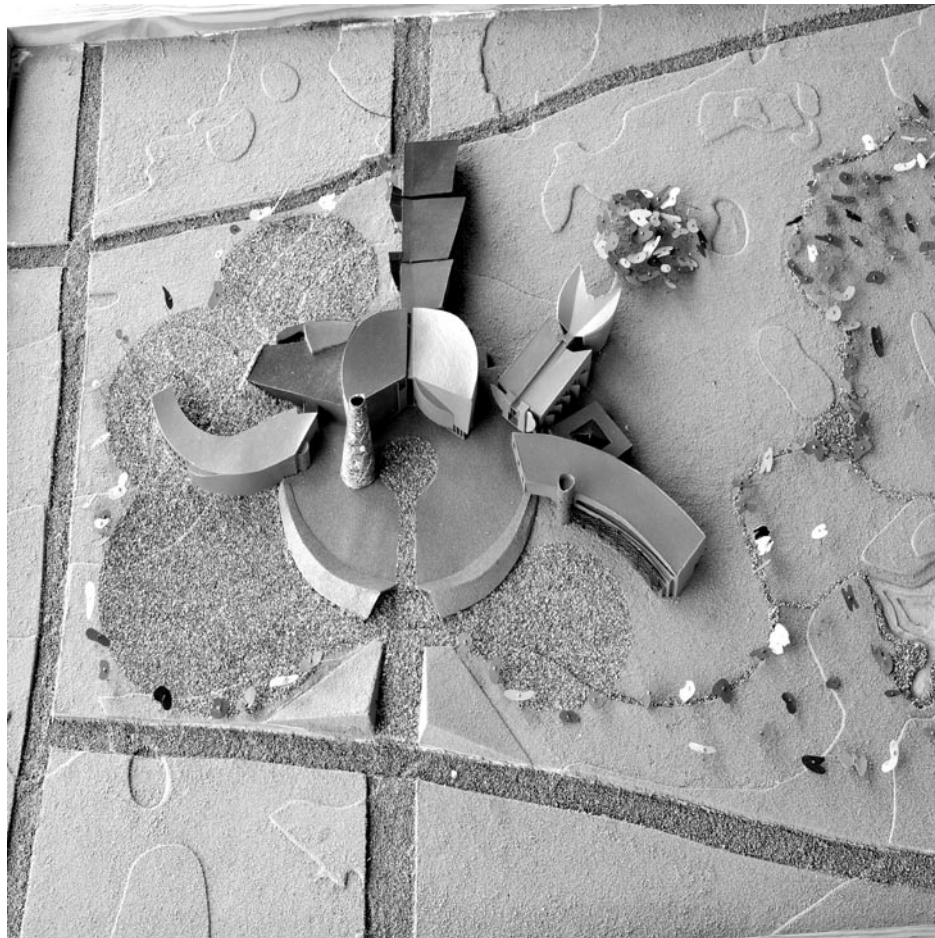


Figure 6
Model of the NCL, by Luis Ferreira da Silva, 1998 (photograph by author).

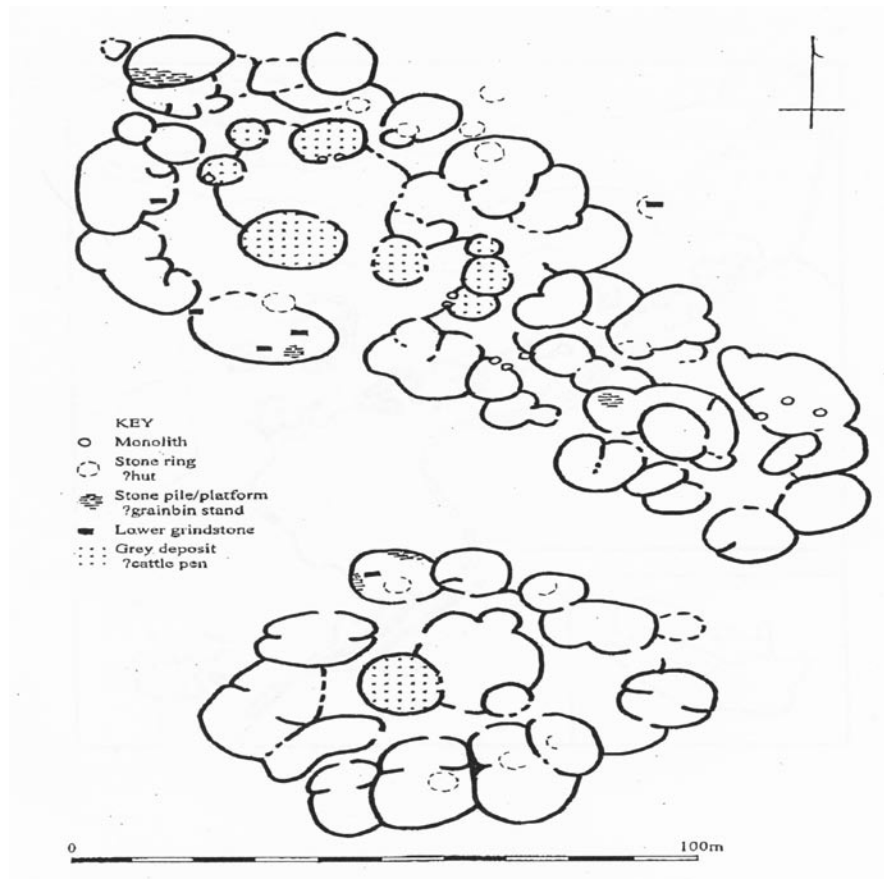


Figure 7
Archaeological site at Dithakong (Maggs 2004).

Space and literature

Before furthering a reading of this scheme, we should pause to consider methodological problems that sometimes occur when placing architecture (spatial and tectonic) in relation to themes derived from literary studies. How might themes and tropes of the Magical Realist novel be translated into terms that are useful for architectural analysis? In his helpful essay titled “The Metamorphosis of Fictional Space”, Rawdon Wilson argues that Magical Realist literature is, in effect, structured by a spatial model – “Magical Realism focuses the problem of fictional space. It does this by suggesting a model of how different geometries, inscribing boundaries that fold and refold like quicksilver, can superimpose themselves upon one another” (Zamora 1995: 210). From this perspective, it appears that the Magical Realist literary aesthetic is based upon an architectonics of the fold, where one narrativized space (or in our case architectonic space, and tectonic sensibility) metamorphoses into another. With this spatial principle in mind the analytical task of this enquiry becomes clear.

This paper will address four structural ideas, gleaned from theory of the Magical Realist novel, and we shall use these concepts to produce an interpretation of the NCL. We shall consider the following: Propinquity, Hesitation, Hypertrophy-Metamorphosis, and Imaginative conversation.³

Propinquity

The most direct-way in which representational realms, or worlds, may converge, is through the structural/spatial use of propinquity – i.e. the bringing into close proximity of what may

ordinarily be deemed to be incongruous elements. Zamora and Faris identify propinquity as a primary feature of Magical Realism, a narrative structure that “moves back and forth [...] between the disparate worlds of what we might call the historical and the imaginary. Propinquity [...] is indeed a central structuring principle of Magical Realist narration.” (Zamora 1995: 1). In spatial and compositional terms, we are, perhaps, more familiar with the idea of juxtaposition as associated with Surrealist art – only now, as already noted, the juxtapositions of Magical Realism are not so much used to render unconscious, dream-like experiences, but rather work to blur the boundaries that exist between.



Figure 8

Consists of 5 images to laid out one beneath the other, from top to bottom (8a, 8b, 8c, 8d, 8e), over one and half pages, and with the following titles:

The buildings of the NCL, from top to bottom: The Members of Parliament Building, The Foyer and Assembly, The Premier’s Building, The Administrative Building, The Premier’s Support Building (photographs by author).

The NCL is composed from a series of incongruous juxtapositions. The somewhat random effect of the scattered plan, is informed by highly inventive structural and tectonic differences. Each of the five building that make up this complex, are conceived in a different way – five different architectures, each exploring unique games of structure and language. Hence, we have the snake-like load bearing walls of the Members of Parliament building; the fluid semi-circularity of the foyer and its assembly, where a hidden steel mesh structure allows walls to tilt in and out; the block like, and frontal solidity of the Premiers building; the desert-modernism of the Administrative building that walks centipede like on legs; and lastly, the Premiers support building, which would appear to combine aspects of each (figure 8). The three facades that address the Peoples Square develop complex and incongruous relation to the architectural structures that lends support. The circular mass of the Assembly gives the impression that a wedge of space has been cut away to provide a welcoming exterior space to the Assembly (figure 9). A symbolic cone, containing a balcony for public address and look out tower, is positioned here, in the open wedge, and where it juxtaposes against the outstretched, wing like façade of the Assembly. Moving to the right of the large mass, we further notice that the right hand wing of the façade is sliced from the building mass. These powerful gestures of proximity

and difference, effectively toy (rather than to represent in an ‘honest’ or ‘functionalist’ sense) with the architecture of the Assembly and foyer, which explores a cavernous spatial interior. The other facades that front the Peoples Square, play similarly complex, although different games with respect to the equally distinct architectonic forms they present.



Figure 9
The circular mass of the Assembly and symbolic cone, NCL (photograph by author).

These complex, formal manoeuvres are further complemented by an equally complex and highly differentiated composure of material surfaces. Building skin explores textures and tectonic resonance that may be associated with the semi-desert landscape that surround, its land and rock formations, the fauna flora and of the site, as well as resonances with pre-colonial forms and local craft traditions (figure 10). This rich palette of architectonic surfaces is adorned by an equally rich decorative programme, consisting of: mosaics, metal inserts and protrusions, bumps and incisions, profiled heads, decorative screens, as well as enigmatic fragments of user friendly sculpture (figure 11). Artist, Clive van den Berg, the author of these decorative works, explained in an interview, that he did not want to hang paintings on the wall, in the manner of a Western, Neo-Colonial government building.⁴ Instead, he wished to take inspiration from indigenous African, and pre-colonial artistic traditions – traditions that have tended to blur the pejorative distinction so often made between ‘A’rt and ‘c’raft. From this came the idea to use building surfaces (internal and external alike) as a canvas for imaginative and decorative intervention. Working with a group of craftsmen from the Provence – who were selected with protocols of empowerment and skill transfer in mind – van den Berg set out to work in a highly experimental, and improvisatory manner. The architects, who have worked with Clive on numerous occasions, entrusted him with an almost unencumbered, free reign of expression. Kevin Johnson fondly remembers how Clive would sometimes call him up on the phone to say you have got to come and take a look, and Kevin would fly down to enjoy the unexpected surprise.⁵ Van den Berg’s explains that his works – a few of which are due to be considered in more detail – give “echo to post-apartheid subjectivity,” by looking to material sources, expressive languages and forms of subjectivity that were denied in the colonial era and under Apartheid.⁶ His designs take clues from multiple sources, such as attitudes to landscape, glacial rock formations, fauna and flora of the region, San rock art, ways of moving through space, popular icons from the years of anti-Apartheid struggle, symbolic reference to popular political sentiments, and so on.

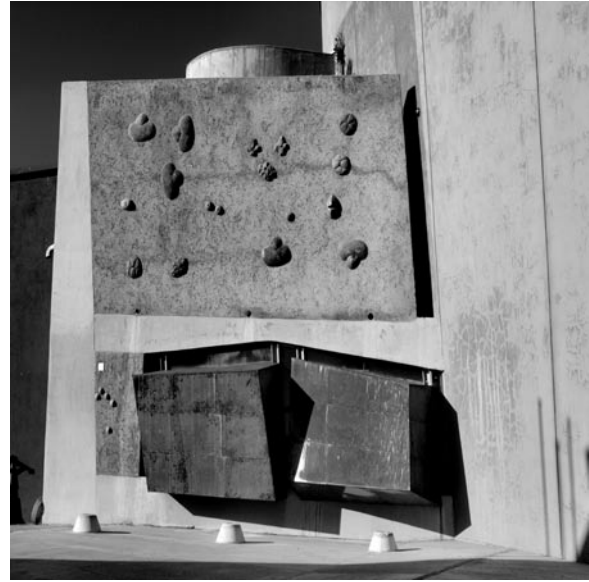


Figure 10

**consists of two images (10a, 10b) to be laid out across the page , one next to the other, (or if you prefer, one beneath the other), and with the following title:
Building facades at the NCL are richly layered (photographs by author).**

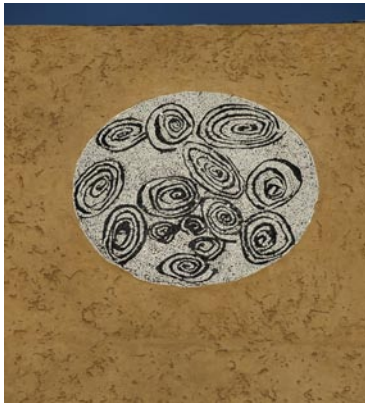


Figure 11

consists of six small images (11a, 11b, 11c, 11d, 11e, 11f) to be laid out with the first three from left to right across the page, and the next three immediately below from left to right across the page (i.e. to form a 3 x 2 grid), and with the following title: Building facades at the NCL are adorned with artworks by Clive van den Berg (photographs by author).

These decorative works allow for a range of loose and at times unexpected relations between architecture and craft. Fragments of architecture and craft abut, intermingle, combine and separate. The propinquity of these elements, ‘marvellous’ and ‘real’, creates an expanded field

of metaphoric reference - one that opens dialogue with histories and subjectivities that were formerly denied.

Hesitation

The second theme derived from Magical Realism that I wish to consider, in that of hesitation. In “Postmodernist Fiction” (1987), Brian Mc Hale provides an insightful analysis of postmodern literature – a genre to which Magical Realism surely belongs. The chapter titled ‘Topological Worlds’, in particular, demonstrates how metaphoric description may be used to translate the reader between different ontological spaces, or worlds. McHale writes:

[m]etaphoric expression, according to Benjamin Hrushovski, belongs simultaneously to two frames of reference [...] Within one of these frames, the expression has its literal meaning; within the other it functions figuratively. Only the second of these frames [i.e. the fictitious frame] actually exists in the fictional world of the text (what Hrushovski calls the field of reference). (McHale 1987: 133)

To illustrate how this structure operates, McHale refers to the metaphor, the “patient etherised upon a table” (McHale 1987: 133).⁷ With this expression we have the suggestion of a body spread out on a hospital table, yet clearly the word ‘hospital’ (i.e. the literal frame of reference) is missing. With architecture, however, we may note that this duplicity of reference seems to work the other way round. This is so because ones embodied experience of a space is tied to the literal presence of that space, and from this ones ‘literal’ sense is the one that actually exists, whilst the expressive or suggestive nature of this experience is what allows for metaphoric relations to another space, one that is imaginatively perceived but not literally present (i.e. the metaphoric sense is, literally, absent). Yet, however we choose to view the differences between architecture and narrative, the bigger point is that the concept of a dual frame of reference clearly does apply to architecture.

Returning to literature, the distinction between these two frames of reference is not always clear, for example McHale observes that, “[s]econdary frames, such as the absent ‘hospital’ [...] may be co-opted, or expropriated, so to speak, from the world of existents, the fictional world of the text; or, alternatively, they may begin as nonexistents relative to the fictional world but subsequently enter the world as full-fledged existents.” (McHale 1987: 134). In either case, the reader will experience an overlap between the literal and metaphoric realms, and it is this transference between frames of reference, both real and marvellous, that Magical Realism exploits. McHale goes on to consider different ways in which this can take place, and from his discussion we shall consider the narrative structures of ‘hesitation’ and ‘hypertrophy’, which, in turn, will be applied to the architecture for the NCL.

According to McHale, “All metaphor hesitates between a literal function [...] and a metaphorical function [...]; postmodernist texts [to which Magical Realism belong] often prolong this hesitation as a means of foregrounding ontological structure.” (McHale 1987: 134). To demonstrate the effect of metaphoric hesitation, McHale quotes the follow passage from Gabriel García Márquez

He went everywhere begging alms with a copper dish. They gave him a large amount, but he wanted more, because the church had to have a bell that would raise the drowned up to the surface of the water. He pleaded so much that he lost his voice. His bones began to fill with sounds. (Márquez 1972: 81)

The reader is likely to hesitate on this last sentence, for by the time she reaches this point, she is unsure as to which field of reference these words belong – is this sentence intended as ‘real’, or is it imagined?

Entering the Assembly to the NCL, ones motion is led forward by a line of columns that direct a quick passage across the foyer, out and onto the covered walkways that feed the administrative buildings at the rear (figure 12). This line of motion extends the primary north-south axis that structures the loose symmetry of the complex. Stepping between the columns to the left, however, one is sucked into the cavernous space of the foyer, with its fluid expanse and curvaceous tilting walls that circulate in a contrapuntal motion. Light streams through what appears to be deep reveals, and spot lighting effects – hung from the ceiling, and projected from the floor – complement the sweeping intensity of the scene. Stone like floor tiles, off shutter concrete, and other rough surfaces lend support to the dramatic contrasts and the texturing of light and shade. Ones sense is of a naturalistic, cave like interior – perhaps a reference to the archaeological digs at nearby Wonderwek Cave that have provided important evidence of early human habitation in this region. (Morris 2004: 31-36). The purposeful motion of the axial entrance motif is here dissolved, and one is left to wonder through this magnificent, indeed fabulous space of the foyer.



Figure 12
Foyer of the Assembly, NCL (photography by author).

Looking down, shafts of light float across the floor, and ones attention is drawn to a series of brass inserts, laid into the irregular pattern of the floor tiles (figure 13). These decorative artworks, by Clive van den Berg, explore strange and beautiful patterns derived from nearby ice-age glacial rocks, and San rock engravings.⁸ The embedded placement of these plates, mimic the sense of hesitation and surprise that accompany the experiences of actual rock formation, or engravings, where they are happened upon in a natural landscape. I say hesitation and surprise, because these engravings and formations speak from across a vast expanse of time, interrupting the common reality and causality of space and time. Such experiences are like magical interludes that transport the imagination to another space, and another time.

Moving across the foyer and onto the other side a pair of rusted steel-plates penetrate and frame narrow shafts, or windows to the outside (figure 14). Intense light flows between the slotted openings, puncturing the dark mystery of the interior. One must surely hesitate, here, while staring into the glaring light. Hesitate in a moment where space is seemingly folded

somewhere between light and dark, inside and out, past and present, a modern interior and a pre-colonial cave. Here again, we have the sense of interruption, of being transported into a distant space and time, one that is disconnect yet at once folded into the momentary experience of this self-same space and time. This sensation directly corresponds with Faris’ characterisation of the Magical Realist vision, which, “exists at the intersection of two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions” (Zamora 1995: 172). And indeed, we could successfully apply this reading to numerous spaces and to various elements within this complex, but it is time to move on to the next point.

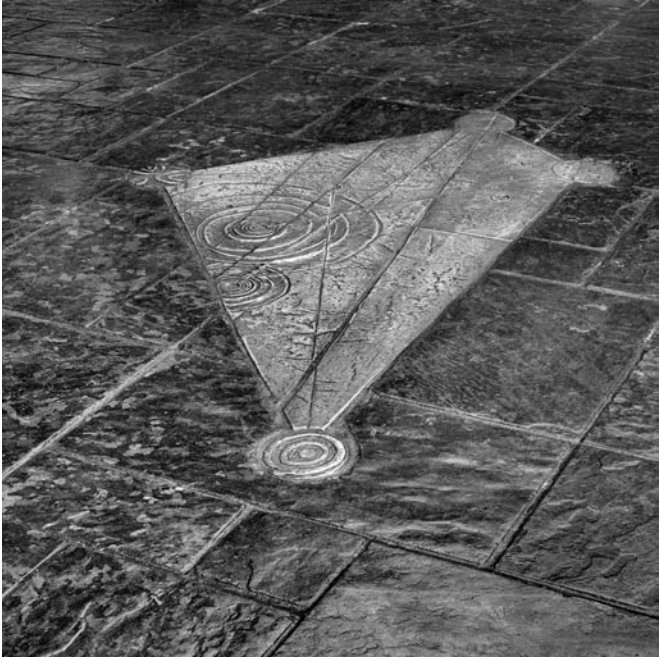


Figure 13
Brass insert, foyer of the Assembly, NCL (photography by author).



Figure 14
Windows to the outside, foyer of the Assembly, NCL (photography by author).

Hypertrophy-metamorphosis

McHale furthers his discussion of ‘topological worlds’ by considering what he terms ‘hypertrophy’⁹, a narrative context where “[...] metaphorical miniature worlds tend to acquire an internal consistency and ‘liveliness’ of their own; gathering momentum, they may even lose touch with the ground of their literal frame of reference and “take off” (McHale 1987: 138). He provides the following passage from Barthelme, as example:

the sentence falls out the mind that holds it (temporarily) in some kind of an embrace, not necessarily an ardent one, but more perhaps the kind of embrace enjoyed (or endured) by a wife who has just waked up and is on her way to the bathroom in the morning to wash her hair, and is bumped into by her husband, who has been lounging at the breakfast table reading the newspaper. (Barthelme 1978: 109)

In this passage we note how the metaphoric relation that begins with ‘some kind of embrace’ appears to run-away with itself, and before long, this relation metamorphoses into a miniature narrative of its own, which exists as a near seamless extension of the primary (i.e. ‘real’) narrative of the work. The reader is pulled along by this motion, led to drift from the realism of the narrative into the othe[R]realism of this pregnant, or hypertrophic narrative. In doing so, the real transmogrifies into the imaginary – hypertrophy is a kind of narrative metamorphosis.

Hypertrophy plays an important role in Luis Ferreira da Silva’s competition submission for the NCL. The Hero’s Acre, a public park with playful sculptures was proposed in the original design, as a way to celebrate, “historically neglected heroes [...] we propose an avenue of profile/sculpture heads lining the meandering road as it moves towards the heroes’ acre situated along the eastern site boundary” (Luis Ferreira da Silva 1998: 8). A sketch, included in the architects written report, depicts a pair of profiled heads with shade cloth for hair that flows outward to form a shaded seating, or picnic spot (figure 15). The aesthetic autonomy of the sculpted work appears to run away with itself, extending and transforming itself into the every-day life-world of the park. A heroic symbol is seamlessly transformed into a support for recreation and retreat. The architects explain that their proposal did,

not wish to repeat the traditional styles and materials used for the deification of political heroes [...] It is important to signal a political change with simultaneous change of imagery, materials, context and the spatial relations between citizen and representation of hero (Luis Ferreira da Silva 1998: 8).

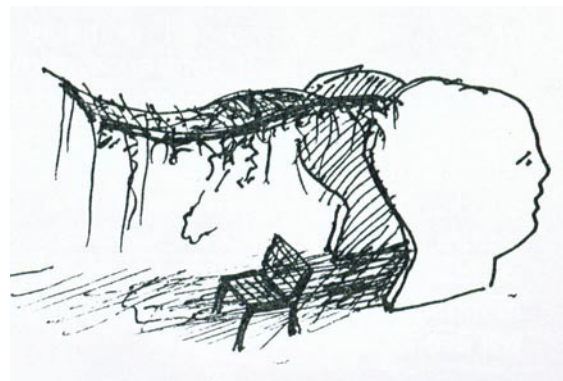


Figure 15
Architects sketch for profiles heads, by Luis Ferreira da Silva.

Unfortunately, due to budget limitations, the Heroes’ Acre was not realised. Clive van den Berg had, nevertheless, commenced with the design and crafting of the intended heads, and these were fortunately re-salvaged, being scattered and inserted into the immediate, surrounding landscape (Figure 16). Further sculptures, by van den Berg, may be found on the site. These arresting works drift across different registers of representation, from the ordinary to the extraordinary and back again. For example wire mesh frames float somewhere between art and nature, decorative insertions hover between architecture and sculpture, and symbolic representations flow from

the direct and real, to highly imaginative forms of perception – a sculptural metamorphosis of each into the other (Figure 17). Strictly speaking, we perhaps do not have hypertrophy in its exact form here – hypertrophy requiring the directed motion of narrative – but rather a more open and undecided form of metamorphosis.



Figure 16
Profiled head, by Clive van den Berg, NCL (photography by author).



Figure 17
consists of three images (17a, 17b, 17c) to be laid out from left to right across the page, and with the following caption:
Sculptural metamorphosis, sculptures by Clive van den Berg, NCL (photographs by author).

The architects written submission to the design competition contains numerous cartoon-like sketches, which develop ideas for interactive, in-between spaces, where buildings, sculptures and human figures appear to metamorphose in an interchangeable fashion – as if one has give birth to its other. These sketches play with a range of formal gestures that provide an imaginative language for the creation of truly interactive public spaces, where building surfaces are thickened to accommodate picnic spots, and where symbolic forms take on a popular, iconic character (figure 18). Significantly, the architects had intended an uninhibited passage across the entire site, and the complex was clearly designed with forms of recreational enjoyment in mind (Luis Ferreira da Silva 1998). Unfortunately, the free and uninhibited passage was not realised, and entry into the complex is presently monitored at the main security checkpoint, accessed off Parliament Avenue. But visitors are welcome, provided correct arrangements are

made, and the Peoples Square has played host to numerous public events, and the architecture has proved to be a popular success.¹⁰

We may note here the transgressive character of Magical Realist representation, where one order of being, or representational world, is extended into the other, and whereby dominant and dominating relations are, momentarily, re-codified.



Figure 18
consists of three images (18a, 18b, 18c) to be laid out from left to right across the page, and with the following caption: Architects sketch's from their competition design entry, by Louis Ferreira da Silva.

Imaginary conversations

The last theme that shall be considered, is one that is implicit to the former points of discussion, only here, at closure, further emphasis shall be place on the conversational nature of Magical Realist representation – an ethical conversation that imaginatively traverses across space and time.

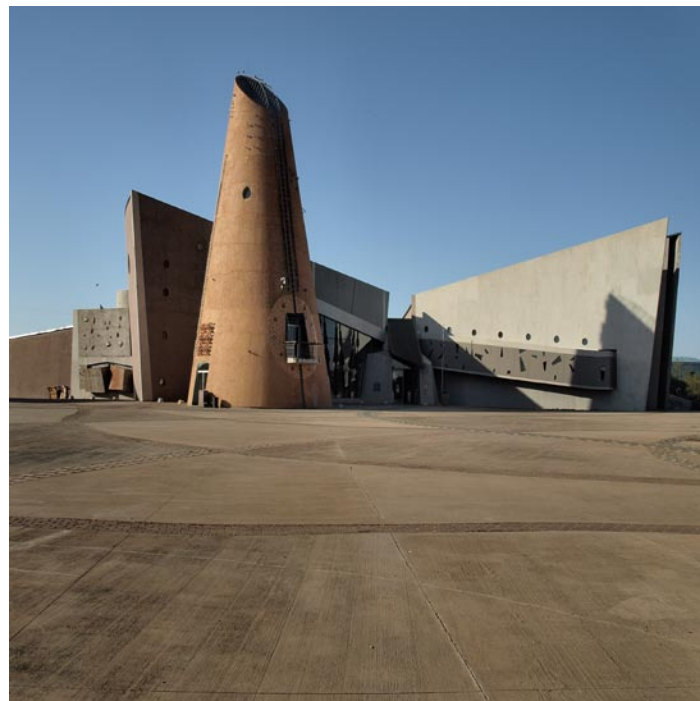


Figure 19
The Tower, NCL (photography by author).

The detached conic form of the tower stands to the left side of the assembly, juxtaposed against its almost blank, winged façade (figure 19). The relation is one of spatial proximity, and difference.

The cone, which functions as a look out point, and a lectern for addressing the Peoples Square, is richly textured by van den Berg's mosaic designs (figure 20). Depictions of South African state presidents, Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, and a blank space provided for future leaders, line the bottom of the tower. Van den Berg has made extensive use of blank spaces in an attempt to create an incomplete and open narrative, one that might be altered through time. Overhead, glass bulb sculptures hang from the tower, glinting in the sun. Van den Berg inform that these were inspired by the coloured beads that adorn traditional Xhosa blankets. And higher up, an enigmatic, disembodied head floats with horizontally posture. Its a "sleeping head", says van den Berg, one that looks down upon the public square from another space and another time – a contemplative realm of spiritual reflection, a "figure in the imaginary; a reminder to power" van den Berg says.¹¹



Figure 20
consists of three images (19a, 19b, 19c) to be laid out from left to right
across the page, and with the following caption: Artistic treatment of the tower at the NCL, by Clive van
den Berg (photographs by author).

Indigenous cultures of Southern Africa, have since earliest times and in many cases still do believe in a spiritual realm of the ancestors. The ancestors look down upon the affairs of men. The effect of their gaze may be understood to contain an ethical notion of the good, because the living are obliged to acknowledge the wisdom of the dead. Van den Berg's dis-embodied head engages this tradition of thought. It establishes an imaginative dialogue with traditions of the ancestor, not literally but metaphorically so. A dialogue that cuts across space and time, through the use of an estranged, and aesthetecised form of representation.

A further example of imaginative and ethical conversation may be seen on the front façade to the Premier's building, where a series of van den Berg's metal plate sculptures are attached, or at times inlayed into the plaster (figure 21). A bowl of food, a book, a house, blocks symbolising construction and development, the head of a child, an HIV-Aids awareness ribbon covered with funerary crosses, are intended as further reminders to power, that the needs of the common people should not be neglected.¹²

Faris notes that, "[i]n Magical Realist narrative, ancient symbols of belief and local lore often underlie the text," (Zamora 1995: 182) and that Magical Realist texts often, "take a position that is antibureaucratic [...] they offer their magic against the established social order" (Zamora 1995: 179). And certainly, this is case at the NCL – an architecture that supports an African, cosmopolitan narrative, one that opens dialogue with histories and subjectivities that were formerly denied.



Figure 21
consists of two images (21a, 21b) to be laid out from left to right
across the page, and with the following caption: Artistic treatment of the front façade of the Premier’s
Building, NCL, by Clive van den Berg (photographs by author).

Notes

1. This last quote is the editors note.
2. Interview with Clara da Cruz Almeida and Kevin Johnston, Johannesburg, (August 2003). Later with Johnston, Johannesburg, (November 2004), (February 2005).
3. It will be seen that these four ideas are somewhat generic in nature, and certainly there is no reason why one could not work these themes in relation to other works of architecture as well – perhaps, almost any building would do. The point about the NCL, however, is that this project is particularly well suited to the interpretation that flows from these theoretical notions, and it is hoped that this paper will enhance appreciation for the unique architectures of the NCL.
4. Interviews with Clive van den Berg, Johannesburg, (August 2003), (February 2005).
5. Interviews with Kevin Johnston, Johannesburg, (August 2003), (November 2004), (February 2005).
6. Interview with Clive van den Berg, Johannesburg, (February 2005).
7. This quotation is taken from T. S. Eliot’s poem, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (Keegan 2001: 847).
8. Interview with Clive van den Berg, Johannesburg, (August 2003).
9. The Merriam-Webster dictionary online defines hypertrophy as, the increase of the size of an organ or in a select area of the tissue (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypertrophy>).
10. The successful use of the Peoples Square was confirmed by E. M. Papenfus a competition juror and former representative of the legislature; Joey ou Tim of Public Works who has managed logistics for public events at the legislature; Patric Moopelwa senior manager for public education and communications at legislature; as well as Matome Mawasha deputy secretary of parliamentary services. Interviews conducted in Kimberly (February 2005).
11. Interview with van den Berg, Johannesburg, (February 2005).
12. Interview with van den Berg, Johannesburg, (February 2005).

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