

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

7.1 RESEARCH SUMMARY

For the purposes of expanding on inadequate South African architectural writing for the 1950s to 1960s and contributing towards debates surrounding housing, this thesis contextualised, dialectically enquired, re-evaluated, conceptualized and construed a theory for the domestic architecture of the 'Silent Subversives' in order to respond to the question:

How did the Silent Subversives go beyond stylistic ideologies to design dwellings of socio-spatial inhabitation during apartheid (1950s to 1960s)?

7.2 SUMMARISED FINDINGS

7.2.1 First Finding

Discontent with incomplete studies regarding the effect of socio-political ideologies, the first research problem was to contextualise the lifetime dispositions of our cohort accordingly.

This study firstly hypothesised that following the Second World War and during the heyday of apartheid, the cohort born in the Great Depression initiated their architectural careers designing suburban dwellings that reflected the socio-political and economic dispositions of their early lifetimes.

Our first finding is that the socio-economic conditions of the Great Depression exposed the cohort to the possibility of simple improvisations. After the Second World War, they aspired to the 'universal' theme of freedom, democracy and human rights of youth culture, which was distinct from pre-war Victorian or *verkrampste* attitudes. However, the further confrontation with apartheid subjugated them to conservative ideas of societal behaviour, religion, racial tolerance, sexuality and approaches to architecture that led them to resort to a creative silent subversive-ness for fear of being 'named'. Distinct from their predecessors, their socio-political dispositions carried new cultural ideas forward to their successors.

7.2.1.1. *First informant*

Generations can overcome difficult situations such as economic downturns, political transitions and hegemonic political powers with silent stoic-like resilience. Rather than ideological political utopias, these contexts can inspire simple daily improvisations for making architecture.

7.2.2 Second Finding

Having observed national stylistic constructs as a lens for reading our agent's architecture, the second research problem was to, while keeping the first contextualising research problem in mind, dialectically situate stylistics within the global polarisations of 'Regionalism' and 'Internationalism'.

Secondly, the study hypothesised that the post-war architectural education, aspirations and architectural stylistic influences on South African architects were characteristic of an international contemporary architectural condition.

Our second finding established paradoxes regarding perceptions and authenticity of 'International' versus 'Regional' stylistic imagery, in relation to socio-economic and aesthetic ideologies. We found that regionalist and international constructs both supported romanticized settler and 'progressive' capitalist agendas. More importantly, we recognised that in contrast to post-war housing developers, mid-century architects countered the stylistics of their predecessors from 'Modern' to an emancipated 'Contemporary' approach, to embrace the perceived freedom of a democratic post-war society.

7.2.2.1. *Second informant*

Irrespective of the specifics of a particular region, architectural languages are and can be multi-cultural borrowings. The pre-occupation of national stylistic ideologies is inauthentic to the inter-relationship of the planetary human condition. Whether 'regional' or 'international', architects do not necessarily have to follow stylistic constructs.

7.2.3 Third Finding

From our socio-political context and global stylistic situation, our third research problem re-evaluated the insufficient local academic writing that constructs emergences as an historical continuum for the post-war cohort.

The third hypotheses stated that the global post-war and apartheid condition influenced the shift in the architectural approach of our generation rendering any regional, linguistic or parochial labelling for the purposes of an historical construct in the same stylistic school as their educators and mentors, as questionable

Thirdly, as a genesis for an emergence of pragmatic regionalism to which historians link our generation, a re-evaluation found that any emotional ideological productions for a unique Afrikaner style could not overlook the technical dominance of the Victorian Empire. What came to the fore were contradictory positions regarding an ideal South African architectural idiom that clearly indicated a variety of pre-war mutated translations of international trends and post-war influences from extreme geographies, bringing any clear-cut stylistic continuum for our young generation into debate.

7.2.3.1. *Third informant*

Architectural history is not entirely a linear progression and although one recognises aspects of a continuum, historical disjunctions disallow simplistic labelling. Moreover, stylistic constructs are relative to the dominant approach of an era's, often regional, agenda and therefore not entirely representative when seen from the lens of another time focus.

7.2.4 Fourth Finding

On noticing limited writing surrounding our agent's architecture concerned only with stylistic forms, the fourth research problem addressed the reciprocity of the social dispositions to the dispositioned structures of our agent's suburban dwellings.

Fourthly, this thesis hypothesised that within the period of the 1950s and 1960s, within the socio-spatial dispositions of their dwellings, our agents found ways to transcend the subjugation of apartheid through the freedom of their private social domesticity.

After investigating the socio-economic dispositions of various family types and intertextual social groups, our fourth finding is that the silent everyday living, liberal domesticity and post-war subversive social practices differed from traditional conservative practices, and thereby altered the architectural production of dwellings as a private realm enabling a sense of secreted transcendental freedom from imposed ideologies. Rather than conscious stylistics, we found that the Silent Subversives dispositioned dwellings spatially in zones, internally and externally, to enhance social communicative interaction economically. We found that they employed structural devices and neutralised materials to achieve an illusion of landscaped space for suburban democratic inhabitation.

7.2.4.1. *Fourth informant*

Including non-traditional westernised domestic situations, a reciprocal relationship between the activities of all household members with building structure is necessary for democratic social dwelling. The manifestations thereof need not rely on architectural styles, high costs or large areas but rather open spatial perceptions and economic, yet expressive, materiality to provide a sense of 'cultivated nature'.

7.2.5 Fifth Finding

Due to the lack of a critical and theoretical enquiry surrounding the Silent Subversives domestic architecture, the fifth research problem was to construe a theory to underpin the Silent Subversives approach to dwelling for the purposes of contributing towards debates on housing.

The fifth hypotheses positions a theory of inhabitation beyond scenography that is embedded in the domestic architecture of the Silent Subversives, as relevant for discourses on housing densities regardless of changed times or political transitions.

Finally, we found that the simple lifetime dispositions of our agents allowed us to construe a theory of inhabited dwelling. Different to the primary simplicity or traditional fixed dwelling tied to rural nature, our construal suggested a secondary simplicity fit for to post-war and apartheid suburban living conditions. By avoiding a stylistic reductivist concept, we found that the physical form or 'silent scenography' of our agent's dwellings was primarily in place for supporting the act of liberal everyday performance, therefore allowing a social and playful, free inhabitation for all the occupants to take place. Although by the 1970s, architectural theory resorted back to stylistics, we found the inhabitation reforms of the 1950s and 1960s, to be lessons for high-density dwelling as is topical for post-colonial and twenty-first century housing debates.

7.2.5.1. Fifth informant

Taking the layers of all the previous informants into consideration, the notion of 'free inhabitation' is a possibility for understanding dwelling beyond theories that are tied to romanticised rural ideas, but rather applicable to the urgency of urban migration and subsequent high-density housing. Unbound from political and economic dominance; released from historic constructs; unfettered by simplistic labelling and unencumbered by dispositional norms; free inhabitation suggests a simple positive freedom that is both transcendental and grounded. Inhabitation therefore, is how to live everyday with others and at the same time how to be home beyond building.

7.3 RECOMMENDED RESEARCH

Due to the adoption of Bourdieu's notion of agents, the undertaking of research for a cohort became difficult for fear of generalisation. However, this study has provided an applicable background legitimising future research on the individualised dispositions of the architects mentioned.

Owing to primary sources being limited, the initial intention was to include a visual verification of available photographic images by utilizing Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies: An introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. (2007). However to avoid disrupting the main thesis argument, the structure of the study eliminated the extensive application of Rose's 'Sites of Production', 'Image' and 'Audience'. Nevertheless, Roses' examination of 'semiology', 'psychoanalysis', 'discourse analysis' and 'content analysis' as a method to study this thesis topic, warrants a research project of its own.

The following question may be applicable for future research:

How can architects go beyond stylistic ideologies to design high-density dwellings of socio-spatial inhabitation for urban futures?

7.4 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

This thesis has broadened the social, cultural and architectural literature that is particular to a post-second world war generation. The consideration of the socio-political effects of a South African architectural cohort's collective dispositions relative to international events contributes to more research understandings.

The study brings marginalised non-mainstream groups into architectural discourse. Furthermore, the thesis aligns off-the-radar local architectural situations with global conditions providing an alternative stylistic lens rather than parochial constructs relative to the time focus of this study.

A re-evaluation of architectural literature challenges dominant approaches, even if only to provide an alternative viewpoint for lively architectural discourse. The study critically unfolds and reveals paradoxes in order to contribute to ongoing research regarding what constitutes 'regionalism' and 'internationalism', particularly in relation to the early post-world war two and apartheid period.

The study attempts to include more than a few singled out architects. Although difficult to collate, the approach has provided an opportunity to collage various forgotten fragments of domestic architecture from more than one region in a research document. This undertaking has continued with the expansion of archival material of a young post-war generation during the heyday of apartheid for the benefit of understanding the socio-spatial aspects of their domestic architecture.

Although by the very nature of its silence and experiential characteristics, the theoretical component of this study has construed some lessons from the Silent Subversives that contribute, albeit small, to both architectural pedagogy and high-density housing debates that resonate with the twenty-first century.

The architecture being built right now has been influenced by changes in economics and taste in the 1970s, the 1960s, the 1950s, the 1940s...You cannot understand what is happening now without knowing what was happening then (Dyckhoff 2015:23).