



*Keynote address by Heinrich Wolff at the Z-Axis Conference which was held in Goa (2018), to be published in conference proceedings (2019)*

Three years ago a statue was removed, in Cape Town, of a man called Cecil John Rhodes. The removal occurred 113 years after his death. He is a much hated British imperialist who operated ambiguously between being Governor of the Cape, a head of a diamond company, head of a gold mining company and a private individual who from time to time invaded countries, called them after himself and instilled vast amounts of tension amongst people. His statue stayed for 81 years in the middle of the University of Cape Town and it took a great deal of protest and even more spray paint until the university decided to remove the statue.

It is remarkable how enduring the social order is that Rhodes put in place more than a century ago; the extractive relationship with land and resources, and the abuse of labour to extract these resources which are still in place today. The problem we are considering today is just how enduring the structures of inequity is. In South Africa, after 25 years of democracy, things are not really changing. It appears that there are other forces at work that seem to control the urban domain more than politics or politicians or planners for that matter. So it has become clear to me that architects and urban planners are complicit in a way in the formation of the unequal city. South Africa has the three most unequal cities on earth and is

an increasingly unequal society. India is following suit, having adopted the same economic policies at the same time. In this play for power in South African society, it is clear that architects are not innocent bystanders and that architects have participated in imagining configurations of the city which assist in the operation of contemporary capitalism. Without the assistance of architects, contemporary capitalism cannot achieve its aims. Architects are fundamental in contemporary iterations of monopolising economic opportunity on the one hand and the marginalisation of people in conditions of unfreedom on the other.

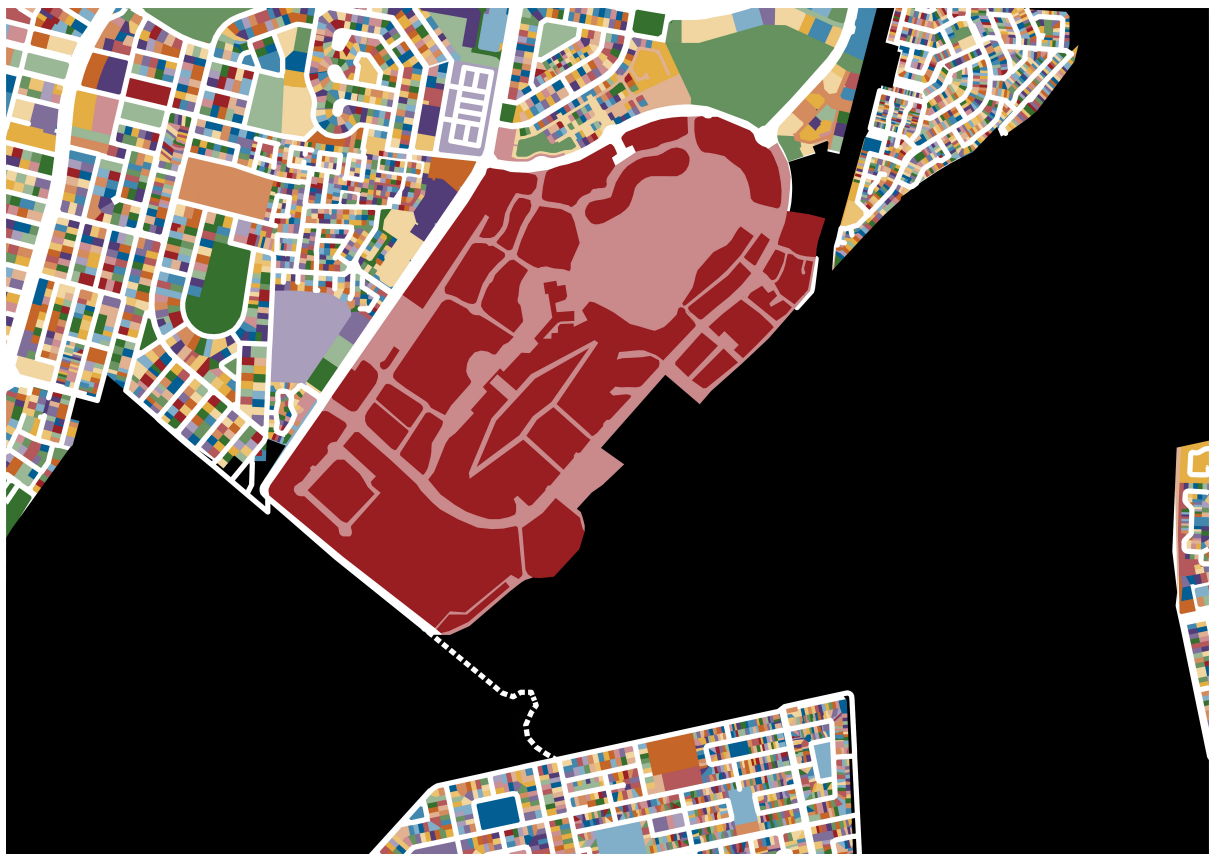
Let us consider the historic patterns of economic monopolisation. This aerial photo of Langa in Cape Town (Fig1) shows the city of apartheid; a basic neighbourhood design which was racialised as black. In the top left you have an area racialised as white; bottom and right hand side as mixed race and an industrial area to the north. To advance our understanding of the city as an instrument of inequality we made a series of drawings which reveal the urban patterns of contemporary capitalism (Fig 2). Firstly, both architectural and urban drawings draw openness. It's a convention. If you draw a door, the door is open or not closed. Everything is always open. The highway is open. Even if it is closed from time to time, we draw it as universally and simultaneously open. Contrary to this convention, we



*Figure 2: Langa (drawing by Heinrich Wolff)*

argue that inequality works differently and we consider that infrastructure can disconnect as much as it can connect. So the convention we invented for these plans is that if any infrastructure or any piece of land in no way contributes to the connection of people or to economic opportunity (because I'm focusing on economic opportunity in these drawings) then we draw this absence of opportunity in black. We just wipe it out from the plan. Even if there is a highway there; if it divides people we make it black. We followed Nolli's plan by making public space white and marking individually owned properties as separate colours. We want to see who owns what and how much is owned where. So what do we see in this apartheid era neighbourhood. You see it articulated as an island, completely separate from other neighbourhoods. Only four entry roads are made into this neighbourhood to allow effect suppression of civil unrest with military force. Economic opportunity of adjoining neighbourhoods cannot grow into Langa because of the buffer zones around it.

In this image (Fig 3) we see Century City, also in Cape Town, but planned after the end of apartheid. Now let's see what's done at the time of freedom. Let us analyse it (Fig 4).



*Figure 4: Century City (drawing by Heinrich Wolff)*

Wow, surprising things are happening here; large black areas - highways, air force spaces, all sorts of things which are impenetrable to the public. We see a neighbourhood in the top left and a massive red island in the centre which is a single property owned by a single company. This red island is a piece of land exactly the same size as the centre of Cape Town, controlled by a single owner. Imagine the economic power of owning a piece of land with both residential and commercial rights equivalent to the centre of Cape Town. Imagine the consequences of this economic and political power vested in a single owner. What we see here is a concentration and a monopolisation of economic opportunity that leads directly to a desaturation of economic opportunity elsewhere in the city. This is extremely serious in the context of the greatest inequality on earth. These consequences are ethically unacceptable and should be outlawed.



*Figure 5: Cape Town, V&A Waterfront, Cape Town Harbour (drawing by Heinrich Wolff)*

Let us consider the morphology of this design; this urban area is pretty much an island as well - this parcel of land has a wall around it and it has four entrances, just like Langa. Limiting movement allows control. It is very curious that anyone is allowed to repeat the planning instruments of apartheid. Let us look at another aspect of this drawing: the pink

routes are the internal circulation of this property which appear to be public, but which are privately owned. These private streets repel what Asef Bayat calls 'the quiet encroachment of the ordinary'; the "*silent, protracted, but pervasive advancement of the ordinary people on the propertied, powerful, or the public, in order to survive and improve their lives*" (Bayat 2013:46). No trader will be allowed to set up shop on the sidewalk. In other words, this concentration of high-end businesses repel low-end business entirely. That is a huge problem. By comparison, (Fig 5) in the centre of Cape Town (at the bottom of the drawing) the old colonial centre which has a grid that can grow over time. The city has a multitude of owners and you can imagine politically it is a more complex situation than Century City. In the top left you see there the red area, the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront; state land that was sold and privatised. The blue area on the right is the harbour owned by the ports authority, a parastatal that behaves like private company at times. These large areas are controlled in a manner that does not enhance economic opportunity or mobility for the poor.

### **Externalities**

In my attempts to understand the social cost of the contemporary capitalist city, I have found economic theory very useful. In economics, the idea that commercial activities can have involuntary consequences affecting people who are not primary agents of such activities, is called externalities. Unintended consequences of commercial activities are not necessarily negative, they can also be positive. The classic example of a negative externality is air pollution; a company produces a product, people buy these products, but the production of these products cause air pollution which, not only, affects the company's customers, it affects everyone, involuntarily. The social cost of air pollution (unhealthy environment, public health costs, etc.) must be factored into the cost of the product. This is done through regulation or taxation. Think for instance of a sin tax on smoking; it disincentivises smoking and it collects revenue for the state to deal with public health care costs, associated with smoking.

Externalities can also be positive. Here the classic example is the telephone; you sell one telephone, it is useless. You sell two, its impact is very limited. You sell a telephone to everyone, then you have exponential benefits to society, way beyond the profits produced by selling telephones. Such positive externalities is also called, network systems. What a lovely term! Is a democratically controlled city not a network system in itself? Well designed cities, porous to economic opportunity, creates a network system with benefits exponential to the base transactions which established the city.

Urban development and its concomitant transactions, spatial configurations, rights and entitlements can have costs or benefits to the general public. Unregulated development can contribute to cities that frustrate the will of people to live, work and socialise. Growing inequality in countries such as India and South Africa are supported by cities that frustrate their citizen's freedoms. I am arguing that the monopolisation of economic opportunity should be controlled by law and extreme consequences of monopolisation should be outlawed. Just as our society became aware of the problems associated with air pollution and created legislation to regulate some aspects of it and outlawed other aspects of it, we should understand, quantify and legislate against the monopolisation of economic opportunity. Once we have quantified the social cost, we should recover it from the parties involved in the transactions.

### **The city of opportunity**

What would be the preconditions to achieve a network effect in a city? Let me map a few thoughts which I believe structure the way towards a city of opportunity. It is important to note that when I speak of a city of opportunity I am focussing on economic opportunity more than residential or recreational opportunity.

First of all, this is an augment about **undoing inequality**. To be specific, we are concerned that cities produce inequality or exacerbate existing inequalities. We are concerned that granting the privilege to monopolise economic opportunity to a minority, is directly responsible for increasing poverty by restricting access to opportunity.

Laurie Baker said that **architecture for the poor** should be the measure of all architecture. He believed that if our conceptions of architecture can serve the poor it could always serve the rich. In other words, if our conceptions of architecture are aimed at serving the rich, they are not likely to be useful for the poor. Baker's conception of an architecture for the poor is relevant here. In the context of radical urban privileges being given to the few and the negative externalities which flow from the exercise of these privileges, we must conclude that the dominant urban conception is urbanity for the rich. Urbanity for the poor therefore is our point of departure here, not the only ultimate goal.

The focus on urbanity for the poor (or let's say, the other 99%) is a way of achieving **urban equity**. I do not think that an urbanity that serves the poor will necessarily work for all levels of the economy, but failure to create a city for the poor is ethically unjustifiable and politically divisive. A city for the rich limits the freedoms of the poor. Cities must allow entrepreneurs

and businesses of all scales to thrive. City administrations have a constitutional duty to treat their citizens equally. Such equality in city administration means that cities have to work seriously through the consequences of development rights given to everyone, from the very rich to the very poor, to think how it affects the rights of other citizens.

In thinking about the rights of all citizens, and thinking about how cities fail their most vulnerable citizens, we must acknowledge, at the most basic level “**the right to have rights**” as Hannah Arendt said. Following from this there are two primary headings that I would like to pursue: Firstly, movement, and secondly, rights.

Let's look at **movement** first. Participation in the benefits of city life is contingent on people's capacity to move through the city. We can also say it the other way around; if anybody's movement is impaired by the design of the city, it substantially frustrated their participation in the city. Such impairment by design can of course happen at the scale of the connection between road and sidewalk, but equally at a metropolitan scale. Uytendogaardt and Dewar, two professors of mine at the University of Cape Town always said that **the measure of the city is a person on foot**. We are of course also concerned about people in wheelchairs or those who cannot see where they are going. So when they used the word measure, they referred to the size or portion of the city accessible to an individual. They also meant that a city can be judged by what it offers the most vulnerable people. Or conversely, a city should be judged by what it denies people access to. If the least capable people are the measure of the city, then we can conclude that advancing freedom of movement is a fundamental task in advancing economic opportunity.

**Freedom of movement** is a constitutional right and yet city design often restricts or frustrates movement. Slavery restricted movement. Patriarchy restricts movement. Insecurity restricts movement. Apartheid restricted movement. The Apartheid city that South Africans live in today restricts movement; restrictions to movement designed into the city lasts a long time. If we want to advance the freedom of movement, we should break through the barriers, we should not allow new barriers to be constructed, we should design the city as a network of movement.

If people's freedom of movement is increased and if such movement occurs through continuous urban networks, the opportunity that an individual has access to, increases. For the individual, the city becomes more useful. But, to reduce barriers and advance interconnection in urban networks is not all we can do. Government can assist in creating **networks of opportunity** by reinforcing urban networks with appropriate development rights, trading rights, entitlements, human densities, public transport, etc. At the same time,

big business have to stop advancing their interest at the cost of others. Tomorrow night I will show you a project where we have done exactly this. The spatial practices of big business can substantially assist in creating attractions for secondary and tertiary businesses. If the spatial practices of big business allows participation in they magnetism, it could create many business opportunities.

If we want to transform a city that privileges a minority to a city of greater equity, we have to consider an alternative conception of the rights that all citizens have to the city. One of the most compelling conceptions of the rights that people should have to the city comes from David Harvey. He said that "*The right to the city is not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart's desire.*" This is an incredible statement, particularly considered from the point of view of the most vulnerable citizens. But, such a "**right to the city**" should be afforded to everyone. I wonder; did David Harvey mean that monopoly capitalists have the right to transform the city to their heart's desire. I don't think so. I certainly think that the city of opportunity should allow all citizens the right to transform the city to their hearts' desire, but the exercise of this right should not be at the expense of others. Just as much as prosperous companies can change the city in such a way that it limits the freedoms of others, so can the poor exercise their "rights to the city" in a manner that could frustrate large scale economic enterprise.

One of the simplest conceptions of the rights of the most vulnerable people was formulated by Amartya Sen, the Noble Prize winning economist. In studying the Indian famine of 1947 he asked himself why people died of hunger if there was enough food for everyone to survive. His answer; people died because they were not **entitled** to the food around them. His classic example compares the fate of an agricultural worker to that of a sharecropper. Both people cultivate food, but the one dies of hunger because there is no **entitlement** to the food that he or she is working with. Let me apply Amartya Sen's idea to the current argument; to create a city of opportunity in the context of a history or a contemporary practice of marginalising people, one has to acknowledge the entitlement that the marginalised have to the city. For example, in South Africa the policy of Apartheid that condemned the majority of the population to urban peripheries, achieved through physical and epistemic violence, has been called a crime against humanity. Since the state acted criminally, how can people, who were forced by circumstance to occupy land that did not belong to them, have no entitlement to the land. How can their rights to the city be cancelled by constant threat of eviction? To acknowledge the entitlement of citizens and non-citizens to economic, residential and social opportunities is the first step towards a city of opportunity. The next step would be the advancement of such rights.



In the context of historic injustice and contemporary inequality, an obligation exist to reverse injustice. This can be done rapidly through revolution or gradually through transformation. South Africa has chosen the path of transformation and hence our constitution allows for the advancement of rights that might be deficient currently. This provision of the constitution acknowledges the limitations of the state to affect immediate and complete change, but it equally compels the state to do something. In this spirit, Urban Landmark, a South African research organisation, wrote an essay on how they propose property rights to be advanced. Without going into the detail of their proposal, it relies on the **incremental advancement of rights**. This is a very pragmatic idea in the context of limited resources. Programs of government should involve the incremental advancement of rights to achieve cities of opportunity. Timelines should be declared and adhered to, unless revolution is favoured as a way of advancing entitlements.

The idea of incremental advancement of people's rights to the city has some overlap with Amartya Sen's notion of the **expansion of freedom**. Amartya Sen argues that the "*Expansion of freedom is viewed [...] both as the primary end and the principal means of development*". The freedoms that he is concerned with involves access to food, job opportunities, education, healthcare, personal safety and the right to vote. In his mind these freedoms are interrelated, for example, the freedom to vote means very little if it is not supported by access to education, healthcare, job opportunities, etc. Therefore, the city of opportunity cannot advance economic opportunity without the advancement of other freedoms.

To my mind, the city of opportunity must be supported by a **plethora of owners in networks of connectivity**. The multitude of property and economic decisions that flow from a multitude of owners and businesspeople create *more* equitable economic development than a city which allows the monopolisation of land and business opportunities.

I think that fundamentally cities are made up of networks and cells. Networks are the publicly accessible, democratically controlled spaces of the city which belong to the citizens. Everything else is cells of private interest. Cells could be houses, religious buildings or shopping malls. The fact that a cell may have an elaborate inner network does not take away from the fact that it is a cell nonetheless. Networks are of course not universally free as Diane Giarardo pointed out in an essay that describes the restricted access that woman in Europe has to public space during the 15th Century. In a city of opportunity, the economy benefits from the capacity of **both networks and cells to expand**. The escalation of economic opportunity is realised physically by extending existing premises or by having the freedom and capacity to relocate. Equally, growth in the economy requires expansion of the city's networks. If such economic growth is realised through parcels of disconnected

territories, then the restriction of movement creates privilege for a hyper-mobile elite and frustration in participating in new economic activity for the person on foot.

The ideas that I am sharing here requires a **facilitative state**. Many of the objectives of the city of opportunity cannot be achieved without regulatory intervention by the state. We must accept that the regulatory interventions of the state, is in the interest of equality and to protect the vulnerable. As such, the efforts of the state may very well be antagonistic towards the propensity of big business to monopolise economic opportunity.

Finally, centuries of engineering wisdom has imparted the value of infrastructure development to cities; infrastructure networks such as water, electricity, sewerage, telecommunication, and so on. I don't think that city governments are as focussed on creating economic opportunity as they are in developing utility infrastructures. I believe that **the construction of opportunity is as important as the construction of infrastructure**.



## **An architecture of consequence**

So what does this all mean for an architectural practice in Cape Town? Firstly, we try and make an architectural practice of consequence. Whether it is through advocacy, design or research. We are keen to work for the entire society and in ways that will advance our thinking.

We have been involved in interventions which confront the received coloniality of the city. One cannot forget about the erasures which are fundamental to South African cities. We made a series of interventions which remember the lost social imagination of black Cape Townians. We have focussed on movie theatres and performance spaces. The interventions range from recreating the cinemas in the streets to 'funeral processions' mourning the loss of a performance space. (fig 7)

Another dimension of our work is that we focus on opportunity; through research and design. In the research we have focused on contemporary urban formations brought about by citizens building for themselves, responding to their own needs. We study the way space is used and what the commercial value attached to that space is. We compare these values with other such commercial or residential values in the city and we speculate as to how commercial opportunity was created. The research also focused on spatial and human relationships between primary, secondary and tertiary businesses. Situations creating easy access to economic opportunity is explored.

In our designs we advance economic opportunity by setting up urban networks, charged with as much foot traffic and desirability as possible. Off these networks we create a multitude of small scale business opportunities, from micro trading spaces to small offices. Lessons learnt through research on low thresholds of entry into the economy and relationships of economic interdependency are applied to ensure the advancement of small businesses. The Watershed achieved many of these objectives. (Fig 8)

Finally, I want to speak about the creation of social structure. In designing buildings or cities, one key question is what is the social structure of the design. In advancing economic objectives, one must not neglect the creation of social structures through the architectural order. In the case of the Watershed (Fig 9) the social structure of a street was superimposed on an old warehouse. In the case of the Cheré Botha School (for kids with special learning needs) the social structure was a series of outdoor courts (Fig 10). A great deal of the education in the classrooms focuses on issues of domesticity, so these outdoor courts become a metaphor for the city, a space of meeting others, a space of work. The focus on social structures is to emphasise the human relations at the basis of economic relations.

## **References**

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