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Performing Problems on the Pavement

An Innovative Approach to Architectural Education in Post-apartheid South Africa

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In this article we interrogate the possibility and benefits of introducing alternative participatory pedagogies to architecture students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in order to mediate the gap between students' knowledge of the living environments they are expected to design and the authentic, lived realities of the inhabitants of those environments. Architecture students, assisted by applied theater students, devised participatory theater on the pavement of downtown Durban.¹ This approach encouraged in situ engagement between students and the typically marginalized inhabitants of that area. Moreover, these participatory performances served as a catalyst to disrupt some commonly held perceptions around the notion of "the expert" and provoked a possible reimagining of an architectural pedagogy that was responsive to the South African context.

Introduction

South Africa is a country of both spatial and social division. It is our unfortunate sociopolitical legacy. Many of these divides are evident in both the South African psyche and the South African landscape. As educators in this new democracy,

we are mindful of our responsibility to try to counter some of these real and perceived divisions. With this in mind, we tell the story of ourselves: two white, female, South African educators from different disciplines (applied theater and architecture), who came together

to experiment with an approach to encourage human empathy and consciousness within the teaching of architecture. Our motivation for this pedagogical approach stemmed from concerns by the architecture lecturer (Horner) about the disengagement she perceived among many architecture students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and from the lived experience of the community for which they hypothetically make decisions in their studio projects. Our challenge was to arouse, among our students, a sense of heightened empiricism, enabling them to connect the cognitive demands of their craft with the technical rigors of their designs, which evince a deep consciousness of community.²

After discussions, we developed a process where architecture students would create a participatory performance that dialogically engaged a real community in situ. The method was employed, first, for architectural research, but inadvertently (and more significantly) it became an exploration for us into the nature of architectural education. Our third author from the university Teaching and Learning Office affirmed what we intuitively felt as potentially emancipatory by reinforcing the critical theory roots of our praxis, particularly the relevance to theories of participatory action.³

We conceptualized the intervention to encourage a shift in the students' thinking, to open up possibilities for new ways of designing as well as cultivating a more inclusive and equitable approach to city making. We hoped the approach would destabilize, to some extent, traditional hierarchies within education that perpetuate class, race, and gender hegemonies and, at the very least, destabilize the illusion that societal structures are static.

In this article, we explore how the pedagogies of one area of knowledge can actively inform and challenge another. In so doing, we set up the paradigms of two disciplines: the traditional design studio of architectural education and applied theater informed by critical pedagogy.⁴ First, in "setting the scene," we orient the reader to the context, which is by nature political, and describe the program itself. We also investigate the (hidden) power dynamics embedded in the studio and the design process since our key ambition was to challenge the assumption about the "all-knowing" expert (teacher/ architect) and his/her relationship to the local inhabitant. Thus we situate the paper within a "life world" perspective that argues that "if architecture is a central, if not constitutive factor, of human life, inhabitants not architects are the experts when it comes to the human value of architecture."⁵ We engage the methodology in some detail, and finally, we describe the performance and offer an interpretation of the findings. In conclusion, we suggest that applied theater can make a valuable contribution to the further development of a socially critical studio pedagogy that is responsive to its context.

The example we elucidate in this article is premised on the recognition that the architectural legacy and organization of space in South Africa has systematically oppressed and continues to dehumanize citizens. Although the government continues to roll out mass housing schemes on the periphery of the city far from



Figure 1. Aerial view of the performance location and the area in which the students prepared a design intervention (Photograph courtesy of the eThekweni municipality. Reproduced with permission.)

transport and work opportunities, little has changed in the past twenty years to transform the material conditions in which people live.⁶ Society, and the spaces we inhabit, remains as polarized as it was during the apartheid era, and the gap between rich and poor is now among the most disparate in the world.⁷ Recognizing that the built environment has potential to influence society, positively and adversely, we felt an obligation to investigate a new participatory methodology of teaching architectural studies that acknowledges that learning and knowing come from a physical engagement with the city and that promotes "crossing divides" in order to generate mutual recognition of the humanity of others.⁸

(Not) The Brief

We implemented the intervention to orient students to the geographic and social spaces for which they were designing in the first year of a two-year graduate program within the design studio module. The initial brief was to find a means to revitalize the inner city as a response to

the migration to newer developments in the north. The given area, which lies to the east of Durban's central business district, is, in parts, run-down, with a number of poorly maintained and abandoned buildings. This is in stark contrast to the glamour and splendor of the touristic beachfront, one block to the east. The given area is perceived by those living outside as mostly inhabited by immigrants, characterized by high crime rates, prostitution, and drug dealing (Figure 1).

The students were asked to address the process of inner city decay without resorting to revitalization proposals that focus purely on the physical site of buildings and street conditions, as opposed to the social concerns for the urban poor, which could result in gentrification and the displacement of those who relied on the city to survive.⁹ We tasked the students with intervening at three levels: a large-scale urban design project, a medium-scale mixed-use building, and a small-scale, catalytic project. We recommended a sustainable approach that investigated the city as a living organism consisting of a complex web of interacting forces that needed to be identified, understood, and developed in order to create a livable, safe, and vibrant city.¹⁰

This urban acupuncture strategy is in contrast to large master planning proposals that often prove unfeasible, take years to mobilize, and fail to engage local communities. The project included a participatory component in order to engage communities through *in loco* participatory theater, which created a space for inhabitants to pose the problems that the architecture students would then respond to, rather than the students proposing solutions for others.¹¹

We asked students to reflect upon these considerations when working on their design proposals. As such, we developed the project with a critical awareness of the limits of student intervention to solve problems that were raised by the community. The intention was therefore in part to develop a more intimate understanding of community needs in an area that did not conform to conventional notions of a community other than a tenuous connection to place.¹²

A Community of Students and Inhabitants

Nabeel Hamdi, a pioneer of participatory planning, defines five types of community, of which two are of interest to our research. The first is “community of work” or “community of practice,” which he defines as “a shared way of doing things [relating to one another that allow [people] to achieve their joint purpose. Over time the resulting practice becomes a recognizable bond among those involved.”¹³ The other type of community is place-based: the idea of the mobile community in which places are occupied infrequently by people or where places are occupied by people first as a temporary measure that then becomes a permanent option.¹⁴ This aspect of “place” and “practice” as community was of interest to the students because it acted as a transitional place for most inhabitants, a place where the inhabitants stayed only as long as it took to get a foothold in the market. Furthermore, this

understanding of community allows us to invert the research and turn the participatory action research inward as a reflection on our students as a “community” and their own transformation through the process, as opposed to the traditional format in which the community is transformed.

We postulate the idea of Hamdi’s interpretation of community as a self-reflection mechanism to view the students as a fleeting “community of practice” as the focus of this research, a shift from the physical “community of place.” To get to this point, students had to overcome several hurdles on many levels: personal inhibitions, intergroup dynamics, unfamiliarity of nontraditional design processes, and uncertainty about expectations of themselves, teaching staff, and the (possible) participants or, to use the term of Brazilian theater practitioner August Boal, “spectactors.”¹⁵

Power Dynamics in the Studio

The concept of the “hidden curriculum” in education articulated by Thomas Dutton is useful here, particularly as his research is specifically located in institutions of architectural learning.¹⁶ In investigating the classroom and design studio situation, he found that the power dynamics of contemporary society, such as race, class, and gender discrimination, were clearly reflected. He develops this idea further in the design studio, where the type of knowledge produced is often asymmetrically distributed in the studio owing to power relations that are manifested in the pedagogy and in societal norms. In drawing on the research of Chris Argyis, Dutton refers to the studio as predominantly teacher centered in that students are trying to draw connections between “their own problems and the teacher’s expectations.”¹⁷ Helena Webster’s current research on the design jury also refers to this asymmetrical relationship between those embodying the disciplinary “truth” and those who aspire to embody the “truth” (students) and

how this “pedagogic event rather than allowing students to reflect on the quality of their designs with the expert others ... had the effect of objectifying power differential ... and this asymmetry of power that [occurred in the event of the jury process] had distorted the pedagogic outcomes.”¹⁸

This power differential is particularly relevant in the postapartheid South African context, where students and lecturers, particularly at our institution, increasingly come from different racial and socioeconomic groups, where patriarchal values are reinforced in South African society and education in particular.¹⁹

Recognition of these social and cultural norms and the power dynamics implicated therein does not mean that change through knowledge transfer cannot happen. To the contrary, Dutton perceives the potential for schools to be “sites for the production of new forms of knowledge and social relationships,” but this requires a shift in the pedagogical approach.²⁰ This pedagogical approach hinges on consensus decision making that values the contribution students bring to the evaluation and interpretation of their peers’ work (as well as their own) and in so doing raises “critical consciousness.” Webster further suggests that only when “experts begin to see themselves as co-learners engaged in a collective project to continually question and reconstruct architectural discourse ... will architectural education become truly student centered.”²¹

The normative unequal power relationships that prevail in the studio are an extension of practice where the “inhabitant” is not viewed as a participant in the design process but rather as someone who is being designed for. As articulated, the life world perspective acknowledges the value of the inhabitants as experts when it comes to the human value of architecture and the contribution they can have to the design process. Access to knowledge and values from

a larger group is enabled by including peers and inhabitants.²² This inclusionary approach was adopted and found expression in the applied theater form described below.

Applied Theater

Applied theater is an umbrella term that encompasses a number of different “theaters” whose *raison d’être* falls outside of Western conventional expectations of entertainment. Typically, it also falls outside the theater space. James Thompson and Tony Jackson describe applied theater as theater that takes place “in non-traditional settings and/or with marginalized communities” and is primarily “concerned with facilitating dialogue on who we are and what we aspire to become.”²³

As its ambition is to try and “reveal more clearly the way the world is working,” it typically involves “nonactors” who participate in the action.²⁴ Yet African theater, of which this is an example, has always been participatory, which means it has always been “applied.”²⁵ It has always had a role to play *as part of* the daily life of a community in the community.²⁶ This essentially positions our example—participatory street theater—as “mainstream” theater. In support of this contention, Malawian academic Christopher Kamlongera encourages us to reimagine African theater from within an African paradigm. His argument is that within this paradigm, theater is not separate from other activities. It is integrated into public life and private, the world of work, and the world of worship. It captures the passage of time and the rites of passage. It is communal and free, can happen anywhere, can be formal or informal, and can assume many forms. Its functions are many, but for the purposes of this article it is important to emphasize that creative expression has traditionally been used as a way of communicating dissatisfaction to people in authority.²⁷ Consequently, “applied” participatory theater within the

(South) African context is familiar, relevant, culturally appropriate, and a potentially valuable approach in heightening consciousness of living spaces.

Methodology and Research Design

Our research is framed within the emancipatory paradigm that has evolved directly from the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire.²⁸ He is regarded as having made a significant contribution to the concepts and methods of participatory research. His development of problem-posing education directly influenced the form of participatory action research used in our subject, which was participatory theater.²⁹ His demands with regard to the necessity for reimagining the teacher/student dynamic through the promotion of “dialogic interaction” are key. For him education should be about “conscientization” that is raised through “thematic investigation.”³⁰ Expanding on Freire’s concept, theater practitioner and author Zakes Mda writes, “conscientisation is a process of dialogue which enables the individual to transform himself [sic] in relation to his fellows and to act critically towards himself and society.”³¹

Freirean pedagogy proposes to expose social, political, and economic contradictions and to enact remedies to counter oppressive elements.³² Bagele Chilisa and Julia Preece adopt the term “to denote a family of research designs influenced by various philosophies and theories with a common theme of emancipating and transforming communities through group action.”³³ It emerges out of a politics that has noted the marginalization of African and female (and by extension poor) communities’ ways of knowing.³⁴ The approach privileges indigenous knowledge systems and, through its design, aims to transform individuals and communities “through a realization of their potential as teachers, renewed confidence in their culture, its values and what they already

know.”³⁵ In the context of South Africa, which according to the World Development Index (2013) is ranked number 2 (behind Lesotho) among countries with the greatest levels of inequality, this approach is both appropriate and necessary. Critical pedagogy argues that the form, rather than simply the content, of the education is hugely implicated in how learners understand and replicate the relationship between power and knowledge.³⁶

Methodologically, action research is typically used “to solve specific practical, social, or individual problems that may be found in a community. ... The researcher must create a change and then observe the dynamics and effects of that change.”³⁷ Community-based action research has much in common with participatory research. Participatory research is intended to address human inequality and “focuses upon the political empowerment of people through group participation in the search for acquisition of knowledge.”³⁸ This echoes Chilisa and Preece’s more general description of emancipatory research methodologies, which sees the research process as both a means through which to gather information and an ethical process of empowering communities.³⁹ Participatory research differs from action research in the role of the researcher: in participatory research the researcher is involved in the action herself and “is not just an objective observer of data.”⁴⁰ There were various levels of participation within this study that produced research material. Students engaged in “entry-level dialogue” with the community of Pixley ka Seme by visiting the area and speaking to people about life there and how the area could be developed.⁴¹ Lecturers, in turn, held participatory workshops with architecture students that were cofacilitated by applied theater students. These were to generate an understanding of the form and intention of the project. Drama students then

assisted in the creation of participatory performances overseen by lecturers based on observations and conversations. The plays they coproduced with the architecture students structured the participation of the “audience” as part of the form. For much of the research process, the students were directly involved in the devising of the plays and interventions, which had a political purpose as they were raising sociocultural issues—another distinguishing factor of participatory research. Finally, lecturers, students, and inhabitants were all participants in performances and engaged in dialogue around the issues raised by the performances.

Participatory theater, the goal of which is “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it,” should ideally involve the community as participants in the process and product of the performance.⁴² Although the plays were informed by interfacing with the community, they cannot claim to have been significantly “transformative” and “conscientizing” for the spectators.⁴³ However, this alternative pedagogical approach, which invited community members to see their capacity to become teachers, can claim to be conscientizing for the students in as much as it challenged the students’ notion of “the expert.”⁴⁴ Further, it allowed students a valuable insight into the life-world of others in a way that was mutually humanizing. By providing a space to speak to the issues of place, students were able to learn not only that the “inhabitants” were the experts, but also that they are human beings.⁴⁵

Designing the Performance

Graduate students in architecture were introduced to the notion of participatory theater through a group workshop at the drama department studios. Students were familiarized with some of the thinking behind applied theater—an emancipatory education that privileged the community rather

than the designs they produced and explained its possible relevance to the education of architects. This provided a means of engaging with members of the community as opposed to the disconnected act of making design decisions for them. Students were asked to discuss their expectations, fears, and skills contribution to the process. They were divided into two groups, each group consisting of eleven or twelve students working with a Drama and Performance Studies tutor.

Two performances were generated from the workshop process facilitated by the drama students. Although devised separately, both responded to the same context and posed very similar problems. Both enacted brief narratives of the struggles of urban life for working-class South Africans, underscoring the intersection of unemployment, poverty, and crime. Typically, “stock characters” were used: taxi operators, street traders, victims of crime, beggars, *sgebengus* (criminals), all of which, in concert, painted caricatured scenarios to generate participation and discussion. The first play juxtaposed a series of images—ideal and “real”—in order to highlight the hard reality of the city.⁴⁶ The second was made up of short scenes: a man is robbed in public but there are no witnesses; a beggar is shunned; drug addicts prostitute themselves. As African popular performance is syncretic in nature, the plays drew on antiapartheid struggle songs and “spoken-word” poetry, for example, to emphasize the ongoing struggle for freedom, despite the dawn of democracy in 1994.⁴⁷

The students met once a week at a predetermined time in the drama department. The project required students to conceptualize and workshop the performance with limited lecturer intervention. The facilitators debriefed the lecturers weekly. Students were aware of the purpose of the participatory performance through theoretical readings. They understood that the

task was to use theater as a tool with which to engage the inhabitants in dialogue around their lives and experiences so as to determine their needs.

Getting Into the Act

There was some initial resistance on the part of the architecture students to the process of the collaboration, which stemmed from a preconceived attitude and assumptions about the community and how and what they were prepared to do in the process of engaging with the community. This resistance stemmed in part from their own fear of performing and engaging with the community. Enabling this process necessitated both a spatial change of working space (move to drama studio) and a physical change to bodily action (as opposed to vocal and visual tools of architecture) through games, to enable them to be more receptive to other ways of generating and testing ideas in a discipline they were not familiar with. Interestingly, we observed that some of the students who tended to be quieter in architectural classes found their voices in this space. These students tended to be black women. Those who were confident to speak in class—mainly young, white men—lacked confidence in the theater space, where they were asked to let down their guard and try new things.

The groups worked independently to develop ideas and content, and to practice ways of engaging the audience. Despite this, there was some degree of crossover between the two groups, particularly in terms of content. Although their architectural brief involved a *built* response to the area, inevitably, the plays served as a *social* response. This was an important first step. Critical pedagogical approaches demand that the learner asks, “why?”/“why not?”—a question that theater of the oppressed practitioners call “the most dangerous question in existence.”⁴⁸ In response to the question, “Why are the buildings in the inner-city in a state of decay?” a first response engages social issues: poor service

delivery, unemployment, crime, and prostitution. These were the kinds of problems the plays posed. It is, however, in the second response that we reach the level of the political: “Why is there poor service delivery, unemployment, crime, prostitution?” These become more contentious issues. Other issues that the students raised through their performance were lack of community cohesion, xenophobia, street children, and prostitution.

Students found interesting ways to get the transient “audience” to participate. They also found an innovative way of trying to grow their audience. Sindi’s group made T-shirts, each shirt being printed with a character and a statement relating to that character. For example, a security guard displayed the slogan: “Is this my problem?” This helped to ease communication at different levels, practically and conceptually. Where the noise of the city made the untrained actors occasionally inaudible, the T-shirts helped to clarify the story (Figures 2–4). After the play, the students dispersed among members of the crowd and became actors/facilitators, asking the audience to write a message about their wish for their city on the T-shirt. In this process the students engaged with the inhabitants one-on-one.⁴⁹

Zama’s group made a banner that read: “What do you want in your city?” After the performance, actors/facilitators asked the audience to write responses on Post-it Notes and stick them onto the banner. By the end of the morning, the banner was completely covered (Figures 5–8).



Figure 2. Above: White T-shirt group: central actor (yellow bag and hand raised) has had her cell phone stolen by one of the actors playing cards in the foreground; no one offers to help her. (Photograph by Bridget Horner.)

Figure 3. Center: White T-shirt group: performance ends with a poem about the city; spectators in pink and green shirts. (Photograph by Devin Audibert. Reproduced with permission.)

Figure 4. Below: White T-shirt group depicting slogans related to one of the “characters” the White T-shirt group identified in the city. (Photograph by Bridget Horner.)



Figure 5. *Left, above:* Black T-shirt group began their performance with a Johnny Clegg song called “Asimbonanga” (we have not seen him), which is a tribute to Nelson Mandela. (Photograph by Bridget Horner.)



Figure 6. *Left, below:* Black T-shirt group preparing the banner and pasting peoples’ responses on sticky notes to it. (Photograph by Bridget Horner.)

Figure 8. *Above:* Stills from the students’ video showing students interacting with spectators after the performance; the spectators’ comments are seen at the bottom. (Video still by Sumaiya Bhatay. Reproduced with permission.)



Figure 7. *Left:* The banner elicited many interesting insights into what people wanted in the city, what they felt about the city (and each other), and what they experienced. (Photograph by Bridget Horner.)

This too created an opportunity for dialogue. Many inhabitants took the opportunity to educate students about their lives, experiences, and insights. The plays were performed several times in different locations in the area.

In Search of the Audience

The site of the performance was critical as it needed to be accessible to a broad audience of individuals who would be representative of the different kinds of communities in the area, namely, people from different socioeconomic backgrounds and people of different races. These individuals would include street children, homeless people, foreign nationals, and city workers.

The location could not exclude the transient, migratory community that lived there, the very group whom we hoped would provide some valuable insight into their lived experience of the city that students could address in the design studio. A busy shopping street behind the beach was chosen as the site of their first performance as this was perceived to include the slightly more affluent beachfront community as well as the more marginalized community that lived in back of the beach.

On the day of the performance, the architecture students arrived early and performed, but both plays were over within thirty minutes. The transient nature of the “audience” and the early hour meant they had

not managed to capture the attention of a crowd. Determined that their performance should have more reach, they did what any street performers would do: go and find the audience. By the time they decided to call it a day, they had each performed their plays about five times, in varying locations within walking distance of each other, for different audiences. Consequently, they managed to perform for a collective audience of several hundred.

The students were visibly impressed with themselves and their ability to capture and engage an audience. One drama tutor noted: “I was pleasantly surprised... the groups were enjoying the performance and receiving information they could use from the residents of the area.” As lecturers, we were also tremendously excited by the architectural students’ journey and how they managed to learn from engaging in this life world. In shifting the focus to problem posing through the use of applied theater, a legitimate space was opened up to test design ideas through eliciting genuine responses from people on and off the street. Once back in the confines of the studio, the instructors hoped that these voices would serve as a continuous prompt to the students in guiding the design.

The Curtain Call Post-performance Dialogue

Amidst the excitement, Academic Coordinator and Lecturer in Drama and Performance Studies at University of KwaZulu-Natal, Miranda Young-Jahangeer held a postperformance debriefing and dialogue at the architectural studios. At the outset, it became clear that the enthusiasm and excitement evident on the pavement immediately after the performances was no longer present in the studio. Several other members of the architectural staff who did not attend the performances were present and observing. The mood was formal and serious, and the students did not engage freely. The

reason for lack of engagement could have stemmed from many sources; however, the physical aspects of the space, such as the configuration of the classroom set up in neat rows of desks, polarized the power dynamic of the facilitator and the student. Moreover, the introduction of other staff members who were not engaged in the performance process could have led to their fear of judgment from their peers and the other lecturers. Whatever the reason, we noted that we could not realistically expect a five-week experience of applied participatory theater to shift a centuries-old paradigm of architectural education that challenged both the pedagogy and the role of the architect in society.

In a solicited reflection, Zama commented that she thought the architecture students “saw it [participatory theater] as a hobby, a means to get information. ... They were more interested in the end product rather than the process.” This was an astute observation. Applied theater students are accustomed to the value of process: in most group practical tasks, the marking system in Drama and Performance Studies weights process 70 percent and the final product only 30 percent. The Drama student’s process mark, which is based on continuous assessment, is graded on, among other things, level of commitment (attendance, preparation, level of engagement) and ability to work in a group (listening skills, leadership, focus, flexibility, sensitivity to the needs of the group). The engagement the students experienced on-site highlights the complex nature of problems (unemployment, crime, homelessness) we are dealing with in our cities and in society, for which rational design solutions may not be the right fit. Consciousness of them, however, is a good start to thinking differently about how we intervene.

In terms of challenging the notion of expert, the program succeeded in facilitating a shift in assumptions in determining the “experts” of a project. It

also initiated the sentiment that it is reasonable to not have all the answers and relinquish some control in order to find solutions in unexpected places. In this respect, Sindi’s observation was revealing: “The biggest change was... the students... realizing and acknowledging the existence of 'the Other' and admitting that they as students know nothing—change was sparked and humanity restored, if only for a second.”⁵⁰ Students themselves acknowledged that they were designing for real people with thoughts, dreams, needs, and feelings. One student noted, “Being on the street one can understand the natures of the user—people don’t have a job, their situation [is desperate].”⁵¹

Regarding the inclusion of knowledge gained through “life-world” learning, one student commented in his feedback report: “We need to think deeper than just the surface ... we need to dissect what *people* said and find a solution that not only solves the problem now, but a solution that will stand the test of time.”⁵²

One white female student admitted: “The first time I went to the site I took a taser and pepper spray ... now having done the intervention I realize ... they are just normal people.”

In response, Zama observed:

When the students got to the site and weren’t raped, torched or whatever else their imaginations led them to think, they were then humanized by seeing the other person on the streets and talking to them, needing their information. ... Humanity was regained/obtained.⁵³

The students were markedly humanized by the experience and felt that it had added value and purpose to the year. There were other advantages as well. During and immediately after the euphoria of the performance it was evident that there was a stronger sense of camaraderie within the two groups and as a class.

They needed one another in order to put on the performance. It is well documented that theater is successful in facilitating social cohesion in its ability to build trust and communication through a creative initiative that emphasizes group work, play, and a common goal.⁵⁴ The project enabled the students to become a “community of practice.”⁵⁵

The performance enabled the students to identify issues based on what they had learned from the inhabitants that they could respond to in the design studio, where they worked in groups to develop their urban design and housing proposals (students generated their own brief for both components). The students were able to convincingly validate the issues that they had chosen to address, as there was an integrity that stemmed from the problems being real, as opposed to perceived.

However, the confidence of the students waned as their design proposals underwent the typical scrutiny from the studio masters. Students were observed to defer to the authority and expertise of the studio masters rather than draw on the knowledge gained from the experience on the ground and the inhabitants’ many contributions. It is significant to note that the students were conscious of this and endeavored to shift the dynamic. Acting as a community of practice, some of the students requested that instead of the presentation style, which they could see was disadvantaging them, they be assessed in small groups. They also requested that students be part of the review process as opposed to only the tutor critiquing the student. This was achieved with some measure of success as the authority of the studio masters lingered.

Although this power dynamic remained, it did not dilute the students’ empathy for the inhabitants of the area, which can be seen in how the students tackled their design solutions. Many drew directly from their conversations with inhabitants to generate design responses. There

was also an overall sensitivity around how to architecturally intervene in the area, choosing to develop on vacant lots and to adaptively reuse existing buildings, including under- and unutilized industrial buildings, as opposed to demolishing and rebuilding. Many of their housing projects were adaptive reuse, cleverly reimagining industrial buildings as short-stay, long-term family shelters, for example. The findings here are twofold. First, the students became conscientized as to the pedagogical implications of their education—although they were unable to substantially shift it due to the extent to which it has been institutionalized and normalized. Second, this experience did, for most students, shift the way they approached design.

Conclusion

Thomas Fisher, in *Transformative Pedagogy in Architecture and Urbanism*, claimed, “To remain silent about the values presented in what we do, either out of mistaken belief that professionals must remain ethically neutral or out of romantic dismissal of all normative values, is to eliminate one of the main reasons for the profession’s very existence.”⁵⁶ With these thoughts in mind, the participatory performances on the pavement of downtown Durban, South Africa, served as a vehicle to begin to address a gap in architectural pedagogy, specifically the studio model, in South Africa. This gap we identify as the need to teach architecture students to be conscious of their own subject positions and value what others can potentially bring to the design process. We believe that this can be achieved through a pedagogical approach that responds intelligently, consciously, and ethically to context rather than perpetuating existing inherited models that reinforce the status quo.

This design studio affirms the value of interdisciplinary approaches that utilize applied theater methods in architectural education. The approach enabled interesting and beneficial synergies and created

positive, although challenging, learning experiences for students and lecturers alike. Despite the limited time the students were engaged in it, the approach deconstructed existing race/class/gender hierarchies within the group through elevating indigenous knowledge.⁵⁷ It shifted students’ perception of “who knows” and challenged their idea of “the expert.” Furthermore, they were able, through this people-centered process, to interrogate their fear of “the Other” through empathy and newfound respect. Consequently, in responding to life from the perspective of the pavement, students were confronted with their relative privilege and were conscientized around levels of injustice in the city in a way that was humanizing.⁵⁸

For the students and instructors, this learning experience highlighted the disempowering process that occurs in the studio, where expert knowledge was believed to be held by the studio “masters” and only released in response to the student’s inability to comprehend the requirements of “the brief” (a concept that the authors also challenge). This is in stark contrast to the enlightenment of self-discovery forged through conversations held with the inhabitant “community” after the street performance.

This pedagogic experiment across disciplines demonstrated that an alternative process *is* possible and that a short process can elicit positive results, despite the current dominant culture of architectural education. Nevertheless, it is our contention that the time has come to challenge inherited conventions and assumptions around the expert, respond bravely, and propose a liberatory critical pedagogy inspired from our southern vantage point.

So what could a new pedagogical approach look like? For a start, the approach should involve reconceptualizing the studio model toward a facilitation process that poses problems in order to generate possible responses to those problems rather than to “give

a brief,” which demands a solution from the student. This implies that the student and lecturer must be open to finding expertise and knowledge from unexpected sources. We propose that this should impact how students’ work is evaluated, not as a final product, but as a series of learning interventions that recognize the value that process work can have in design.

Designing an architectural pedagogy which would begin to conscientize students would need to consider three principle factors: learning from others, learning from peers, and learning from place. *Learning from others* could include the inhabitants, other aligned and nonaligned disciplines that share a common connection to place; the learning outcomes should be directed toward enhanced empathy and compassion, and they should contribute to deepening the understanding of the problem. *Learning from peers* necessitates allowing time for small groups of students to evaluate each other’s work within a framework that encourages critical reflection in a constructive environment. The learning outcomes would then be to build confidence in communication and deeper listening skills. *Learning from place* requires students to spend time reading the site and becoming familiar with the inhabitants. The benefit of this cannot be underestimated when so much time is spent developing solutions in the studio, removed from the site without a proper understanding of what can be learned from the site itself to generate local precedent and knowledge to find solutions to our own problems. These processes should aid in building empathy, compassion for humanity, flexibility, and independent thinking. Holistically viewed, the studio process should assist in developing students’ emotional, intellectual, and design skills, not just the latter. It is our view that teaching that encourages empathic and political realization can only be

positive in the development of the socially responsible and responsive human being—who happens to be an architect.

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Notes

- 1 Durban is a metropolitan city on the East Coast of South Africa.
- 2 N. Gough, “Occasional Paper Series” (University of Durban-Westville, South Africa, 2001).
- 3 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1970); Zakes Mda, *When People Play People: Development Communication through Theatre* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand Press, 1993).
- 4 Peter McLaren, “Critical Pedagogy: A Look at the Major Concepts,” in *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, ed. Antonia Darder, Marta P. Baltodano, and Rodolfo D. Torres (New York: Routledge, 2009), 69–93.
- 5 Pauline von Bonsdorff, “Architecture and Education: The Question of Expertise and the Challenge of Art,” in *Playce: Architecture Education for Children and Young People*, ed. Esa Laaksonen and Jaana Rasanen (Helsinki: Arts Council of Helsinki, 2006), 19–26.
- 6 Shireen Hassim, *Women’s Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).
- 7 Johannes P. Landman, *Breaking the Grip of Poverty and Inequality in South Africa 2004–2014*, 2003, <http://www.sarpn.org/documents> (accessed August 12, 2014).
- 8 Von Bonsdorff, “Architecture and Education” (note 5), 19–26.
- 9 Gentrification was seen as the displacement or eviction of those that currently occupy the space owing to regeneration/renewal strategies that do not take into consideration the current users’ needs but aspire to a future user need that is beyond the current user’s affordability.
- 10 The students’ brief defined Sustainable Urban

Acupuncture as a means of encouraging urban revitalization—the idea being to begin at the hyperlocal level by a targeted small-scale intervention to heal large-scale urban decay.

- 11 The term “inhabitant” is used here as an alternative to the word “community,” which is problematic due to its homogenization of the disparate groups of people who live, work, and travel though the place daily. Inhabitant also has implications that are not entirely accurate in the context of this research, particularly when looking at “homeless” people, for example. Nevertheless, it invokes a sense of knowing place, which we felt was more appropriate. See von Bonsdorff, “Architecture and Education” (note 5), 19–26.
- 12 The people populating this area include residents (both “squatters” and legal tenants), homeless people (adults and children) who are both transient and “relatively” permanent, as well as business owners and others who work, legally or illegally, in the area, and, of course, customers and commuters who are passing through.
- 13 Nabeel Hamdi, *Small Change about the Art of Practise and the Limits of Planning in Cities* (London: Routledge, 2004), 100–104.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 100–104.
- 15 Brazilian Theater practitioner Augusto Boal employs the notion of the “spectator” in his *Theater of the Oppressed* to describe a reimagining of the spectator into an active participant in a performance that engages issues and concerns directly relevant to the “audience.” See Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 1979).
- 16 Thomas Dutton, “Design and Studio Pedagogy,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 41, no. 1 (1997): 233–42.
- 17 Chris Argyis, cited in Dutton, “Design and Studio Pedagogy” (note 16), 233–242.
- 18 Helena Webster, “The Analytics of Power,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 60, no. 3 (2007): 21–27.
- 19 Daniella Coetzec, “South African Education and the Ideology of Patriarchy,” *South African Journal of Education* 21, no. 4 (2001): 300–304.
- 20 Dutton, “Design and Studio Pedagogy” (note 16), 233–42.
- 21 Webster, “The Analytics of Power” (note 18), 21–27.
- 22 Von Bonsdorff, “Architecture and Education” (note 5).
- 23 James Thompson and Antony Jackson, “Applied Theatre/Drama: An E-Debate in 2004: Viewpoints,” *RIDE: Research in Drama and Education* 11, no. 1 (2006): 90–95; Philip Taylor, *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003).
- 24 Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton, “Theories and Histories of Applied Theatre,” in *Applied Theatre: International Case-Studies and Challenges for Practice*, ed. Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton (Bristol: Intellect, 2009), 8.
- 25 Christopher Kamlongera, *Theatre for Development in Africa with Case Studies from Malawi and Zambia* (Bonn: German Foundation for International Development, 1988).
- 26 *Ibid.*

- 27 Thenjiwe Magwaza, "Private Transgressions: The Visual Voice of Zulu Women," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 49 (2001): 25–33.
- 28 Bagele Chilisa and Julia Preece, *Research Methods for Adult Educators in Africa* (Cape Town: UNESCO Institute for Education, 2005); Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (note 3); Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 2005).
- 29 David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1995); Miranda Young-Jahangeer, "Sizodla la siyimbokodo thina: Acting Out against Patriarchy with Inmates at the Westville Female Prison," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 55 (2004): 101–9.
- 30 Kerr, *African Popular Theatre* (note 29); Young-Jahangeer, "Sizodla la siyimbokodo thina" (note 29); and Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (note 3).
- 31 Mda, *When People Play People* (note 3), 45.
- 32 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (note 3).
- 33 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 "Indigenous knowledge systems" refers to contemporary community-based practices and knowledge that is generated from within a community. This knowledge and these practices, for the purposes of livelihood construction, are framed within the communities' belief system and evolve in response to the challenges of a changing environment. *Ibid.*, 34.
- 36 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (note 3); Peter McLaren, "Critical Pedagogy: A Look at the Major Concepts," in *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*, ed. McLaren (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1989), 72–86.
- 37 Sharan B. Merriam and Ewin L. Simpson, *A Guide to Research for Educators and Trainers of Adults*, 2nd ed. (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing, 1995), 122.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 125.
- 39 Chilisa and Preece, *Research Methods* (note 28).
- 40 Merriam and Simpson, *A Guide to Research for Educators* (note 37), 126.
- 41 Shirley White and Sadanandan Nair, *The Art of Facilitating Participation: Releasing the Power of Grassroots Communication* (London: Sage, 1995).
- 42 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (note 3).
- 43 The participating audience was made aware of the nature of this performance as a student exercise. Many audience members engaged in meaningful dialogue with the students around the issue of "What can my city do for me?" It was clear that many "community" members welcomed this intervention as an opportunity to speak to the students about the realities of their lives, without any expectations. Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed* (note 15).
- 44 Chilisa and Preece, *Research Methods* (note 28), 34.
- 45 Von Bonsdorff, "Architecture and Education" (note 5), 21. In engaging with the inhabitants, the students better understood the broad spectrum of issues that the inhabitants face and could then define which issues they could respond to and provide possible design solutions for.
- 46 Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed* (note 15).
- 47 Karen Barber, *Readings in African Popular Culture* (Oxford: James Curry, 1997).
- 48 Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- 49 Some of the issues the inhabitants raised were social issues such as unemployment and crime; other issues offered opportunities for architects to respond, namely, cheaper and more housing options for the poor, recreational facilities for students in the area, and more schools and crèches and "something" that could make streets safer.
- 50 As part of the process, the two tutors assisting us in developing the plays for the performance, as well as the students, wrote reflective notes of their experiences. Reflective notes, Sindi (tutor), April 2014.
- 51 Reflective notes, students, April 2014.
- 52 *Ibid.*
- 53 Reflective notes, Zama (tutor), April 2014.
- 54 Miranda Young-Jahangeer, "Bringing into Play: Investigating the Appropriation of Prison Theatre in Westville Female Prison, KwaZulu-Natal (2000–2004)," *South African Theatre Journal* (SATJ) 19 (2005): 143–56.
- 55 Hamdi, *Small Change* (note 9).
- 56 Thomas Fisher, cited in Ashraf Salama, *Transformative Pedagogy in Architecture and Urbanism* (Solingen, Germany: Umbau-Verlag, 2009), 19.
- 57 Chilisa and Preece, *Research Methods* (note 28).
- 58 Von Bonsdorff, "Architecture and Education" (note 5), 21; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (note 3).