Radical Centres

Michał Murawski

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The Political Morphology of Monumentality in Warsaw and Johannesburg

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INTRODUCTION

Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication (WSSD) is a huge, public square at the heart of Kliptown, Soweto. All vernacular-tinted soft brutalism, it looks very much like something Nehru's India or Kubitschek's Brazil might have built in the 1950s or early 1960s. But it was completed in 2005, opened by President Thabo Mbeki, on the site where – fifty years earlier, on 26 June 1955 – 3,000 delegates and 7,000 spectators had gathered to adopt the ten postulates of the Freedom Charter, the foundational manifesto of South Africa's anti-Apartheid movement.

Less than a month following the signing of the Freedom Charter, on 22 July 1955, an opening ceremony took place in Warsaw for the Palace of Culture and Science, an enormous Stalinist skyscraper 'gifted' by the Soviet Union to Poland. Now, Kliptown's Square (horizontal, modernist, concrete, restrained) and Warsaw's Palace (vertical, Stalinist, brick and stone, bombastic) have almost nothing to do with each other, it would seem. One common feature of both, perhaps, is their anachronism: while WSSD's mid-century high modernism was out-of-time in 2005, the Palace's late-Stalinist grandiloquence was, conversely, something of an oddity in the mid-1950s, when most of the world – including much of the Eastern Bloc and indeed, of Warsaw – was busily embracing high modernism.[1] But there are a few other significant shared features too. Both are monumental architectural and planning ensembles, created more or less a decade following the beginning of a period of political reconfiguration: the introduction (or imposition) and consolidation of state socialism in Poland; and the collapse of Apartheid and the construction of a new political order in South Africa.

I juxtapose these events and these buildings to draw attention to some questions which lie at the core of this article. If we are comparing – as the

1 For more on the 1950s reassertion of modernism in Warsaw, and its appropriation as a post-socialist ideology of 'cosmopolitan patriotism' see Michał Murawski, 'Cosmopolitan Architecture: "Deviations" from Stalinist Aesthetics and the Making of Twenty-First Century Warsaw', in Caroline Humphrey and Vera Skvirskaja, eds, *Post-Cosmopolitan Cities: Explorations of Urban Coexistence*, Berghahn Books, New York, 2012.

Satellite images of Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication in 2001 and 2015, map data: Google, MGGP Aero

texts in this special issue aim to – the political-aesthetic parameters of Eastern European and South African transitions, should we really be focusing exclusively on Eastern Europe's 1989–1991 and South Africa's 1994? Furthermore, what are the shapes, scales, geometries and aesthetics attached to certain ways of organising and thinking about politics and economics? Do authoritarianism and democracy, communism and capitalism – and the passage from one to the other – come ready-made with their own, inherent, formal or morphological characteristics and trajectories? A comparison between Kliptown's WSSD and Warsaw's Palace does not answer any of these questions definitively, but it provides the ground for a few reflections, laid out in the paragraphs below, complicating some commonly-held ways in which scholars – of politics, architectural aesthetics and urban planning – have tended to answer them so far.

KLIPTOWN OCULUS

Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication receives its framing from two colonnaded concrete edifices. Sections of each house an eclectic assortment of functions: a lively market, featuring traders and food-sellers, dispensing everything from steak and pap to shoelaces and fresh vegetables; a four-star hotel, the Soweto Holiday Inn; an under-used retail wing; and a perpetually empty 'multi-purpose hall'. Vast information tablets hammer home the complex geometrical symbolism, with which the Square's architects, Johannesburg practice StudioMAS, saturated their competition-winning entry: jauny off-Corbusian *pilotis* stand, we are told, for 'vitality'; abundant X-shapes – laid out as brick benches on the 'New Square' section of the site – signify 'equality, democracy and the freedom to vote'; the 'modular' form of the buildings refers to 'robustness', 'adaptability' and, again, 'equality'; recycled roof-sheeting and 'bricks from demolished buildings' (those demolished to make way for WSSD, perhaps?) evoke 'ecology' and 'Kliptown's rich cultural and historic legacy'. The symbolism conveyed by the paving on the 'Old Square', WSSD's most featureless, deserted, windswept and sun-drenched section, is particularly layered and multi-faceted, it turns out:

> The grid pattern on the paving of the square signifies the unyielding nature of the regime against which the struggle was waged. A footpath that once existed during the time when the meeting took place is commemorated by an irregular brick line that runs across the grid. This path breaks the rigid geometry of the paving and also symbolizes the collapse of the political order against which the struggle took place.

The visual pivot of WSSD is a vast, Great Zimbabwesque brick cone. Within it stands a circular granite platform, sliced into sections laying out the Freedom Charter's ten postulates. The interior is dark and musty, but an awkward slither of light shines from a cross-shaped oculus (another ballot box reference, apparently) cut into the cone's ceiling. A few days before coming to Kliptown, I had visited the Voortrekker Monument – a gargantuan, fascistic brick stump, looming high on a hilltop overlooking Tshwane (formerly Pretoria), and the Kliptown cone was very awkwardly
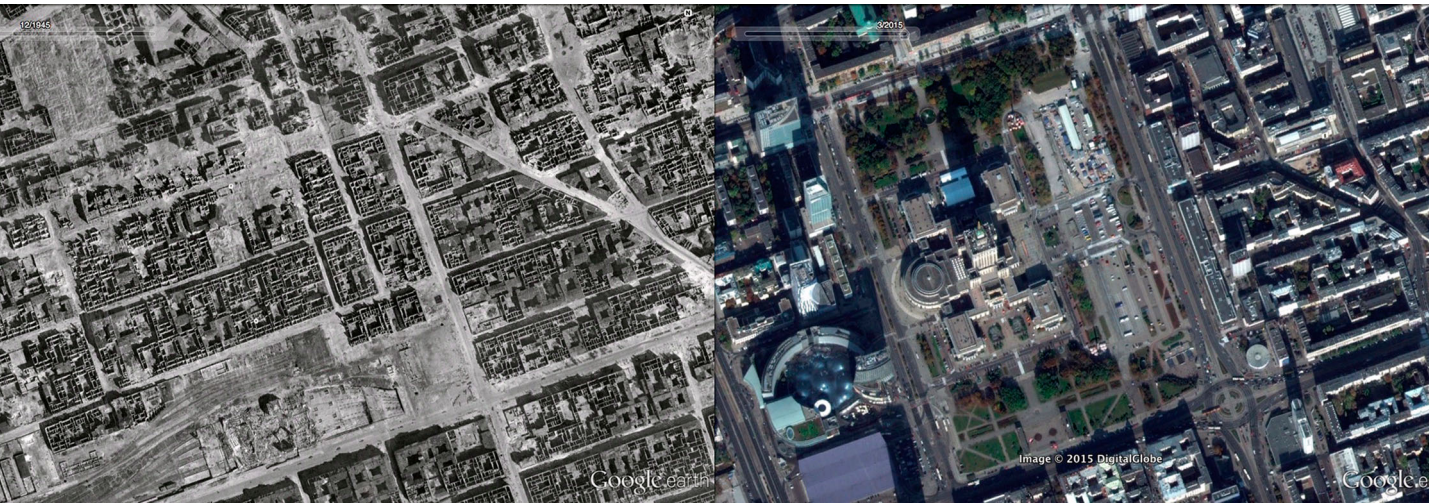
Aerial and satellite images of the area today occupied by Parade Square in central Warsaw in 1945 and 2012, map data: Google, MGGP Aero

reminiscent. The Voortrekker Monument was opened on 16 December 1949 – one year following the establishment of the Apartheid regime – on the Day of the Vow, commemorating a bloody 1838 Afrikaner colonists' massacre of their Zulu adversaries. It had also been conceived to convey associations with Great Zimbabwe (that and the ruins of Egypt, the other great civilisations evoking the 'vastness of Africa'),[2] and even featured its own cosmos-channelling dome slit, which, at noon on the Day of the Vow each year, shines a forty-metre ray of light onto the cenotaph in the building's vault. Architect Lindsay Bremner comments sardonically on the resemblance between the two monuments: 'on June 26 each year' – the anniversary of the Freedom Charter – 'observers would be able to watch the sun briefly light up [the Charter's] surface, before it receded once more into the shadows of history'.[3]

An old man, shabby and tired-looking, sombrely dressed in a ripped shirt and tie, rested on a bench by the wall, dusting down a recorder flute. He introduced himself as Tabang, and offered to tell us the story of the Freedom Charter. We shuffled around the slab, stopping for a moment to examine each slice. Although the narrative was interrupted by dreadful fits of coughing, Tabang rolled out the tale of the first two postulates – 'The People Shall Govern' and 'All National Groups Shall Have Equal Rights' – in a fairly celebratory tone, 'These have been

2 See Annie E Coombes, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2003, p 38

3 Lindsay Bremner, 'Reframing Township Space', in Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, eds, *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2008, pp 342–343

Tabang and the Freedom Charter, March 2015, photograph by the author

realised,' he said. At Number Three, however 'The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth' our guide became scathing. 'This has not been realised. The whites and rich own the country, while the blacks go poor,' he said. After this, what had started out as an apparent propaganda spectacle, turned into a twenty-minute circumambulatory critique, whose severity focused in particular on Postulates Number Four ('The Land Shall be Shared Among Those Who Work It'), Seven ('There Shall be Work and Security') and Nine ('There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort'). As we completed the tour, Tabang took out his recorder and played the first verse of the South African national anthem. The patriotism was as genuine, I think, as the pathos was pungent. Has he always lived in Kliptown, we asked? Did he remember the assembly at which the Freedom Charter was adopted in 1955? Yes, he said, he was born here, but not until many years later. Tabang, hunchbacked and gravely ill, had the appearance of an old man, but he couldn't have been much over fifty. We asked him whether he liked the Square and the Monument, but he politely ignored the question. We paid our small fee, said our goodbyes, took a few more photographs and walked back out into the scorching March heat.

KLIPTOWN SCALE

The try-hard democratic triumphalism of WSSD, in other words, lays bare, with a brutal honesty, the myriad contradictions, inadequacies and shortcomings of the post-Apartheid South African political order. It's not very hard to find things to dislike about it, and the critics have not hesitated in doing so. Its barren, foreboding vastness is off-putting, they agree, and ignores all aspects of the local area's social life, economic dynamics, aesthetic and scalar characteristics. In the words of Johannesburg-based architect Jonathan Noble:

> The windswept terrain of the square, with its seemingly endless hard paved surface, devoid of places to sit or opportunity for shade from the harsh sun, is quite uninhabitable, and one struggles to imagine how this space might be used by the residents of Kliptown on a daily basis.[4]

Lindsay Bremner – herself a co-designer of another WSSD competition entry – casts the site as an anachronism, a 'nineteenth century beaux arts set piece', redolent not just of the Voortrekker Monument or Great Zimbabwe, but also of 'the colonnades of ancient Rome' and the 'light columns of Hitler's Nuremberg stadium'.[5] The problem with StudioMAS' winning design, says Bremner is that it 'constructs a meta-narrative for the space'.[6] Her own design, by contrast, rested on

> allowing the micronarratives of everyday life in Kliptown to carry on undisturbed… Our approach to architecture was anthropological. We attempted to observe spatial practices from an ethnographic, not a panoptic point of view.[7]

Echoing Bremner, anthropologists Lynn Meskell and Collete Scheermeyer (2008) dismiss WSSD as a 'set piece' of 'heritage pageantry',

4 Jonathan Noble, 'Memorialising the Freedom Charter: Contested Imaginations for the Development of Freedom Square at Kliptown, 1991–2006', *South African Journal of Art History*, vol 23, no 1, 2008, p 26

5 Bremner, 'Reframing Township Space', op cit, p 342

6 Ibid, p 341

7 Ibid, p 344. This corresponds with Clifford Geertz's observation (which he attributes to Alfred Kroeber) concerning anthropology's longstanding 'centrifugal impulse'.

Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication Colonnade, March 2015, photograph by the author

8 Lynn Meskell and Colette Scheermeyer, 'Heritage as Therapy: Set Pieces from the New South Africa', *Journal of Material Culture* 13, 2008, p 162

9 Ibid

10 Noble, 'Memorialising the Freedom Charter', op cit, p 30

11 Ibid, p 26

12 Christa Kuljian, 'The Congress of the People and the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication: From Public Deliberation to Bureaucratic Imposition in Kliptown', *Social Dynamics*, vol 35, issue 2, 2009, pp 450–464

13 Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, op cit

at once ineffectual and obfuscatory. 'Extravagantly memorialising the site of the Charter's endorsement has proven much easier than fulfilling the document's promises for the residents of Kliptown.'[8] WSSD, and analogous sites of ideological spectacle in post-Apartheid South Africa – like Johannesburg's Constitution Hill, Durban's Old Fort Museum or Tshwane's Freedom Park, which sits adjacent to the Voortrekker Monument – are compared unfavourably by the authors to 'small-scale heritage initiatives by marginalised communities'.[9] Jonathan Noble, meanwhile, draws attention to the manner in which StudioMAS' design paid scant regard to the 'multicultural history and complex hybrid character of the area' and instead 'has sought to impose its own architectural geometry'.[10] Noble bemoans the 'cathedral-like expanse of wasted space' and wonders 'why the informal traders could not have been accommodated in a more modest fashion'.[11] Johannesburg-based sociologist Christa Kuljian, meanwhile, follows Noble's diagnosis of the undemocratic character of the site a 'grandiose', 'non-Kliptown', 'bureaucratic imposition',[12] and cites Annie Coombes's highlighting of the associations between large public spaces and totalitarian regimes.[13] All the authors above highlight a sad irony: WSSD was intended as a site for the memorialisation and commemoration of a proud democratic heritage. But whatever 'good intentions' may have been behind the project, the bureaucrats

The Palace of Culture and Parade Square's centrality on display, during 'Nine Rays of Light in the Sky', an action by Henryk Stażewski (1894–1988), curated by the Museum of Modern Art in 2009, photograph by Jan Smaga, courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

14 Meskell and Scheermeyer, 'Heritage as Therapy', op cit, p 463

15 Particularly interesting from this perspective are Elżbieta Matynia's reflections on the relationship between democracy, dialogue and roundness in Poland and South Africa. In both countries, the transitions to democracy were negotiated around round tables. See Elżbieta Matynia, 'Furnishing Democracy at the End of the Century: The Polish Round Table and Others', *East European Politics & Societies*, vol 15, no 2, 2001, pp 454–471; Elżbieta Matynia, *Performative Democracy*, Routledge, Oxford and New York, 2015.

16 M M Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michael Holquist, ed, and trans with Caryl Emerson, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, 1981, p xviii

17 Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1940; Clifford Geertz, 'Centers, Kings and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power', in Clifford Geertz, ed, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, Fontana Press, London, 1993, pp 121–146

18 Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, vol 2, Selected Papers of Edward Shils, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1910–1995, 1975

19 Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy: Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1979; Eric R Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982

and architects clubbed together to make sure they fell way short of their stated goal. 'Unfortunately, in the era of democracy, in Kliptown – the home of the Freedom Charter – public deliberation was not allowed to flourish; rather, it was severely curtailed.'[14]

POLITICAL MORPHOLOGY

I have no intention in this article to defend WSSD, and have no data at my disposal to counter the assertions of the authors cited above. I would like to highlight, however, how their critiques resort to a quite consistent set of convictions about the relationship between spatial, geometric and aesthetic – one might say, morphological – features of built form, and their cultural, historical or political correlates. In the critics' presentation, the 'historic character' of pre-WSSD Kliptown in its authentic self is 'complex', 'hybrid', 'small-scale', 'modest', 'informal' and, by implication, intrinsically democratic. Populated as it is by 'micronarratives of everyday life', Kliptown, Bremner suggests, is a proper terrain for 'ethnography', rather than for architecture in the traditional sense. WSSD, by contrast, is 'panoptic', 'extravagant' and 'grandiose' and therefore bureaucratic, autocratic and totalitarian (Voortrekker, Hitler, ancient Rome).

I am interested in how these sorts of alignments – between ideas pertaining to morphology, and those pertaining to politics, economy (or culture, social organisation and even the epistemological foundations on which academic disciplines rest) – are made. In other words, I would like to get to grips with the 'political morphology' which impacts on the way in which scholars – but also architects, planners, politicians and 'the general public' – experience built form. How can these political and morphological concepts be combined and correlated? What is the relationship between hierarchy and *verticality*, equality and *horizontality*? Between holism and *Euclidean space*, atomism and *nonlinearity*? Between statism and *striation*, anarchy and *smoothness*? Between collectivism and *asceticism*, individualism and *luxury*? Between authoritarianism and *centrality*, democracy and *marginality*?[15]

Over the past hundred years, a great deal of scholarly energy has been expended on interrogating the permutations of the back-and-forth between centripetal and centrifugal forces, concentration and dispersal – the 'ceaseless battle between centrifugal forces that seek to keep things apart, and centripetal forces that strive to make things cohere', as Michael Holquist puts it with reference to Mikhail Bahktin's philosophy of language.[16] To name a few prominent, canon-forming instances, these have included explorations into fission and fusion, centrality, charisma and kingship in political anthropology;[17] centre-periphery relations in political sociology,[18] Marxist political economy,[19] ancient archaeology[20] and broadly-defined urban studies;[21] studies of polycentric organization in political science and government;[22] theories of morphology and period in art and architectural history;[23] concepts of arborescence versus rhizome or linearity and nonlinearity in continental philosophy;[24] and models of centrifugality and centripetality in urban economic geography.[25]

On an urban terrain, the odds in this 'ceaseless battle' have, it seems, been tilting decidedly more in favour of the centrifugal side. The 'mono-

Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication Freedom Charter cone, March 2015, photograph by the author

20 M J Rowlands, Mogens
    Trolle Larsen and Kristian
    Kristiansen, *Centre and
    Periphery in the Ancient
    World*, Cambridge
    University Press,
    Cambridge, 1987

21 Robert Ezra Park, E W
    Burgess, Roderick Duncan
    McKenzie and Louis Wirth,
    The City, University of
    Chicago Press, Chicago,
    Ill., 1925; Chauncy D
    Harris and Edward L
    Ullman, 'The Nature of
    Cities', *Annals of the
    American Academy of
    Political and Social Science*,
    vol 242, November, 1945,
    pp 7–17; Jane Jacobs, *The
    Death and Life of Great
    American Cities*, Random
    House, New York, 1961;
    Jean Gottmann, *Centre and
    Periphery: Spatial
    Variation in Politics*, vol
    19, Sage Publications,
    Beverly Hills, 1980; Henri
    Lefebvre, *The Production
    of Space*, Blackwell,
    Oxford, UK; Cambridge,
    Mass., 1991; Henri
    Lefebvre, *The Urban
    Revolution*, University of
    Minnesota Press,
    Minneapolis, 2003; Saskia
    Sassen, *The Global City:
    New York, London,
    Tokyo*, Princeton
    University Press, Princeton,
    NJ, 1991; Peter Geoffrey
    Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow:
    An Intellectual History of
    Urban Planning and
    Design in the Twentieth
    Century*, Blackwell,
    Oxford, 1997; Edward W
    Soja, *Postmetropolis*:
    *Critical Studies of Cities
    and Regions*, Blackwell,
    Oxford, 2005

22 Michael Polanyi, *The Logic
    of Liberty: Reflections and
    Rejoinders*, University of
    Chicago Press, Chicago,
    1951; Vincent Ostrom,
    *Water & Politics: A Study
    of Water Policies and
    Administration in the
    Development of Los
    Angeles*, Johnson Reprint
    Corp, New York, 1972

23 Heinrich Wölfflin and
    Marie Donald Mackie
    Hottinger, *Principles of Art
    History: The Problem of
    the Development of Style in*

centric' cities of old – whether theocratic-feudal ones dominated by soaring temples, or industrial-capitalist ones pivoted around downtown 'Central Business Districts' – are on the wane. The new urban age – say politicians, planners and scholars – will be one of polycenters margins and peripheries; of suburban special economic zones, grassroots innovation hubs and brownfield eco-cities. But do architectural goings-on in Warsaw and Johannesburg confirm the received idea, or the common-place 'macrophobic' ideology of scale – widespread among scholars of municipal politics economy and planning, from Jane Jacobs to the Ostroms and Paul Krugman – which suggests that democracy must necessarily equate to urban polycentricity and architectural humility; and authoritarianism to monocentricity and monumentality?[26] Do different ways or organising politics and economics, in other words, have inherent morphological corollaries (or morpho-logics)?[27]

COLLECTIVE CENTRALITY:
THE MORPHOLOGY OF LUXURY

Kristin Ross' recent work on the Paris Commune has produced some richly suggestive, provocative avenues for rethinking deeply-rooted political morphological doxa – particularly with regard to the perceived interdependence between egalitarianism and asceticism, or progressive politics and the renunciation of pleasure. In Ross' account, the actions and imaginations of the Communards were underlain by a vision of 'communal luxury' (the phrase is Eugène Pottier's), by a call to transform 'the aesthetics coordinates of the entire community', 'the demand that beauty flourish in spaces shared in common and not just in special privatized preserves'.[28] Communal luxury, as Ross explains (via William Morris) entails the replacement of 'senseless luxury, which Morris knew cannot exist without slavery of some kind' with 'communal luxury, or equality in abundance'.[29]

   Ross is keen to emphasise that the morphology of her own account – and those of the Communards or Communard fellow-travellers she draws on, among them William Morris, Elisée Reclus and Pyotr Kropotkin – is not afflicted by a 'fetishism of the small scale'.[30] And, indeed, while it emphasises 'the centrifugal effects of the Paris Commune', this centrifugality is indeed of a distinctly 'macro' character – it sets out to rupture the 'cellular' regime of national space, its reach is global. Nevertheless, a positive valorisation of ascesis, a championing of the humble over the bombastic, and an active rejection of any centre-focused dynamic is evident throughout. Although the ideas and practices Ross discusses are founded on the very act of de-privatising beauty, in her account 'communal luxury works against the centralizing organisation of monumental space'.[31] And the Commune itself, 'is perhaps best figured as having the qualities Reclus attributes in his book to the mountain stream. Its scale and geography are liveable, not sublime'.[32] In Ross' own summary, 'the supposition here is that a particular economic structure – common ownership – working with a particular political organisation – a decentralised one – will foster a new level of fellowship, reciprocity and solidarity of interests among associates'.[33] But where does a decentralised organisation end, and a centralising one begin? Does the one always have to be the opposite of the other? And is it not possible to
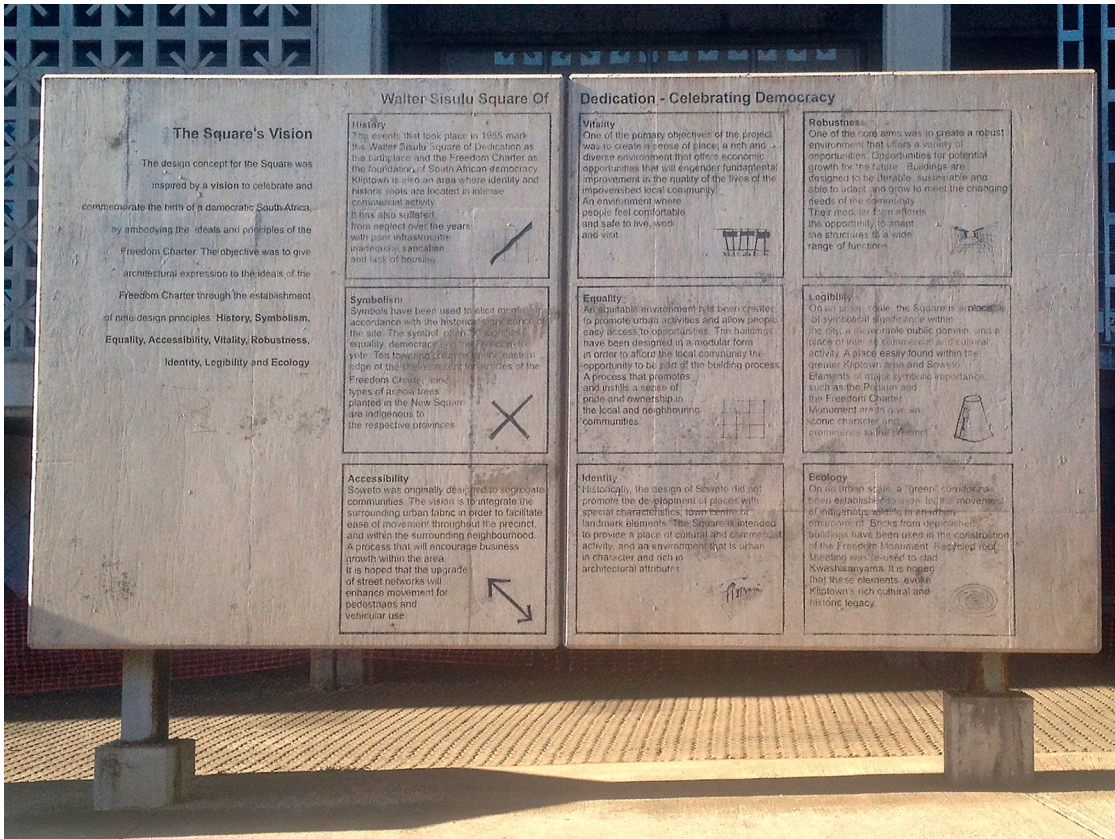
Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication, Glossary of symbols, photograph by author

Later Art, Dover, New York, 1950; Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2000; Vladimir Papernyĭ, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2002

24 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987; Manuel De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, Zone Books, New York, 1997

25 Masahisa Fujita, Paul R Krugman, and Anthony Venables, *The Spatial Economy: Cities, Regions and International Trade*,

produce a political morphological framework, which elides the significance of neither periphery nor centre?

NO CITY WITHOUT A CENTRE: RE-CENTRING THE COLLECTIVE

In terms which overlap strikingly with those of Ross, architectural historian Łukasz Stanek emphasises how French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre's interest in 'collective luxury' was connected to a reaction against the perceived fragmentation of the modernist city.[34] As Stanek's analysis suggests, Lefebvre was given over to the task of overcoming the tendency of thinkers who interested him – whether Guy Debord or Charles Fourier – to focus on one pole, rather than both, of the central-peripheral divide. Instead, Lefebvre's concept of 'dialectical centrality' – a concept, which has been markedly neglected by scholars before Stanek – aimed to account for the 'complementary processes of exclusion, repulsion and dispersion... the simultaneity of these contradictory movements'.[35]

As Stanek emphasises,[36] Lefebvre's historical study of the Paris Commune (as well as his participatory account of May 1968 and its 'explosion' on the peripherally-located Parisian campus of Nanterre

MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1999

26 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, op cit; Vincent Ostrom, *Water & Politics*, op cit; Masahisa Fujita, Paul R Krugman and Anthony Venables, *The Spatial Economy*, op cit

27 I discuss academic 'macrophobia' and 'microphilia' in more detail in Michał Murawski, 'Big Affects: Sex, Size and Stalinist Architectural Power in Post-Socialist Warsaw', in Mikkel Bille and Tom Flohr Sorensen, eds, *Elements of Architecture: Assembling Archaeology, Affect and the Performance of Building Spaces*, Routledge, London, 2016, pp 63–83. David Graeber and David Wengrow point to archaeological and anthropological evidence – the 'puzzling phenomenon of "rich" hunter-gatherer burials'; monumental architecture apparently raised during the 'pre-pottery Neolithic'; and, most notably, Marcel Mauss' and Henri Beuchat's pioneering work on the 'double morphology' of hunter-gathering eskimo populations, whose social organisation varied from summer to winter – to show that the relationships between politics, economy and social morphology are not necessarily fixed as solidly as scholarly consensuses assume them to be. Our earliest ancestors, Graeber and Wengrow suggest, were just as aware as us that 'no social order is immutable'. See David Wengrow and David Graeber, 'Farewell to the "Childhood of Man": Ritual, Seasonality, and the Origins of Inequality', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol 21, no 3, 2015, pp 597–619. For more on ideologies of scale, see also Patrick Neveling and Carsten Wegrin, 'Projects of Scale-Making: New Perspectives on the Anthropology of

University) analysed both events as dialectical encounters of 'necessity and chance, determination and contingency, the anticipated and the unpredicted';[37] events, during which, in Lefebvre's words:

> People who had come from the outlying areas into which they had been driven and where they had found nothing but a social void assembled and proceeded together toward the reconquest of the urban centres.[38]

Thinking through his project of 'unitary architecture' Lefebvre sought inspiration in Charles Fourier's attempt to 'overcome the separations produced by modern capitalist society'[39] – separations such as those that Ross' Communard protagonists sought to overcome in their thought and work: between intellectual, aesthetic and manual work; between fine and decorative arts; between nature and culture; between city and country; between centre and periphery.[40] Indeed, in Lefebvre's account, centripetality constitutes a necessary condition, without which no sort of urbanism is possible. In his own words,

> 'There can be no city or urban reality without a centre… there can be no sites for leisure, festivals, knowledge, oral or scriptural transmission, invention or creation without centrality.'[41]

These words by the French Marxist philosopher mirror quite uncannily a pronouncement made by Edmund Goldzamt, a leading architectural ideologue in Warsaw during the Stalinist 1950s:

> There can be no such thing as a city without a centre. The very idea of the city incorporates within itself the fact of the existence of the primary catalyst of the urban organism: the central ensemble or arrangement.[42]

It may seem far-fetched to claim an affinity between Lefebvre's and Goldzamt's ideas about centrality. Lefebvre's own political anti-Stalinism is well-known, as is his hostility to the aesthetics of Socialist Realism[43] and his broader lack of enthusiasm for state socialist planning and architecture's capacity to produce a 'differential' space. In Lefebvre's assessment, under actually-existing socialism, 'no architectural innovation has occurred… and no specific space has been created'.[44] I would like to suggest, however, that there is common ground between Lefebvre's and Goldzamt's ideas about centrality-as-publicness. Further, I want to challenge Lefebvre's judgement concerning the failure of state socialist space, by suggesting that Warsaw's Palace of Culture – as designed, as implemented and as still-functioning today – in fact makes for an instance of a remarkably successful, actually-existing instance of Lefebvrean centrality in action.

Goldzamt's thoughts on centrality were formulated with explicit reference to the Palace, Warsaw's then-brand-new Stalinist skyscraper. Now, the Palace was consciously intended to endow Warsaw with an entirely new political morphology, focused on itself – and the surrounding, twenty-five hectare Parade Square – as pivot and *dominanta*. The

Tourism', *Etnografica*, vol 13, no 2, 2009, pp 315–342.

28 Kristin Ross, Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune, Verso, London, 2015, p 58.

29 Ibid, p 63.

30 Ibid, p 133.

31 Ibid, p 59.

32 Ibid, p 8.

33 Ibid, p 127.

34 Łukasz Stanek, Henri Lefebvre on Space:Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2011,pp 170–179.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid, pp 179–191.

37 Henri Lefebvre, La Proclamation de la Commune, 26 mars 1871, Gallimard, Paris, 1965, p 11.

38 Henri Lefebvre, *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1969, pp 117–118

39 Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space Architecture*, op cit, p 170

40 Cf Ross, *Communal Luxury*, op cit, pp 41–65

41 Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2003, p 79

42 Edmund Goldzamt, Architektura zespolów sró dmiejskich i problemy dziedzictwa, Panstwowe Wydawn, Naukowe, Warszawa, 1956, p 11

43 Marc James Léger, *Brave New Avant Garde: Essays on Contemporary Art and Politics*, Zero Press, London, 2012, p 145

44 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, op cit, p 55

morpho-logic of the gift – as verbalised by the Stalinist architectural ideologues of the day – was to function as the 'vital and territorial centre of gravity' of Warsaw,[45] the new 'urban epicentre', to which the remainder of Warsaw would be 'harmoniously subordinated'.[46]

The Palace was suffused with transformatory social, political and economic intent; on both vertical and horizontal planes it rode roughshod over (what survived of) Warsaw's pre-existing urban structure and aesthetic. The radical multiplicity of functions encompassed by the building – three major theatres, three cinemas, a vast 'Palace of Youth' complete with resplendent marbled swimming pool, a 3,000-seat Congress Hall, municipal offices, two museums, numerous libraries, research and educational institutions, among much else – *condensed* enormous quantities of people within its walls and environs, inculcating Varsovians with a profuse concentration of socialist culture.[47] The Palace was to serve, in the words of Warsaw architect Szymon Syrkus (a lifelong communist, but a leading International Style modernist until the onset of the Stalinist period in 1949), an 'immovable guiding star on our journey to transform old Warsaw, princely Warsaw, royal, magnates', burghers', capitalist Warsaw into socialist Warsaw'.[48]

Stalinist architectural thinking, therefore, saw no unresolvable contradiction between revolutionary social content, and morphological centripetality or monumentality. Echoing German Expressionist architect and theorist Bruno Taut's influential notion of the *Stadtkröne*,[49] Goldzamt writes that the 'particular destiny and ideological role' of the central ensemble 'determine the deployment in its construction of only the most monumental types of public construction and architectural form, *which crown the aesthetic unity of the city*' (emphasis added).[50] Further, adds Goldzamt, 'the dominating role of the central ensemble is the effect of the concentration therein of *architectural power*'.[51]

How does Goldzamt square the egalitarian imperative behind socialist urbanism with the Stalinist elevation of the all-dominant centre? He distinguishes between the levelling effect of socialist town planning and the distribution of wealth and access to dignified living conditions on the one hand and, on the other, the *architectural* differentiation between centre and periphery, which the realisation of an egalitarian urban environment necessarily entails:

> Socialist urbanism eradicates class differences within the city, creating across all districts identical conditions for living, in terms of dwelling, work, communal services and aesthetic experiences… But the eradication of the social contradiction between the city centre and the suburbs does not entail the elimination of all differences in architectural solutions, nor does it entail the eradication of central ensembles, with their particular form and spatial role. To the contrary, the democratism of socialist societies… necessitates the enormous significance of the centres of socialist cities.[52]

THE RADICAL CENTRE, OR DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

In Goldzamt's account – quite jarring to the parameters of today's democratic-peripheralist political morphology – the distinction between social-

45 Goldzamt, *Architektura zespołów śródmiejskich i problemy dziedzictwa*, op cit, p 22

46 Józef Sigalin, *Warszawa 1944–1980: z archiwum architekta, T 3*, Państ, Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa, 1986, p 10

47 For more on the 'social condenser', see Michał Murawski, 'Palace Complex: A Stalinist "Social Condenser" in Warsaw', *The Journal of Architecture*, 2017, forthcoming; and the contributions to Michał Murawski and Jane Rendell, eds, 'Re-Activating the Social Condenser: A Century of Revolution through Architecture 1917-2017', a special issue of *The Journal of Architecture*, 2017, forthcoming.

48 Józef Sigalin, *Warszawa 1944–1980: z archiwum architekta*, vol 2, Państ, Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa, 1986, p 460

49 Bruno Taut, *Die Stadtkröne*, Eugen Diederichs, Jena, 1919

50 Goldzamt, *Architektura zespołów śródmiejskich i problemy dziedzictwa*, op cit

51 Ibid, p 21

52 Ibid, p 18

53 Ibid, p 16

54 Ibid, p 20

55 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, op cit, p 79

56 In October 2010, I carried out an online-based questionnaire, composed of seventy questions about the Palace's relationship with Warsaw. Bias was controlled to some extent by collecting demographic data from respondents, but the survey did not aspire to representativeness. For an in-depth discussion, see Murawski, 'Palaceology, or Palace-as-Methodology: Ethnographic Conceptualism, Total Urbanism and a Stalinist

ist and capitalist centrality lies precisely in the fact that, on all accounts, the former exceeds the latter: in scale, in intensity and in agentic capacity. In contrast to capitalist urban cores, which are merely 'material carriers of the dominant worldview', socialist centres function as 'actual tools of ideological impact'. 'What is more', Goldzamt continues:

> … their prominence in the life of socialist cities must become incomparably higher than that of the ceremonial or financial-commercial centres of feudal and capitalist cities. The foundation of the strengthening of the role of the centre in the practice of Soviet, Polish and other Peoples' Democracies is the *transformation of the infrastructure of social ties carried out by central ensembles* (emphasis added).[53]

The centre of the urban organism, when possessed of the right characteristics, is able to and should become a powerful agent in the transformation of society, simultaneously actualising and illustrating the 'coming unity of interests in socialist society, the unity of the interests and ideals of the entire population of the socialist city'.[54] The socialist centre is thus never at loggerheads with the remainder of the city.

Like Goldzamt, Lefebvre also emphasises that there is more than just one kind of centrality, and that the nature of centrality's social functioning depends on more than merely its shape, size and appearance. Having declared that 'there [will]… be no city or urban reality without a centre', Lefebvre makes an important clarification: 'But as long as certain relationships of production and ownership remain unchanged, centrality will be subjected to those who use these relationships and benefit from them.'[55] The question of the urban, then, is not one of periphery versus centre. The victory of a more collective, more egalitarian, more just or otherwise better urbanism does not depend on the vanquishing of the middle by the margins. It is, instead, a question of good and bad centralities: those owned by and open to the collective, or those held and guarded by the few; and those whose design – its aesthetic, scalar and morphological characteristics – are founded on *planned* use value, or those determined by *calculated* exchange value.

More than a quarter of a century has passed since the collapse of Poland's state socialist regime in 1989, and yet the Palace of Culture continues to work much as Goldzamt and the other planners and ideologues of Stalinist urbanism intended it to. The vast majority of Warsaw's residents – eighty percent according to a large-scale survey I carried out in Warsaw[56] – consider it (and the surrounding Parade Square) to constitute Warsaw's singular central or core site (*centrum*); none of the plans for filling the space around it with a triumphant coterie of money-making skyscrapers have been carried out; and contrary to initial assessments that its shape, form and symmetry are 'anathema to democracy',[57] the Palace – Warsaw's most conspicuously totalitarian edifice – in fact functions as one of the city's prime sites of municipal democracy: the city council chamber meets here; and in 2000, a large clock tower was added to the building's spire, with the intention – according to then-Mayor (1999–2002) Paweł Piskorski – of 'townhalling' the Palace and providing Varsovians with a 'place to come together, integrate urban society, under a huge clock tower.'[58]

Skyscraper in Warsaw', *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Science*, no 2, 2013, pp 56–83.

57 Michał Murawski, *Palace Complex*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, forthcoming (2018).

58 Ibid.

Nevertheless, it is essential to emphasise that Warsaw's post-socialist Palace is far from being some sort of amenable, humble lackey of the new political-economic order. The Palace remains a uniquely effective piece of *communist* architecture, spatial planning and social engineering. It is a building which functions as well as it does in post-socialist Warsaw, because the land on which it stands was expropriated from its pre-war owners, and has not yet been 'returned' to property speculators. It is a building, which, so far, resists the 'wild capitalist' chaos – of property restitution, twenty-storey billboards, inner-centre poverty and rampant gentrification – which surround it. This situation may not last for long, however. Parade Square, and much of the rest of Warsaw, is slowly being chopped up and parcelled out to the descendants of pre-war owners, or, more often, to rapacious property developers, who have spent most of the last twenty years buying up land claims, more often than not for absurdly low ('non-market') prices. The Palace, then, will only distribute its seditious 'architectural power' over the city, for as long as it, and its surroundings, remain publicly-owned and managed.

CONCLUSION: A PALACE FOR KLIPTOWN

As Lungisile Ntsebeza points out,[59] the global conditions of possibility for the post-Apartheid order to take form according to anything other than capitalist lines collapsed together with the Soviet Union, in 1991. The characteristics and consequences of one transformation – from Eurasian state socialism to neoliberal capitalism – in other words, foreclosed those of another – from Apartheid capitalism to neoliberal capitalism, or from constitutional to merely economic Apartheid. So although, at least on paper, Kliptown's WSSD is also publicly-built, owned and managed, it would be difficult to expect the parameters of its design to have had anything to do with the 'revolutionary transformation' of a capitalist urban organism into a socialist one.

WSSD's critiques account extensively for the manner in which the project was driven by the desire to boost investment and visitor numbers, to 'upgrade [Soweto's] existing business nodes' and 'create business opportunities'.[60] In Jonathan Noble's words, the layout and programme for WSSD was determined, in fact, by 'the investment logic of a conventional shopping mall'.[61] Furthermore, while the Square's brief did initially incorporate training spaces, sports facilities, a police station and a community advice centre, all were removed from the final design, 'which is dominated, almost exclusively, by rentable space' and from which – in absolute contrast to the Palace – 'social functions have been excluded'.[62] In the illustrative description of Graeme Reid, CEO of the Johannesburg Development Agency – the public body responsible for managing the Greater Kliptown Regeneration Project – the last remaining hope for WSSD is that it will act as a sort of catalyst for the gentrification of Kliptown: 'The square… has the potential to be sort of like a Rosebank [an affluent part of Johannesburg with open-air cafes and shops]'.[63] With this projected future in mind, it goes without saying that its construction was preceded by the mass evictions of traders and others who had occupied the same site for many decades – in some cases, for the entirety of the Apartheid era.

59 Lungisile Ntsebeza, 'Land Redistribution in South Africa: The Property Clause Revisited', in Lungisile Ntsebeza and Ruth Hall, eds, *The Land Question in South Africa: The Challenge of Transformation and Redistribution*, HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2007

60 JDA (Johannesberg Development Agency), http://www.jda.org.za/index.php/milestones/kliptown, accessed 29 June 2015

61 Noble, 'Memorialising the Freedom Charter', op cit, p 27

62 Ibid, p 27

63 Kuljian, 'The Congress of the People', op cit, p 458

Warsaw's Palace of Culture was erected by a regime expropriating land from the propertied, for what it perceived to be the public good. Today, however, it stands within a political-economic context, where the transformation towards 'democracy' goes hand-in-hand with the restitution – or, as they say in Polish *reprywatyzacja*, or reprivatisation – of land and property, a triumphant reassertion of an urban morphology founded on wealth stratification. WSSD, meanwhile, was built on land expropriated from the poor, by a system which has been very happy for the lion's share of land – whether urban or rural – and all other kinds of property, wealth and resources, to remain in the hands of the rich. The Kliptown square and its monument, in other words, belong within a context, where the transition towards 'democracy' limits itself to the political and symbolic realms. It is an aesthetic-morphological symptom of post-Apartheid South Africa's political and economic logic – not a Goldzamtian 'actual tool of ideological impact', but a mere 'material carrier of the dominant worldview'. Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication expresses with great eloquence the contradictions of a regime, whose much cherished and celebrated constitution fails to enshrine any of the Freedom Charter's economic postulates – many of which, as Tabang pointed out, 'have not been realised' – but instead ensures protection for the plunderous property arrangements left over from the colonial and Apartheid eras.[64]

In the critics' eyes, the problem with WSSD is that 'the excessive scale of the superstructure stands in marked contrast to the needy social life of surrounding Kliptown'.[65] The 'needs' of Kliptown are indeed unfulfilled, and the Square serves well as a venue for articulating this lack of fulfilment. Indeed, as Kuljian, Meskell and Scheermeyer recognise, since its opening in 2005, WSSD and its environs have played host to regular protests and rallies – including major disturbances in 2007 and 2013 – by activist groups, such as the Kliptown Concerned Residents, the Anti-Privatisation Forum and now Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters.

But, while the square's monumentality and enormity make it into an excellent venue for expressions of political dissent, do they – in themselves – bear responsibility for Kliptown's ills? And on what basis does one make the claim that the social life of Kliptown – or of anywhere else – belongs to a small rather than a large scalar order? Accepting the obvious flaws and inadequacies of the WSSD project in its actualised form, in other words, precisely why ought a public space adequate to Kliptown be modest, micro, small-scale, informal? Could Kliptown, if the political-economic conditions of possibility were in place, not accommodate its own forms of monumentality, grandeur, bombast and centrality – its Palace of Culture and Science?

64 Lungisile Ntsebeza, op cit; Cherryl Walker, 'Redistributive Land Reform: For What and for Whom?', in Lungisile Ntsebeza and Ruth Hall, eds, *The Land Question in South Africa: The Challenge of Transformation and Redistribution*, HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2007

65 Noble, 'Memorialising the Freedom Charter', op cit, p 29