

## **Practise Based-Research**

Practise Based-Research in Architecture at UFS

Prof. Jonathan Noble

Crossing various economies, technologies, environments, scenarios, role players and flows, architectural design creates new relations between things. Practise-based research in architecture, allows for an inquiry into this intricate web of connections, with a view to extracting the complex modes of thought and action that are required for success in design. The primary objective is to harvest and study the implicit orientations and achievements of design, and to enlist creativity in the forming of new knowledge. It is a mode of study that facilitates analytical reflection, stimulates creative action, and opens new insights into the unique logic of design.

This presentation will consider research modalities that inform the PhD in Architecture with Specialization in Design, at the UFS (University of the Free) – this being the first dedicated creative research program in architecture in SA, and possibly the continent. With a focus upon research ‘in the medium’ of architecture; tacit knowledge and reflection-in-action; modes of practise within technological, professional, and social networks; exegesis and discovery that lead to creative in-conclusion.

## It Depends on the Lens: Film as Experiential Teaching in Architectural Design and Design Representation

**Authors Name:** Anita Szentesi

**Keywords:** Narrative in the Design Process, Architecture and Film, Architectural Pedagogy, Film and Design Representation, Storytelling, Historical Narrative, Decolonial, Inclusive Collaboration

My creative research in Architecture and Design explores the transformative work that I have been contributing to architectural pedagogy, specifically in the undergraduate architectural design studios in the Wits School of Architecture and Planning. I introduced film and its narrative formats into the architectural design process through a methodology that focuses on characters' lived experiences in places, a notion I have called *character-led architecture*. I developed this notion through my own research in the Master of Arts Film and TV that I completed at the Wits School of Arts, and through applying the knowledge that I gained from my Masters to architectural pedagogy with the full support and encouragement from my colleagues. This openness for change and collaboration occurred as a result of the #FeesMustFall protests in South Africa when students asked for free tertiary education and for a decolonised curriculum. As lecturers, we felt the need to explore new methods of teaching, such as an equal exchange of knowledge (Sendra, 2020). My research explores the diverse and complex relationships that exist between people, culture, identity, history, buildings and landscapes to achieve a collaborative and inclusive design. These relationships are even more complex in places with colonial histories.

My research is situated in the field of narratives in the design process, where different narrative typologies are used for different reasons. The narrative function of empathy, identification, and memory through the process of persona narratives, enables me to explore attachment through history and identity to a place. Entertainment narratives, which in my case, filmic narratives, are the least explored type of narrative in the design process (Grimaldi, Fokkinga, Ocnareescu, 2013), thus creating an opportunity for me to add new knowledge to this field of study. The aim of introducing this narrative structure in the design process is to enable an understanding, as a designer, of someone else's point of view, and their attachment to culture, history, identity, and connection to place. *Character-led architecture* supports the design process for the designer and aims to include the user: through the inclusion of diverse points of view, the voice of the designer and users, aims to achieve a design that is inclusive and collaborative. Applied to the design studio in architectural pedagogy, *character-led architecture* aims to encourage students to teach and learn through the processes of their productions, starting the design process from their narratives, and not exclusively from traditional top-down teaching methods. Student projects with a specific focus on exploring *character-led architecture*, were initially introduced in 2018. In the collaborative teaching team first-year design studio, student narratives mostly evolved within imaginary worlds. The second-year Design Representation course, which I designed, explored the relationship between architecture, film and identity to analyse a specific neighbourhood in Johannesburg. As part of this presentation, I will showcase selected student projects exploring *character-led architecture* to demonstrate how my artistic research contributes to transforming parts of the architectural design and design representation pedagogy.

## List of References

Grimaldi, S., Fokkinga, S., Ocnareescu, I. (2013). *Narratives in Design: A Study of the Types, Applications and Functions of Narratives in Design Practice*. Designing Pleasurable Products and Interfaces, DPPI'13 Praxis and Poetics, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, September 3-5. Association for Computing Machinery: New York, pp. 201-210. <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/2513506.2513528> (Accessed 28 January 2022)

Sendra, E. (2020). 'Video Essays: Curating and Transforming Film Education Through Artistic Research'. *International Journal of Film and Media Arts*. Vol., No2, (p.65-81).

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books Ltd. New York: Room 400.

## Biographical Note for Anita Szentesi

Anita Szentesi is an architect, filmmaker, lecturer and researcher. She proposes a design methodology called *character-led architecture*, which combines architecture and film to achieve inclusive collaborative designs and design environments, and new ways of communicating the complexities of life in design representations.

## Exploring the transformative potential of Practice based Design Research (PbDR) methods in Architectural Design Pedagogy.

Sandra Felix

Practice based design research (PbDR) methods have been used by various architectural postgraduate programs internationally to evidence existing established mastery in design (RMIT)<sup>1</sup>, venture new speculative futures (Bartlett)<sup>2</sup> as well as continue a long tradition of architectural research incorporating a “productive relationship between drawing, text and building... multi-directional... drawing may lead to building, writing to drawing or building to drawing and writing” (Hill 2013). These research explorations have been at postgraduate level, demonstrating and evidencing the design methods of established and early career practitioners, and in many cases transforming their design practice.

The question I sought to explore was whether these same methods could have a transformative effect on architectural design undergraduate students, who are just starting to explore and find their own design voices. The transformative potential assessed is a change from an unconscious, automatic, unreflective design practice to a more conscious and self-aware practice, which reveals a greater level of confidence in the student’s own ‘voice’ and validates diverse ‘voices’, and points of departure. The research therefore asks if mastery or confidence in the practitioners’ own voice can be developed through PbDR methods and counterpoints the RMIT precedent program listed above which focuses on evidencing established mastery.

In order to explore this transformative potential, PbDR methods have been employed in the WITS, Bachelor of Architecture undergraduate third year program over the last few years. These methods include reflection on and diffraction of deconstructed archives of design practice and developing personal spatial narratives. Using action research cycles each successive iteration of the project has been adjusted by reflection on the outcomes of previous cycles.

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<sup>1</sup> RMIT and associated programs in Europe including Adapt-r started as by invitation programs that evidenced existing mastery

<sup>2</sup> Bartlett Postgraduate programs in Design at University College London

De Sousa Santos, Boaventura. 2014. *Epistemologies of the South: justice against epistemicide*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Freire, Paulo. 2018. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Hill, Jonathan. 2013. “Design Research: The First 500 years.” In *Design Research in Architecture: an overview*, edited by Murray Fraser, 15-34. Ashgate.

hooks, bell. 1994. *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

These PbDR methods are applied within a 'parallel-engaged pedagogy' in the architectural design studio. This 'parallel -engaged pedagogy' combines aspects of various pedagogies of transformation, including De Sousa Santos' "walking alongside" the students (2014), seen as a form of parallel pedagogy with the "engaged pedagogy" of bell hooks (1994), and the transformational pedagogy of Freire (2018).

**Biographical note:**

Sandra Felix is a lecturer at the Wits School of Architecture and Planning, and a practicing architect with 25 years of experience, currently completing a PhD in Practice based Design Research at the intersection of practice and pedagogy.

## **Artistic research and the city space: new working profiles and collaborations**

Stefan Winter

In an increasingly widespread tendency, urban researchers from the Global South such as Edgar Pieterse and AbdouMaliq Simone, as well as architects and urban theorists in Europe and beyond, e.g. Cristina Díaz Moreno, Efrén García Grinda and David Harvey, claim that the societal and cultural lifeworld dimension, the „soft infrastructure“ that makes the city work, needs to be taken more into account in urban development. The city space is thus considered not so much as a built environment, but rather as a habitat, in which the guiding question of the Venice Architecture Biennale 2021 - “How will we live together?” - is constantly asked and negotiated. Architects and urban planners do not just conceive, design and build, the Biennale’s curator, Hashim Sarkis, said, but they are first of all „convenors and custodians of the spatial contract“. In this shift, working profiles in architecture and urban planning are changing, while artistic research unfolds its impact and potential in urban development processes. In its various disciplines, it enables us to explore, understand, and map the city in new ways. Artistic research generates new insights into our common lives in the urban habitat. It bundles practices to devise the re-using of existing buildings and focuses on artistic vision to create scenarios for future city spaces. In all these respects, novel collaborations between artistic research, architecture and urban design are taking shape in a common aim at sustainability, which unfolds in the ecological, economic and societal dimension. As these dimensions are interdependent, they cannot be advanced in isolation. We will not arrive at ecological sustainability as long as we live in a linear economic system that by its very structure requires a continuous depletion of resources. And we will not achieve to build a sustainable economy of mutual care and social benefit as long as we don't move towards a cohesive society, in which heterogeneous groups negotiate and re-negotiate their shares and commons in mutual respect.

My talk will take concrete projects as a guide to show the impact and potential that artistic research can bring to each of the three sustainability dimensions. In order to show the commonalities and differences between various approaches, projects from the Johannesburg sphere are brought together with projects from Europe and beyond. In the ecological dimension, The Watershed (Johannesburg 2018) and the Dung Beetle project (Johannesburg, ongoing) will be discussed together with the Floating University (Berlin, 2018) and the Kirigami Solar Cell project (Michigan, 2015). In the economic dimension, Johannesburg projects that re-define spaces in a circular economy are being compared with The Coming Tide (London, 2014) and Hansel and Gretel (New York, 2017). An example of how artistic research can induce societal cohesion is given by the Hotel Yeoville project (Johannesburg, 2012/13). This will not be matched by a single project from the European sphere, but by a memory of the ways in which European avantgarde movements, from Dada to the Lettrist or Situationist motion and beyond, aimed at

win-win constellations and thus undercut and contradicted the colonial stance from within the european sphere.

**Stefan Winter**, philosopher and author, is Honorary Professor for Artistic Research and Head of Institute for Artistic Research at Film University Babelsberg, Visiting Professor at the Wits School of Architecture and Planning, and representative of Germany at the European Forum for Advanced Practices. In his research and teaching at universities and art schools in Basel, Berlin, Braunschweig, Düsseldorf, Helsinki, Perugia and Potsdam, he traversed and connected artistic and scientific knowledge cultures. Numerous publications on all epochs in the history of knowledge and on present-day questions across the disciplines.