Retrofitting, repurposing and re-placing: A multi-media exploration of occupation in Cape Town, South Africa

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The vast majority of city planning literature on informal occupations has focused on how residents occupy vacant and peripheral land, developing informal structures to address their basic needs. A smaller body of work, but one with much purchase in South Africa, explores the informal occupation of existing formal structures and how residents infuse these emergent places with social and political meaning. Across this work, occupations represent a dominant mode of city-building in the Global South. Contributing to this debate on city-making and occupations, this paper departs from an unusual case of South African occupation. We explore how displaced people have occupied a multi-storey vacant hospital building situated close to Cape Town's city centre. Using documentary photography and interviews with residents, we argue that this occupation reflects a logic of 'retrofit city-making'. We show that, through processes of repairing, repurposing, and renovating, dwellers have retrofit an institutional building, previously designed by the state for a very different use, to meet their needs and desires. As cities become more densely built and vacant land more peripheral or scarce, the retrofit of underutilised buildings, particularly through bottom-up actions such as occupation, will become an increasingly important mode of urban development. Not only are the practices of material transformation useful to understand, so too are the ways in which occupations reflect significantly more than simply survivalist strategies, but also care and meaning-making.

Keywords: Occupation, retrofit, Cape Town, South Africa, housing struggles

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Introduction

Most of the literature on informal occupations focuses on why and how residents occupy vacant land, incrementally developing shelters to meet their basic needs (Ahmad, 2010; Hidalgo et al., 2010; Lemanski & Oldfield, 2009).[1] In this literature, land occupations have, and continue to be, a dominant mode of city-making in the Global South. Occupation is driven primarily by a need for accommodation in cities gripped by perpetual housing shortages (Shatkin, 2004). Concepts such as 'peripheral urbanization' (Caldeira, 2017) and 'insurgent citizenship' (Holston, 2009) capture how bottom-up practices of land occupation have fundamentally shaped cities in the Global South, resisting market logics, which exclude the poor.

This article contributes not only to this debate on city-making and occupations but also to the limited work on the occupation and retrofitting of existing buildings. In South Africa, the occupation of buildings, as opposed to vacant land occupations, has primarily featured in the inner-city areas of Johannesburg and Durban (Hoogendoorn & Giddy, 2017; Wilhelm-Solomon & Pedersen, 2017). Referred to in the literature as hijacked buildings, bad buildings, problem buildings, and the Zulu term 'em'nyamandawo' (place of darkness), these occupations occurred following the capital (white) flight from downtown areas towards the end of apartheid (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2012; Chambers, 2019). In most cases, these informally occupied buildings are privately owned, residential buildings, abandoned by their owners and occupied by those trying to gain a foothold in the city (Dugard & Ngwenya, 2019). While the occupation of existing buildings has also taken place in Cape Town, the city centre did not experience the marked decline, which provided the ground for occupation of high-rise buildings at scale.

This article focuses on an unusual case, the Cissie Gool House (CGH) occupation. CGH is unusual because residents, who were facing eviction, occupied a semi-vacant, state-owned hospital. As such, this occupation constitutes an effort to re-appropriate, so to speak, public assets and actively reshape them to fit residential purposes. The occupation is also unusual as it occurs in Cape Town, where, despite having one of the most unaffordable property markets, so-called hijacked buildings are uncommon. Using documentary photography and interviews with residents, we reflect on how residents make homes. We argue that this occupation reflects a logic of 'retrofit city-making'. We show that, through various practices, dwellers retrofit a space, previously designed for a very different use, to meet their needs and desires. While the paper primarily deploys the concept of retrofit, we also use the concepts of repurposing and replacing.

The paper is structured in five parts (of which Part 1 is this introduction). Part 2 provides a review of the literature related to two bodies of work: occupations and retrofit infrastructure. First, we explore how occupations have been framed and understood in the Southern urban literature. Second, we explore retrofit infrastructure. The concept of retrofit, well established within the urban infrastructure debates, provides a starting point for the discussion of related concepts, such as incrementalism, adaptation, care, and meaning-making. It also provides a foundation for extending our thinking on retrofit practices to include issues related to purpose and place, themes we pick up on in the empirical sections. Part 3 outlines the research methodology. At the core, this paper is a case study. One of the unique contributions this paper makes is that its empirical basis includes both conventional qualitative research methods such as policy review and interviews, and documentary photography[2]. Part 4

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[1] Also see Cousins (2000) on why informal occupations occur in South Africa's rural areas.
[2] We do not aim here to write a methodological paper making the case for photographic methods, but rather to use photos as one mode of data collection. Papers within planning, which have used photographs in a similar way

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documents the findings. The anchor of this section is a series of images, organised around five themes. The first is *Retrofit infrastructure.* This theme refers to the practices of material improvisation that residents engage in order to connect and access water, electricity and other services necessary for daily life. The second theme is *Retrofit internal structures.* This refers to the ways in which neglected infrastructures are resuscitated, reimagined and repaired. The third theme is concerned with the *Repurposing of micro-publics.* Here we discuss the importance of solidarity and care as emergent from collective practices. The fourth theme of *Repurposing for enjoyment*, and the fifth theme of *Re-placing* speak to the ways in which residents bring meaning into the materiality of the space. They serve as a reaction to displacement and an effort to forge a sense of belonging. The paper concludes by arguing that processes and practices of occupation and retrofit are essential themes in the study of Southern cities. They are not only a survival strategy, but reflect laborious practices of material (re)configuration and meaning-making. Considered together, retrofitting and occupation foreground the malleability of apparently fixed infrastructure and the potential for new modes of generative city-(re)making.

Occupation and retrofit as modes of city-making

This section provides a review of the literature related to occupations and retrofit infrastructure.

Occupation as city-making

Within the urban literature, 'informal occupation' refers to the process of claiming and inhabiting property, such as land or buildings, by individuals or collectives without the consent of the property owner (Huchzermeyer, 2002; Mitchell, 2012). While often manifesting as an informal settlement, defined by UN-Habitat (2015) as a residential area or neighbourhood characterised by unregulated construction and insecure tenure, the concept of occupation draws attention to the process through which such settlement is initiated. This process involves physical interventions by occupiers in space, as well as the rhetorical and discursive frameworks to make sense of occupation practices (Mitchell, 2012).

Occupations form a significant part of urban development, and place-making discourses. In cities marked by colonial histories, occupations are now widely acknowledged in academic literature and in urban policy debates as fundamental forces in the construction of new spatial formations and imaginaries (Ghertner, 2011; Padawangi, Marolt & Douglass, 2014). From 'quiet encroachment' to bolder forms of spatial insurgency, occupations have shaped cities for decades, often being incorporated into city planning processes through informal settlement upgrading programmes (Bayat, 1997; Huchzermeyer, 2006).

Depending on both the nature of occupations and the state's responses to them, occupations have resulted in many different living conditions and arrangements in cities (Gouverneur, 2015). In places with progressive state responses, informal settlement upgrading programmes have regularised occupations over time, drawing them into formal planning systems and land markets (Abbott, 2002; Chenwi, 2012; Hegazy, 2016). In other cases, occupations have led to the creation and expansion of highly precarious settlements or been dismantled through often violent evictions (El-Batran & Arandel, 1998; Strauch, Takano & Hordijk, 2015).

There are some significant differences between the Northern and Southern literature on occupations. The former has focused on alter-globalisation movements such as the Occupy movements (Jacobs, 2018; Langman, 2013). Occupations have been framed as a radical

include Bigon (2020) and De Boeck & Baloji (2016). Another inspirational piece, with conceptual synergies related to questions of dispossession in South African cities, is Chari (2009).

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response to the hyper-neoliberalization and financialization of real estate in cities. Katz and Mayer (1985), for example, demonstrate how occupations not only work to fight capitalism, but also state practices, which reinforce market-led economic solutions to urban development.

Research and theorization on occupations in the Global South, in contrast, focuses on a wider range of issues, including the process of occupation (Huchzermeyer, 2002; Smart, 2001), the materiality of dwellings either constructed or claimed by occupiers (Amin & Cirolia, 2018; Meth, 2013), and the precarity experienced primarily in the form of tenure insecurity by occupiers (Durand-Lasserve, 2006; Ramanathan, 2006). This body of literature, which generally focuses on land occupations, frames occupations primarily as a survival strategy (Sihlongonyane, 2005). For example, Vaz-Jones (2016) shows how the Ithemba Farmer's land occupation in Cape Town enables access to basic livelihoods. There has been very limited work on occupations of existing buildings and the more affective nature of occupation experiences.

In both Southern and Northern scholarship, there is also a significant body of work on how occupations intersect with social mobilization (Ballard, 2015; Gillespie, 2017; Vasudevan, 2015). For example, Bayat (1997: 56), writing on the daily, non-institutionalised practice of silent encroachment as a current for socio-spatial change, argues that occupations are an 'everyday form of resistance', which enable the urban poor to individually and discretely challenge systems of oppression. This work reframes occupations as a more complex, political activity that is not just about survival or housing. This framing has been taken further by a number of scholars who argue that occupations are a form of resistance against settler colonialism, financialisation of urban spaces, and exclusionary land and housing markets as well as policies (Abellán, Sequera & Janoschka, 2012; Fields, 2015; Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Conrntassel, 2014; Watt & Minton, 2016). This literature acknowledges that, rather than being 'leaderless movements' (as has been suggested by the Occupy discourses within Northern literature) such struggles have their own endemic power dynamics, which are shaped by context and play out through the process of occupation (Huat, 2017; Sheriff, 2001).

The valorisation of occupations as a political project (as opposed to purely technical or instrumental responses to unmet housing needs), allows for nuanced and relational analyses of occupations to be developed (Aitchinson, 2011; Bhan, 2019). Several scholars have nuanced the concept of occupations, and facilitated the reframing of occupations as a series of different practices, with multiple urban outcomes, undertaken by various and power-laden actors. One of the practices, which this work touches on, is retrofitting.

Retrofit as city-making

While occupation is a central part of Southern city-making, the process of occupation is only one part of the city-shaping/making process. After occupation, people work to maintain their space and establish their place in the city. A part of this includes various forms of resistance to eviction. Another part of this relates to how people invest in occupied spaces, to make them more habitable and fulfilling, even if only temporarily.

Making occupied land and buildings into spaces for medium- to long-term habitation requires laboured investments in the material conditions of places and infrastructures. Southern scholarship on cities has documented the incremental, informal, and often sophisticated material investments that households and communities have made into their residential structures (Huchzermeyer & Misselwitz, 2016; Harrison et al., 2018; Silver, 2014). Incremental housing, linked to the informal settlement of land, has a long lineage in both scholarship and policy processes; this work has been inspired by scholars such as Turner, Burgess, De Soto and others whose work has shaped development policies globally (Adebayo, 2011; Greene &

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Rojas, 2008; Van Noorloos et al., 2019). It is not in the scope of this paper to rehash the debates on incremental housing. However, it is useful to note that this work spans many urban disciplines and has been both celebrated and critiqued.

In addition to the vast body of work on incremental and informal housing practices, new concepts have emerged to capture how infrastructure and service delivery systems are incrementally adapted, retrofitted, repaired, and extended, through bottom-up processes (Amin & Thrift, 2017; Lawhon et al., 2018). This work draws on a range of scholarship, including urban studies, geography, city planning, politics, and anthropology, valorising the practices households and communities undertake to amend the urban fabric in order to access water, energy and other infrastructural services (Jaglin, 2015). The concept of retrofit, as we use it in this paper, departs from its traditional use within engineering and construction, instead working to foreground the ways infrastructure systems are constantly reconfigured through everyday practices of people, often in conditions of duress and extreme hardship (De Boeck & Baloji, 2016; Graham & McFarlane, 2015; Pieterse, 2008). This departure – or perhaps expansion – of the more mundane uses of the term retrofit aligns closely with humanities and social science scholars who have, for over two decades, sought to challenge the monopoly that technical disciplines have had over infrastructure debates and terminologies (Amin, 2014).

In cities where the infrastructure systems, such as those for the provision of water or energy, are partial and contested, space is created for wider participation in infrastructure provision (Coutard & Rutherford, 2016; Jaglin, 2016). In the context of precarious and often poor settlements, practices of material retrofit work to fill gaps in or repair infrastructure networks and connections without which the poor would remain excluded (Amin, 2014). These practices of filling and suturing take many forms, some more permanent than others. For example, Simone (2004) discusses 'people as infrastructure', celebrating the ways people use their bodies and labour to fill the gaps in incomplete systems of provision, maintenance and repair. Silver (2014) discusses 'material improvising' in Accra, as a more permanent way to extend networked systems. Lemanski (2019) deploys the concept of 'infrastructural citizenship' to foreground the relationship between political identity and infrastructural practices in Cape Town. These pieces show how, as Howe et al. (2016: 553) point out, 'infrastructural solidity, in material and symbolic terms, is more apparent than actual'. In other words, infrastructure, and its dynamic coming into being, is deeply intertwined with questions of identity, social reproduction, and political practice; it is not solid, fixed or neutral. While cities all over the world experience infrastructural adaptability and reconfiguration, in the Global South, the everyday, people-driven, and often informal nature of retrofit both responds to, and further creates, deeply fragmented urban service delivery and housing systems.

Across much of this work, infrastructure 'coming into being' through processes of retrofit, extension, repair, and reconfiguration is viewed in relational terms – reflecting the relationships between objects, agents, and discourses of meaning-making (Amin, 2014). In this way, infrastructural arrangements and transformations contain within them a temporality, constructing material and immaterial bridges between the past, present experiences, and future possibilities (Howe et al., 2016). While some scholars are critical of the ways in which structural inequities are reproduced through practices of retrofit and extension, there is important work which examines how urban socio-spatial relations are reimagined through re-placing, that is, through the re-inscription of a building's history and identity (Lehrer, 2006). Another growing body of work considers how such processes are infused with care, solidarity, and resistance – progressive and even radical social and political practices (Lemanski, 2019; Silver, 2014). Mattern (2018) defines care as everything that we do to continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. Similarly, Millington (2019: online) draws a connection between repair and care, suggesting that '[r]epair can also be a care practice,

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especially if we understand the infrastructures that surround us to be interlinked … with broader dynamics of social reproduction'. These practices of care are driven by a shared understanding of purpose and are central to the meaningful production of places – particularly at the micro and everyday scale (Jackson, 2015). Improvisation and adaptation are pervasive features of peripheral urbanisation in South Africa, and elsewhere in the Global South (Bhan, 2019; Caldeira, 2017).

Through our case, we contribute to these discussions on Southern city-making, exposing the ways in which spaces are retrofit, repurposed, and replaced in CGH. We draw attention to the emergent and inscribed meanings awarded and show how meaning-making is inextricably bound to the material reconfiguration and use of these places (Mattern, 2018; McCann, 2002).

Methods

The research is focused on the case of CGH occupation in Cape Town, South Africa. Using the case study method allowed us to deploy a combination of conventional and creative methods. More conventional data collection methods included: conducting non-participant and participant observations at CGH since the second quarter of 2017; engaging with the occupiers and supporting NGO, Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU)[3], during their weekly Advice Assemblies; 6 in-depth interviews; and 10 less formal (i.e. unscheduled) interviews.

The creative contribution to this article is grounded in the methods of documentary photographer, Barry Christianson.[4] A key part of the research method included reviewing hundreds of images, which Christianson captured of the occupation. The visual data analysis entailed the identification of retrofitting activities and grouping those into different themes. We intentionally included this work as we are interested in knowledge production that goes beyond the confines of academia and works through different registers.

The question, which underpinned the review and selection of the photographs, was: '*How are residents in CGH shaping the space and with what purposes?*' Through the review of the images, we were able to identify a series of practices that might have been too micro and mundane to have been identified through interviews, but were apparent in the images. For the descriptions of the images, we used, with their informed consent, the occupiers' real names. It is important to note that the research participants' names, as well as the names of the majority of the occupiers, are already in the public domain, for example in court documents related to eviction proceedings, newspaper articles, and reports written by NGOs/activists about the occupation.

Understanding the CGH case requires a wider grasp of South Africa's housing and human settlements dynamics. In various capacities, the authors have been involved in tracking Cape Town's urban development and housing experiences over the past ten years (see, for example Amin & Cirolia, 2018; Cirolia, 2014; Cirolia & Scheba, 2019). For this research project in particular, the authors reviewed relevant policies, plans, and legislation, interviewed City of Cape Town and Western Cape Government officials involved in the human settlements sector, and attended workshops related to human settlements and land development.

Occupation and retrofit in Cape Town's central city

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[3] NU is an NGO, which is involved in housing and land struggles. RTC (http://reclaimthecity.org.za/) is a social movement, supported by NU.
[4] The choice to work with a photographer, and particularly Barry, reflects an effort to bring together projects, which were independently underway. The African Centre for Cities has an existing programme on occupations, of which CGH is one empirical site. Barry has, since the inception of the occupation, been photographing residents at CGH.

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Occupations have been a key component of the growth of Cape Town's built fabric since the 1940s (Bonner, 1990). As the White Paper on Land Reform notes, occupations (often referred to as 'squatting') are a 'result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices' and inadequate housing policies (Department of Land Affairs, 1997: 4). South Africa's apartheid history thus plays a central role in the informal settlement of Cape Town's urban landscape.

The pace and scale of occupations has increased since the 1980s (Sihlongonyane, 2005). Whilst many discriminatory laws and measures have been repealed, Cape Town, like South African cities more generally, bears a history marked by displacement and exclusion. Apartheid, both as a spatial and economic set of policies, built racial segregation into the fabric of all cities and drove the hyper stratification of economic outcomes across racial groups. Many post-apartheid policies have reinforced, this history. In contrast to other South African cities, Cape Town's inner-city land values have skyrocketed in the last twenty years as a result of aggressive state-led investment in Cape Town's city centre, for example through the Cape Town Partnership and other entities. Increasing land values have, in turn, resulted in market-led displacement and overcrowding (Miraftab, 2007; Pirie, 2007).

Cape Town's housing challenge

Cape Town is characterised by, among other things, a highly skewed land and housing market, which has left many households unable to access formal housing opportunities. Cape Town's housing backlog is estimated to be between 360,000 and 400,000 units (Malusi Booi, interview, November 15, 2019). Given that the household growth rate is projected to be 1.5 – 2% per annum and that only 8,000 – 10,000 units are built by both the government and the private sector annually in Cape Town, keeping up with the demand for housing has been impossible (Fischer, 2019).

Of this housing backlog, roughly 146,000 households live in 437 informal settlements across Cape Town (Ndifuna Ukwazi, 2016). Most of these informal settlements are on sites that are owned by organs of state or individuals. The housing backlog is not only made up of residents in these informal settlements, but also the many people living in overcrowded formal accommodation and 'backyards' – informal accommodation, which is provided in the backyards of formal housing. There are also growing numbers of families who have occupied vacant buildings, many of whom are undercounted in studies on housing demand.

The challenges related to housing access in South African cities, particularly Cape Town, persist despite a plethora of policies that have been developed to realise the state's legal obligation to provide [access to] adequate housing (see Government of Republic of South Africa v Grootboom [2001] and the South African Constitution 1996). These policies include the state's housing delivery programme, which includes subsidy instruments for developing new housing projects, upgrading existing informal settlements, and even providing emergency accommodation in cases of fires, floods, and evictions (Department of Human Settlements, 2004, 2009). There is a plethora of documentation on the challenges and opportunities these programmes have created (Charlton & Kihato, 2006; Cirolia et al., 2017).

Despite the existence of these tools to address housing needs, they do not function optimally, and many remain excluded. For example, for state housing projects, families must meet income-related criteria and put their name on a long list. For upgrading programmes, the settlement must be deemed 'upgradable' through a range of assessment criteria, which few settlements meet. For the emergency housing programme, qualification is less an issue. However, the temporary relocation areas people are sent to are often far from transport,

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incredibly dangerous, and poorly serviced (Cirolia, 2014; Levenson, 2018). The result is that families choose and in some cases are compelled by circumstances to fend for themselves, rather than make use of this programme. The occupation of Woodstock hospital, discussed below, is one example of Cape Town residents creating homes for themselves.

The Cissie Gool House occupation

CGH is located in what was a provincial hospital, situated in the gentrifying suburb of Woodstock. Woodstock is located one kilometre from the city centre of Cape Town. One of the few neighbourhoods that was able to resist forced removals in the 1950s, the area has maintained its racially and ethnically diverse character (Garside, 1993). During apartheid, food processing and textiles manufacturing industries were located in Woodstock, providing working class employment opportunities to people living across the metropolitan area (Whittingdale, 1973). Having undergone a significant decline in industrial activity since the 1990s, Woodstock is gentrifying as the private sector takes advantage of the area's designation as an urban development zone (UDZ) by the City of Cape Town. This designation provides a tax incentive for private developers to develop residential and commercial properties in the inner city. Consequently, the area has experienced significant increases in property prices that have been accompanied by displacement of the neighbourhood's lower income residents (Ngwenya, 2013).

In response to this market-led displacement, Reclaim the City (RTC), a social movement made up of housing activists, evictees and working-class people, occupied the abandoned Woodstock Hospital building in 2017. They renamed it Cissie Gool House after anti-apartheid activist Zainunnisa 'Cissie' Gool. At present CGH is home to over 900 people, who occupied CGH wing-by-wing; a process which occurred between 2017 and 2019. The majority of occupiers are originally from Woodstock, however, they can no longer afford the rental prices in the area. Many families, having been evicted from their previous homes, are scared as they face another threat of eviction from CGH, and the possibility of being relocated to Wolwerivier. Wolwerivier is a desolate and shoddily constructed temporary relocation area around 30 km from Woodstock, which has been proposed as the site for alternative accommodation for occupiers by the City during eviction proceedings in court. The occupiers, with the legal support from NU, have refused the offer, hoping to stay in the central suburb where most have lived their entire lives. The occupiers have made the abandoned hospital their home whilst trying to maintain community ties with former neighbours, some of whom are also now living in CGH. This is the backdrop for the everyday stories of occupiers and retrofitters, as they work to shape the city.

Empirical data on how people are retrofitting the building

In this section, we turn our attention to retrofitting, repurposing, and replacing as modes of urban practice, exploring the ways in which these distinctive practices contribute to building the city. For the purposes of this paper, retrofitting is specifically concerned with the material restructuring of external and internal infrastructures. In contrast, repurposing focuses on using the existing infrastructures and spaces, but for new purposes. Finally, replacing focuses on how place is given meaning and constructed by the residents. In examining these practices, drawing on the photographic method as a route in, we identify five emergent themes that are discussed in greater detail below.

Retrofit infrastructure: Connecting the building outside infrastructure systems

CGH residents have had to build infrastructural connections between CGH and the wider

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urban infrastructure network. These connections are essential for ensuring that the building can serve as people's homes. As a hospital, the building was connected to the City of Cape Town's water supply system and electricity networks. However, the downscaling of the hospital to a day centre in 1993, left much of the building unused and disconnected from the urban infrastructure network. When the Woodstock hospital was closed in 2018, many of the pipes and cords were stolen or simply fell apart.

Since occupying the building, residents have made their own connections to urban infrastructures through material improvisations (Silver, 2014) – retrofits intended to reconnect the building and transform CGH for residential use. In one of the images an orange water pipe is hanging between two sections of the hospital and an electricity chord is hanging out of the window. In another image, a resident, Uncle Freddy, is fixing a leak in a sink after connecting a water pipe from another section of the hospital. Figures 1 and 2 reveal practices of retrofitting points of connection, improvising to fill gaps and access water, electricity and other services needed in their everyday lives (Baptista, 2019; Howe et. al., 2016). They also suggest a wider connection to the city, as residents challenge uneven urban infrastructural provisioning, by tapping into the grid.

Figure 1. *An orange water pipe and electricity chord connect CGH to the city networks*

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Figure 2. *Uncle Freddy fixes a leak in a sink after connecting a water pipe*

Retrofit internal structures: Reshaping the internal spaces for residential use

Occupiers have not simply retrofit CGH to connect to the wider city, they are making internal changes to the building to better accommodate their needs and desires. While part of CGH served as a nursing home, the rest of the building was not structured for residential purposes. As a hospital, many spaces were used for temporary stays, with hospital beds being separated by thin veils of fabric for privacy. Some spaces were not used for the living at all, for example, the room which was used to prepare the bodies of those who had passed. To transform the various hospital spaces to cater for residential use, significant material retrofitting and incremental consolidation has been undertaken. This has primarily entailed carving out individual living quarters by erecting more permanent divides between spaces. These investments represent real material and financial investments made by people to secure their space within the building (Huchzermeyer & Misselwitz, 2016; Silver, 2014). Many factors have shaped the nature and form of these internal divisions, including the time of settlement, the households' individual needs, and the design constraints and opportunities that each of the original spaces pose.

The images show two striking cases of internal retrofit. In the first image, a former operating theatre has been converted into a laundry room. In the second image, Faghmeeda Ling and Nazley Salie, who are part of CGH's leadership team, examine a new section of the building that is being prepared for a tenant to move in, ensuring that the wall is constructed properly.
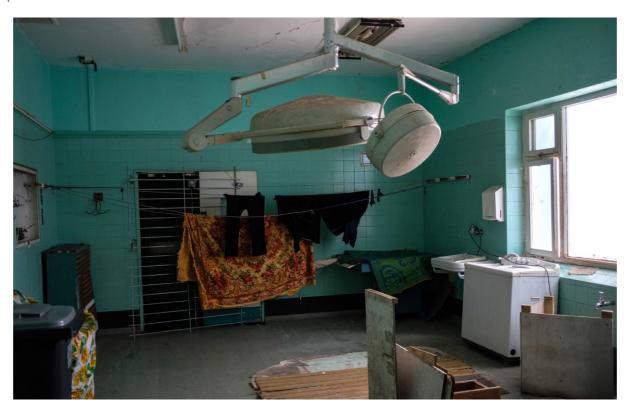
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Figure 3. *A former operating theatre has been converted into a laundry room*

Figure 4. *Members of the leadership team inspect a new section, which has been built for rental*

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The leadership team, which is elected by occupiers annually, is responsible for ensuring that the house rules are followed by all. They organise meetings, and work to ensure that CGH is safe, and secure for residents, especially women and children. To this end, the leadership team occasionally hosts fundraisers to raise money for building maintenance and improvement purposes. Together, these images show a complex negotiation between malleability and durability – a careful balance between building for the dynamic present and planning for a more durable future. This temporality and futurological orientation (Howe et al. 2016) are extant in each of the images.

Repurposing micro-publics: Using the hall for new purposes

Another important practice, similar to retrofit, but without requiring changes to the material structure, is repurposing. In CGH, spaces are repurposed in ways that reflect the residents' current and emergent needs. One of the best examples is the central hall. Prior to occupation, the central hall served as a nurses' dining room. This hall has remained materially intact, today serving a myriad of new purposes. Weddings, yoga classes that are open to the public, community feeding schemes, public meetings, and church services are conducted in the central hall. In many ways, the hall is repurposed almost daily to serve the residents' evolving needs. The hall also operates as a public space, largely for the community, but also for the wider neighbourhood. As control over the building is maintained by RTC activists, the hall is not fully a 'public space'. Instead, it is a micro-public (Amin & Cirolia, 2017), a small-scale effort to build something communal and shared, even if there are constraints to access.

The focus on repurposing, and purpose more generally, allows us to also explore issues related to solidarity and care. In this sense, these reflect purposeful practices which foreground collective, rather than individual survival. The images powerfully capture this relationship between material places, social reproduction, and care as affect in the world. The image of Boeta Naziem and his wife preparing a huge pot of food or residents, as they do every Friday using donated food items, is particularly illustrative. The other image shows collective child-care and communal activities, namely yoga taking place in the hall. While recognizing the purposeful practices associated with these micro-publics, we are also cautious not to overly romanticise the care, which goes into the repurposing of these spaces (Mattern, 2018; Millington, 2019). Care work is often the work of women. Furthermore, in South Africa women of colour tend to perform care roles at home and as paid labour, as nannies and domestic workers, in other's homes in the city. This is the case for women in the occupation, resulting in them carrying multiple care burdens simultaneously. However, we do think that the construction of micro-publics and purposeful practice (Jackson, 2015) point to a more progressive potential for the work of care, opening up different types of social relations.

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Figure 5. Boeta Naziem and his wife prepare a huge pot of food for their fellow residents

Figure 6. A yoga session in the central hall

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Repurposing for enjoyment

The practices of repurposing are not only about functional activities like feeding or childcare, but also joy and recreation. In a context where much of the documented work on occupations focuses on survivalist strategies, enduring violence, and the precarity that marks everyday life for occupiers, many of the images also show occupiers repurposing spaces simply to enjoy them. In this sense, people are not reduced to their pain and precarity; they experience a full range of human emotions. The enjoyment of urban life takes many forms. These include raising and training pigeons for racing (figure 8), coming together as family and friends to celebrate special moments (such as Eid, Christmas, birthdays), and play. For example, in figure 7 Adam Nibizi's niece is playing with peeled off paint while he fixes the wall in the other room. The image captures an unexpected moment of enjoyment and meaning-making (Mattern, 2018; McCann, 2002). The images in this section show a wide range of recreational and enjoyable activities, many of which are uniquely cultural in their specificity and deeply relatable in their humanity.

Figure 7. *Adam Nibizi's niece plays with peeled off paint*

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Figure 8. *Snake is busy building an enclosure for two racing pigeons*

Re-placing

As part of the processes of understanding 'place', which is coming into being through the CGH occupation and retrofit, residents often compare the spaces where they lived before to those they are creating within CGH. Most people living in CGH moved there after being evicted from their homes in Woodstock. In this sense, they were forcibly displaced. While residents do miss the homes and spaces they left, residents also seem to be involved in a process of what we have termed 're-placing'. We see this as an act of translation, a challenge to their experiences of displacement through making spaces, which they perceive to be better and more meaningful than those they left behind (Ghertner, 2011). The images shown here speak to practices guided by vision and a future orientation, a claiming of the possible in the now and a challenge to normalised exclusions.

Here the residents claim a home through mundane acts. These acts are aimed at improvement and ascent – making the space better than what they left. At the same time, they are reflective of gestures that show a refusal to be 'kept in place' or 'pushed out of place' (Lemanski, 2019; Silver, 2014). Instead through beautifully decorating the entrances to their homes, celebrating acts of natural beauty (such as the view of Table Mountain), and creating shops in their homes, residents are challenging their market-led displacement through acts of replacement. They are creating not only new spaces, but new places, which are improved and provide better material and symbolic conditions (Lehrer, 2006). They are actively claiming their role as city-makers, repairers, carers, transformers and transgressors.
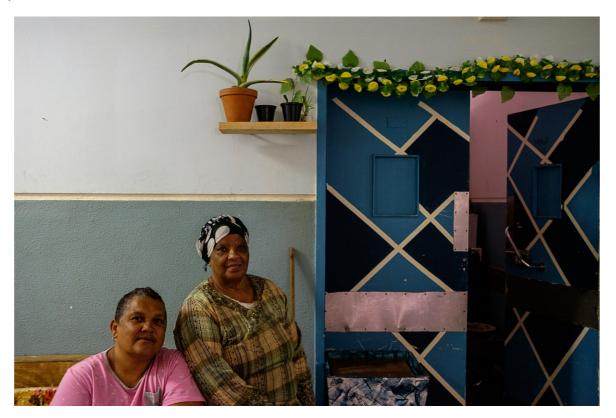
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Figure 9. Aunty Mackie (left) and her friend sit outside her home

Figure 10. Fagmeeda Ling hangs laundry to dry on her balcony

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Conclusion

As cities become more densely built and vacant land more peripheral and scarce, the retrofit of underutilised buildings, particularly through bottom-up actions such as occupations, will become an increasingly important mode of urban development not only in Cape Town but throughout the Global South. It is now, more than ever, imperative that we think about retrofit, repurposing, and re-placing as central to the Southern urban project.

We have shown that residents' practices of occupation and retrofit include several dimensions. First, there are practices, which are distinctly material in nature. They rework infrastructure systems externally, for example through connecting to infrastructure and internally, for example through partitioning space (Amin & Cirolia, 2018; Meth, 2013). However, not all processes require material changes to the space. As we show, people are also involved in repurposing spaces, infusing fixed spaces with new everyday activities. These activities are not only about collective survival as Sihongonyane (2005) and Vaz-Jones (2016) argue, but also about recreation, joy, care, and meaning-making, both in the building's micro-publics and in the private spaces of peoples' homes. Therefore, there is a need for us to acknowledge the influence of the affective dimensions of occupier's experiences on the choice not only to participate in an occupation but also on the choices regarding how the occupied building is retrofit to ensure it meets occupiers' needs. Finally, and most importantly, these practices reflect a 're-placing' – the making of new places, infused with meaning, ambition, and desire. Through practices of replacing, residents build bridges between their past (displacement), the present (experiences of collective precarity), and future (ambitions and desires) (Howe et. al, 2016; Mattern, 2018). This temporality is present materially as neglected infrastructures are resuscitated, reimagined and repaired. These material interventions and reconfigurations also act symbolically as a gesture to alternative futures and spatial imaginaries (Ghertner, 2011; Padawangi, Marolt & Douglass, 2014), as adaptation, care, solidarity, and improvisation open-up to the recognition of possibility.

This theoretical contribution was only possible because of methodological creativity and generosity. In reflecting on working with a photographer and incorporating arts-based methods into data collection, we were concerned about the need to deploy alternative methods that support collaborative engagement beyond the confines of academia. While not necessarily Southern in nature, the use of non-conventional tools provides ample room to consider a resistance to classical modes of inequality by enabling intertextual analysis, and open-up the city in new ways. Hence, we centralised the photographic method to enable an ethnographic attentiveness to urban sense-making. The medium we have used for this project allows for these everyday practices to be foregrounded and understood in richer and more creative ways.

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