Spatial Justice as Viewed from Gauteng, South Africa: Professionals, Planning, Possibilities

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Is it possible to contribute in durable ways to social justice through the construction and organisation of space? What are the possibilities of achieving “more” through planning and architecture? The reflections in this paper arise from engagement with questions of spatial difference and change in the Île-de-France region and from continuing engagement with the politics of social justice in South Africa, aspects of which have become more apparent through the very recent political history of the country. These experiences form the basis of reflection stimulated by the colloquium to reflect on what confronts professionals, “planners” of cities in the English language sense particularly or perhaps more helpfully urbanists in the French sense, in the deepening challenge of confronting urban injustice. By urban injustice I mean to begin with, decisions, distributions and forms of access which are deeply unequal and probably unfair, to use simple terms. While not coterminous with inequality, urban justice is inserted into that set of questions. Many forms of inequality, most with a spatial expression but not all showing the same geography – life and health; freedom and respect; material and symbolic resources¹ – come to mind. Architects and planners often claim and indeed believe themselves to be challenging urban injustice. What does experience reveal?

Many urban injustices interact with geographies and thus have expression as spatial injustices. The challenge of urban justice may be deepening in the face of massive suburbanisation in Johannesburg and Rio de Janeiro, or it may be deepening in the face of seemingly intractable alienations and divisions across seeming lines of language, class, colour and more in Paris and Cape Town. The settings in which professionals attempt to make ethical contributions to realising greater social justice do not seem to simplify and reflecting on what makes such efforts so hard seems a necessary exer-

cise to someone who has spent thirty years teaching and working with a sense of attempting urban change.

Therefore the paper which follows considers “what can be done” in accomplishing greater (spatial) justice (in cities). The paper draws on ideas, research and images from France, South Africa and some other places. It is not a comparative paper although it is set in the context of efforts to understand contemporary urbanism across diverse places. It is rather a contribution which draws on stories from different cities and juxtaposes them with one another. It does this because I continue to be convinced that social justice is cosmopolitan... it is not something which will somehow be achieved in one place whilst lacking terribly in others. The ties binding cities worlds apart emerge more clearly if more confusingly as the globe tightens.

The paper starts in the northeastern areas of the Paris region and traverses the city towards the southwest. The vertiginous separation between aspects of the social landscape of Ile-de-France reflects stark contrasts in the practices of at least one common actor whose work nonetheless connects those sections. That professional’s practices lead on to Cape Town with its startling contrasts and depressing injustices. A further branch of the same person’s actions (and impact) lead on to Johannesburg and its burgeoning inequalities. Here we are in territory usually associated with the infamy of apartheid – illustrating the close connection between social injustice and spatial systems, often represented as a special case of what David Harvey described. Meanings of social and spatial justice, seemingly so clearly delineated in the closing days of formal apartheid, become increasingly elusive as the stories unfold. Thus the paper in part reinforces the aptness of Dikeç’s dialectic between spatiality of injustice and injustice of spatiality.

The Gauteng city region, with around 10 million people living within commuting distance of Johannesburg’s centre, perhaps as much as any


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illustrates how vital and yet seemingly impossible it is to address these spatialities. It is my halting attempts to grasp the dynamics and possibilities of change in social inequality and related practices. I have come to think, though, that whatever my own and other scholarly limitations, the problem for action is simply that it remains profoundly difficult to address justice, inequality, space and social change. The paper shows some ways in which they thread their tangled way together, viewed from work and residence in Gauteng, and in special relation to professional activities in the urban sphere. The question of what planning – urban planning, spatial planning – can do to contribute to the more “just city” becomes subject to only modest thoughts in the thicket of difficulties faced by citizens and professionals in the early twenty first century. In the end these difficulties lead us back to a city region renowned for its citizen struggles against radical injustices – 1789, 1848, 1871, 1944, 1968 and even 2009 – a city in which, yet, possibilities of just citizenship seemingly remain elusive: Paris.

Roissy Express

I have to admit that when I land at Aéroport Charles de Gaulle and take the RER B into Paris, I sometimes wait for a second faster train to depart, so as to travel without stopping in places such as Villepinte and Drancy on the way to and beyond the city. As represented by François Maspero and Anaïk Frantz, the sector of Île-de-France traversed several times every hour by the “Roissy Express” reveals even from the windows of the train the pain of spatial distinction which haunts this great urban region, just as it does every city in the world.

Drancy is among the poignant zones through which the train passes6. Lost in its midst, the Cité du Square de la Liberation (“shut and locked”) is surrounded by the U shape of the Cité de la Muette – revealing under the gallery on the right side of the Square, several marble plaques on the wall. One very briefly tells the inquisitive that between 1941 and 1944 this space became the site of the deportation camp at which 100000 men, women and children (mostly Jewish) were interned and sent on to the concentration camps where almost all of them died. The buildings, celebrated at their inception in the mid 1930s, are not on the site: they are the site. Maspero evokes the seamlessness with which these machines for living, modern apartment buildings built in hopes of addressing terrible shelter problems,

could be converted from public housing, to police barracks, to concentration camp, to detention centre for collaborators after liberation, and back to public housing.

The question in my mind as I pause in Drancy is not the same as that which animates Mustafa Dikeç. Whilst he seeks to construct a geography and logic of “resistance behind the revolts”, my exploration of Drancy and Sarcelles is more about trying to grasp some elements of the diversity of conditions and approaches to life displayed and practised by those I see living in these huge areas – where most of France lives today, in a sense.

*People are living there*, as Athol Fugard wrote of the dying days of Braamfontein in its original terraced house form in Johannesburg – an idea readily transposed to the inner sections of other South African cities where the play was performed… but I digest too quickly to another series of urban islands far south of Île-de-France. In Drancy and its neighbours of course there is a culture of resistance to something not too easily defined, in the midst of teenage boredom and the grinding tectonics of different ways of being across genders, languages, beliefs, ideas and ways of engaging people. People are living here, in very many ways. Ways which have remade uses of space and do so daily. Space is malleable and dramatically so, something which a pause at La Muette amply reminds. That there are many people living there who struggle, who face unfairness and much worse in the course of daily life, is also evident. It is banal to note that the conditions of life in Drancy bear not very easy comparison with those on the other side of the city, where RER B emerges towards Gentilly, Arcueil and Bourg-la-Reine. There are certainly signs of similar histories in some of these places. But by the time the train passes Sceaux and stops at Antony, a very strong sense of different spaces and different opportunities of life surely impress themselves on most passengers (a diversity of space well described by Vieillard-Baron).

Indeed, the passengers are very seldom the same people as those seen in the carriages passing Drancy and Le Bourget to the north east. South and west of Sceaux is distinctly another side of Paris (underneath Paris if the idea that most of Africa is under the Sahara is transposed: but perhaps it is


8. Fugard Athol, People are living there: a play in two acts, Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1970.

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places like Drancy which resemble more the underside of the city region). Yet of course they are tightly linked, and not only by the RER B. At Antony – of course a site of immense Corbusian cités – one may nonetheless observe quite distinct environments. A short walk from the station and one arrives at a monument to one of the architects of La Muette: the contemporary art museum at Maison Eugene Beaudoin. This is a house, perhaps more a mansion compared with the narrow windowed flats of La Muette, which memorializes the very large contribution of this, among many, modernist architects of Paris. Associating Beaudoin (and Lods) with the buildings of La Muette would be less intuitive, perhaps, had the traverse across the city started here in Antony rather than in the midst of the famous ensemble of La Muette. Contemplating the practices of professionals – architects, urbanists, planners, and others – who directly placed their marks on the Paris of the middle third of the twentieth century – leads to some difficulty in apprehending their roles in contributing to what superficially appears to be the stark history of spatial injustices which reveal themselves across the map of the region. Yet we remember the welcome and celebration of modern public housing through those decades, indeed something still celebrated in cities such as Berlin10. The legacies of modernism and forms of justice and injustice in the city are most certainly varied.

Obviously I do not intend here to explore in detail the social segregations of Paris… which would require us to refer to vast literatures and the enormous complexities of social fragmentation and more which they entail11. Some are puzzled, or even brutal in their observations on the city. Fred Khumalo’s columns in the Sunday Times (Johannesburg) during 2008 gently point to the disparities of Paris as puzzle. Another South African observer, Breyten Breytenbach describes how “The Arabs either drowned when the police threw them into the Seine during street demonstrations or disappeared into high-rising no man’s land ‘zones’ in suburban cités and their old haunts became a much sought-after area for the yuppies and the rich fils à papa12.” Rather I am suggesting nothing more than some additional ways of thinking about space to read the world (penser l’espace pour lire


and in this case, the world of social injustice. I suggest that additional ways of thinking may come from diverse ways of seeing what is happening in the continual reproduction of segregation and reintegration, something which flows through every hour of every day as people move from shops to streets to homes to spaces of communal engagement. The exceedingly interwoven patterns of movement which open and conceal connections indicate a need for “a critical perspective on ethnic and racial segregation [to which one could add gender, and class questions – AM] [which] requires us to acknowledge the gaps and silences in the data produced and the complexity, and often value-laden nature, of our interpretations”.

Such a critical perspective belies anything simplistic about addressing social justice in situations of “significant” ethnic, race, gender and class distinction. The history of state concentration on addressing spatial and other forms of urban injustice along contours of identifying crisis in the banlieue and focussing tremendous effort on all manner of “interventions” to attack unequal opportunity – to take one example, the ZEP (Zone d’éducation prioritaire) – has certainly identified the problem, but perhaps even massively failed to change it, at least as the political economy of the post 1973 period in many cities has exacerbated nascent inequalities and injustices. Urban and spatial justice do not come easily from the histories we see from the RER B. It is easy to see that in the Paris region, at least after a few trips on RER B; perhaps more difficult to acknowledge in South Africa, in which at first sight, and second, and beyond, the realities of daily life persistently involve observation of distinction, discrimination, unfairness and probably injustice tied up with race and ethnicity. There the foregrounding of race and patterns of residence demarcated by race, so generally persistent as Christopher (in many works) observes meticulously, despite some areas of change, is surely the most common descriptor of urban space. Surely in such circumstances of the obviousness of racial oppression and injustice, and where space and race have been so welded, progress towards greater justice can be accomplished by breaking some of these links, by actions to shift older boundaries and to alter locations.


Foreshore in the foreground

Yet the stories of ethnic oppression and radical reform, which are so tightly plaited at La Muette in Drancy, are linked too in South Africa. The very same Beaudoin, architect of the Cité at La Muette, found himself in South Africa in the later years of the Second World War. Whilst La Muette served as deportation camp, radical change in the spaces of Cape Town were in the making, and those provided openings for professionals to expound theory and practice anew. In Cape Town Beaudoin’s reforming vision and his skill at the new, even dramatic, space making project, came to bear on the creation of new spaces for a city which – it was hoped – would rise to meet the challenges of the new post-war world. Retained by the city government of the day, Beaudoin sketched a hypermodern future for the new space of Cape Town – the foreshore, in the foreground of many aerial views of Cape Town’s trademark beauties, literally reclaimed from the sea and offering a *tabula rasa* to such urbanists.

But Cape Town of course was a city almost three hundred years old and sticking the new foreshore onto the city was conceptualized and designed fully in relation to existing parts of the city. Along with – or better, in competition with – another modernist, Leslie Thornton White (who had arrived from London before the war), Professor of Architecture at the University of Cape Town, competing authorities jostling for control over the potentially rich returns from all this new land, appointed Beaudoin. Both produced grand plans for the reconstruction of central Cape Town, the differences between which revolved around different conceptions of the role of the railways and positioning of railway facilities, as well as the accrual of the spoils. Fierce dispute between the main actors was resolved by placing the competing plans in the hands of a Joint Technical Committee in 1945. That committee had little difficulty in adopting the City Council’s plans for wholesale demolition in District Six, and new roads (the progenitors of the Eastern Boulevard which connects most of the population of Cape Town to the city centre, and more). By releasing District Six for commercial and industrial, as well as more salubrious residential uses, to the new foreshore – envisioned, according to Naomi Barnett16, as the recreation of inner Cape Town. What survived into the compromise plan was primarily the grand conception proposed by Beaudoin. It entailed pushing poorer tenants and other less financially endowed citizens out of the central districts. Through the sixties and seventies Cape Town was reshaped as the

Cape Flats – the south east quarter of the city became the home to an overwhelming majority of its population, tied to the city centre on roads and railways realised over the same period. Much of what took place reflected the contradictions of modernist planning, as a certain zeal to create better design conditions for modern living – recognisable from twenties Moscow to thirties Paris to seventies Mitchell’s Plain (SE Cape Town) – intertwined with particularly oppressive notions of ordering the city and the perpetual economic squeeze on accomplishing real improvement for the poor. In the dying days of apartheid, the last major elements of Cape Town’s present space economy arrived with Khayelitsha, still further to the south-east and now home to something like a third of the citizens.

All this change in Cape Town had its roots in elements of space created 60 or more years ago, which have persisted and in the recent past been accentuated. Breyten Breytenbach writes of the city now in words not especially measured.

The lines of economic and racial iniquity were still there for all to see, carved starkly in the living flesh of communities. Mile upon mile of “township”… informal settlements, shanty towns, squatter camps – tumbled over the dunes and crawled from the scraggly undergrowth and teetered on the rubbish tips and overed the land… this satellite universe of tin and cardboard… Close to the business heart of the city, bordered by golf courses and verdant parks, were the affluent suburbs where the rich Whites – and increasingly also Blacks, Coloureds and Indians fleeing upcountry upheavals and insecurity – lived in houses set in gardens shaded by trees and surrounded by protecting walls… Around the sweep of mountain along edges of the sea you found apartment buildings of the affluent, those who jogged and strolled wearing baseball caps and outsize Greta Garbo hiding glasses as they walked their dogs…

One can hardly exaggerate how better life is for many in South Africa on many levels: at least in the largest cities, democracy has brought citizenship with degrees of respect for person and voice for millions – degrees of freedom indeed. Yet the promise of “the rainbow nation of God” named by Desmond Tutu is more elusive than expected, and certainly the “rainbow city” has yet to replace the city of colonialism, segregation, apartheid, and indeed rapacious capitalism. An opening of public discourse over recent

months, a perverse effect of machinations in dominant party politics, has pulled back the rug to some extent, revealing or representing what the bumps underneath may be made of. Of course global anxiety so visible in parts of Europe and elsewhere, also permeates South African discourse (with its own tones of electricity shortages, violent crime and more), and much rhetoric is to be discounted. But sober editorials in every issue of, for example, the Sunday Times are nowadays addressing “where we are” with renewed inspiration. The terrible contest between the desire to claim progress and the need to excavate failure if injustice is to be confronted threads its way through such texts.

And so, in Cape Town, with its tangled and ugly politics, where it is perhaps less possible than elsewhere to name spades openly, some yet muffled efforts to engage what it is which is frustrating realisation of the dream begin to emerge. Yet it is hard for locals to distance themselves from the anger surrounding Delft Symphony, and N2 Gateway...

Sometimes it is those from without who catalyse the process. In the city improvement districts established over the past five years on the edge and on the foreshore, abutting the hugely successful older harbour areas known as the Waterfront, is a realisation of something prefigured in the forties. How can this be in the land of the resounding defeat of apartheid 15 to 20 years ago? Dubresson offers a radical hypothesis derived from that which Heribert Adam, Van Zyl Slabbert and Kogila Moodley propounded a decade ago: that the new elite consciously or otherwise constructs new position through neo-liberalism, black empowerment and/or corruption – becoming an aristocracy of liberation. Dubresson suggests that such instruments as city improvement districts could be portrayed as a vehicle for this process... with consequences that actions against the injustices of the society are muted. Here is something like a “urbanité selective” in the phrase of Thierry Paquot.

Freeways, suburbs, city regions

Such selectiveness is hardly unique to Cape Town. Further north, and back in South Africa in the 1950s, the apparently ebullient Beaudoin contributed another grand spatial conceptualisation. Sketching in charcoal on large sheets of paper (copies preserved in a collection at Wits University), Eugene Beaudoin helped to lay out the freeways which today remain the backbone of Johannesburg’s central spatial structure and movement patterns. The most poignant feature of which is... the daily pilgrimage homewards from the northern employment areas to Soweto and other tracts of the southwest. For this is another city divided, less reunited than reproducing a series of exclusions and injustices on a vigorous scale, despite the dedicated intentions of a vigorous democratic local government. Assuming that Joburg’s capacities in this regard are well known, from the burgeoning recent literature, let us pass on to some observations on this case23.

The sense which inspired the colloquium emerges very strongly in Johannesburg as Claire Benit has indicated24. That is, spatial justice is not interrogated, seems obvious, is simply counterposed against spatial injustice. “La notion même de justice spatiale est restée peu questionnée tant elle s’est imposée comme une apparente évidence, souvent définie, d’ailleurs, à partir de la dénonciation des injustices spatiales25”. The formation of single local (“metro”) government for Joburg or Cape Town seems to have dealt with the problem of territorial fragmentation… but not to have dealt with continued processes generating new inequalities and new processes generating continued inequalities.


Gentrification continues... even in central Joburg, with sales of new apartments in converted office buildings reaching prices unimaginable not long ago. “The rich are mobile, the poor are moved... an official drive to pretty up our cities by pushing out the poor. It’s called ‘urban renewal’.” The suburbs seem archetypal, challenging even Ed Soja’s description of suburbanism as reaching its peaks in Los Angeles.

The highways sketched boldly in 1955 by Beaudoin provided one of the keys to the suburbanization of this city. Through the 1960s the creation of American-style suburban municipalities ensured that the trend accelerated, and the “completion” of a national freeway system through the seventies helped to cement the attractiveness of suburban investment location, with swooping highways achieving all manner of temporary goals (making money for the then party faithful, providing rapid military access like Eisenhower’s “Interstate and Defence” highway system in the USA, and for a while moving the traffic along). Given the massive spatial inequalities of Johannesburg with its apartheid forms of segregation, which went together with huge disparities in public investment and maintenance spending across different areas, it was inevitable that the idea of “one city, one tax base” would form the elementary basis of an approach to local government for the post-apartheid era. The optimism of the early nineties led many to believe in the transforming potential of this rearrangement as the suburban municipalities (Bedfordview, Edenvale, Sandton, Randburg, Midrand) were eliminated and mostly incorporated into Joburg or its neighbour, Ekurhuleni.

Yet investment continues to pour into the new and outlandish built environments of far-flung suburban Johannesburg perhaps best described by Ivan Vladislovic in his representations of the city. Breytenbach, whose observations and expressions evoke so much elsewhere, unfortunately does not turn his pen to Joburg except to run from it.) Unified local govern-


ment, so hard to achieve in the USA\textsuperscript{30} and many other places, came to Joburg: its prospect of addressing spatialities of injustice yet fail to be fulfilled despite tarring roads in Soweto and many other accomplishments of the local government which I in a small way helped to bring into being and which I have supported in many voluntary and voting ways.

It turns out that it is not easy to shift obvious spatial problems, something which may have been obvious but takes time to understand. Apartheid with its rather elaborate spatial apparatuses (for example the detailed apparatuses of implementation of the Group Areas Act\textsuperscript{31}) constructed an obviously spatialised oppression. Surely, therefore, instruments of spatial planning could be applied to its undoing? Such was a frequent cry of the early years post apartheid. I remember well an official coming out of the old regime and enthusiastically embracing the new in 1996, saying in a meeting in Gauteng’s Department of Development Planning on how to craft new land use management: “We used land planning to install apartheid, we can just use similar instruments to undo it” and she was far from alone in this view. What does this ignore? Presumably the flowing together of the broader social system and state action towards greater polarization and greater injustice? This would certainly be the position of Abahlali in Durban\textsuperscript{32} – but its demand to remove capitalism in order to achieve social justice, something which it shares with the Anti-Privatisation Forum in Johannesburg, seems unlikely to be achieved in the near future, despite the gestures of Purcell\textsuperscript{33} and many others in the literatures. What else can be done? Slogans demanding “Build no social segregation” point in interesting directions but as recent “integrated human settlements” seem to show – like Cosmo City in the suburbs of Johannesburg – not easy to sustain.

Finally on Joburg: its setting is not isolated. For manageability reasons perhaps one tries to confine an account of its history to something like its present boundaries\textsuperscript{34}. But for many tens of kilometers beyond, it is of course surrounded by South Africa’s major zone of urbanism – Gauteng.

\textsuperscript{30} But see \textit{Economist}, 8 March 2008.


\textsuperscript{34} E. g. Beavon Keith, \textit{Johannesburg: the Making and Shaping of the City}, op. cit.
Since the State of the Cities report a few years ago emerged from the government-linked SA Cities Network, it has again been fashionable to talk of this as a single city region – an idea which comes to us from around 1950 if not before, but which remains contested. Certainly as Dikeç has it: “what is at issue is the larger city region” and not simply parts of it however much attention they draw. Social and spatial justice in Gauteng – is this the scale at which we need to think? Does it help, in revealing any processes or dynamics which operate in ways to pervert and defeat well meaning attempts to redress injustice and inequality? I think the answer is yes, but I do not think that elaborating that answer will come from compiling more statistics and tracking more closely a huge range of indicators compiled at regional or even detailed subregional scale, however important the data may be for drawing the picture descriptively. It is in better understanding of how people travelling from Hammanskraal in the northern reaches of Tshwane to work in Alberton, and trying to cope with extended families spread from Naledi to Tsakane, linked to places like Nebo and Nqutu… in how people understand and experience the cleavages and unities of this vast “global city region” that some prospects seem to exist for identifying the things which are susceptible to immediate more equal, more just, social action. What is clear is that amongst other lacks is a conceptualization of the city region in these senses, something to be worked on in times to come.

How to grasp, to explain, to offer ways of moving on?

Now, my tales are told, and the questions of the colloquium remain. What difference does justice make to space, what difference does space make to justice? Are such differences consistent across scales, or haphazard, or does scale itself make a difference? If the challenge is to do something – under exceedingly difficult circumstances, apparently – we could merely conclude that it seems that the chances of a socially just city are negligible. How to move beyond such depressing conclusions, if at all?

Most of the conceptions offered towards why we are not hitting social and spatial injustice head on are at large scale. Shall we blame globalization? To

some extent that is what I do in earlier work\textsuperscript{37}. But what else is going on? We can take the line that the “strong affiliation of the post-apartheid government to a neo-liberal economic policy, low economic growth, pervasive poverty, high levels of unemployment, and the crisis engendered by the HIV/AIDS epidemic\textsuperscript{38}” are responsible, and perhaps they are.

Another approach might be to see what has made possible some of the more interesting new developments where people have “got on with it” – and pulled down resources – to create quite new forms of space and insertion into the city – in ways which seem to sustain themselves – and which perhaps are indicating possibilities of greater “spatial justice”. The example of the Johannesburg Housing Company and its Brickfields development in Newtown comes to mind. This is a creatively designed space of hundreds of new apartments which create opportunity for “ordinary people” – employed but not well paid, with regular incomes but not with real savings, to reside in the very centre of Johannesburg again. It is a complex which is partly supported by public funds and which demands regular rental payment from its residents. It is most certainly in a place which opens possibilities of participation in urban life and which offers much less expensive movement around the city by virtue of its location, than can possibly be the case for the large majority stuck out towards the periphery in Orange Farm and Diepsloot, or for that matter stuck in traffic congestion on the freeway system. It bears much more investigation, which has to address its contributions to individual lives as well as the iron rod needed to prevent problems such as those that have crept in to some other cases (like coop versions in Burghersdorp nearby); and the possibility that its expense cannot be replicated really widely.

Such examples tend to reinforce a sense of contingency which can be tackled rather than grand theory which can only most distantly be applied. This is why Rasmussen criticizes Soja for “sweeping theoretical gestures, accompanied by a litany of academic description that leave us in a city that appears to be a figment of the L.A. school’s intellectual imagination\textsuperscript{39}”. She prefers Abu-Lughod’s account of “an urban politics – deeply embedded in


\textsuperscript{38} Morris Alan, “Decade of Post-Apartheid: Is the City in South Africa Being Remade?”, \textit{op. cit.}

globalized processes – that struggles with the inability of empirical and historical narrative to capture the ‘essence’ of the city”.

Without wishing to comment on the validity of this specific observation, all too often policy portrayal of Gauteng appears to me to remain in the realm of “sweeping gesture”. Authors originating from less spatially charged disciplines than geography and urban planning often have things to say which help to break the ice. For example, Rengert notes: “Spatial variation in crime rates generally has been attributed to differences in culture, economic status, and the social organization of communities. Rarely have policies and practices of criminal justice professionals been examined as causes of this variation”. The spotlight moves towards the practices of professionals if we can build on such observations.

After all, what is it which we are trying to figure? Something which the simple phrase “spatial justice” may even tend to conceal, since it is the complexity of the dialectic as Dikeç insists across his work, which needs complex action. For me that implies complex concept of practice and indeed complex professional practice. But is such achievable? “How then, can we better exercise [the] right to the city? But whose rights and whose city? Could we not construct a socially just city? But what is social justice? Is justice simply whatever the ruling class wants it to be?” It appears to me that “an active right to make the city different, to shape it more in accord with our heart’s desire, and to re-make ourselves thereby in a different image” is an attractive, even exciting prospect: but the pragmatist gets the better of me, and I want to see what urban planning can do to contribute, now.

Planning and spatiality of justice, injustices of spatiality

Since planners plan, they claim that their local, regional or national spatial plans are crucial for achieving spatial equity. Certainly creating “mental visions” at whatever scales is part of the work of planning. I would go so

43. Ibid.
far as to say that urban planning has at times constituted one of the key means of attempting the pursuit of spatial justice. The idea that achievement of social goals depends on achieving greater spatial justice has held such sway in several contexts that some have even argued that urban planning and the search for spatial justice are equivalent. But others argue that they are almost mutually exclusive, since the results of urban planning are frequently quite different from explicit goals and intentions. As Erminia Maricato put it in Joburg in 2006: “There is a very huge gap between rhetoric and action45”.

In South Africa it is claimed that the legacy of apartheid makes the search for spatial justice the focus of any planning activity46. We have seen how presently powerful patterns of suburbanisation of business activity and middle class residence, and location of new housing projects aimed at poorer citizens in peripheral urban situations has tended to deepen rather than alleviate the legacy of apartheid and there is a widespread search for ways of (1) achieving progress towards spatial justice and (2) reducing the negative environmental impacts associated with the sprawling forms of urban development in evidence. What is it that stands between planning and achievement? And this is not a South African but a global quest, surely. Cardoso and Breda-Vázquez argue that the tensions of modernism in Portuguese planning undermine the theoretical capacity of practices to achieve socially just territories47. Valuable as this analysis is, for me the question is not merely one of conceptions of method and process in planning which have such distinctly modernist roots, but the “real” practices of professionals in contemporary situations which require interrogation. To try to go beyond the images of planning so effectively painted by Susan Fainstein, it is not merely the roles of planners as mediators, the physical pictures of a desirable planned city they paint, or even the attempt to inject equity into planning48. It is not only that normative theories of planning face chal-

lenges in African urban context or for that matter in Île-de-France’s vast complexity and diversity. It is not only the central assumptions of normative theory which seem inadequate.

Pieterse claims that “there is an urgent need to reinvigorate civil society in these cities, to encourage radical democracy, economic resilience, social resistance and environmental sustainability folded into the everyday concerns of marginalised people”. That path is actually one of optimism about (state based) planning and its potential for social and spatial justice as long as planners can listen. A much more disturbing idea comes from thinking that there are systemic defeats of intention and an intrinsic corruption of intent on the path to accomplishment. It is unfortunately the antithesis of the optimistic view, which could be illustrated like this: “All it needs is visionary planning authorities guided by utopian images of a clean, safe and just city, and well-designed, appropriate policies to direct Cairo’s steps into this direction. All it needs, moreover, is citizens who actively take part in the molding of the city’s shape…” This optimistic view is exactly what we had thought in Johannesburg and Cape Town, exactly what some propound in Paris. Yet when the conditions are achieved, the realization eludes. Criticism is stifled: politically linked officials may ice continued participation in discussion of reasonably informed but undisciplined commentators, researchers, consultants and others, some of whom are effectively constructively dismissed from employment and others simply lose access — I am contemplating how to write about my own experience and observation of these things, not easy to do.

Presently my thinking is provoked by the simple observations from Roissy Express on the massive amounts of time and professional energy invested in urban policy planning and discussion. “It’s crazy how many meetings there have been in recent years to reflect on the problems of the suburbs”. The effort seems to fail on the “Everyday poverty that’s rising, rising, and just goes on rising without bothering whether it’s in Paris or outside”. It seems


50. Pieterse Edgar, City Futures: Confronting the Crisis of Urban Development, op. cit.


53. Maspero François, Roissy Express, op. cit.
that despite frequent citation of Lefèbvre, “consciousness of the city and of urban reality is dulled\textsuperscript{54}” as the meetings grind on.

The contrast between self-initiated organizations and their apparent relative lack of corruption – burial societies being a classic, superb example – with the intrinsic corruption of state based work is a cause for pondering\textsuperscript{55}. Perhaps the emphasis, in South Africa, could fall more on “how to develop the local state rather than how it can be developmental\textsuperscript{56}”. I am suggesting that if planning is to contribute towards spatial justice, we have to address the inadequacy of any form of local state machinery to create a neutral political environment while development projects (driven by national and international funds, with lots of billboards and speeches at meetings claiming credit for the same) are implemented – governance in other words is ineffectual at precisely this conjuncture. Just possibly this is rooted in a form of governance which requires “more concern and respect” for the office of the president than for the “office of the citizen”\textsuperscript{57}. Huchzermeyer, Bähre, Mde, Khanyane and Staniland\textsuperscript{58} offer to my reading (whatever the authors intended) more detailed analyses of how the hierarchical context, deference to power, prioritisation of party position, associated clientelism and nepotism, as well as a failure to challenge the consequences of top line personnel and personal advancement policies and politics, are combining


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to create elements of an understanding of the environment in which planning, plan, environment and action interact in ways which defeat the ends of spatial justice. Whilst political competitors focus on allegations (and in some cases evidence) of straightforward corruption, the social anthropology of power and relationships within and around local government seem more significant in generally frustrating achievement of greater justice.

Is this simply a normal environment? Do Maspero’s notes of incredulity on how he became an expert after Roissy Express – yet another input into a vast machine of urban policy and planning reproducing, ignoring or missing spatial injustice – indicate that South African city planning is catching up fast? And how to grapple with this type of system without grand gesture, in the quest for something different, if not merely romantic? At the risk of encouraging more talk, but in common with other authors, I propose that more scholarly engagement with questions of why planning (and its professional relatives) struggles to grapple with spatial injustice, would be greatly encouraged by events succeeding the provocative symposium at which these thoughts were first presented.

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