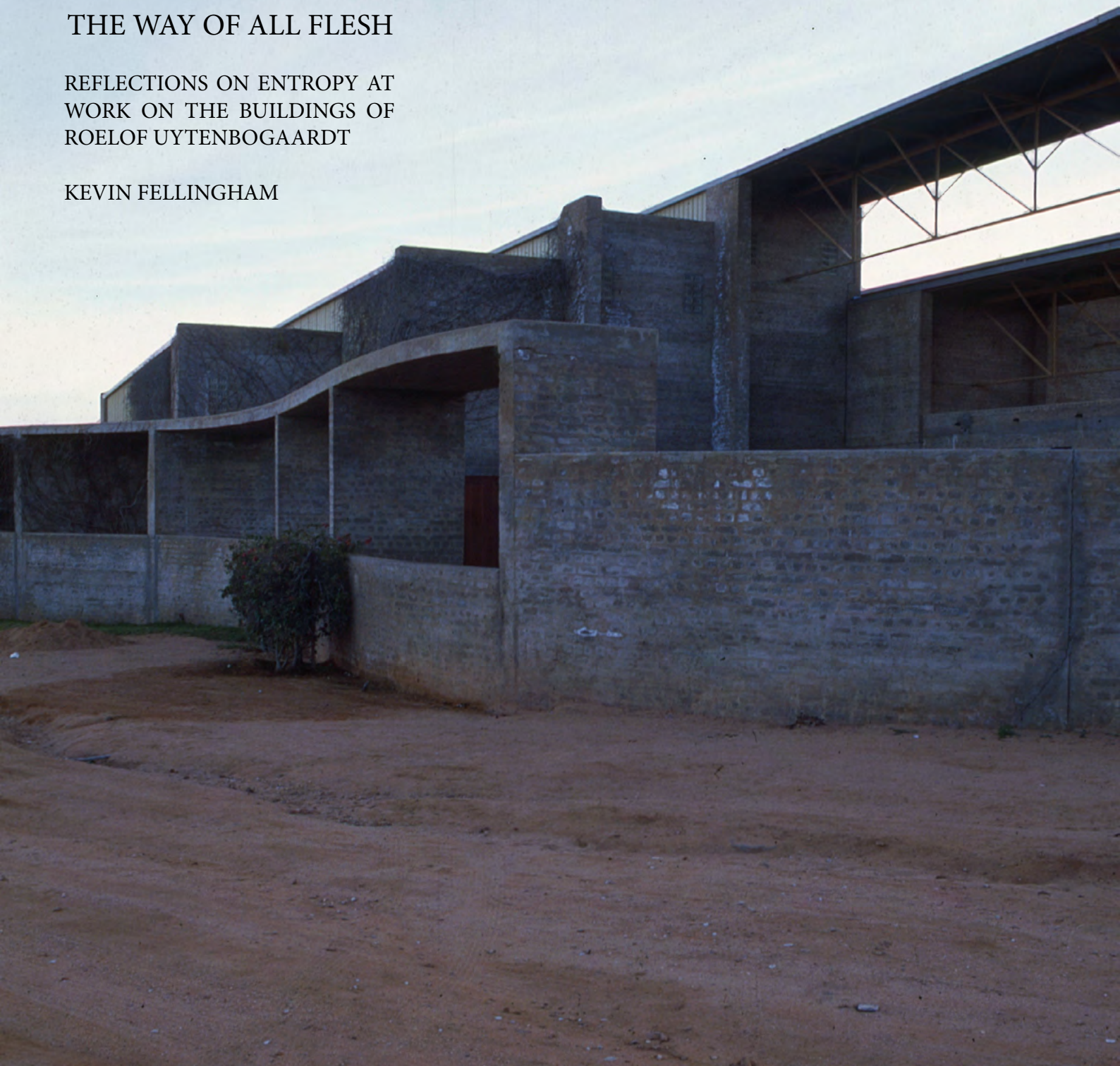


THE WAY OF ALL FLESH

REFLECTIONS ON ENTROPY AT
WORK ON THE BUILDINGS OF
ROELOF UYTENBOGAARDT

KEVIN FELLINGHAM



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On the day that the photos of Springfield terrace were taken, Roelof Uytendogaardt put me in touch with Piet Louw who gave me an invaluable collection of photocopies of Uytendogaardt's work, a sort of unpublished Oeuvre Incomplete.

The title was borrowed from a film by Adam Curtis about the unacknowledged and unpermitted proliferation of the genetic material of Henrietta Lacks throughout the research community. That title was itself borrowed from Samuel Butler's multi-generational novel from 1903. The ultimate source is however a misquotation of a biblical Verse in which David said to Solomon, "I am about to go the way of all earth. Be strong therefore..."

Thanks to Dr Ranald Lawrence of Cambridge Architectural Press, and Nicoletta Michaletos for editing both images and text and the design and production of the book.

Thanks too to the University of Cape Town for the sabbatical leave, which enabled me to reflect on the place of architecture in the world rather than its place within the University.

Finally, thank you to Winnie Sze for curatorial advice and much else besides.

Instead of causing us to remember the past like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future. Instead of being made of natural materials, such as marble, granite: plastic, chrome, and electric light. They are not built for the ages, but rather against the ages. They are involved in a systematic reduction of time down to fractions of seconds, rather than in representing the long spaces of centuries. Both past and future are placed into an objective present. This kind of time has little or no space; it is stationary and without movement, it is going nowhere, it is anti-Newtonian, as well as being instant, and is against the wheels of the time-clock.

- Robert Smithson, *Entropy and the New Monuments* (1966)



WHEN THEY WERE YOUNG

Just the other day, whilst dead-filing projects, I unearthed a binder of old photographs, taken perhaps 25 years ago, when I was the age that my students are now. Amongst the photographs were several sleeves of unmounted slides of Roelof Uytenbogaardt, whose buildings taken when they, too, were young.

Time has not treated the buildings well well, nor for that matter has critical opinion or the public opinion been entirely favourable. What leaps out from the images, however, is their astonishing power and beauty and hope. Of course, the buildings are not aware of these attributes.

Buildings have no subjectivity; they are not alive. Or, perhaps in a way they are? Are bones alive, or seashells, or our teeth or the visible surface of our skins? All of these structures and surfaces are laid down by living things to provide support and protection, to keep water in or out as required. In a sense, buildings form the skeletons and skins of collective bodies. As collections of people rather than collections of cells, they work together toward some mutual advantage. So when a building is loved, or hated, desired or despised, it is not just the calcified matter that is being judged, but also the beings that made it, the reasons for its coming into being, the life which it is meant to shelter and support.

By the provincial standards of the Cape, Uytenbogaardt, whose work was difficult and unfamiliar. His buildings do not look like what the people, believed buildings to look like, which is to say the way that the buildings were built in the past, familiar and apparently permanent. This prejudice against the new, or the different, or the difficult is handed down through the generations, perhaps some of it is natural or genetic, but mostly it is cultural, memetic. „ÄúDont touch that, it, whose dirty. Don't pick that up, you don't know what it is. Don't put that in your mouth, you don't know where it, whose been., Äù

the nature of Uytenbogaardt, whose oeuvre also changed with time, as he worked through various influences and with various partners; as he came to terms with the failures of the buildings to work as imagined, the failure of the public to give up their prejudices against unfamiliar beauty, and the failure of the construction industry and wider economy to maintain old skills or develop new ones.

Opposite: The Hout Bay Library, designed by Uytenbogaardt and Rozendal in 1986.

The Last House

His last house remains much as it once was. It is still owned by his family, still loved by them and by others who knew the architect as a stand-in for his absent presence. In the interests of transparency, I must say that I met Roelof only once, and so I will not try to read his personality into the work. But, this house or this personal village rather, is nestled in the vegetation, but still standing proud on the hill, remains a touchstone. Its many influences flicker a little below the surface, and I would argue that it has had a very deep influence on the buildings of Cape Town, for good and unfortunately for ill, still 25 years after its completion and nearly 20 years after the death of Uytendogaardt, and 22 years after the death of Norbert Rozendal, his partner in practice, and the person responsible for bringing to the later work a delicate and engaging exuberance which somehow completed the orchestration of Uytendogaardts powerful spatial compositions.

The work by teachers and students of the UCT School of Architecture and Planning that was derived stylistically from Uytendogaardt and Rozen-dal,Äôs work, post-mortem, seemed to lack the spatial rigour, tectonic in-vention and experiential delight of their prototypes. This suggests that it is not their particular style of buildings that is of essential value, but rather, that it was the particular expression of two deep intelligences engaged in a shared pursuit which gives this prematurely late work its power. This is not a unique problem. The trivialities of the New York 5, say, in comparison to the work of Le Corbusier presents a globally recognisable example. Or perhaps, consider what becomes of the language of Zaha Hadid,Äôs work in the Southern Sub-urbs of Cape Town: it is not the language that is of value, rather it becomes valuable in the way in which it is used, or to paraphrase Ludwig Wittgenstein, the meaning comes from the use. I have no photographs of the house, and there is no need for them, it is still alive.

The University of Cape Town Sports Hall

The UCT sports hall was designed constructed, in partnership with Ian Macaskill, between 1969 and 1977. According to Heinrich Kammeyer, who worked on the project as a year-out student, the only books allowed in the office were Le Corbusier,Äôs Oeuvre Complete. When questioned about his (almost) complete adoption of the language, Uytendogaardt apparently re-plied by saying that it is a language available to us, it is capable of saying anything the needs to be said, and has been refined over time, thus making it pointless to waste one,Äôs time trying to invent a language of one,Äôs own. The gestation of the building corresponds with the heroic period of Neo Corbusianism. Although being fashionable is not necessarily a merit in and of itself, it is worth noting that Richard Meier,Äôs similarly formed but differently constructed essays in the language places this local the work not far behind what was at the time one of the international vanguards of archi-tectural exploration.

Right: University of Cape Town Sports Centre, designed by Uytendogaardt and Macaskill in 1977.



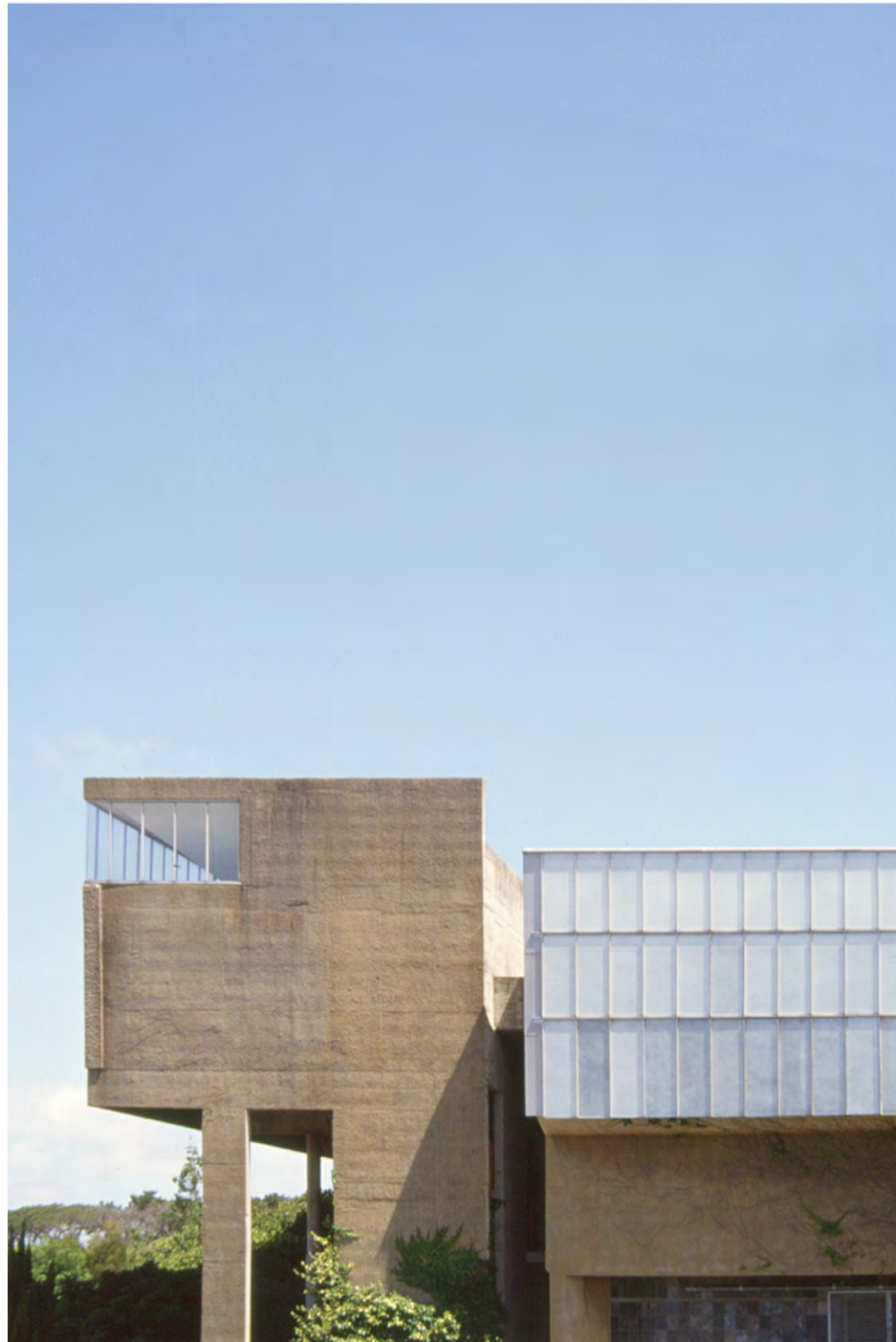


Left: University of Cape Town Sports Centre

On the other hand, the integration of the building with the topography and its image of building as landscape, 'Ài clad in rippling slate and planted with trees, whilst learning from Aalto, 'Ài seems to have been prescient in the extreme. I would argue that it is in the relationship to landscape that his originality lay, in particular to topography and the movement of the sun; in his transposition of models taken from Le Corbusier, Khan, Aalto; and in later years, his transposition of vernacular building traditions, whose transformation of the source material produced, not a pidgin, but a hybrid language. Since he was fully capable of the most sophisticated use of the various languages in modern architecture, his was not an entirely autonomous language. The work is often close to pastiche, which is to say the creation of a new work in the manner of another (past work?). However, this is never a copy; there is a restless reassembly of fragments drawn from many sources. (The Welkom church, for example, reprises Wright, 'Às Unity Temple in the vocabulary of a brutalism somewhere between Khan and James Stirling.)

Elements of these other sources can be read into the Uytendogaardt, 'Às sports hall, but one can also sense a strong family resemblance to a work of his that is not a building at all: the Garden of Remembrance in Seaforth. The memorial and the sports facility share the gestalt of a path rising up a slope. There is an unmodified terrain to one side and sequences of similar but different rectangular places, spaced apart by ribs of circulation to the other. At Simonstown a single slate-clad cylinder anchors the composition; a sort of locus of souls, pegging the geometry in place. The sheets of black stone are raised from the ground to screen off part of the horizon and hold a space in which no rest is offered, only a flowing movement and a focus on the mountainscape of the Cape. These are tragic spaces, both the sports hall and the memorial. One holds the remains of the dead; the other a more quotidian tragedy of a building left to decay, 'Ài with any repairs made to keep it working leaving further evidence of reduced financial means, reduced architectural sensitivity, and reduced craftsmanship, as the slowly disintegrating university struggles to maintain its historical fabric.

Carefully placed Mediterranean trees occur in both the works. In Seaforth there are cedars, at UCT, there are cypresses standing in clusters just like the rearrange monuments in the cemetery. and others project above the undulating black slate, or so they did until it was revealed that there was a flaw in the cladding detail, and the beautiful black skin was flayed to reveal a crudely cast skeleton, which was slathered over with a layer of protective slurry a few years later, and left like the bones of a long dead dinosaur unearthed at the edge of campus. The (now) alien trees suggest an complex relationship to place, they are from elsewhere but they seem to belong, standing comfortably amongst the fynbos, suggestive of tally, or greece, both as geographical places, but also as places of antiquity. Giovanni Vio, 'Às monograph on Uytendogaardt takes as its title, 'ÀúTimeless/Senza Tempo, 'Àù and this indeed summarises both the aspiration of the work- a timeless way of building, a phrase coined by Christopher Alexander as the title of a book much read at UCT in the recent past. There is indeed timelessness in the work, but there is also temporality, or even temporariness- far from becoming permanences, monuments, a part of collective memory, much of Uytendogaardts work is being undone by time.



The building still serves its original purpose, and still has a strong visual presence. But its skin was not functionally necessary, and so it is unlikely that it will ever be replaced. And so the image of building as a raised contour has been lost. Instead, what remains is a hard brutality, not of the architect, but of making. The building will, no doubt, continue to slowly degrade as the acid rain and the sea air eats away at the concrete from the inside, taking even the bones the way of all flesh.

Above: The approach to University of Cape Town, Sports Centre.

Left: The figural quality of the Sports Centre's form. Next spread: Sports centre building as a series of raised contours





Architects are prone to think of buildings as a remedy against death. This is only slightly more delusional than the belief that buildings are able to transform society, or if they are more radical, that the refusal to make buildings can transform society. Buildings have no agency, they are too to be picked up like stones, used for a task and discarded when they become a burden. And so it is with Uytenbogaardts work, the Werdmuller lies in limbo, passed by by the triumph of car culture and the interiorised fantasy of shopping as paradise, as escape form the city. It is not difficult to see that its complexity, its openness, its honesty, its unadorned materiality, its aspiration to a rich urban life, its specificity and carefulness can be cast as ugliness and a recipe for failure, because in our society, those attributes are understood not to be aspirational but to be negative.

Left: Interior photograph of the University of Cape Town Sports Centre. Right: the ghost of Villa Savoye keeping an eye on the rugby practice equipment







This comes to the crux of the argument-if buildings are the skin and bones of a body politic, a collective body made up of the individuals who in being brought together constitute a society, then buildings designed with this intent cannot succeed if there is no society. Buildings are not the medium by which now shape society, if they ever were. Society is shaped by other media, the shapeless, placeless, temporal, transient and hectoring talking heads which tell us how we should be, who we should hate, and why we should avoid sharing public spaces with them. That is the marketplace, the agora, the theatre, the Odeon, the stoa, the community centre, the stadium, the tree under which the elders meet.

Institutions are complex hybrids of purpose, place and people. Without a shared purpose, there is no need for places in which to gather to carry out that shared purpose. Without people buildings remain empty shells, subject to entropy as are all things, but lacking the care by which buildings are sustained. The power of architecture in this relationship is ambivalent-buildings need to be useful-fit for purpose, but they can also give form to the experience of use, and in so doing give

form to the memory of use, which is essential to the durability, the extended, collective life of an institution. But there presence alone is not enough to bring an institution into being, the world is littered with buildings meant to give rise to communal or cultural values which stand empty or underused - no amount of intelligence or goodwill on the part of the architect can carry out the alchemy of turning sign into substance - The Meaning Comes from the Use.

What then is the function of form? That which is formless cannot be remembered, cannot mean, cannot become a symbol, can have no value other than what it is being used for in the moment. Once used it is mentally discarded, leaving no residue.

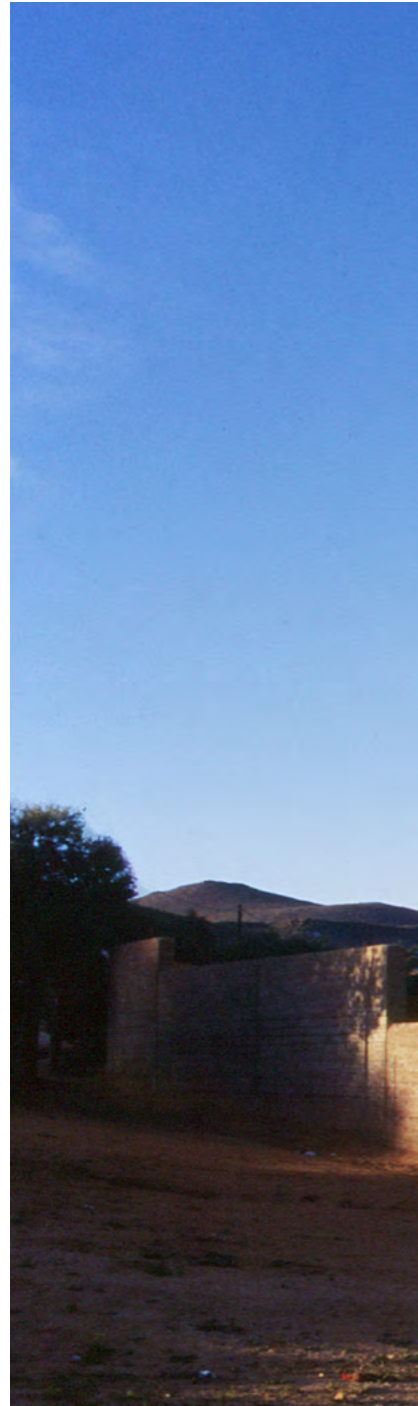
Previous spread: The Werdmuller Centre, designed by Uytendogaardt in 1973. Left, right and following spread: The Werdmuller

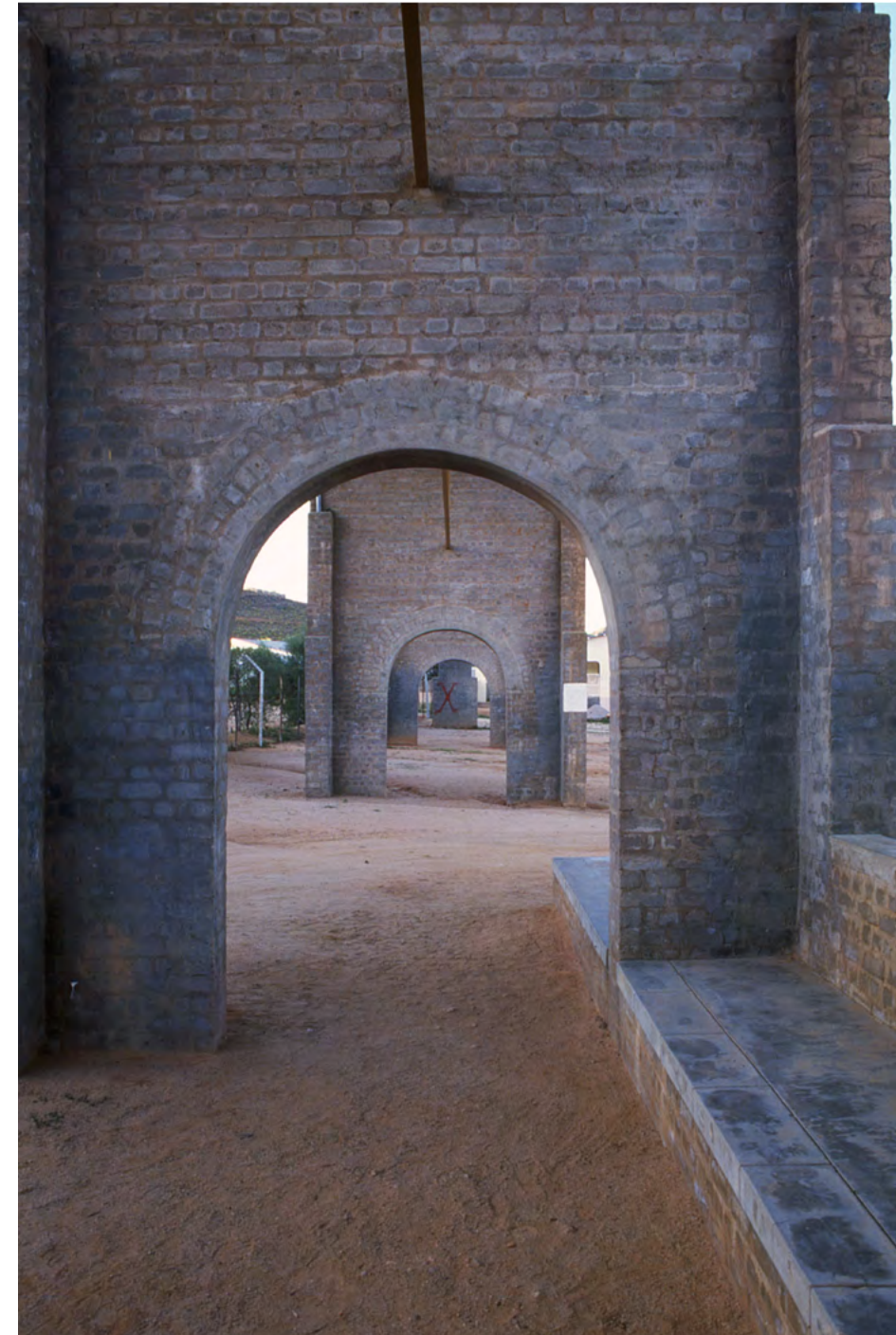




What makes Steinkops community centre so tragic is that it has a truly memorable form, it is to my mind the most beautiful building in South Africa, it is placed with precision against the hill behind the town, The shadows it casts on itself and on the ground, are there in the drawings. Also there in the drawings are a pool, a library, a clinic, a creche, and pepper trees shading a space. In reality, not even the trees were planted. The building was never taken to heart by the community for which it was meant to form the centre. Perhaps it is because it is at the edge, that it cost too much to build, or to run, that in a place where it seldom rains, the caretaker said to me ,*„Ú Die dak is n dam.* *„Ù My first exposure to the building was in a lecture by a sociologist in my memory noted that the building was beautiful, that it referenced Khan, and then set about berating the architect for failing to solve the problems of a poor community, in a culturally marginal*

Right: Steinkopf Community Centre, designed by Uytendogaardt and Macaskill in 1980.





area, during a period of deep political injustice which was established to entrench failure, through the design of a building. This of course appeared self evident, but was seen to be evidence of some other sort of failure-the failure of an architect to change society and to change the members of society though the construction of a building because the architect was not good enough at understanding the needs of the people. Perhaps the people didn't need a building, or not then, or not as much as they needed things a building simply cannot supply.

Perhaps it shouldn't have been built, then there would be nothing to discuss, which for those who hate architecture would not be a positive result, because they need things to hate, special things to hate, to prove that they would do it better if they were prepared to suffer the moral compromise which comes





Right: Steinkopf Community Centre. A photograph of the tuckshop, which is at the back of the building.

from trying to build in the world in which humanity actually exists.

I have in my possession a set of photocopies which I bound into a book whilst studying at MIT, a sort of incomplete Oeuvre Complete. It contains two very simple line drawings of Proposals for the Urban design of Hout Bay. It is full of references to Alvaar Aaltos town centre plans for the remoter parts of Finland, = Senaijoki, Rovaniemi Viipuri, In which the finish master conjured forth urbanity from very little building, from the stuff which usually constitutes suburbia.

It sets out a strategy for parking cars, for planting trees and for the placement of building edges along and adjacent to the main road as it winds through towards Chapmans peak drive. What was already there is drawn with the same tentative line as what was being proposed, and so it is difficult to work out just what the influence on reality the drawing had as opposed to the influence reality had on the drawing. But if one overlays the drawing on what is there now, its predictive power was immense. Certainly the commercial buildings are not spectacular, but they are good/ordinary. But the public realm is coherent, the parking under the trees is spacious but discrete, and the three buildings by Uytendogaardt and Rosendal range from the good to the masterful. A mixed use commercial building, simple in its ma-



Right: the Hout Bay Post Office, designed by Uytendogaardt and Rosendal in 1986.
Next spread: Hout Bay Public Library





teriality incorporates a glass roofed walkway, its screen wall pulled away from and above the block of the building to give scale, proportion and image to an unpromising programme. But it also does something a little magical, the sun strikes though the glass onto the back of the wall and bounces into the south facing windows of the offices behind, so where darkness is expected there is light. Appended to this block is a delicate little public building, once again with the most banal of programmes, a post office hall and its attendant banks of boxes, cutting at a diagonal out towards the street and the landscape. It had until recently a beautiful bespoke gutter forming a cornice to the roof. Rather than being repaired it has been replaced with the sort of rubbish which we import in the untwists of de-industrialisation. Evidently no-one attended to its installation, it is asked, awry and prone to being struck by vehicles.

Artists make small worlds of individual order, and so do architects who care about the world, and about people. Those worlds, although physically present are a sort of a fiction, a version of reality which has been made up to have an internal coherency which the rest of the world lacks. This fictive order runs through this corner of Hout Bay from the largest scale to the smaller, from the mountains to the mounting brackets and came about through the care and effort of the architects and those who commissioned them. As time passes though, the place becomes cruder, the gutter, the glossies of the mall, the grass, unweeded, unsown, untended. Entropy works almost invisibly, in the Words of Neil Young, Rust Never Sleeps. Nature undone the work of architects, however true they are to the nature of materials, and without constant attention to the originating intentions of a place everywhere becomes the same, a steady state of generic brutality, the same here as everywhere else, trending like the universe as a whole to an equal distribution of energy and material and potential matter each particle annihilated by its opposite.

Left: Approach to Hout Bay Public Library
Next spread, left: Hout Bay Public Library showing the well-maintained secret garden, and further on the yet unbuilt mountain slopes of Hou Bay. Next spread, right: The Hout Bay library interior.





I remember visiting the Library on the day these images were taken out of time. The librarian did two things which stuck in my mind. She lay on the floor in order to lock, or unlock the glass pivot door between the library and the hallway, as its beautiful, thin fram allowed a rebate for the lock only in the bottom stile of the door. The other memory, a little unreliable, is that when seeing that I was photographing the corner bench which looked out, unfenced, onto the street, re-arrnged the cushions and fetched a different vase, one she thought more whiting to posterity, to set the scene for the photograph.



The first action was necessitated by the sort of error made by young architects who don't yet know that at some point kneeling down to open a latch will become impossible. The second wasn't necessary at all, it was an act of love for the building in which she had the pleasure of working. On returning recently, a hole has been hacked through the door and a chain of the sort used to lock a shed has been installed and there are no flowers. The structure has sagged a little but is still beautiful, still annoyingly complicated and still far too derivative of Aalto to fully satisfy.

Left: Pedestrian approach to the Hout Bay Library. Above:



Left: The University of the Western Cape Sports Stadium, designed by Uytendogaardt and Macaskill in 1981.

Once again the language is borrowed, not superficially, as the way the enclosure builds up from the first rich of the paving grid, to the corner window by the fire, drawing one towards, beyond , into an back through the building is more powerfully handle here than it is by Aalto, because it is Corbusian being translated into the cape Vernacular through the medium of aalto, and beyond that to I believe, vincent Scully and perhaps Martienssens understanding of the Greek way of making space by movement in relation to topography. It is a scholarly work, the work of teachers and readers and so it is fitting that it is a library, a place where one can take a book, as Khan said , to the light.

The sports hall at the University of the Western Cape was built before the Library , but follows it in this sequence because it has recently been altered so as to secure its future. It is a looming presence within the flatness of the landscape, gesturing out towards the Mountains beyond Stellenbosch, turning its back on a campus characterised by architectural trivialities of many different sorts perpetrated by a variety academically minded architects. The building had become unloved, maybe it always was, perhaps someone could



write a paper about it and draw down on the subsidy for knowledge creation of an academic sort. But really it is of no interest

It had also developed the usual modernist leaks, corruptions and delaminations, the fruit of what after a century or more are still experimental building methods. Into this standoff between various estranged, and now departed professors, Jo Noero, himself no stranger to the difficulties of building for a social order which does not yet, and perhaps never will, exist. With some modesty, his practice added new gymnasium and ancillary accommodation on top of an existing slab, making a series of spaces between in-



Left and right: The University of the Western Cape Sports Stadium. Next spread: the University of the Western Cape: the building in its campus context





Left: Springfield Terrace, designed by Uytendogaardt and Rozendal in 1991.



side and out, not in the language of the building, but in the particular stylised and didactic manner of assemblage which is the signature of the Architect, an architect not ignorant of history, but not interested in quoting anyone but himself.

How long this new addition will remain popular, or how well it will work cannot be known, nor for that matter whether the complex, new or old will remain viable, ut for the moment it presents a sort of hope, that buildings can be repaired or reworked rather than replaced when it transpires that past visions of the future were not entirely accurate.

The Last Houses

I et Roelof only once, and very briefly when a colleague who was working on a fictional project for a Land Claims Court on a site in District Six organised an interview to discuss the Masterplan then being developed for the area. We met in the project office, towards the city end of Main Road in

Left and Right: Springfield Terrace



Woodstock, and it was thus that we were pointed in the direction of the photocopied corpus of drawings and the then newly constructed housing at Springfield Terrace. As Architecture they are pleasant enough buildings, owing much, and prophetically so, to the Houses at Bettys Bay and Kommetjie, with almost a, but not all, of the charm and vigour removed. They are rational pieces of new urbanism, built just as the term was being promoted by its American instigators. The buildings stand with their backs towards the backs of others, with their fronts facing one another in conversation. They have windows in their side gables to discourage loitering against blank walls, little bits of ornamental fenestration and unnecessary changes in material of the sort which people believe are necessary to make an interesting facade. There are stairs which are to be found in Council housing in the Cape flats and in the work of Alvaro Siza. There are bracketed eaves, projecting not quite far enough to actually require the brackets- they are essentially a fake version of those at the library which enable deep shadow and express the fearsome wind of the Cape. The rear facades are graphically patterned with stepped motifs of the sort by then no longer fashionable, and exposed plumbing stacks which are the Legacy of the British Empires. In short they are ok. But they are special, they are owner occupied, well maintained, desirable enough to be under pressure from gentrification of the more adventurous sort. Like the housing at Belhar, which I was not to visit until recently, they are, or appear to be enormously successful examples of the sort of housing which is so difficult to get right, they make the half houses of Aravena and his many imitators seem really rather media savvy then satisfactory. They are masterful, or whatever term might express that level of accomplishment when a less loaded term is agreed upon.



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The Way of All Flesh exhibits photographs of South African architect Roelof Uytendogaardt's buildings, all taken in the early 1990s by Kevin Fellingham on 35mm slide film. In part this is an act of appreciation for the built legacy that Uytendogaardt contributed to architecture in South Africa; Uytendogaardt is recognised and respected as a teacher and practitioner working within the late modernist idiom that was then global fashion. The images also record the shift to a humbler and more intricate language which was to become and still remains enormously and often unconsciously influential on the architecture of the Cape through the long tenure of his students on the teaching staff at UCT.

It is also a reflection on a larger force at play, one which concerns all architecture equally, and that is entropy. These photographs can be considered as images that preserve Uytendogaardt's work at their approximate half-life, between newly built ideal and boarded-up decrepitude. The photographs define a moment, and in so doing also suggest a narrative: the buildings' initial idealism expressed through his powerful manipulation of form, the buildings settling into everyday use as recorded in the photographs, and then of course the buildings as we know them today in their various states of appropriation and neglect. Entropy is formless, it is a process, and when it works on built form it presents the unavoidable fact of future, which is ruin and eventual absence.

It is in these terms that the author has approached the legacy of Uytendogaardt, through an exhibition of once forgotten photographs and an accompanying reflective text. Since around 2010, with the pending demolition of one of Uytendogaardt's most contested buildings, the Werdmuller Centre, the heritage of Uytendogaardt and his architectural contribution has been questioned and debated – sometimes placed on a pedestal, sometimes demonised – and in a way this work seeks to contribute to that dialogue. It respects the ambition of the architect's desire build fragments of a better world and acknowledges the resistance to that ambition offered by a complex and ever shifting reality. It hopes to contribute quietly to the on-going conversation in local discourse about the social agency of built form.

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