

with integrity, how architecture is ‘proved’? Or is it seen as self-proving?

**TG:** The measure of that proving is not always pretty, not aesthetically so. For example, if you look at the benches in Soweto and downtown Joburg, they are bastardised, messed up. But it achieved in allowing people to occupy the street. Why are people always reduced to being commuters through space, not occupiers of it? Where can you just spend some time and take the space in for a while? To layer other uses into the future of these things is something we’re interested in. But it’s not easy to photograph. You probably won’t see it in a magazine. This business of ‘proving architecture’ is a messy business.

**What is the ‘proof’?**

**TG:** In the Yeoville Recreation Centre, the proof was initially in the built success but more in the rereading of the use – the whole thing is now fenced off. In the past, there were diagonal shortcuts through which you could almost move freely. They’re all gone, and there’s a turnstile there. So it’s not necessarily about proving the architecture, but taking what is learnt from the life of it back to the studio. In this way, the proving of architecture is a perpetual thing. You have to put these artefacts out there as way of testing and finding the proof for the next move, the next project.

**So you’re saying it can’t be proven in the instance of a single work; that the proof emerges through an accumulation of findings through a continuous series of tests?**

**HD:** This talks very much to the idea of process as the result. In the creative process, the design is part of the methodology.

**Could we suggest a shift in the making of architecture here? Moving from handover on completion to handover for completion? Do you take the stance that realising architecture is simply part of the bigger process and, once ‘finished’, will change? Is the essence of this position that architecture is only finished once it is changed through its use?**

**TG:** This is about having an obsession with ‘less of how something looks’ (presents itself) versus how something works. It has an operative dimension. It needs to do XYZ, and whatever shape or form it does that in is the measure of proof for us.

**HD:** It’s the physics behind it all – why things work the way they do.

**TG:** This is the proving of architecture that we’re looking to do; we’ve got all these insights...

**Are you saying that demonstrating how the architecture adapts through routine use and inhabitation proves it to be a good project?**

**HD:** We are saying that the workings are more important than appearance, but we’re interested in the ambiguity – research and participation, while still having a strong belief in good design. The one might be dominant in a particular project, but a central belief is in good design that, through the process of design and realisation, not only facilitates the workings of the environment, but is also open to change to unforeseen workings. These things emerge in parallel.

**In these parallel interests, ‘the workings’ and ‘good design’, does beauty and balance feature?**

**TG:** Balance is too simple a word. There’s an almost coexistence in the approach...

**HD:** Symbiosis...

**TG:** ... both how things work and good design happen at the same time. It’s often not an ornate thing and beauty comes at unexpected times, whether it’s shadow or other qualities...

**HD:** Let’s talk about, now three years later, not giving up on the African Food Hub.

**TG:** In that project we’re talking about taking static programmes, elevating them and proposing an indeterminate use that is always on the ground. It’s a simple concept, but if you want to know where all the ideas that have emerged over the years come together, it’s in this project – reflecting economics, politics, science, heritage, social interaction.

The ambition of the project demonstrates a raw conflict of emergent practice, a conscious grappling with multiple influences. The design was conceived on a slow-built understanding of how things work (processes, people, politics), how to assemble these systems, and how to push constraints while delivering what’s appropriate. The design is conceived to accommodate a series of futures – second, third and fourth lives – building in a resilience to allow for scaled versions of the project to be realised, dependant on state partnering (in varying capacities) as well as potential state resistance.

## ‘SPATIALISING SHEBEENS WAS AN IMPORTANT PROJECT ABOUT UNDERSTANDING A HAND-MADE, CONSEQUENTIAL URBANISM – THE IMPULSES OF THOSE ON THE MARGINS CARVING OUT A SPACE DESPITE THE SITUATION.’ – THRESH GOVENDER

**Is this success due to the value that UrbanWorks places in research; where the preemptive study of the project (context, people, patterns, habits), the design and implementation, and the reading of the project through its use are all integral stages of the scope of the project? Could it be said that your projects are different stages of realisation of the architectural project (as opposed to a single project), where each architectural project not only changes what the practice delivers, but changes how you conceive of what is next delivered?**

**TG:** Working through the many scales is important because sometimes an idea takes better root in smaller things, bigger things, graphics, or whatever. We are trying to find out where the idea has most resonance. >

4 Serpent Planter illustration. 5 Domino benches.