

S O U T H A F R I C A
T H E S T R U C T U R E
O F T H I N G S T H E N



D A V I D G O L D B L A T T

S O U T H A F R I C A
THE STRUCTURE
OF THINGS THEN

David Goldblatt

with an essay by Neville Dubow

'I feel as though my teeth are being pulled out one by one.
I run my tongue over the spaces and I try to remember the
shape of what was there.'

Ozzie Docrat during the destruction of Fietas
under the Group Areas Act, Johannesburg 1977.

Introduction

A glossary of South African terms used in this book can be found on pages 257–259.

After the war there was a time of hope. It seemed then that the values which South Africans had helped fight for would begin to thrive here and Black people would be freed from discrimination. Surely our men who had gone 'up north', fought in the desert and in Italy, the men who had spent years in prisoner of war camps, would not tolerate anything less? Was not the defeat of fascism the triumph of democracy and humanism? So it seemed when I was in high school.

However, far from dismantling discriminatory legislation, the Prime Minister, Field Marshall Jan Smuts, who had led the country through the war and helped write the Charter of the United Nations, actually extended it. Yet change still seemed possible. Though steeped in White paternalism, his United Party did what was expedient and pragmatic rather than ideological; gradually, it seemed, they would muddle through to a better dispensation. Then the National Party won the parliamentary elections of 1948 and suddenly we were governed by ideologues who believed the Afrikaners to be a *Herrenvolk* predestined to rule the country, who believed Blacks to be inherently inferior to Whites, who were blatantly anti-Semitic, who had opposed our entry into the war, and some of whom had openly supported the Nazis. I remember gloom and confusion among family and friends and a frightening foreboding. I was then 17 years old, in my last year of high school and increasingly obsessed with photography.

In the early 1950s, as the apartheid edifice began to emerge from Nationalist rule, I tried to photograph a few of the events surrounding the imposition of the system. The outside world seemed neither to know nor care what was happening and I took it upon myself to inform and to stir consciousness. I failed. Not only did I lack experience and skill and the nerve to operate coolly in situations of violence and confrontation but I seemed deficient in an essential ingredient: I felt no driving need to record those situations and moments of extremity that were the stuff of the media. It was to the quiet and commonplace where nothing 'happened' and yet all was contained and immanent that I was most drawn.

Discouraged, I concentrated for a time on family photographs, improving my command of the medium, and university studies. When I emerged again in the 1960s I knew that I could no longer respond to the situation as I had before. I was neither an activist nor a missionary. Yet I had begun to realise an involvement with this place and the people among whom I lived that would not be stilled and that I needed to grasp and probe. I wanted to explore the specifics of our lives, not in theories but in the grit and taste and touch of things, and to bring those specifics into that particular and peculiar coherence that the camera both enables and demands.

The first group of photographs that I attempted of structures was a series made in 1961 on places of worship on the Witwatersrand. I came to this from two starting points. The first was a fascination with the idea of faith. Notwithstanding recurrent nightmares during childhood about the infiniteness of everlasting hellfire and uncertainty over the domicile of my unbaptised Jewish soul in the hereafter, arising from an otherwise happy primary school education by nuns, I don't think I was ever able to believe in or pray to the deity with much conviction – except momentarily under extreme threat of imminent disaster. Neither nuns nor rabbi could ever enable me to transcend the banal with that leap of faith required of true believers. When I came to Bertrand Russell I found affirmation for what was, I think, an innate scepticism on the one hand, and the realisation that I was not able

Its gable and entrance porch reminded me of the somewhat more opulent yet still modest embellishments of the synagogue and the Methodist and Catholic churches in my home town, Randfontein, 40 kilometres to the west. It was finished in coarse stucco, the kind on which we had scraped our knees when clambering over backyard walls as boys. Seen in the raking winter light, it had a rootedness in that bleak place and a wholeness eloquent of the Hindu belief in the oneness of all life. The photographs flowed naturally, almost inevitably, from the subject itself.

When I went back about 18 months later to look again at the temple it was gone. Unknown to me, Martindale too had been declared a group area for Whites; the shopkeepers and their families had been removed to Lenasia, 32 kilometres beyond the city, and their temple had been razed. Had I known of the government's plans I would probably have photographed something of the community's removal and the temple's destruction. But there was a sense in which the existing photographs seemed somehow to suffice for me: they seemed to hint, beyond the bearing of witness to the demolition, at the inestimable value of what was lost.

Until I photographed the Martindale temple I had often been troubled by an unease with the tonal qualities of my photographs. They were quite lacking in the subtle gradations of work that I saw reproduced in magazines and books from Europe and the United States. Now I began to realize that in trying to emulate those qualities I had been false to our light. In much of South Africa the light is hard-edged and intense and integral to my sense of the place. It is difficult to convey the excitement of this simple perception. Instead of fighting the light I began to embrace and work gladly within it. Congruence became possible between my awareness of what I knew so intimately, and the photographs I attempted of it. Over the years I have used several modes of rendering tonalities under our light. There has been a never-quite-resolved tension between my sense of what is there and my rendering of it in the print, between the complexity of reality and the sensuality of the print.

I think that my experience of the Martindale temple was the first occasion on which I became aware with strong immediacy of a structure, and more particularly a place of worship, as an expression of values. For the Martindale community this was a place set apart, sanctified by the rites performed within it, the most visible and indelible assertion they could make of their faith in the dogma which they proclaimed and the beliefs and values associated with it. Because it was so closely identified with what was sacred, because it was so public, because, once built, it was for all practical purposes immutable, and because it required so substantial a dedication of their resources, much care and thought would have gone into the choices that had to be made with regard to its construction. From the first mooted idea of a temple to the raising of funds and selection of a site; from the balancing of size against needs and costs, to the ways in which ideas of what was traditional, hallowed, innovative, suitable, respectable, and respectful were blended; from the selection of artisans, materials, and appointments right through to the manner of throwing plaster onto a wall: the temple was the outcome of hundreds of choices. Held in its bricks and mortar was an intricate web of ideas and values which constituted the beliefs of this community regarding their relationship not only to the ineffable, but also to themselves within the world they inhabited. It was, indeed, their self-image made manifest.

Gradually I came to see structures and their form as expressions of value. If it is a truism that all structures are necessarily the outcome of choices made by their makers, and are therefore an expression of their makers' values, the quality of that expression is as varied as the people who make the choices.

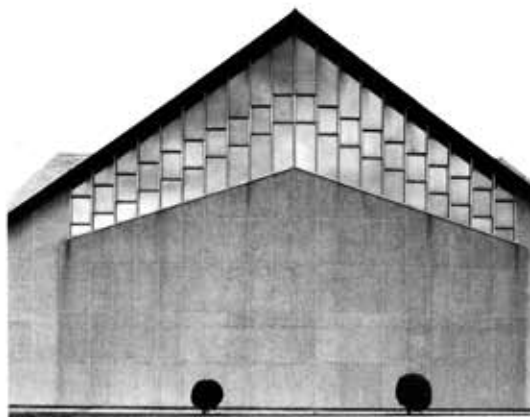
The present work has grown out of and uses some of the photographs of earlier essays. It was a natural step to take into areas previously only touched upon. Its immediate beginning was in a visit to the Strand in April 1983. This seaside resort near Cape Town had long been popular with up-country Afrikaners. Some owned holiday cottages or had retired there, others had built blocks of flats; lodges, hotels, shops, and cafés catered especially to Afrikaners and there were several Afrikaner Protestant churches. The town was heavily invested with 'Afrikaansness', and I was attracted by the variety and strength of the ways in which this had been expressed in its buildings. After a few days of intense photography I decided to explore our structural heritage more generally, and by the end of that year I had bought a camper to enable me to do this more easily. Then, for some years, whenever I could get away, I criss-crossed South Africa seeking out and photographing structures.



House on Kusweg Road, Strand. 16 April 1983.

The 1980s were the most violent and perhaps the gloomiest years of apartheid. There were moments when it seemed improper to be doing something so remote from the terrible events of the day. But mostly I worked with the sense that it was imperative to put on film what seemed so immediately and potently eloquent of the civilisation we had built. After 2 February 1990 it became evident that apartheid had ended and that the subject of this essay – happily – had reached its conclusion. It was about that other time. It remained to complete the photography and write the text.

Although this introduction and the extended captions are more explicit and detailed than I would have liked, they are no more than an attempt to give, for the reader who wishes it, an extremely condensed, highly selective insight to the 'structural context', the densely complex matrix of cultural, social, political, and economic interaction from which the subjects photographed emerged and in which they had their 'being'.



Dutch Reformed Church, South Strand. 15 April 1983.

The particular importance I attach to places of worship as repositories and expressions of communally held beliefs and values is evident in the large proportion of these structures among the photographs. Of these, for reasons explained below, by far the greatest attention has been given to the Afrikaner Protestant Churches. Looking at many of them during my travels, I was struck by distinctive changes in their architecture which demanded explanation. Since very little has been written about these matters I have ventured an inexpert view.

The selection of subjects and of the photographs shown here is subjective and idiosyncratic, and makes no pretence to being representative of anything other than my own concerns. The photographs in this book are about structures in South Africa which gave expression to or are evidence of some of the forces that shaped our society before the end of apartheid. Many of our structures tell much and plainly and with extraordinary clarity, not only of qualities of existence and of the needs, conceits,

longings, and fears of those who built and used them, but often too, of vital beliefs and ideologies upon which lives here were contingent. Our structures do not dissemble. Perhaps this has to do with our society's youth and naivety as well as a certain bluntness. South Africa is not a society in which expression has been muted by obfuscating encrustations of centuries of art and refinement. Even when we attempt symbolism it has the quality of clumsy transparency rather than dissimulation. Our structures often declare quite nakedly, yet eloquently, what manner of people built them, and what they stood for. There was – and is – a rawness to the forces at work here that is evidenced in much of what we have built. I would like to sketch a few of those forces.

The establishment of the first permanent European settlement at the Cape in 1652 was the beginning of the time of White domination. Although substantial vestiges of that era will probably linger for many years, it ended effectively on 2 February 1990, with the speech by President F. W. de Klerk in which, on behalf of the White minority, he abdicated from the dream and substance of continued White supremacy. I call the period 1652 to 1990 the Era of *Baasskap*. The essential core of its history is this: as Whites gradually settled the country that is now South Africa, they dispossessed Blacks, often violently, from the greater part of the land and subjected them to White rule by a long process of economic, social, and political disempowerment. This was achieved, in the main, by the forces of Afrikaner expansion and British imperialism, and by competitive and hostile interaction between the two.

From being simply a refreshment station for ships of the Dutch East India Company plying between Holland and the East, the Cape soon became a colony. It suited the Company to allow men who wished to farm on their own account to leave its employ and then to buy their produce. These were the first burghers and the progenitors of the Afrikaners. Except for some resistance by the indigenous Khoisan who fought to retain grazing and hunting grounds, but who were neither numerous nor powerful, land was easily acquired. What farmers lacked was labour. Since all but the poorest of European immigrants could set up on their own account, few of them needed or were willing to work for others. At first the Khoikhoi, with whom they traded for cattle, showed little inclination to work as labourers. Then, as their herds dwindled and their clans disintegrated under the pressure of European occupation, some sought work. For the most part, however, the Company itself and the burghers became dependent on slaves imported from other parts of Africa and from the East for their labour. It became endemic to Cape society that work – physical work – was done by slaves and Khoikhoi, people of colour. Aside from a small group of Free Blacks, those who owned land and labour were White. There was almost no mobility upward into that class. Thus were laid the racial foundations of *Baasskap*.

By the end of the 17th century proto-Afrikaners had settled the south-western corner of the country with wine and wheat and stock farming, and had begun to move eastwards in search of grazing. Wandering patriarchal pastoralists or *trekboers*, accompanied by their slaves and Khoikhoi servants, extended White dominion eastwards until, in the late 18th century, they came into violent competition with powerful Xhosa chiefdoms whose need for land was pushing them in the opposite direction.

The Xhosa were the southernmost group of an expanding population of Nguni-speaking African peoples who had lived in the eastern rainbelt for several hundred years. Clustered in numerous chiefdoms they cultivated the soil, mined it, kept cattle and other stock, and hunted. Like the *trekboers* who opened up new farms for their sons as they grew to maturity, the Xhosa set up new households and chiefdoms as their extended families grew. The Cape's eastern frontier became extremely tense as Boers and Xhosa struggled for mastery of the territory. In nine brutal frontier wars between 1771 and 1877, the Xhosa were eventually crushed by British forces, dispossessed of much of their land, and compressed into the remaining fragments. Unable to support their populations these lands became pools of labour for the expanding economy of White South Africa. It was a pattern of conquest and exploitation that would be repeated both by Afrikaner and British forces acting against other African groups in many parts of Southern Africa in the 19th century. Out of the fragmented Xhosa lands the apartheid government would eventually create two nominally independent but wholly unsustainable 'states', Transkei in 1975, and Ciskei in 1981.

Britain took the Cape in 1795 in order to protect its sea route to India, lost it for a time to the Batavian Republic, was ceded it in 1806, and became the reluctant governor of a colony that had become a stagnant backwater of corrupt mercantilism in the wake of the recently bankrupted Dutch East India Company. Production was based on the labour of slaves and the coercion of Khoikhoi on land almost entirely in the hands of White overlords. Trade was hindered by a web of concessions, licences, and monopolies, and by the use of barter rather than cash. Government and the courts were fiefdoms for the private profit of those who administered them. Britain, increasingly in the thrall of capitalism, free trade, and liberalism, introduced sweeping changes in the 1820s and 30s which began to bring the Cape into the increasingly liberal political economy of its empire. The thrust of the changes, although unevenly achieved, was to reduce corruption, abuse of power, and inefficiency through the introduction of an independent judiciary and a professional civil service. They also sought to stimulate economic activity by abolishing monopolies, rationalising taxes, improving communications, surveying land, registering title deeds, and freeing the Khoikhoi from compulsory labour and the carrying of passes, and permitting them to acquire land. The ultimate change was the abolition of slavery in 1834.¹

The effects of these developments on Cape society were profound, but nowhere more traumatic than among Boers in the turbulent Eastern Cape. *Trekboers* could no longer rely on influence to obtain land and they now had to produce a cash surplus in order to pay wages, taxes, survey fees, and quitrent. Denied the right to compel labour and without the means to pay for it, many farmers and their wives and children had to do that physical work which, almost since its inception, Whites in the Colony had shunned. If a farmer did attempt to coerce labour he could find himself the accused in a court in which he and his servant were at least theoretically now treated as equals. The emancipation of the slaves ended a deeply embedded institution as old as the Cape itself and resulted in considerable capital losses to slave owners. Added to this were the Xhosa, seriously threatening White farmers' access to land and its secure possession, but, from the point of view of those farmers, not being decisively dealt with by the government.

In reaction to what they found to be intolerable, groups of Boers took to their wagons, and with

¹ J. B. Peires. 1989. 'The British and the Cape, 1814-1834'. In *The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1840*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.

their servants and livestock trekked into the interior. Between 1834 and 1845 between 6 000 and 15 000 Afrikaners, most from the Eastern Cape, joined this mass exodus, or Great Trek. Over the next 40 years these Voortrekkers and their descendants took possession of vast tracts of the country. They conquered some Black polities, suffered defeat at the hands of others, and arrived at uneasy treaties with those they could not at first subdue. With guns, horses, determination, and guile they gradually imposed dominion, carving out huge farms for themselves and establishing pre-capitalist republics governed by democracies of the elite – themselves – in unambiguous domination over the Africans they conquered.

The Trek was the beginning of a long struggle by Afrikaners to escape British values and domination. It was out of this concert of Afrikaner action and out of the need to define itself in opposition to what Britain stood for, that the beginnings of Afrikaner Nationalism emerged. Britain rapaciously pursued imperialist ambitions through 19th century Southern Africa in a confusion of treaties made and broken, annexations, and violent confrontations with African chiefdoms and Boer republics, the culmination of which was the Anglo-Boer War, from 1899 to 1902. Arising from this the Boers increasingly nursed a deep sense of grievance and of difference which contributed greatly to their strident and xenophobic nationalism in the 20th century.

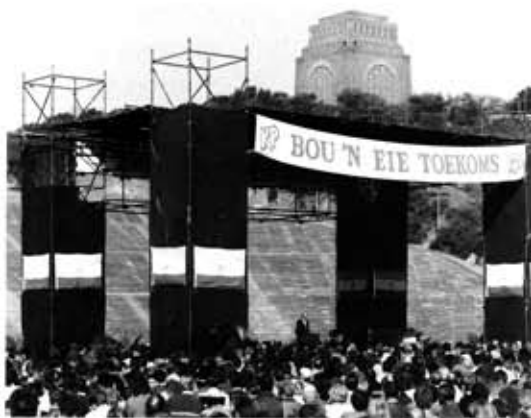
What in the 19th century had been an almost inchoate search by dissenting parties of Trekkers for Boer utopias, became in the 20th century a gradually more focused and orchestrated quest for Afrikaner economic and political power, with Afrikaner supremacy in a South African republic as the ultimate ideal. This quest was invested with the qualities of a divinely sanctioned mission by Christian-National ideologues who propagated the belief that, like the Israelites, the Afrikaners were a Chosen People pre-ordained to guide and lead South Africa.

Afrikaner hegemony was attained when the National Party came to power in 1948, and an almost monolithic synthesis of the state, the Party, and the Afrikaner Protestant Churches began to emerge. The overwhelming strength of the Party derived from the deep commitment of tens of thousands of Afrikaners to a Christian-Nationalism of which, for many, the Party's rule was the exact expression. The longed-for republic was achieved in 1961.

Christian-Nationalism approached apotheosis in the policy of apartheid. For 300 years there had been muddled, ad hoc racial segregation based on naked domination sometimes ameliorated by benign paternalism. Now there was apartheid: segregation that was not simply systematic, but that was claimed, above all, to be 'just' and in compliance with Christian ethics. Its proponents aspired to total apartness except in certain irreducible areas of common activity – principally those dependent on Black labour – which were to be rigidly controlled. Whites and Blacks would each enjoy their own way of life with full citizens' rights in their own designated areas. Under apartheid the patent inequity of the old order would thus be eliminated, the protagonists of human rights silenced, and Afrikaners would be able to hold their heads high in the world and live with their Christian conscience. No matter that the designated areas bore no relation whatsoever to the demographic



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(35) Iron-age corbelled hut
Sedan, near Lindley, Orange Free State. 25 July 1993.

(175) The Voortrekker Monument and a Sunday service of the ultra-conservative Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk after a rally of right-wing Afrikaners
Pretoria, Transvaal. 27 May 1990.

preponderance of Blacks, or that the execution of the dream required social engineering on a vast scale, without regard to the wishes of those – almost exclusively Black – who were to be moulded to fit its designs. Apartheid was a radical creed. It demanded radical changes and whatever it cost to achieve them.

Apartheid had its roots deep in Afrikaner Christian-Nationalism and was actively supported and propagated by the Afrikaner Protestant Churches. It became an administrative and ideological system of immense complexity, applied with dedication and, particularly in regard to Black people, with considerable violence for some 40 years. Apartheid infected every aspect of this society. There can be no one in South Africa, Black or White, whose life was not profoundly affected by the tragic obsession of Afrikaner Christian-Nationalists with their own religious, national, and racial identity, with their will to power, and, ultimately, with the expression of all this in the ideology of apartheid.

Apartheid could not have become the all-embracing system that it did without the explicit support of a substantial number of White and Black South Africans who were not Afrikaner Christian-Nationalists, and without the passive involvement of the great majority of White and Black South Africans in its day-to-day functioning.

Broadly, there were two kinds of explicit support that the government received from Whites. The first, in many variants, was expressed as the belief that the 'firm' attitude of the government in its 'handling' of the Black majority was the best means of safeguarding 'Western Values'. That this coincidentally assured the perpetuation of White privilege was seldom mentioned. The second came from a wide spectrum of professional people and corporations engaged in supplying, building, and servicing the vast apparatus of the system. Apartheid was lucrative. Refusal to trade with it could involve substantial sacrifices which few were prepared to make. Many respected names of the 'English' establishment and Stock Exchange listings were heavily involved in apartheid business.

There were Blacks who participated actively in the propagation and application of the system. Some may have done this from belief in apartheid. But for most, from police informers to the apparatchiks of the tribal authorities and bantustans, survival and the rewards of wealth, power, and privilege were probably the persuading factors.

Perhaps the most significant 'support' that the system received was the passive, often unwitting and, for many, unwilling involvement of the great majority of South Africans in its day-to-day application. Without this the system would have ground to a halt. To walk the streets or the veld, catch a bus, live in a house, rent an apartment, study, put a child in school, take a job, post a letter, go to hospital, use a public toilet, enter a railway station, eat in a restaurant, buy a beer, travel, copulate, marry, pay tax, register a birth or death, bury a loved one, indeed to live in South Africa at all, required compliance with apartheid regulations. Most South Africans, Black and White, being ordinary people, did these ordinary things in a law-abiding way, and in so doing, gave their tacit support to the system. Compliance was 'encouraged' through the fostering by the state of a climate of fear. Through the years the Security Police and other agents of the state acted with less and less restraint against those regarded as threats to 'law and order' – especially if they were Black.



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(176) A new shack under construction, Lenasia Extension 9 Lenasia, Transvaal. 5 May 1990.

(177) A man building his house on his own plot of ground Marselle Township, Kenton-on-Sea, Cape. 8 July 1990.

Non-violent mass resistance initiated by the ANC in 1952 and by the PAC in 1960 collapsed in the face of state suppression. There were small numbers of heroic activists, but there were not large numbers of people prepared to rise and, if necessary, to die in rebellion. Thus the government was able, with impunity, to do what it did. That began to change with the revolt by the children of Soweto in 1976, and then with the campaign to make the country ungovernable in the 1980s.

In the 1970s and 80s countervailing forces led by Black liberation movements with White and foreign allies, punitive sanctions by foreign states and other organisations, particularly against the banking system and against South African sporting bodies, and a rising tide of revolution within the country, together with the depletion of the economy by the huge costs of apartheid and the increasing corruption of the ruling elite, eroded the power of the Afrikaner Christian-National State and its ability to enforce its policies. On the very brink of cataclysmic conflict between White and Black South Africans there occurred – against all reasonable hope that such a thing was possible – a time of extraordinary grace. Conciliatoriness, concern for the common good, and enlightened self-interest among Black and Afrikaner leaders brought to a close, without major conflict, the rule of Afrikaner Nationalism and 338 years of *Baasskap*.

Congeaed in the particulars of innumerable structures and not a few ruins throughout our land is evidence of much of this. Like geological accretions in the cooling crust of the earth they tell of the long era out of which we have come; we are in a new time. It is to be expected that a lot of our structural heritage will disappear, some will be adapted to other ideas and needs and, as time goes on, many of the structures that survive will do so as relics, their ideological origins and intentions forgotten or mythologised. While it is still possible to see them in their context this book explores fragments of that legacy, attempting to pin down in photographs something of what we were and became as it is evidenced and expressed in our structures.

The corbelled hut of the first photograph (see 35)² almost certainly predates White occupation of the southern Highveld, and the subjects of the last three (see 175, 176, 177) come from the immediate post-apartheid era. For the rest, although some photographs were made after 1990, their content relates to the Era of *Baasskap*. Several of the extended captions follow topics into the early post-apartheid years.

I am mainly concerned here with structures of public life. That most of the photographs relating to the lives of Black people come from the private rather than the public domain reflects circumstances during the Era of *Baasskap*. It was in Black homes that the struggle to retain values and traditions, to survive and transcend dispersion, dispossession, humiliation, and brutality was mostly evidenced. The public structures of African polities were destroyed by the conquerors (see 97). Public structures in contemporary Black communities were generally put there by the state or by missionaries or were those of which the state approved – any expressing ideas the state did not approve of were invariably attacked (see 69, 80).

² Unless otherwise noted, the numbers cited in round brackets refer to the page numbers of the plates under discussion, or of other relevant plates.

(97) *uMgungundlovu*, The Place of the Elephant, capital of the Zulu king, Dingane, destroyed after his defeat by the Boers in 1838; under excavation and reconstruction by archaeologists
Dinganestad, Natal. 1 August 1989.

(80) The Cross Roads People's Park
Oukasie, Brits, Transvaal. 22 November 1986.

(40) Monument commemorating the *Ossewa-trek* of 1938, which celebrated the centenary of the Great Trek
Riebeeck-Kasteel, Cape. 7 February 1993.

(69) Memorial to those killed by police in the 'Langa Massacre', 21 March 1985, and to others who died in 'the struggle'; vandalized in 1987 by Black vigilantes funded by Military Intelligence
Kwanabuhle Cemetery, Uitenhage, Cape. 15 September 1990.



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Many of the South African structures of colonialism, imperialism, mining, industry, commerce, and religion were the fairly predictable correlatives of similar developments in other parts of the world. While some are included here, I have given the greatest emphasis to structures of a South African genesis, and of those, as indicated earlier, I have been especially concerned with the churches of Afrikaner Protestantism. These, in my opinion, are in many ways the most telling structures to have emerged from the Era of *Baasskap*. They were peculiarly indigenous not in the sense of a uniquely native architecture but because, from about the middle of the 19th century, they arose in the form that they did almost exclusively out of the ethos and dynamics of Afrikaner life. Tall, unmistakable, prominently sited, in almost every village and town of South Africa and in many others of the sub-continent, they visibly exemplified and propagated Afrikaner values and world-views as these developed through the years. Changes in Afrikaner Protestant Church architecture precisely mirrored and expressed the rise, the triumph, and the decline of the Afrikaner *volk* as the dominant force in the land. The Afrikaners are a small people; there can be few in modern times who poured so much of their resources and energies into their churches and few whose churches so starkly expressed their spirit.

Afrikaner Protestantism, which had such a profound influence on South African society, did not become a significant force until the second half of the 19th century. During that period the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape, freed of the governmental control and interference that had stultified it for some 200 years, and with better organisation, became far more actively evangelical. A proscription by the Cape synod forbidding its ministers from serving the Voortrekkers was revoked. Meanwhile, as the Trekkers settled the interior they established parishes and *kerkdorpe* independently of the Cape synod. There were many tensions within the Church which were manifested in doctrinal and secular differences between various factions. But they were the concomitants of a new vitality resulting in the formation of the Gereformeerde Kerk (Dopper Church) and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk as well as an independent northern synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. There was unprecedented growth in Afrikaner Protestantism in this period. Some 223 new parishes and 75 *kerkdorpe* were founded. Church membership grew from about 92 000 in 1850 to about 383 000 in 1900, while the vigour of the movement was given its most visible and potent expression in a wave of church building such as had never before been seen here. Whereas some 35 Dutch Reformed Churches, including 6 mission churches, had been built in the entire period from 1652 to 1846, 97 were built, none of them mission churches, in the period from 1847 to 1899.

Most of the new churches were substantial Gothic structures. Strongly vertical, usually steepled and spired, they celebrated devoutness, arrival, and possession. If their lofty spires reached towards God, they also told everyone for miles around whose God was master of those places, and who was chosen to act for him. Since there were no South African trained architects at that time, their designers were, for the most part, men who had trained in Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands.

During the period between the end of the Anglo-Boer War and the start of the Second World War South Africa went through a difficult transition to modern statehood. After the formation of a unitary state in 1910 and an attempted rebellion by Boer *bittereinders* in 1914, the previously warring Boer and British factions painfully arrived at a series of uneasy accommodations in a parliamentary system from which all but a tiny fraction of the Black population were excluded (even those few



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would in time be disenfranchised). The destruction caused by Britain's scorched earth policy in the Anglo-Boer War, devastating drought and livestock diseases, industrial revolution, industrial unrest, depression, and the impoverishment of a large proportion of the population were some of the problems of the period. There was rapid growth in a landless and largely destitute class of Whites, some 300 000 in 1932, most of them Afrikaners, in a population of 1,8 million Whites. The culture which regarded physical work as beneath the dignity of Whites and miscegenation as bastardisation came increasingly under threat as Afrikaners found themselves competing with and living among Blacks in city slums. The state instituted a policy of employing indigent Whites on public works and railways which helped relieve White poverty, but probably worsened the Black plight. While membership of the Church continued to grow, new parishes could only afford temporary places of worship. Architecturally the few new churches that were built were simply modifications of the established Gothic idiom.



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It was during this period that Christian-Nationalist ideologues and the Afrikaner *Broederbond* laid the foundations for an Afrikaner identity based on cultural autonomy and political and economic power. The struggle for this identity was given great impetus by the *Ossewa-trek*, an event staged in 1938 by a front of *Broederbond* organisations led by the FAK and ATKV. This symbolic re-enactment of the Great Trek in commemoration of its centenary and of that of the Battle of Blood River (see 40) was a huge success. Tens of thousands of Afrikaners were drawn into the regeneration of *volk* tradition and the re-enactment of history made heroic. The trek gave an unprecedented sense of unity and mission to Afrikaners and created the mass support which swept the National Party to power in 1948.

South Africa's entry into the Second World War on the side of the Allies – opposed by the National Party and by Nazi sympathisers within the Afrikaner right wing – probably delayed the full impact of the Afrikaner revival from being felt. However, there were two churches built during the war which were probably the first to break completely from Gothicism and were, I suggest, inspired by the Afrikaner renaissance. The first, inaugurated at Ladismith, Cape, in 1942 was remarkable for the purity of its modernism (see 134, 135). The second, at Wolseley, Cape, was by the same architect and in similar idiom (it was destroyed in the earthquake of 1969). Probably because of wartime shortages there were no immediate successors.



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The 1948 victory of the National Party enabled a theocentric synthesis of Christian-Nationalism with Afrikaner political and economic power. It was orchestrated by the Afrikaner *Broederbond*, sanctified by the Afrikaner Protestant Churches, and dedicated to White and, in particular, to Afrikaner domination. The Afrikaner Protestants' belief in their divine destiny as a *volk* chosen by God to be leaders in this land and defenders of Christian-National values against atheism, communism, liberalism, humanism, and racial miscegenation, became a driving force of enormous energy and influence. The Church flourished: 502 new parishes were founded between 1945 and 1961 in most of which new churches were built. The pain of defeat and hard times had been lived through and transcended. The new churches unambiguously asserted the ascendancy and triumph of the Afrikaner *volk*. Vertical, bold, often powerfully triangulated, they redefined the landscape. If the Gothic churches of the previous generation dominated with some grace, these did so aggressively.

(134) The second church of this Dutch Reformed parish, inaugurated in 1874, abandoned in 1942
Ladismith, Cape. 11 May 1992.

(135) The third church of this Dutch Reformed parish, inaugurated in 1942
Ladismith, Cape. 3 January 1992.

(155) Gereformeerde Kerk, inaugurated in February 1976
Edenvale, Transvaal. 28 December 1983.

(158) Dutch Reformed Church, completed in 1976
Stellenberg, Durbanville, Cape. 11 January 1992.

(159) Interior of the Dutch Reformed Church, inaugurated in 1976
Welgemoed, Cape Town, Cape. 11 January 1992.

(163) Dutch Reformed Church, completed in 1984
Quelerina, Johannesburg, Transvaal. 3 November 1986.



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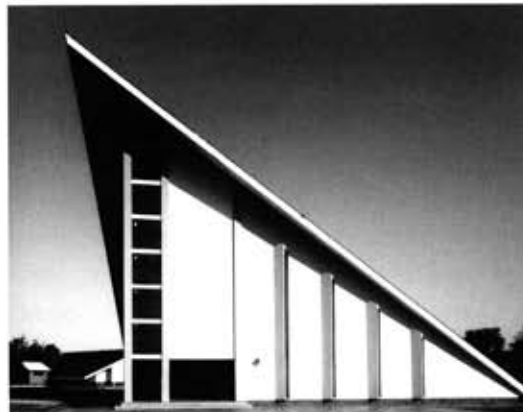
135

Liturgically, Afrikaner Protestant church architecture was based on the primacy of the preaching of the Gospel: *Die Woord moet uitgaan*, the Word must go forth. The preacher, who gave voice to the Word, was the focal point of the church. In many of the new generation churches he stood at the apex of a megaphonic structure: from him, through tall windows, the Word went out to the world. The Word was the Gospel according to Christian-Nationalism, a set of principles by which Afrikaner hegemony would take South Africa into a new and just dispensation. The paradox of ultra-conservative religious bodies still imbued with a pre-1789 world view embracing an extremely radical architecture was no paradox. Theirs was a modern message with a radical core: apartheid.

In the 1970s and 80s there was a marked change in church architecture which corresponded closely with the increasingly manifest failure of apartheid, the rising tide of opposition to it, and the weakening of the apartheid state. The symbiotic relationship of the Afrikaner *Broederbond*, the National Party, the state, and the Afrikaner Protestant Churches, which had seemed almost monolithic, was broken by deep dissension and political fission. There were attempts by government to reform apartheid and much discussion on the morality of it within the Church. Defiant and defensive, Afrikaner Nationalists saw themselves deserted – standing alone against communist ambitions in Southern Africa, and defending law and order

(139) Gereformeerde Kerk, inaugurated on 13 June 1959
Totiusdal, Waverley, Pretoria, Transvaal. 25 September 1983.

(141) Dutch Reformed Church, inaugurated on 31 July 1966
Op-die-Berg, Koue Bokkeveld, Cape. 23 May 1987.



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against increasingly radicalised revolutionary forces at home. Latter-day church architecture began to reflect these changes. Churches built in this time had few openings piercing their outer walls. The buildings became enclosing and inward-looking rather than outward-thrusting. No longer did the Word go out to the world, it went only to the Elect, the faithful within the laager (see 155, 158, 159, 163).

Very little attention seems to have been given to the meaning of the architectural idiom of Afrikaner Protestant Churches. While some architects with whom I spoke were keenly aware of symbolic values in what they were doing (see 139, 141), they worked within the received 'language' of design acceptable in the Church at the time without questioning its origins or meaning. One, Gerrie Steenkamp, deliberately stepped out of the language to try to find another (see 153). I suspect that his mentor, J. Anthonie Smith, the designer of the Ladismith church (see 135) did so too. I reached him too late for an answer. The architect Daan Kesting in his Ph.D. thesis writes, '... Since the Church was the centre of the social and cultural existence of the Afrikaner, his national characteristic has become distinguishable in his church architecture ...' He goes on to break up the history of the Church into somewhat different periods from those suggested here and then says, 'It is striking that these eras of periodisation reveal an intimate relationship between church architecture on the one hand and socio-political and economic developments in South Africa on the other as an affirmation of the common destinies of Church and State in this country.'³ However, he does not attempt to interpret the architectural language or to relate it to the history of its time.

Minutes of church councils that I have seen are singularly uninformative on the views of members about the architecture of their churches. They deal with the number of seats, costs, availability of materials, funds, and so on. Parish histories and newsletters are only slightly more forthcoming.

I can offer no evidence for the relationship between the three stages of Afrikaner church architecture that I have distinguished above and the development of the *volk*. I can only argue that given the *Zeitgeist* the architectural idiom of a later period would probably have been inadmissible in the

³ 1978. *Afrikaans-Protestantse Kerkbou, erfenis en uitdaging*. University of Port Elizabeth. 561, 564.



(153) Dutch Reformed Church built to replace one on this site damaged in an earthquake in 1969, inaugurated on 29 September 1973
Tulbagh, Cape. 16 December 1991.

preceding one. The Gothic churches of the late 19th century would have been unacceptably ornate and costly in the days before the Church was vitalised. Anthonie Smith's Ladismith church and those that followed after 1948 would have been far too radical a departure from Gothicism without the great lift of the *volksgees*, the spirit of the *volk*, sparked by the 1938 *Ossewa-trek* and the subsequent victory of the National Party. And if an architect had proposed to a parish in the 1950s that it build a 1970s-type windowless church, it is unlikely that his plan would have been accepted. The practical advantages – coolth in summer, warmth in winter, less glare, greater flexibility in the use of the space, and so on – would not have been persuasive. The enclosed nature of the building would have been contrary to the triumphant spirit of the time. In the 1970s, however, the ascendancy of Christian-Nationalism became less certain; there was confusion and, increasingly, a hunger for security. The advantages of the windowless church now became convincingly apparent.

Spiritually the new churches would do in the latter 20th century what the Voortrekker Monument was intended to do by its architect, Gerard Moerdijk, when he wrote of it in 1938, a decade before its completion:

... The monument must be a separate terrain, a place where the Afrikaner can come into his own, a place free of all foreign influences, protected from everything that can promote denationalisation. To secure this intense feeling of separation a laager of granite wagons will be built around the whole monument ...⁴

Unpierced walls in studiedly rough brick replaced the granite wagons. Christ's injunction, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel ...' provided, as always, the underlying liturgical principle. Indeed, every auditory, visual, and emotional value of architecture and furnishings was dedicated to ensuring that the Word went out with the greatest possible effect. But 'all the world' was now the congregation, the *volk* within the walls. They sat safe in the subdued light of a carpeted auditorium before the pulpit, the centre-piece of an architectural 'arrangement' that rose cathedral-like behind it, to shed from high rafters, through artfully angled skylights, a celestial light on the preacher – the technology of the shopping mall in the service of God.

In 1990 the Era of *Baasskap* came to an end and the synod of the Dutch Reformed Church declared that apartheid had been a *dwaling*, an 'error'. As far as I am aware no congregation or synod of the Dopper Church or the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk has made a similar declaration.

⁴ 1938. *Die Voortrekker Monument*, 'n Gedenkboek van die Eeupees 1838–1938. Pretoria.

The period 1652 to 1990 was the time of the White in South Africa. White power prevailed. That time has now passed. We are in a new time. What its values and spirit will be and how these will be expressed and evidenced in the structures brought forth has hardly begun to emerge.

1 | A Geological Probe

In July 1988 several photographic exhibitions were mounted at the University of Cape Town. They were linked to a conference that set out to debate issues affecting concerned documentary photographers in the apartheid era: censorship, publications control, the future of the media. Few of the issues were effectively resolved. And there would have been equally few present who could have realised that the beginning of the next decade would also see the beginning of the end of apartheid.

But if the conference proceedings were clouded, the images in the accompanying exhibitions were lucid enough. Most of them were images of violence whose impact bore testimony to the symbiotic relationship between violent events and striking photographic imagery. They come readily to mind. A mother from the black township of Tembisa holds the bloodied shirt of her dead son: on it is an imprint of his body – a shroud from Tembisa. A man's body lies flat on its back, covered by newspapers weighted down with stones; one of the lines of newsprint covering his face reads, quite visibly, 'What would you die for?'



Killed by the police, Soweto. June 1976.
Photograph by Peter Magubane.

Among these graphic records of overt violence were images of a different kind. They were altogether quieter, distanced, but not wholly removed. Seen among the documented evidence of confrontation and carnage, they still seemed to be part of a whole. There was a subversive edge to them – in the sense that Roland Barthes implied when he pointed out that 'ultimately photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatises, but when it is pensive.' These were images of a thinking kind. They were concerned with structures of a physical sort, with another kind of narrative. They spoke of another sort of violence of a more covert kind, a violence done to the social landscape. Their subjects were structures, some of them extravagantly banal: a house under construction in the affluent white suburb of Verwoerdburg (then named for the architect of Grand Apartheid, now renamed Centurion) – the entire complex, including twin garages and boundary wall, built in overblown post-modern style with a pervasive arched motif recalling the canopy profile of Voortrekker wagons.

The author of these pensive works was David Goldblatt. He told me that since 1983 he had been engaged in a form of 'geological probe'. He spoke of 'how in the geology of South African structures are to be read the accretions of our history and the choices we have made'. I noted in an article I wrote at the time that the structures Goldblatt had been documenting coincided more or less with the period of 40 years of Nationalist rule. That, apart from all other criteria, we would be known by the quality of the structures imposed on the landscape; that we would be judged by the vulgarity, the spiritual impoverishment, the banality of the dispirited structures we had erected.

Out of that geological probe has grown the substance of this book. It is a project that seems to me to be of particular significance. Its basic premise has remained intact:

The photographs in this book are about structures in South Africa which gave expression to or were evidence of some of the forces that shaped our society before the end of apartheid ... Our structures often declare quite nakedly, yet eloquently, what manner of people built them, and what they stood for.



House under construction, Verwoerdburg. 22 June 1986.

The idea that structures, like works of art, carry societal truths embedded in them, has a long lineage. John Ruskin, among others, expressed this idea in the declarative tone of 19th century certitude:

Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts, the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others, but of the three the only trustworthy one is the last.

Kenneth Clark quotes this aphorism approvingly in the introductory chapter to his *Civilisation*, and then goes on to comment:

Writers and politicians may come out with all sorts of edifying sentiments, but they are what is known as declarations of intent. If I had to say which was telling the truth about society, a speech by the Minister of Housing or the actual buildings put up in his time, I should believe the buildings.²

And so should we. David Goldblatt's work is about buildings and structures in the South African landscape. It is, in part, about actual structures – bricks, mortar, mud, and corrugated iron. But it is also about ideological structuring: about the mental constructs that underpinned the structures of South Africa in its colonial era and more specifically, the apartheid years, the locust years, of its recent past. What Goldblatt has done is to frame these physical structures in terms of photographic constructs which, cumulatively and compellingly, reveal the many ways in which ideology has shaped our landscape.

For the markings on the landscape go beyond its surface: they are testimony to the ways in which contestation over land, and what lies beneath it, has shaped the forces which have formed our landscape – its myths, its metaphors, its memories, and its memorials.

Simon Schama has argued that landscape is a construct of memory, that landscape is a work of the mind 'built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock'.³

The structures that Goldblatt has chosen to photograph have to do with memory. In a literal sense, many of them are memorials – memorials to conquest, to faith, to an ideology of racial superiority. On a deeper level these images speak of the need to remember. And this is particularly important when we consider how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had to come to terms with the rampant selective amnesia evinced by those who held power in apartheid South Africa.

Thus Goldblatt's project is doubly significant. To make evident the less obvious evidence of the structure of things that belong to our pre-democratic history is to allow us some understanding of the challenges that have to be faced in the present and future historical moments. For the structure of things then is an irreducible part of the structure of things in a post-apartheid era. These structures are part of our inheritance – millstone and cross. They cannot be wished away, nor can they be ignored. There is much we can learn from them.

¹ 1984. *Camera Lucida*. London: Flamingo.

² 1969. BBC/John Murray.

³ 1995. *Landscape and Memory*. New York: AA Knopf.

And as we tentatively, haltingly – and, occasionally, bravely – make the transition to embracing the realities of a rewritten landscape, we should continue to put our trust in the evidence of actual building blocks, not the speeches or programmes promising them.

2 | Photography as Witness

Photography in South Africa has been characterised, and perceived to have been dominated, by its documentary role. We tend to use the term 'documentary' somewhat loosely, to cover all aspects of what we imagine to be factual record. Yet the range of photography purporting to be documentary, or perceived as such, is wide and variable both in theme and in quality of insight. The notion of witness or witnessing is crucial to the role of the activist generation of South African photographers who recorded the decades of resistance to and struggle against apartheid. I shall characterise them as the 'Across the Barricades' generation. This description is derived from the publication *Beyond the Barricades: Popular resistance in South Africa in the 1980s* featuring photographs by 20 South African photographers.⁴ The book – a landmark publication of its kind in the field of activist documentation – could, in the light of the confrontational nature of its imagery, have been more aptly named 'Across the Barricades'.⁵ Nevertheless, it remains an important record of the climax of the anti-apartheid struggle.

In his introduction to the present volume, Goldblatt confesses to being unable to function as an activist photographer when he first took up a camera in the 1950s; of his lack of a 'driving need to record those situations and moments of extremity that were the stuff of the media'. He speaks of his inability to operate in situations of confrontation and violence.

This is a modest disclaimer which perhaps needs some qualification; for while Goldblatt has declined to use his camera overtly as an 'instrument of struggle' it has in fact been an analytical tool in which South African realities have indeed been confronted. That the nature of this confrontation has been oblique, rather than head-on, does not in any way detract from the clarity of his vision.

In a South African context, just as there is more than one level of confrontation, it is important to recognise the coexistence of several kinds of violence. The first is the structural violence that was necessary to maintain the institutionalised fabric of an apartheid society. The second is the active and reactive violence that resulted from resistance to the structural violence of the state. It was this resistance that created the framework in which activist documentary photographers made their most telling work.

In this overtly activist sense, Goldblatt is not a photographer of the 'Barricades' school. But this is not to say that he has avoided being witness to his times. It is, rather, that his acts of witness have taken a different, more subtle form. This has more to do with understanding the roots of the structures of domination than with the recording of confrontation in the moment of its happening: 'It was to the quiet and commonplace where nothing "happened" and yet all was contained and immanent that I was most drawn'.

⁴ 1989. London: Kluip town Books in association with Aperture Foundation.

⁵ Paul Weinberg, one of the leading members of the Afrapix collective who together with Gideon Mendel and Omar Badsha chose the images for the book, has commented to me that its real title could have been 'Behind the Barriers'. This is to take nothing away from the importance of the book.

The quality of immanence is central to Goldblatt's vision of things; his work has a contained quality, a kind of 'indwelling'. And this in turn might be linked to an older usage of the term 'document' which has to do with the notion of manifesting ownership. The structures that Goldblatt has witnessed and documented have everything to do with ownership: ownership of the land and ownership of the means to work the land; the demarcation of boundaries and the erection of barriers of a physical, psychological, and legislated kind.

These are the remains of the long day of apartheid: an era which nominally lasted 40 years, but whose roots were systematically embedded in the history of this country. The barriers were metaphorically and literally in place long before the official institution of apartheid which conferred on them a kind of ideological extension of the institution of barriers – barriers which restricted social access, education, freedom of speech and association. These barriers were the progenitors of the barricades of confrontation that reached a climax in the 1980s. And in this sense the structures that Goldblatt has photographed are the record, scrupulously observed, of a process of metamorphosis: from stockade to barrier, from barrier to barricade. It is a record of the marks we have made on the landscape. It is also a record of the scars we have inflicted on ourselves.

Now that the barriers have been legally dismantled it is possible to look not across the barricades but beyond. One of the many questions to be asked in the new South Africa concerns the position of committed, socially critical documentary photographers. What had previously been definitively polarised issues of morality, with clear perceptions between oppressors and oppressed, have now become blurred in a post-apartheid society where the issues, as well as the moral high ground, are no longer as clearly defined as they were. This realisation was summarised by Goldblatt himself in an opening address at a photographic exhibition at the South African National Gallery in August 1993:

When apartheid stopped as the official policy of the state and the machinery was thrown creakingly into reverse, photographers – and others – were suddenly deprived of the central focus of their work. Whereas before there was an enemy and no one was in any doubt about the nature and identity of the enemy, there was now a confusion of forces. Previously the protagonists were clearly divisible into the bad guys and the good guys. Now they were no longer unequivocally so.

Equivocation brings with it its own discontents. By the end of the politicised 1980s several of the committed photographers had turned their focus elsewhere.⁶ Goldblatt's focus has not lost direction; rather he has intensified his long-established reflective and analytic mode. This is revealed in the contents of this book, which are concerned not with excoriating the 'enemy', but rather with an attempt towards a fuller understanding of the forces that shaped the conflict, and indeed with the shapes through which those forces were expressed.

The barricades have been dismantled. What lies beyond? While every sane South African hopes that violence will begin to recede in the light of a new democratic dispensation, we remain a violent society. The structures of institutionalised violence still have their aftermath. We still have to come to terms with the all-pervasive legacy of a system marked by forced removals, displaced communities,

⁶ Gideon Mendel and Paul Weinberg, to mention only two of the prominent members of Afrapix, responsible for major contributions in the documenting of political confrontation, have moved on to other fields. Weinberg has increasingly addressed himself to the South African landscape; Mendel, now based in London, has made some notable photographic essays on the subject of AIDS.



Greaser, No. 2 North winder, Randfontein Estates. 1965.
From *On the Mines*.

exploitative labour practices based on the transport of workers from their dumping grounds in fictional 'homelands'. These are the ugly realities, the inheritance of the apartheid system that still has to be resolved. To be resolved it has to be understood. And this is a process that goes beyond witnessing: it involves analysis, interpretation, a profound awareness of the social dynamics that have made us the violent society that we are.

In this process towards awareness David Goldblatt must be seen as a major figure. As a photographer his work has had a wide and commanding influence. Intellectually he is rigorous and demanding; he has set standards of technical excellence and professional integrity that remain a touchstone. There is a moral dimension to his work: it embodies what might justifiably be called documentary conscience. As an index of this it is pertinent to refer to aspects of Goldblatt's photography which are not represented in this book, but which have appeared in earlier publications.

On the Mines, published by Struik in 1973, is an exploration of the human and mechanical dynamics of that quintessential South African industry, gold mining. In its evocation of deserted mine buildings, with their angular geometries sheathing great machines, there is a sombre and melancholy beauty. In its recording of the drama and dangers of shaft sinking there are speed-blurred images of great power. In its portrayal of the men who work the mines there is a gallery of South African archetypes – from deskbound managers to rock-face labourers – held together in a web of interdependency and treated with an even-handed humanism that is the hallmark of Goldblatt's work.

At the heart of the mining enterprise is of course the institution of migrant labour housed, as Nadine Gordimer puts it in her essay in the book, in 'the inward facing compounds', all part of a system that gave the mines their commercial viability. The title page of *On the Mines* prominently features a quotation from Albert Camus: 'This people, plunged wholly in the present, lives with neither myths nor consolation'.

This could apply with even greater force to a subsequent photographic essay published under the title *The Transported of KwaNdebele* by Aperture/Duke University in 1989. This essay, made in one of the arbitrarily designated 'homelands' north-east of Pretoria, has as its focus a key aspect of the apartheid system: the forced removal of communities to areas remote from employment. The essay is a record of exhausting twice-daily bus journeys that start in the early morning hours and end late at night.



Going home, Marabastad-Waterval bus. February 1984.
From *The Transported of KwaNdebele*.

It is a sobering document. Goldblatt made the grinding journey several times. The photographs, taken with a 35 mm camera by meagre available light, are consistent with the nature of the journey itself. They are grainy, slightly blurred, what you would expect of conditions where the photographer has to brace the camera against the jolting of the bus by pulling against a strap held under his foot. Individually the images are unsensational. But cumulatively they build an indelible picture of fatigue, boredom, numbed resignation. This is apartheid's wasting of human resources, as dispiriting as it is dangerous. These are images of the working of a dehumanising system to which Goldblatt, despite his disclaimer to being an activist, has been a potent witness.

What distinguishes earlier work of this kind from the imagery included in this book can be characterised

by a form of double shift. On the one hand, there is a nuanced shift of emphasis from process to its materialised evidence, not in the sense of setting up oppositions between them, but in seeing their interrelatedness. The structures recorded here are the tangible trace elements of complex processes, subtle and brutal, based on the racial and social hierarchies that underpinned the practice of apartheid.

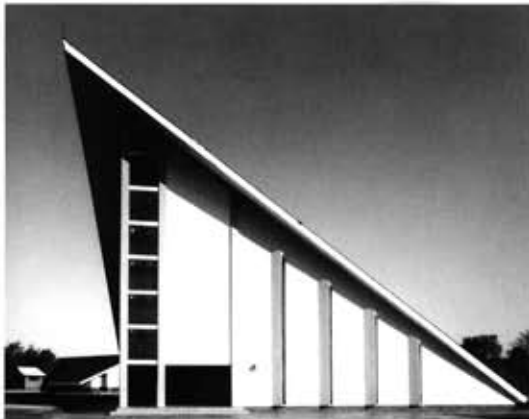
The other shift of emphasis is from the direct recording of human particularity to the implications of human presence. Individual people are seldom portrayed in these images, certainly not in the way they had been foregrounded in Goldblatt's previous work. But, though absent, their presence is everywhere felt.

These images, then, speak of interlocked dualisms – of triumphalism and loss, of possession and dis-possession, of rootedness and transience, of presence and absence.

3 | A Thinking Eye

Presence and absence. Perhaps the first presence that needs to be noted is that of the photographer himself, how he positions himself, his determination of stance. It is a matter of relationship. The photography of witness involves both absolute and relative truths. Relative because relativity implies attitude, selection, a decision to frame an event in a particular way. It follows then that no photograph resulting from this subjective process of selection can be regarded as neutral. These images of Goldblatt's may well be measured, even at times distanced – this is a question of choice, but the relationship of photographer to image is never neutral. What might be seen as detachment is a coded form of involvement. There is never indifference, instead there is a controlled passion that borders on obsession.

This is nowhere more clearly to be seen than in one of the major themes of this book – the place of the church in the landscape, the focal point of the church in the town, the village, the *dorp*. The evolution of the *kerkdorp*, literally a church village – a process whereby habitation gathers round a place of worship and evolves into a town – has been documented, visually as well as textually, in Goldblatt's introduction and extended captions. The centrality, the dominance of the Church in the town is a pervasive icon of the South African landscape. Goldblatt sees these churches as 'in many ways the most telling structures to have emerged from the Era of *Baasskap*' which visibly exemplified and propagated Afrikaner values. He develops a thesis which distinguishes three stages in the development of the Afrikaner church form. These may be seen metaphorically as Beacon, Megaphone, and Laager. Church building is the material expression of the Afrikaner's belief in his God-given mandate to rule. In their many forms (and in their various denominations, off-shoots of the Dutch Reformed Church) churches are the visible symbols of permanence and rootedness in the South African landscape. They stand as beacons, usually in a neo-Gothic or Gothic-bucolic form. In a later triumphalist phase they act as spiritual megaphones, instruments through which the Word may be conveyed to the faithful, to the *volk*. The laager form, defensive, inward-looking, is equated with the latter days of the apartheid era, when South Africa's leaders invoked the battle cry of 'total onslaught' and matched this by an aggressively defensive posture to the outside world.



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It is an interesting thesis – and is persuasively evidenced by the core of photographs that record these strident geometries of sweeping diagonals and phallic thrust (see 139, 141). One finds parallels in secular building as well. A case in point is the uncompromisingly neo-brutalist style of the Rand Afrikaans University, a fortress in academe, a stage-setting for an Afrikaner Brave New World (see 169).

The fascination with the nature of Afrikaner rootedness in the land is a binding thread that has run through much of Goldblatt's work. In a paper reflecting on the evolution of his photographic archive Goldblatt acknowledges the ambivalence he felt towards Afrikaners when, as a young man working in his father's clothing store, before he became a professional photographer, he encountered them:

Many of our customers were Afrikaner families. The men were mostly petty officials, miners, railwaymen, and farmers. Reluctantly I found myself liking many of them. They seemed earthy, warm, lusty, and honest people. I even began to enjoy their language, Afrikaans, which I had hated at school. Yet it was the language of the oppressor and these were the people who had put the National Party into power. Many of them were anti-Semitic – as a child I had had bad experiences with Afrikaner boys – and their attitudes toward black people were appalling. I feared them: some seemed racist in their very blood. There was a terrible contradiction here, one that I needed to explore and understand. So I began to photograph Afrikaners.⁷

The results of this exploration were published in 1975 by Murray Crawford in a volume called *Some Afrikaners Photographed*. This was a scrupulously fair, and on the whole sympathetic, view of Afrikanerdom beyond its stereotypes. This theme was extended in the publication of *In Boksburg* by Gallery Press in 1982, an incisive but non-judgemental study of white middle class mores – the dumb domesticities, the social rituals of small-town existence – which are examined with a gentle irony that does not entirely exclude a certain wry affection. It explores the milieu in which so much of South African white consciousness has been rooted, not least that of its author, whose home town of Randfontein mirrored the patterns of Boksburg.

The exploration has never stopped. In a very significant sense this present book is a continuation of the process in which Afrikaner institutions, pre-eminently Afrikaner churches and their associated monuments and memorials, are further explored. The notion of photographic enquiry as a means towards understanding is fundamental to Goldblatt's approach to his work. It is in this sense that I have invoked the metaphor of the thinking eye. But the thinking eye must also, of necessity, be an informed one. The photographs in this volume are accompanied by extended captions at the back of the book. The attention of the reader is drawn to these. They provide detailed extensions, by way of background information, to the visual images.

Goldblatt has used the metaphor of a geological probe in relation to this project. Archaeological sifting may provide an appropriate parallel. Just as an artefact prised from an excavation, dusted off, and formally presented, may be seen to possess aesthetic quality independent of cultural context, so Goldblatt's images are visually potent in themselves. But seen in conjunction with their texts, deeper layers of meaning may be extracted. Seemingly innocent or bland objects take on a new meaning when they are contextualised as trace elements of a malignant process of possession and dispossession.

⁷ 1995. 'A South African's archive'. *Camera Austria*, 51/52.



A railway shunter at the dam which he dreams will water the garden he is still to make, Koksoord Plots, Randfontein, 1962.

From *Some Afrikaners Photographed*.



(Frontispiece) Café-de-Move-On

Braamfontein, Johannesburg, Transvaal, November 1964.

The 'terrible contradiction' to which Goldblatt refers – his reluctant regard for the very people who perpetrated abhorrent ideologies – is the key to how he has photographed their institutions. In the same way as he has always refused to demonise Afrikaners, his considered treatment of their aspirations materialised into institutions shows a similar respect. He gives his subjects their due. His images of churches, monuments, memorials, carry with them a wry recognition of that authority that stems from a system of belief. He shows a capacity to admire – somewhat ruefully, perhaps, in that he is not able to share in it – the tenacious faith that caused churches to rise from the veld.

These, then, are photographs of weight, of *gravitas*. Their realisation in formal terms is marked by an approach that can best be described as classical and frontal. There is no striving after effect, no contrived angles or rhetorical flourish. These are sober documents. They have a sparseness about them, an austerity which, when viewed cumulatively, builds up into an aggregate of considerable material richness. There is spatial drama in this evocation of the colonised landscape, but nothing in the way of theatricality. Instead there is a considered accumulation of minutiae, a patient aggregation of visual evidence.

There is some irony to all this. Here we have the depiction of Afrikaner rootedness, documented by the son of immigrant parents uprooted from eastern Europe. These are images drawn from an archive compiled by an unbeliever 'generally sceptical of believers' beliefs, but also in awe, and sometimes envious, of their ability to believe'. It is an irony which produces its own distinctive tension: the cutting edge of the outsider with insights into a state of belonging with which he might empathise but which he can never share. At the same time, these photographs reveal the other face of the land, the ugly South African reality of inequitable land ownership, the kind of rootedness that derives from the uprooting of others; the themes of possession and dispossession which, linked and intertwined as if in a spiral helix, run through the history of this land. They are the DNA of the South African landscape. They are the core of this book.

4 | Some Notes on the Images

The frontispiece to this volume is a deceptively simple image, that of a 'Café-de-Move-On'. It encapsulates several of the themes that run through the work – the imperatives of transience, the demands of the need to move on, and a response in the way of self-reliant, improvised tactical ingenuity. The subject is a home-made coffee cart. Its body is clad in pressed steel ceiling sheets; its movable counterflap is formed from corrugated iron. The elements of the wheel – rim and spokes – are forged by hand. The image has been frontally framed in close focus so as to occupy the major part of the picture plane. It is a tactile image, its surfaces rendered tangible. We can feel as well as see the accretion of dents and stains on its press-moulded surface that have come from years of hard usage. It is the kind of image we may experience on at least two levels of intersecting immediacy: on the one hand, an intimate depiction of a familiar artefact; and on the other, in purely formal terms, a constructivist composition of rectangles within rectangles.

Vendors' carts of this kind were contrived as moveable structures, to be placed near points of maximum



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consumer use. In practice, once in place, they were seldom moved despite the fact that they were there illegally. The socio-political forces responsible for making the café-de-move-on move off the urban scene have been documented in the caption to the image. Informal street trading has become one of the major formative factors in the present urban scene. But the demise of the improvised coffee-carts marks a certain kind of loss: that of the presence of the human hand, and, dare one say it, of the human spirit where inventive combination of found and handmade objects forged a way to beat the system. This tension between the product of an abhorrent system, and ways of overcoming and living within it, is a leitmotif that runs through the book.

If the frontispiece speaks of transience, the first plate that we encounter is an image of permanence. It is that of a corbelled stone hut in the grasslands of the Orange Free State, erected by pastoralists moving south from Zimbabwe as a means of protection for their livestock and themselves. By the very nature of the weight of its corbelled stones it speaks of permanence. It is testimony to the fact that there were people on the land before the arrival of white settlers. Yet, historically, this fact of land usage was itself to prove transitory. The wire fence in the background gives a clue to the historical process: the seizing of the land by a technologically powerful settler culture; the possession of the land and the demarcation of boundaries; the erection of barriers. These are recurring themes that surface time and time again in this project.

The boundary fence can be seen as a form of attenuated icon in the South African landscape. Whilst it is seldom a central focus in these photographs it is, nevertheless, insistently there. In the first sequences of the book it occurs with regularity, in various permutations. It links the first two images: wire drawn between steel standards behind the corbelled hut (see 35), wooden palings behind the café-de-move-on (frontispiece). It occurs again in suburban scalloped form at the edge of the manicured lawn in the view of Table Mountain from Bloubergstrand (see 39). It is there again in familiar diamond mesh form – the lingua franca of South African fences – protecting the monument to the freeing of slaves at the mission station of Elim (see 41).

Monuments and fences go together. The fence assumes archetypal form in the surviving remnant of the nine kilometre hedge of prickly wild almond, part of a defensive cordon that the first settlers in the Cape erected to protect their livestock from the indigenous Khoikhoi – Van Riebeeck's Hedge (see 46). This is the grandfather of all South African fences, planted in 1660 on the instructions of the first Commander of the European settlement in the Cape. On the facing page there is a juxtaposed image of some poignancy: a sculpture of a Khoisan man in cellular underpants in the forecourt of the maximum security prison on Robben Island. The work no longer exists, but its provenance is worth noting (see the extended caption for page 47). It depicts the first political prisoner, the Khoi Chief Autshumato, marooned on the island by the Dutch in 1658. The sculptor of the work, Japhta Masemola, was a political prisoner arrested in 1963 and held in jail for 26 years. The sculpture group was destroyed in 1992, but the prison wall behind it is still there, though its symbolism has dramatically changed, from prison to museum/shrine. No almond hedges need to grow on Robben Island.

The juxtaposition of a hedge to keep out the Khoi with an image of the first Khoisan notable to be imprisoned on the island, gives a clue to the sequencing of the images in this book. A musical analogy



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is appropriate. There are dominant themes: possession and dispossession; transience and rootedness; barriers and boundaries; monuments and memorials. There is unfolding visual counterpoint. There are pauses, caesuras, and then the themes are taken up again, ranging from elaborate set-pieces to simple, humble subjects. This is clearly to be seen when the subject shifts from the public to the intimist domestic view. In the *voorkamer* in Pageview (see 84) the ostensible subject matter is plain enough, but this plainness is parallel to an extraordinary richness which is the photographic substance of the work. It is created in the play of light which burnishes worn wooden surfaces, edges a highlight on an earthenware jug, casts delicate shadows on a background wall. Vermeer in Pageview? Perhaps not. But in the purest photographic sense this is an image suffused and defined by light. As the caption records, the room no longer physically exists; like so many of its kind it fell victim to the Group Areas Act the year after the photograph was made.



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The possibility of parallel readings of many of Goldblatt's images may be seen as forms of double coding, which work both thematically and visually. It is a question of correspondence, of multiple relationships. For instance, one of the most pervasive of symbols in South African memorials is that of the cannon. Given our history this is unsurprising. What is interesting is the variety of forms in which it occurs in a number of Goldblatt's photographs. It forms a triumphal platform, a virtual outdoor pulpit, for the exhortatory figure in the monument to Sarel Cilliers beside the Dutch Reformed Church in Kroonstad (see 133). Some form of deal is being done with God: You give us victory, we will build you a church. In a very different mode it is the centre-piece of the People's Park in Oukasie (see 80). The cannon here is a home-made affair, fashioned out of found objects on a site of popular resistance. Significantly, though, its barrel points in the direction of the local police station.

There are further echoes of mock cannons. Consider the images of the tomb of Dominee Pieter du Toit at the Dutch Reformed Church in Edenburg, and the mock cannon on the *Feesterrein*, festival ground, of the Dutch Reformed Church in Marchand (see 144, 149). The weapon in the latter image, a counter-cultural token to its People's Park counterpart, is a crude centre-piece for an annual celebration of allegiance to the emotional and political ties of Voortrekker sagas. Its tin barrel rests, Voortrekker fashion, on the axle of a set of wagon wheels. Its angle of elevation suggests it has its sights on a distant target. But not as distant as that suggested by the tomb of the



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good Dominee du Toit. His memorial consists of an angled stone slab mounted on a cylindrical fulcrum so that its elevation matches that of the facing image of the canon; it has eternity in its sights. It is hardly coincidental that both memorials are found within the precincts of Dutch Reformed Church ground.

In like vein, there is a peculiar resonance to be found in the way Goldblatt has framed his picture of the Dutch Reformed Church in Lothair (see 131). This humble little structure, with its sadly debased gable, is marked off from the surrounding grassy veld by the customary five-strand barbed wire fence. Just inside this, on the axis of the entrance, are three heavy stone slabs, a perpendicular supported by two leaning side slabs. They constitute a fence-post of a form not uncommon in this part of the country. Collectively the arrangement of the units projects a monumentalism that seems to outweigh their utilitarian function. But then, in South Africa, fences and monuments tend to a symbiotic relationship.



154

Consider the photograph of *Die Heldeakker*, The Heroes' Acre, in the Western Transvaal (see 154). A stretch of barren veld is marked off, inscribed by a rectangular fence. The fence is of two materials: approached on the axis of the wire gate (standard farm size) it presents a facade made of pre-cast cement slabs, commonly known by its trade name, vibracrete. The bottom-layer slabs simulate bonded stone. The upper portion approximates that genteel suburbanism, the scalloped picket. The vibracrete returns along both sides of the enclosure to about half its depth, at which point suburban gentility gives way to the economic pragmatism of the veld. The fence continues, but as galvanised wire. Above the entry gate, on an arched board, is the legend 'Ons vir jou Suid Afrika', 'We are for you South Africa'. On its reverse, 'Die Heldeakker'. Within the sizable enclosure, which is in fact a military cemetery, lie two solitary graves of white national servicemen who died in the 1980s. Inside the fence is the domain of shrine; outside of it, wilderness.



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In the public domain of shrine there is no more potent symbol of Afrikaner national triumphalism than the Voortrekker Monument. It stands on its hill outside Pretoria, in the words of its architect, as 'a separate terrain, a place where the Afrikaner can come into his own, a place free of all foreign influences, protected from everything that can promote denationalisation'. One can debate the claim to be free of foreign influences. Its resemblance to the Völkerschlacht-Denkmal in Leipzig has been noted (see the extended caption to page 175), but perhaps that particular kind of influence is not really all that foreign to *völkisch* memorialising of blood and soil. On a personal level, its form has always put me in mind of a giant Deco radio cabinet, which, given its designated function as a public broadcaster of nationalist aspirations, is not totally inappropriate.

Goldblatt's photograph of it is framed in a historical moment when that very threat to 'promote denationalisation' was perceived by the Afrikaner Far Right. The title of the work – 'The Voortrekker Monument and a Sunday service of the ultra-conservative Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk after a rally of right-wing Afrikaners, Pretoria, Transvaal. 27 May 1990' – locates it very precisely. Nelson Mandela has recently been released after a total of 27 years in captivity. The Communist Party of South Africa has been unbanned. The threat is palpable. The forces of Conservatism have gathered to confront it.



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Goldblatt's picturing of this is a remarkable study of inverted values. The faithful have gathered under a temporary proscenium of steel scaffolding and black cloth which frames the amphitheatre of the monument. Visual values are reversed. The receding arc of stepped seats appear to thrust forward through the frame of scaffolding. This, by virtue of its black cloth covering, is given a *faux* monumentalism, an illusory weight that allows one to suspend one's awareness of what is temporary and what is permanent. The scaffolding, in its swathed form, evokes an uneasy reminder of another precedent. Albert Speer's neo-classicist stage settings for the Nuremberg rallies must have had this kind of power whereby the transient somehow reads as permanent; cloth as durable stone. The banner that loops between the scaffold towers contains the rubric 'Build your own future'. In a sense it is the counterpart of the 'We for you South Africa' above the gateway of the Heroes' Acre. It is a vision of an Afrikaner future imperfect, which carries visual resonances with the succeeding image in the sequence that ends the book.



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The subject here is a new shack under construction in Lenasia extension (see 176). Unlike most shack constructions in what are euphemistically called informal settlements, this particular dwelling is made from new galvanised iron sheeting, shiny in the sun. The window and door areas are as yet unfinished. In their blankness, the positive and negative shapes suggest a curious correspondence with the positive and negative shapes created by the scaffolding in the previous image. This is another version of building one's own future. The shack has literally arisen from the bare veld in an area of stamped earth surrounded by tall grass.

There is no boundary fence in sight.



63

The next image in the sequence is the final image of the book. It too is concerned with the building of a future: 'A man building his house on his own plot of ground' in Marselle township, 1990 (see 177). The date is significant. The right to freehold property, the ability to raise a loan to be able to buy building materials, has been recently won. The house, like its visible neighbours, will be little more than a brick box. But its walls rise out of proper foundations; there is a plastic damp-proof course underneath the concrete slab that is being cast. The scaffold planks that lead in from the front plane of the picture, the bridge that allows the wheelbarrow of concrete to be wheeled in and upended, are in a sense, more than that: they are the path that leads from the structure of things *then* to a more positive *now*.

In its understated way it is a quietly hopeful image. On first seeing it I was put in mind of the concluding passage in Charles van Onselen's remarkable work of South African social history, *The Seed is Mine*,⁸ the story of a black South African sharecropper, Kas Maine, whose perpetually moveable assets – watercart, corrugated iron shed, and house – Goldblatt has chronicled (see 63). Van Onselen's account ends on an elegiac note. After a long life of infinitely resourceful tactical survival, Kas Maine has been buried. The funeral is attended by a 'tall white man' (the author), who throws a handful of earth into the grave. The passage concludes 'On the way back to the Witwatersrand he noticed the first heavy clouds of the new season rolling in from the south, and in a small field beside the Tlhabane road, there was a man planting beans'.

⁸ Kas Maine once observed about his life as a sharecropper on land owned by white farmers, 'The seed is mine, the [plough] shares are mine ... the span of oxen is mine. The land is his'.

David Goldblatt's finely measured photographic essay ends in a similarly elegiac vein. Somewhere in South Africa, on land that he owns, a man is building a house.

'It is to be expected that a lot of our structural heritage will disappear, some will be adapted to other ideas and needs and, as time goes on, many of the structures that survive will do so as relics, their ideological origins and intentions forgotten or mythologised. While it is still possible to see them in their context this book explores fragments of that legacy, attempting to pin down in photographs something of what we were and became as it is evidenced and expressed in our structures.'

South Africa The Structure of Things Then is the culmination of fifteen years of photography, research, and writing by acclaimed South African photographer David Goldblatt. In 136 powerfully evocative black and white photographs Goldblatt critically probes the relationships between South African structures and the forces that shaped the society from 1652 to 1990, a period he calls the Era of *Baasskap* or White domination. His is a seminal exploration that compels the reader to look afresh at South Africa's cultural heritage and to ask 'What do these structures signify? What convictions, what hopes and fears went into their building?'

In his introduction and the extended captions to the duotone images, Goldblatt gives fascinating insight into the meaning of the structures, and the context from which each photograph emerged. The work is complemented by Neville Dubow's illuminating critical appraisal, 'Constructs: Reflections on a Thinking Eye'.

(Cover) *Café-de-Move-On*

Braamfontein, Johannesburg, Transvaal. November 1964.



DAVID GOLDBLATT was born in Randfontein in 1930 and became interested in photography while at Krugersdorp High School. He has worked as a photographer since 1962.

His professional work for magazines, corporations, and institutions in South Africa and abroad has supported a series of critical explorations in photography of South African society. These have been exhibited in South Africa, Britain, Germany, Holland, Australia, and the United States. They were also the subject of a one-hour film by Britain's Channel Four, and have been published in book form. These publications include *On the Mines* (Struik, 1973), *Some Afrikaners Photographed* (Murray Crawford, 1975), *In Boksburg* (Gallery Press, 1982), *Lifetimes: Under Apartheid* (Alfred A Knopf, 1986), and *The Transported of KwaNdebele* (Aperture, 1989).

In 1989 Goldblatt founded the Market Photography Workshop in Johannesburg with the object of teaching photographic skills to young people, particularly those disadvantaged by apartheid. Several hundred students have been trained at the Workshop, a number of whom are now professional photographers.

Goldblatt's prints are in the collections of the South African National Gallery in Cape Town, the Durban Art Gallery, the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the University of South Africa, the University of the Witwatersrand, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

His work was part of the Guggenheim Museum exhibition on photography in Africa in 1996. Exhibitions of prints from *South Africa The Structure of Things Then* will be shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Netherlands Architecture Institute, Rotterdam in 1998, and at the South African National Gallery, Cape Town in 1999.

NEVILLE DUBOW is a Professor of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town. He is a well known critic of art and photography, and is an architect, and a photographer in his own right.

'I feel as though my teeth are being pulled out one by one. I run my tongue over the spaces and I try to remember the shape of what was there.'

Ozzie Docrat during the destruction of Fietas under the Group Areas Act, Johannesburg, 1977.

'David Goldblatt's work is about buildings and structures in the South African landscape. It is, in part, about actual structures – bricks, mortar, mud, and corrugated iron. But it is also about ideological structuring: about the mental constructs that underpinned the structures of South Africa in its colonial era and more specifically, the apartheid years, the locust years, of its recent past. What Goldblatt has done is to frame these physical structures in terms of photographic constructs which, cumulatively and compellingly, reveal the many ways in which ideology has shaped our landscape.'

Neville Dubow

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