



INTERVENTIONS IN CRITICAL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

TRANSFORMATION

2023 SEMINAR SERIES

Dr. Suraya Scheba

**Occupations as reparative urban
infrastructure: Thinking with Cissie Gool
House, Cape Town**



As cities have been gripped by a global housing crisis, city-life has continued to be marked by profound precarity. The occupation of vacant land and buildings has accelerated in this context as residents seek out places to live in conditions of uncertainty. Occupations claim the right to housing and disrupt property relations, thereby surfacing “conflicting rationalities” (Watson, 2003) between different valorisations of land and infrastructure. In doing so, they ask foundational questions about the right to the city.

Located within this provocation, we recognize occupations as a necessary and immediate response to housing precarity as well as precarious entities in themselves. We are interested in reflecting on occupation as a transgressive practice that can contribute to reimagining and remaking urban life-worlds. Taking this interest seriously, the contribution of this paper is to pay attention to sets of practices mobilized in occupations that function to intervene into the socio-material fabric of the city and hold the possibility of opening toward more emancipatory futures.

We situate our reflection in Cape Town, at the Cissie Gool House (CGH) occupation. CGH refers to a former hospital that was largely vacant when it was occupied in 2017 by the housing justice movement Reclaim the City. The occupation of a building in the high-value inner city of Cape Town reflects a clear intervention into the materiality and value-relations of the city. Over the course of nearly six years, Cissie Gool House has been defined by ongoing labors of endurance. In paying attention to this labor, our particular interest is in drawing out sets of what we understand as reparative practices, mechanisms for constructing more just futures through ongoing relationships with the site created by occupiers, most of whom now refer to themselves, proudly, as residents. We provisionally draw out a set of reparative practices that can be read as central to sustaining, reclaiming, and future-making, naming these: infrastructural repair, refusal, prefiguration, and defiant endurance.

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Thursday 23 February, 13:00-14:30 (SAST)
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