

Hilton Judin (University of the Witwatersrand)

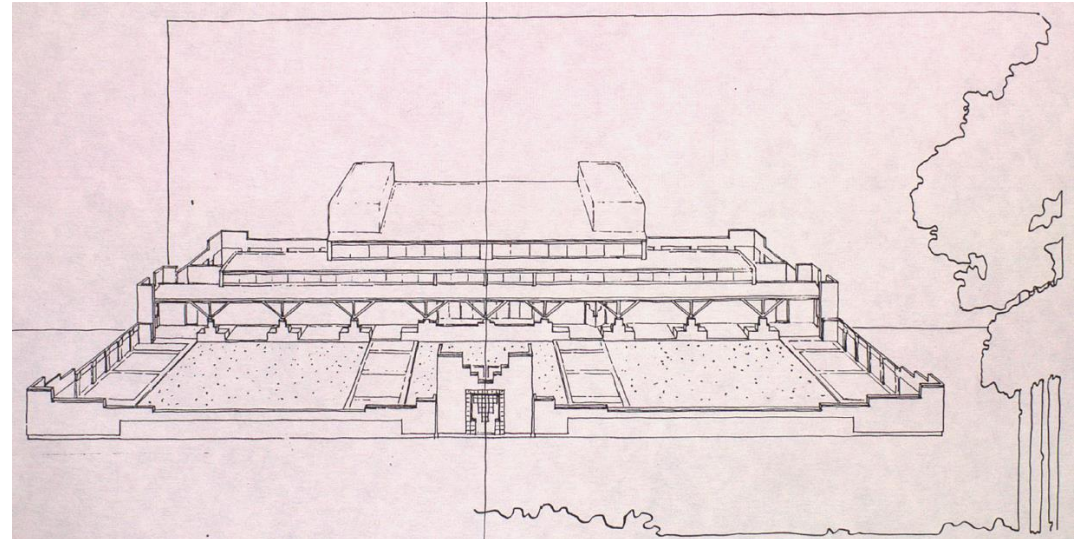
Hilton Judin is architect and director of postgraduate architecture in School of Architecture & Planning at Wits University. He developed a number of exhibitions, including display of apartheid state documents and public video testimonies [setting apart] with History Workshop in Johannesburg and District Six Museum in Cape Town. He was curator and editor (with Ivan Vladislavić) of blank_____ Architecture, apartheid and after for the Netherlands Architecture Institute. He was in practice with Nina Cohen on Nelson Mandela Museum in Mvezo and Qunu, and Living Landscape Project in Clanwilliam. In 2021 he published Architecture, State Modernism and Cultural Nationalism in the Apartheid Capital (Routledge), and edited the volume Falling Monuments, Reluctant Ruins: Persistence of the Past in the Architecture of Apartheid following the conference with History Workshop.

Political evolution of a building type: the community centre in South Africa

In the absence of universal public projects in South Africa before 1994, a few white architects in South Africa saw the need for architectural responses to address their built environment of widespread social neglect and spatial damage going back centuries. How could they engage a black community with whom they had limited experience or imagine a civic environment of social coherence and defiance. In cases they turned to absent urban structures such as the multi-purpose hall and resource centre. These were the early spatial battles laying claim to the broader civic structures long exclusive to whites.

Community spaces became a poignant and unacknowledged focus for recognition as citizens with a place in the city. A search on the community's own terms that a civic space was thought to deliver. No longer the endless queues and documents in racist bureaucratic offices and bare municipal outposts. There was instead growing demand for civil places and sensitive buildings the black community could identify as their own, of which they could take ownership and through which they could come to feel a sense of belonging in the city. Spanning the violent period from the mid-1980s through mid-1990s - from the death throes of apartheid to the transition to democracy – the community centre became both a civic placeholder and urban precursor of the society imagined. It was a building type at once culturally distinctive, politically vital and historically unfamiliar. Architects saw themselves as social activists engaged, in fact, in creating communities, and looked for ways to support organisations that were actively working towards these ends.

With limited means and modest ambition, these architects were tackling through the development of a particular type of building some of the urgent tasks facing them in this critical period. For the community centre had come to be offered as the essential cultural and social space, a bridge in a society without cohesion or shared sensibilities, one that was then undergoing radical confrontation and searching for a way past apartheid.



Roelof Uytenbogaardt, Belhar Community Hall, 1984 (Uytenbogaardt Papers at University of Cape Town Libraries Special Collections).