Aftermaths of Apartheid: The story of the first post-Apartheid prison
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“This Renewal” projects attempted to create social utopia by changing the arrangement of buildings and streets – objects in space – while leaving social relationships intact. … [S]chools and hospitals were built, and air and light were brought into the city, but class antagonisms were thereby covered up, not eliminated.

Buck-Morss [Benjamin], *Dialectics of Seeing* 1989

This is the story of two plans. The first is an act of urban planning begun in the early 1970s as a conversation between Cape Town local government and the Union buildings in Pretoria, during the height of Apartheid. The second is a plan for a new prison, begun in 1994 within months of the first democratic elections. Despite being decades apart, and involving remarkably different objects and agents, it is the argument of this chapter that they converse with each other across time, in a riposte that must be critically harmonized so that we might see more clearly how apartheid and post-apartheid life are inflected in each other. The story these two plans tell serves as both an example and a metaphor for the relationship between the late apartheid and early post-apartheid periods. In particular, it is concerned with the hubris of apartheid’s racial modernism and the paradoxes of post-apartheid attempts to overcome the failure of that hubris. It is a story that shows in empirical detail the relationship between what might be called the ‘structural violence’ of apartheid, the resultant everyday violence of post-apartheid life, and the apprehending of that violence in post-apartheid projects that cannot pretend to undo it. The story, as with much of this book, takes its lead from an ethnographic moment in a South African prison.

One hot summer afternoon in late 2004 I was in the juvenile section of Malmesbury New Prison on the edge of Malmesbury, a large farming town in the wheat-growing region of South Africa on the south west coast. In a small room at the entrance to one of the sections of the prison, a group of young men were busy giving each other haircuts. One of the intimate rituals of prison life, haircutting involves a pair of clippers being passed from prisoner to prisoner as each has a turn to have his head shaved. The group of about ten teenagers between the ages of eleven and seventeen were lounging together on tables and chairs, telling jokes and chatting. As the clippers were passed around, each boy took off his prison shirt, ostensibly to keep it free of hair clippings. But it became clear that this act was also intended to produce an audience for the torsos the young men were at pains to display for their peers. Most of the boys were already marked with the homemade tattoos that signaled induction into gang life outside of the prison. Many had also received prison-issue Number gang tattoos
which are given either inside of prison or as an introduction to the prison
Number on the outside. I watched the younger boys look at the older boys’
odies with slightly widened eyes, as the soft buzz of the clipper working close
against their young heads accompanied the heat of their incarcerated summer.
‘Waarvandaan kom julie? [Where do you come from?]’, I asked. ‘Atlantis’ they
almost all replied.

Atlantis has almost no historiography. Indeed, most South Africans have never
heard of it, even though it is only a stone’s throw from South Africa’s oldest city,
and has been home to thousands and thousands of people for several decades.
The people to whom Atlantis matters, both as a home as well as an economic
centre, are certainly not in the business of courting history, nor of attracting
public attention. Sometimes a Cape Town newspaper article will feature Atlantis,
sometimes a photographer will make a study of it. One of the only published
accounts of Atlantis comes from a study of the Cape Town underground criminal
economy, which describes it as a critical node in the regional drug and smuggling
trade (Standing, 2006). The small city, hidden behind the dunes of the south-
western coast, was introduced to me by the young men at Malmesbury New
Prison. The sheer number of Atlantis youth that I found in west coast prisons led
me to the archives of Cape Town and Pretoria, and to fieldwork in the strange
streets of Atlantis, to understand the relationship between Atlantis and the
prison. This relationship is what the chapter seeks to uncover. In keeping with
the major argument and method of the book, this chapter insists that the
truncated durée of criminal punishment must be read in terms of the longer
durée of history in order to properly grasp its social and political meaning.

**Plan 1: The rise and fall of Atlantis**

In 1970 the Pretoria government took a decision to develop a brand new city just
north of Cape Town along the West Coast. The new city was a flagship
programme of Pretoria’s National Physical Development Plan, ‘the philosophy of
which [was] to deconcentre urban development out of the congested
metropolitan areas’. The plan was led out of the President’s office, and managed
by the Department of Planning, a branch of government responsible for
orchestrating the physical instantiation of apartheid ideology across the South
African landscape. The modernist plan of raising a city out of the dunes and
scrub of the West Coast was publicised as a way to manage ‘congestion’ in Cape
Town and to enhance regional development. But the archived correspondence
between Pretoria and the Divisional Council of the Cape, the regional body that
managed the project, reveals that it was part of the broader national plan of
‘decentralisation’, through which regions outside of urban areas were developed
for black inhabitation and work. Essentially, government’s primary anxiety

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1 GMO 1/17 25: ‘Atlantis: Progress Report and Looking Ahead’ by D.W. Du Plooy,
1977, p.2.
fuelling the invention of the new city was the growing number of black residents in Cape Town.²

In a discussion in parliament in 1972, in reference to the decentralisation developments in the Cape, the Minister of Coloured Affairs laid bare his white anxiety: “What,” he asked, “is at the core of our problem? Numbers. I say that numbers cannot be divorced from the Coloured problem and its solution…. I want to say that if there is one thing of which the Coloured population has need, which plays and will have to play a role in their process of upliftment, something which is indeed in their interest, it is to plan their families and to keep their numbers within reasonable limits…. Uncontrolled numbers [are] a threat to mutual acceptance and future White-Coloured relations.”³ Throughout the archival material, despite government’s attempts to use the language of international best planning practice, there are iterations of this racial argument, including this chart projecting the future racial demographics of Cape Town, used as a racial warning, and as a defense of the new city.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>2025</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>0.44m</td>
<td>0.9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloureds</td>
<td>0.75m</td>
<td>2.85m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td>0.13m</td>
<td>0.77m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.32m</td>
<td>4.26m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 1: Population justification for Atlantis

Numbers, and their use in calculating racial population, were certainly a preoccupation of the apartheid government. This was particularly the case for urban areas, which, under apartheid logic, were constructed as racially white. One of the central strategies of apartheid rule was to regulate the presence of black people in urban space, forcing blacks into rural ‘homelands’/bantustans and developing an elaborate state system of migrant labour, controlling black movement in and out of cities for the purposes of providing a supply of cheap

² In line with most progressive political claims throughout apartheid and after, I do not employ the apartheid racial category ‘coloured’ in my discussion. This category was deployed to describe people who, in a pernicious white supremacist hierarchizing of race, were considered neither black nor white, but something in between. Rather, I use the generic term ‘black’, unless it is important to differentiate racial category as a way of describing the specific racialised practices of the apartheid state, or if research participants explicitly invoke the category themselves in relation to that history. If readers find the movement back and forth between ‘Coloured’ and ‘black’ difficult to follow, I offer my apologies, and ask that they forgive the difficult but necessary attempt to overcome apartheid racial ideology.


labour for white urban capital. In the context of a settler colony in which whites were always in the vast minority, the presence of ‘too many blacks’ in South African cities was the source of enormous concern for whites, resulting in many commissions, surveys, moral panics and state interventions. In Cape Town, so-called ‘Coloureds’ had never been relocated out of the city into the countryside, even as the system of intra-city forced removals into ‘Group Areas’ on the Cape Flats was prolific. This was in part because ‘Coloureds’ were considered ‘mixed-race’ and therefore not sufficiently ‘native’ to warrant a fixed association with the countryside, in part because of Cape Town’s paternalistic liberal political tradition of trying to keep franchise for so-called ‘Coloureds’, at the expense of ‘Blacks’ [Xhosa-speakers]. The more-or-less successful construction of this apartheid racial distinction out of a complex and contested cultural and linguistic landscape was exemplified most powerfully by the ‘Coloured Labour Preference Area’ policies from the mid-1950s which effectively banned ‘Blacks’ from the Western Cape as a measure of ‘protection’ for ‘Coloured’ labour.

In spite of this special protectionism, blacks in Cape Town did not escape the ‘decentralisation’ policies that were developed by the Pretoria national government in the latter decades of apartheid. During the first years of the 1970s a number of white-owned farms on the West Coast, about 60 kilometres from Cape Town, were bought by government and proclaimed a ‘Coloured Group Area’, designating the area as a place for so-called ‘Coloured’ housing, schools, facilities and small businesses. From 1974, other farms just south of the Group Area were purchased for industrial zoning. The idea was to move a substantial number of black families from the Cape Flats to the region just south of Mamre, a Moravian mission station established in the late 1700s and designated as ‘rural Coloured’. At the same time as houses for these relocated families were being built, white industrialists would be given incentives to build factories in the industrial area with the promise of lower taxes, well-serviced land at reduced prices, and a ready labour-force located right next door. The city would be divided into two major areas: a ‘Coloured Group Area’ for residential space and right next to it a ‘White Area’ for industrial space. This imagination of the bifurcated industrial town, with minimally-serviced black residential space for the housing of labour in one half and white-owned-and-controlled factories for the production of white profit on the other, is really a distilled image of the political economy of the apartheid project. It required a sophisticated planning infrastructure of racialised zoning that calibrated a thick relationship between race and space, inserting the logic of racial difference into the micro-detail of national geography.

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As soon as these plans were leaked to the media, black political leaders in Cape Town understood the development to be what they called a ‘Colouredstan’, the inclusion of so-called ‘Coloureds’ into the Bantustan system. Reading the archival record, they were largely correct. By the early 1970s it was clear that the ideological premise of apartheid, ‘separate development’ – the idea that each ‘nation’ should develop separately according to its internal, organic logic – was in tatters, given that the economies of Bantustans were dead, perhaps stillborn, surviving only by means of the system of migrant labour that had come to define South African life. Pretoria, in an attempt to prop up the Bantustan idea, had engaged in creating what were called ‘Border Areas’, in which, to quote Prime Minister Verwoerd, “industrial development takes place through European initiative and control, but which are so situated that the Bantu workers can maintain their residences and family lives in the Bantu area, and move readily to
their places of employment." In other words, the Border Area project was a development of the Bantustan principle in that, rather than forcing black labour to migrate to cities for work, it was an attempt to move industry to the borders of black residential space as a way of *refining* the system of 'white profit – black labour' premised on the logic of the racialised internal border. Repeatedly in the archival material on the new city, as exemplified in the quite below, government agents make use of the term and the practice of the Border Area in conceptualizing the new Cape City, in effect producing a 'homeland' in the western region of the Cape.

The original scheme for industrial and residential area establishment in Mamre was based on the border area principles that were in operation in many Bantu areas. This is because the industrial township is, and will remain, a White area, White industrialists retain full title to their industrial erven, and they remain under the control of a White municipal government where they can play a role as voters.

The new city was constructed, despite criticism, between 1974 and 1985 and was eventually named 'Atlantis'. Perhaps the apartheid bureaucrats did not know of the fabled island that, in Plato's account, sank into the sea "in a single day and night of misfortune". Perhaps they knew all along that their plan was a terrible one. For indeed, within 25 years the city sank, becoming, in the words of one commentator, 'a utopian nightmare'. Atlantis was a massive investment of state money and planning effort. Apart from the ordinary investments of roads, water, sewerage, electricity, transportation, etc., a railway line was built to the industrial area, and large tax breaks, tariff protections and other incentives were given to industrialists willing to move their factories to Atlantis. The city was planned in very careful detail. The Draft Guide Plan of 1975 describes how the city was to be designed as six 'independent but interrelated small towns for between 60,000 and 140,00 people each, with a total 'potential holding capacity' of half a million [people]. Each of the six 'towns were themselves designed to have 'tight enclaves or mini-neighbourhoods' which were to correspond to an industrial salary tier. Thus, built into the planned infrastructure of Atlantis, was industrial class stratification amidst racial homogenisation. The fragile premise of the modernist plan was that the incentivised factory and the racialised labour force could be designed in perfect alignment, *ex nihilo* on the coastal dunes of the Atlantic.

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Thousands of people came from the Cape Flats to take up decently-sized and serviced subsidised houses, and employment. Many people who moved to Atlantis had been the victims of forced removals in Cape Town, having to take up state housing stock far from the city in sandy, dangerous conditions on the Cape Flats. They were already disaffected by the manner in which the state had forcibly dispersed communities, separating neighbours and disrupting intimacies long forged in neighbourhoods closer to the city. While the relocation of blacks to Atlantis was not forced, the conditions of life for blacks in Cape Town had been so impoverished that Atlantis seemed like a good idea. In Atlantis, the promise of full-time employment and discounted accommodation built close enough to workplaces that long commutes were not required was desirable to many, and people started flowing into the area. As an older resident of Atlantis told me ‘Everyone moved here because of a job. There was work here and so people could afford houses.’ White-owned factories were built in their numbers in the industrial area as white capital could hardly refuse the substantial subsidies and tax breaks offered to them by government if they built in the area, not to mention the readily-available labour force within walking distance of the new factories. For a time, a racialised Fordist compact held in Atlantis, with workers organising increasingly powerful industrial action through COSATU-aligned unions, and the state providing basic public services like schools, clinics and playgrounds.

But near the end of formal apartheid, with the entire edifice of apartheid social infrastructure, including the project of government-funded racialised labour projects, in dispute, two major processes brought Atlantis to its knees. The first was the withdrawal of state subsidies to factories, which led to overnight factory closures and the mass abandonment of workers. The second was the escalating crisis in the textile industry in the Western Cape due to the rapid movement of textile production to China and other Asian countries where cheaper labour and other forms of subsidization could be procured. Almost all of the Atlantis factories closed and jobs disappeared, some literally overnight. One ex-worker told me of how she arrived at her clothing factory one morning ready for work only to find the factory abandoned by management and chains barricading the doors. Having relocated their families and lives to Atlantis, black workers could not afford to abandon their homes and move back to the Cape Flats, where unemployment figures were also rising. The major institution in Atlantis was no longer the factory but the corner church and the informal drinking tavern. Those factories that remain utilize contract and outsourced labour wherever possible, and unions have been severely demobilized by the factory closures and the new forms of precarious work on offer.

Hanging on the walls of the municipal offices in Atlantis are dozens of photographs of Atlantis from the 1970s and 80s. Many of these photographs are aerial photographs showing factories being built, roads and railway lines being constructed, some show the new housing developments, black families walking on clean streets next to a new shopping mall, black children playing in a park in front of well-tended front gardens. Next to these images are contemporary
posters saying "The city wants to help you settle your arrears: apply for an indigent grant today!" In the Department of Labour building, queues of people sit waiting to see state officials. A manager told me that most of these people had jobs but have lost them, and when they can get jobs it is on contract. Social grants and Unemployment Insurance (UIF) are now significant contributors to the Atlantis economy. On the Monday morning I was at the Department of Labour offices the register book at the entrance to the building already registered 150 enquiries, every one of them for UIF. Rows and rows of ex-workers sat in the chairs waiting to get access to some form of unemployment assistance, while the office manager conveys to me, in a long list, the names of factories that closed down. She says she doesn’t know what people would do without the government social grant system that helps people at least put food on their tables.

The principal of one of Atlantis’ public primary schools told me that the school fees are only R200 ($20) per year but that he has a defaulting rate of 82%. There is an 80% drop out rate between Grade One and Grade Twelve. He describes how children come to school with two small plastic packets of niknaks chips to sustain them for the whole day. He laments extremely high rates of foetal alcohol syndrome and teenage pregnancy in Atlantis learners. And he spends a good portion of his time trying to prevent his school’s fence from being stolen by residents. The fence is an issue because one of the few ways to make small amounts of money is by collecting pieces of scrap metal and selling them the scrap yards. On the streets you see young men with stolen shopping carts collecting metal. People say that for the change they get for these scraps they buy ‘tik’, the local name for crystal methamphetamine, the drug that has Atlantis by the throat. As the manager of the Department of Social Development explained to me, “Everything stems from drugs: gangsterism, theft, family violence. Ever since the factories closed, the vicious circles have started.” A youth worker active in the low-income apartments in one section of Atlantis tells me “Gangsterism is like a job here”. Residents tell me over and over how it isn’t safe to walk on the streets of Atlantis, even if you are merely going to do your shopping. Women worry that young men will rip their earrings out or grab their necklaces in order to make quick, small amounts of cash with which to buy alcohol or tik.

In a small but significant comment in a 1977 year report in the Moravian Church records of Mamre, a church official asked ‘Will Atlantis become a hothouse for something that we would not like to foresee?”10 Indeed, far from the vision of a perfect Fordist social arrangement as envisioned in the planning documents for the city, Atlantis has become a place of endemic poverty, unemployment and social violence. It is a primary satellite node for organised gang activity, where well-established Cape Flats gangs such as the Americans and the Hard Livings operate much like franchises. As one of the few researchers of Atlantis reports,

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According to one former member of the Americans in Atlantis...:
"Basically the Americans [in Atlantis] get their drugs from the
Americans on the Cape Flats.... It’s a big chain, you know, like 7/11
franchises”\textsuperscript{11}... \textquotedblleft... The criminal economy is substantial, its various
boundaries blur with other economic and social activities and it
involves thousands of people. It is therefore a core dimension of
the community. What is more, in impoverished areas that have
been neglected by both capital and the state, the criminal economy
can develop social dimensions. Organized crime may represent a
rational response of survival and resistance.\textsuperscript{12}

The normalization of drug use, gang networks and violence that attenuates life in
Atlantis invokes the presence of the criminal justice system not only into the
lives of its inhabitants, their imagined futures, their biographies, but into the life
of the city as a territory. The increased circulation of capital through the drug
economy has made a handful of gang leaders and merchants exceptionally
wealthy, able to move into wealthy suburbs, and often immune to prosecution.
However for the thousands of workers it ‘employs’, the trickledown effect does
not improve life substantially, and includes high exposure to the criminal justice
system. Thus is instantiated a carceral geography that includes and conjoins
Atlantis and the prison. As the Atlantis youth worker tells me, “If you are in a
gang, at some point you want to go to prison. \textit{Jy moet jouself gaan bewys} [You
must go and show yourself].”

\textbf{Plan 2: Malmesbury New Prison}

In late 1994, the year of South Africa’s transition out of apartheid proper, a new
prison was commissioned for Malmesbury, a town in the farmlands of the
Western Cape. The apartheid-era prison and public works bureaucrats, who had
remained in office through the grace of various clauses in the negotiated
settlement process, saw the project as a simple refinement of already existing
apartheid prison plans. In particular, the architects were handed plans that had
been passed shortly prior to the Malmesbury commission for the construction of
prisons in Goodwood and Porterville. The design brief to the project’s architects
read,

\begin{quote}
You have been appointed for stage 4 [of the planning phases of
the prison] meaning that you don’t have to design the prison.
Malmesbury will consist of about 15 cell units identical to
Goodwood and all the other facilities identical to Porterville re-
using the same drawings and details. The site at Malmesbury
being different from Goodwood and Porterville, the only design
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Standing 2003 [check pp #s]
\end{footnotes}
the Department expects from you is the implementation of those units on the site.13

While this brief may have been well received by architects working for the state during the apartheid era, the early implementation by the interim and post-apartheid governments of affirmative action policy in government contracting meant that the consortium of architects hired for the Malmesbury project included a fledgling black architecture firm opposed to being ordered into design choices by apartheid bureaucrats. In particular, the government brief was queried by a young architect named Gita Goven, who was handling the Malmesbury project for the black Cape Town architecture firm, ACG. Goven had been involved in the progressive United Democratic Front during the 1980s, a movement that was widely considered to extend the work of the exiled African National Congress from within South Africa, and was therefore familiar with many of the positions and agendas of the anti-apartheid movement. She co-founded the architecture firm ACG Architects in 1993, a practice that was unusual in the profession for having a large majority of black partners and employees. The award of such a large government project to ACG was a considerable feather in the firm’s young cap, but the fact that it came in the form of a prison made for a somewhat wary response. Prisons had acquired, after all, a ghastly political reputation from the perspective of the anti-apartheid movement.

Reading through Gita Goven’s carefully archived files on the Malmesbury project, it is clear that what the architects wanted to accomplish with the prison design was the first self-consciously post-apartheid prison. They wanted, that is, to manifest in the prison’s form the shift in political and ideological governance in South Africa, to indicate the ‘new-ness’ of the historical era. Goven’s marginalia throughout the many theoretical and technical documents she collected as reference for the project betray a concern with the alignment of penal philosophy and national liberation. The irony of searching for prison designs to reflect a national project committed to the pursuit of freedom did not escape attention. For example, Goven’s notes in a chapter on the history of prison design include a circle being drawn around the phrase ‘conditions for communal power through solidarity are denied’, a basic tenet of prison design yet an all too familiar estimation of the logic of apartheid repression. Goven was drawn to instances in the texts that refer to social justice and relations of power. Her marginalia include comments such as ‘the critique of power is justice’, and highlight references such as a text called Architecture for Justice.

What is also apparent from Goven’s notes, is how she was able to understand and relate to the larger structural critiques of the function of prisons within conservative criminal justice systems. As would be expected in 1994-5 South Africa, a social and political context in which issues of social trauma, violence, racism and systematic inequality were high on the national agenda, the

13 Fax from Mr J. Poot of Department of Public Works, 17 May 1995
Malmesbury architects understood that a person’s imprisonment was not simply a matter of individual failure or immorality. ‘The narrative web’ they wrote in a statement, ‘whose endpoint is someone’s imprisonment is known to entail early childhood, education, social agencies, housing, health, employment and economic circumstances – the entire social fabric.’ Their conundrum was to design a prison that would form part of a national effort at social reconstruction. Indeed, the architects explicitly linked the Malmesbury project to the national policy of the Reconstruction and Development Project (RDP): ‘The success of this project in the context of change, and the maximising of the contribution made by the project to the RDP, requires the formulation of a clear and compelling vision’.

Malmesbury New Prison was the first prison to be designed as an explicitly post-apartheid form.

In May 1995 the Malmesbury architects sent a memo to the Department of Public Works complaining about the process: ‘This is a shortsighted and extremely limited approach to the design of an environment for human beings....It is important that the designers understand the structure, rules, philosophy and key issues regarding a prison in order to design it. This should not be an exercise to shuffle lego blocks on a site but rather to design an optimally humane environment.’ Repudiating the state’s insistence that they not design the prison, but merely replicate South African precedent from the preceding years, the architects began conducting qualitative design research alongside their ongoing argument with the state about the project’s brief. The quantity of academic and technical illustrations of prison principles and design histories in the architects’ files attests to their commitment. Throughout this process, the architects were searching for appropriate design precedent, explicitly avoiding drawing on prior South African prisons as exemplars, but rather searching international praxis for ideas. In challenging their given brief, the architects had to attempt a formulation of their own, and Goven, in particular, immersed herself in criminological ideas and penal history in order to prepare for the task.

There can be few social forms that better exemplify the philosophy of progress in service of a social project than the institution of the prison. Indeed, ‘reform’, fuelled by what has been called ‘a lofty idealism and a dogged optimism’, is the determining principle in prison design as well as practice. Foucault defines it as the very birthright of the prison:

Prison ‘reform’ is virtually contemporary with the prison itself: it constitutes, as it were, its programme. From the outset, the prison was caught up in a series of accompanying mechanisms, whose purpose was apparently to correct it, but which form part of its very functioning, so closely has it been bound up with its existence throughout its long history.

14 Memo, June 5 1995.
16 Foucault 1979, p.234.
When we recall Harvey’s reading of modernism as reinvigorating some of the older claims of the Enlightenment, the modernism typified in penal institutions can be understood to refract and amplify the terms of the prison acquired from its formulation during the Enlightenment. Reformism throughout the history of the prison provides for the ongoing justification of prison-building as it attempts to map each moment in the long history of reform, each set of ideas about the social function and possibilities of incarceration, onto the prison form itself. Prison architects and planners have been conscious of the accrual of design choices into a larger polemic about the shifting meaning and function of prisons as social institutions. They seek to formally demonstrate the prison’s function to such an extent that the form comes not only to anticipate, but to produce a set of behavioural norms that correspond to the ideology of incarceration to which the prison is responding. The prison, perhaps more than any other built structure, has epitomized the hubris to determine human behaviour through design. It advances a functionalist dream that every singular act within a built form can be elicited from the buildings’ design, and can accrue towards the total function of the institution. Foucault’s famous reading of Bentham’s prison refers to this ‘perfection’. With its central tower and circular arrangement of cells allowing guards in the tower to see the movements of every single prisoner, it is an architectural apparatus, in Foucault’s reading, that conditions its own inhabitation, no matter who might be using it. It affords almost no possibility for interpretation by inhabitants, creating an ideologically saturated space with little room for deviance or defiance. ‘The panopticon is a marvelous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power.’ Each successive architectural idea in the history of penal reform has sought to find the sort of ‘machine’ that would better resolve the problem of criminality.

The prison’s references to the past are never palimpsestic or playful, gesturing nostalgically to past styles as a source of legitimacy, as is typical of the postmodern, but remain avowedly processual and progressivist. The past exists in prison buildings by means of its absence, or at least the ideology of absence, furthering the idea of continuous and resolute improvement. Prison-building thus proceeds according to the ideological principle of progress and betterment, and prison architects understand old prisons not as an archival resource, but as a disaffected past. ‘The British prison system today’ writes one architect, ‘is a kind of museum to penal architecture’. Prison architects and planners are constantly searching for new forms to better exemplify the intentions of incarceration. Each new generation of prisons signals an attempt to redeem the institution from its own history, each generation of practitioners claiming that the newest might herald some kind of resolution.

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17 Ibid. p.202
19 A prominent prison architect declared optimistically in the late 1980s, ‘There have been so many false dawns in prison design and management that it would be foolish to predict that here is the answer to all penal problems. But the
As critics of modernism have demonstrated, the idea of necessary progress is not a simple technological possibility but an ideological project, created by 20th century political arrangements that present history as a methodology of progressivism and improvement. As Buck-Morss writes of Benjamin’s critique of modernism,

[Benjamin] is fundamentally concerned with debunking mythic theories of history whatever form their scenarios may take – inevitable catastrophe no less than continuous improvement. But Benjamin was most persistent in his attack against the myth of automatic historical progress. In his lifetime, at the very brink of the nuclear age and the twilight of technological innocence, this myth was largely still unshaken, and Benjamin considered it to be the greatest political danger.... [His project was] “to drive out any trace of ‘development’ from the image of history”; to overcome “the ideology of progress... in all its aspects”.20

The act of planning is always aspirational, always premised on the possibility of a new form that might provide some remedy, some opening into a new kind of living. There is almost always a degree of hubris that preoccupies the planner or the architect in imagining how an invented space might overcome a social dilemma or provide an answer to need. But, following Benjamin, I would argue that architectural reconfigurations in the name of the ‘new’ can never determine or eclipse the social life that surrounds and animates them. Social dilemmas can certainly be rehoused and redirected by the built structures of architectural projects, but the idea that what Latour calls ‘non-human objects’ can act back in equal measure on human actors caught up in social complexity is unrealistic. If architectural projects are to have effect in the manner of transforming social relations, they have to be allied to, or expressive of, a transformative social project, as spatial explications of the more stubborn and complex task of reordering social relations.21 Certainly, the celebration of the improvement of the techniques of incarceration is politically worrying, obscuring more urgent conversations about the deeper social dynamics of the project of incarceration.

The most recent invention in the history of prison design is what is called the ‘third generation’ or ‘direct supervision’ model. It builds on a trajectory of prison design that began in the 1960s in the United States with the movement away from large warehouse-style communal cells or massive serialised sets of individual rooms towards decentralised ‘units’. From the mid-1970s, prison

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20Buck-Morss 1989, p.79.
21 In this regard, Levebvre remains the most significant theorist of this relationship between space and society.
designers began developing triangular cell units containing small groups of cells around a central multi-use association space. These separated units became known as ‘pods’, a term that indicates an architectural idea as much as it does an ideological project committed to an enclave cultivation of model behaviour. The early ‘pods’, or ‘units’ were made up of around fifty cells, usually on two levels, occupying two sides of a triangular day room, the third side being used by warders for surveillance from a control room, from which warders could watch prisoners in the dayroom and in their cells. This continuous management of prisoners conducted from the vantage point of the control room came to be described as ‘remote surveillance’.22 Prison design called the ‘third generation’ or ‘direct supervision’ model was a reinvention of the ‘pod’ to bring warders into direct contact with prisoners at all times. The most important architectural change was the complete removal of the control booth from the ‘pod’, ensuring that warders must be physically in the unit alongside prisoners. 'In ...direct supervision facilities officials freely interacted with inmates in an open setting. Many typical institutional features, such as bars and fixed furniture, were eliminated in favour of more non-institutional materials, furniture and décor.'23 This became the horizon of the new prison aesthetic: the non-institutional institution. In fact, one of the terms used to describe this horizon is ‘normalization’, the ability to make the inside of the prison feel much like normal life. In designing a structure that doesn’t ‘look or feel like a prison’ designers of new prisons were to bring more sunlight into dayrooms, use laminate polycarbonate glazing instead of bars, and more generally use design to create secure environments without giving the impression of security.24

The ‘third generation/direct supervision’ design was accompanied by a turn in management technique that was hailed as revolutionary within international prison administrations. The philosophy was to disable any remote or intermittent surveillance of prisoners by warders, and to value human interaction as a security and rehabilitative ideal. This philosophy was synthesized in a strategy called ‘unit management’, that has been aggressively marketed as the ‘concept that changed corrections’25. What hard labor was to the workhouse prisons of the 17th century, and solitary confinement and silence to 19th century prisons, ‘unit management’ is to prisons at the turn of the 21st century: an idea that seeks to finally herald a new kind of prison that will solve many of the problems that have plagued the institution’s long history. Put most simply, unit management is the strategy of subdividing large facilities into smaller units that function as semi-autonomous groupings of warders and prisoners. Each unit should consist of ‘a small, self-contained inmate living and staff office area’, in which prisoners and warders exist as a small community.26

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23 Werner, 1995, p.79.
24 Pearson, 1990, p.141
Each prisoner is allocated a warder as a ‘case officer’, who becomes, to quote from warder from Malmesbury prison, ‘the most important person in the inmate’s life. The case officer is like the mother of the inmate, the father, the brother that he never had.’ And most importantly, each prisoner must have a ‘case file’ in which a range of different documents about the prisoner’s life, criminal history, psychological state, behaviour and sentence plan should be continuously updated by his/her case officer. Diagnosis, treatment and planning should be worked out by the case officer in relation to each individualized prisoner, a technique that amplifies strategies from the long history of classification within penal systems.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 3. “Third generation” or “direct supervision” prison ‘pod’**

It was to this model that Gita Goven was drawn in searching for a design for Malmesbury prison. Throughout her notes are peppered references to this new design and management philosophy: ‘light and color’, ‘light and flexibility’, ‘Dignified accommodation in an environment facilitating movement, interaction and change is conducive to rehabilitation’. Even though Malmesbury’s ‘pods’ eventually did include a control booth, its design was largely in line with the ‘newest’ of international designs, an appropriate precedent for the first post-apartheid prison. The eventual design for Malmesbury prison consisted of a ring of independent ‘pods’, educational, training and kitchen facilities arranged around large grass sports’ fields. Circling the inside of the ring, and making various cross-routes between facilities is an open-air walkway that is covered with a roof and enclosed on the sides with wire netting. It is through this semi-enclosed system that prisoners and warders, except when using the sports fields or working on the grounds, must walk through the prison. At the entrance to each building, as well as at various points along the corridor and within buildings, electronic doors restrict, both for prisoners and warders, the entrance and exit of prison spaces. The doors do not operate with keys but are opened and closed via a central control room that sits in the administration offices at the entrance to the prison. Apart from the closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras and intercom system located at every door in the prison, including the doors to each prison cell, the presence of the control room is entirely obscured. In fact it is
difficult even to find it when searching for it, tucked away as it is down a corridor on the first floor.

From the intensity of the bright Boland sunlight, and the glare of white neon light reflecting off the bare walls of the prison’s corridors, it took a while to adjust to the darkness of the control room. Two warders, eventually discernible in the dark room, sat in front of computer screens, television monitors, speakers and microphones in quiet concentration. When an intercom was pressed anywhere in the prison, including in any cell, a message popped up in a box on the computer screens alerting the warder. When the warder clicked onto the message, a diagram of the section of the prison in which the intercom buzzer was pressed came up onto the screen, and the corresponding intercom audio was activated to allow for the warders in the control room to communicate with the person at the door. The entire prison was diagrammatically represented in this computer software program that monitored all access points in the prison. The cameras trained on each of these points allowed the warders in the control room to watch and control all movement around the prison. Functioning as a kind of high-tech panopticon, the CCTV system allowed the control room user to see and hear the prison without being seen or heard him/herself. As if in front of a computer game, the warders flicked their cursors across the screens, responding to incessant signals, queues of waiting calls from across the prisonscape, laid out in pulsing maps on the screens.

’The Panopticon... is the *diagram* of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system’.27 The ‘diagram’ here takes on a theoretical formulation for Foucault. The prison *as* diagram represents the conditions under which a particular form of behaviour is imposed onto human multiplicity and difference by an architectural apparatus. As Deleuze interprets, ‘[t]he diagram... is an abstract machine... that is almost blind and mute, even though it makes others see and speak.’28 The ultimate horizon of the prison is to create congruency between the architectural diagram drawn in the planning of the prison and this Foucauldian diagram which elicits a set of normative behaviours from those inhabiting the materialized prison space. The prison diagram seeks to become the prison *as* diagram. The plan here becomes an exercise not only in transferring the idea into physical form, but of transferring the physical form into human behaviour. It serves an imagination of the possibilities of prison design that invokes the posthumanist fantasy of directing the human, scripting it, through the non-human form of the hyper-technologised building.

Warders at Malmesbury are reminded of the diagrammatic imperative every time they fill a shift on the main control room or go into the satellite control

27 Foucault 1979, p.205. (emphasis mine)
28 Deleuze, 1986, p.34.
rooms stationed in every unit, where the \textit{plan} of the prison is explicitly referenced.

One of the most interesting functions of the combination of overdetermined diagrammatics and the high-tech surveillance system at Malmesbury is that it is not only the prisoners who are expected to be interpellated into the diagram. Apart from the warders who sit in the control room and are able to experience control over the visibility of the prison through computers, warders occupying the space of the prison are also entailed in panoptical surveillance. Warders as much as prisoners must communicate through the high-tech security system of the prison in order to be able to move from section to section. As one control room operator remarked, ‘If a warder takes a chicken from the kitchen, we know about it.’ Here the prison diagramme serves also as an early expression of the anti-corruption motif that has taken shape inside of government departments and programmes, an awareness that regulation and surveillance must also extend to the functionaries of the state. The idea of Malmesbury New Prison is to have the imperative of the diagramme produce not only the nature of human life within the context of the building, but also, through the experience of the diagramme, to transform the prisoners into improved human beings for life after prison, for a new society. Malmesbury prison was designed to function as a kind of flow diagram, with inmates entering the prison at the assessment centre, being designated a cell and an institutional program through a particular series of units, classrooms and workshops, and departing at the other end of the prison via the pre-release section. As the prison exists as a series of units arranged circularly around playing fields and gardens, prisoners enter and depart the space of the prison from the same location at the administration block, their circuit around the prison diagrammatically signifying the intended process of human transformation, or ‘rehabilitation’. The plan of a sophisticated surveillance technique, provided by the dovetailing of high technology panoptical vision and low-tech direct supervision, alongside the carefully orchestrated mapping of rehabilitation programs onto the architectural diagram of the prison, produced a prison which is lauded as the country’s flagship penal institution. If anywhere, this is where the rehabilitative vision of post-apartheid ‘correctional services’ can be achieved.
The Malmesbury project was certainly not a reflection of a clear and streamlined design and policy process occurring in the Department of Correctional Services. Post-apartheid prison building has been erratic in its vacillation between different kinds of construction projects, invoking a number of different ideological positions in the conceptualisation and design of the space of incarceration. During the tenure of the first Minister of Correctional Services,
many features of the United States prison service were imported wholesale into South Africa, including the notorious C-Max concept. South Africa’s first C-Max prison was built in 1997 to replace the death row cells inside the walls of the existing Pretoria Central Prison. Built to lock down dangerous criminals, the C-Max design arsenal included,

- Single cells, exercise ‘baskets’ covered by wire grating, x-ray machines for all goods going in or out of C Max, and ‘stun’ instruments for use when a prisoner from C Max was outside the prison (e.g. to go to court). This stun instrument, activated by means of a waist/kidney belt worn by the prisoner, could be used at 50 metres to bring a prisoner trying to escape to the ground.
- Prisoners would also be handcuffed at all times when outside their cell… [and] kept in isolation for 23 hours a day.  

There were also notorious proposals from within the Department to begin utilising various non-prison structures to accommodate the growing number of incarcerated South Africans. In a 1998 international report on private prisons, a British practitioner recorded,

Representatives from a private firm were in the Ukraine in February looking at two vessels that South Africa's Department of Correctional Services want to use as prison ships.... An earlier proposal to hold prisoners in disused mine shafts has been abandoned.  

However, the Malmesbury New Prison project helped to confirm and extend a set of changes within the Department of Correctional Services that gradually built momentum and was given full expression in the 2004 White Paper on Correctional Services, a document that established unit management and the case officer at the centre of its agenda for the transformation of South African prisons and rehabilitation as an ideal-type response to South African criminality. It is one of the best examples in the criminal justice system of the aspirational moment that occurred in South Africa in the mid-1990s in the midst of the foment of collectively imagining a new society. It tried to make a space within the criminal justice system for a radical reimagining of how punishment could be thought and managed in relation to the project of post-apartheid conceptualisations of human development and nonracial freedom.  

**Atlantis in Malmesbury: a planning riposte**

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What do these two plans – the first for the apartheid racial-industrial city, the second for the post-apartheid model prison – have to do with each other? They certainly characterise the spirit of the respective eras in which they were made. The bifurcated city of Atlantis perfectly represents the modernist project of high apartheid. Malmesbury New Prison exemplifies the earnest early post-apartheid commitment to transform the existing institutions of state into progressive fora, even as that transformation did almost nothing to undo the effects of apartheid. But more than their historical allegory, these two plans speak directly to each other through the presence of the young men and boys in the juvenile section of Malmesbury prison. Their young brown bodies caught up in Malmesbury’s diagramme and marked with the early presence of gang tattoos, stand as evidence that their Atlantis-forged lives are accommodated by the prison, that the prison is the institution that responds to the condition of their lives. What the prison became was a significant mechanism by which the post-apartheid state could mop up the spectacular demise of Atlantis’ racist apartheid hubris; a response to the sinking of Atlantis. The meager measures of support that people living in Atlantis receive from the state to constitute lives in the midst of unemployment are dwarfed by the blossoming criminal economy that draws young people into the life of the prison. A liberal-reformist criminal justice project has come to be an important site for contending with the fall-out from apartheid planning. What makes the project plausible in the context of proliferating democratic ideals is the faith placed in the institution of the prison to be redeemable as a good space, a democratic space, a diagrammatic practice (in the Deleuzian sense above) of the best intentions of the planner.

To return to Benjamin, what is made clear by his critique of modernist hubris is that attempts to ‘create social utopia by changing the arrangement of buildings … – objects in space – while leaving social relationships intact’ fail to make significant historical interventions into social life. Indeed, if the past exists in the prison building by means of its absence, then it comes flooding back into the prison as soon as it opens its doors to inhabitation. When read as a social form, rather than an architectural one, any single prison is part of a large system of social life that at times relies on the physical enclosures of prisons but is by no means contained by them. Imaginative design cannot exorcize the architecture of human relations, which bring to prisons histories which can contradict, overturn, or render impossible the intentions of the diagramme. In fact, as has been shown most clearly by critics of the prison system in the United States, the prison can often augment rather than contain or undo the larger historical processes for which they are supposed to serve as a remedy.32

One of the most significant design features of the Malmesbury New Prison was an ‘assessment centre’ that was built at the entrance point into the prison’s flow diagram. Here prisoners were to spend time under ‘assessment’ to enable warders to devise suitable, individualized ‘sentence plans’ designed to optimize

32 See in particular Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s excellent critique of the California prisons system (2007), and Loic Wacquant (2001)
each prisoner’s potential for rehabilitation. Here prisoners were to have their case files opened and filled by specialist social workers before being transferred to the units. Here, also, is the first instance in which diagrammatic intentionality ran aground. When I first went to the prison in 2004 after pouring over Gita Goven’s design files, I asked a warden to show me the assessment centre. To my surprise, he said it wasn’t being used. He explained that this section of the prison had briefly been used for its original intention, but quickly warders began to default on the prison’s intended plan. This was at least in part because the tremendous overcrowding of other prisons put pressure on Malmesbury to accept more inmates than the prison was designed to hold, and the increase in human traffic made it difficult to complete assessments properly. With overcrowding in South Africa’s prisons estimated at an average of almost 170%, with some prisons exceeding 200% overcapacity, it is difficult, if not impossible, to keep at bay the demands of a massively strained criminal justice system. The overload of prisoners resulted in warders sending inmates directly to cell units without the intended assessment.

For a while after the assessment section was closed to the adult male prisoners for which it was intended, the assessment cells were used for female prisoners who were creating overflow from the older prison in Malmesbury. With women usually held in buildings quite separate from the male prisons on shared compounds, the circular design of the new Malmesbury prison with its windows opening up into shared courtyards and fields proved a little too accommodating for female prisoners. Following their refusal to stop entertaining the male inmates by stripping their clothes off at the windows, the women were transferred to other prisons. When female prisoners were removed from the ‘assessment centre’, it was decided that the space should be used for the detention of juveniles. Malmesbury was not planned to incarcerate juveniles at all, but the possibility of housing young prisoners in a new facility with more control over their induction into prison gangs and access to classrooms and sports facilities proved appealing to prison authorities. But the young prisoners rioted in the section, sealing their doors and flooding their cells from the bathroom taps and showers; breaking whatever they could. Eventually the juveniles were transferred to another section of the prison, and the assessment section was left abandoned. On entering its courtyard it was immediately clear that this part of the prison had not been used for some time. It was empty, cell doors standing ajar, and waist-high weeds growing through the brick paving on the courtyard floor. The disrepair also bore traces of the young prisoners’ riot: a broken basin, stained walls, and several pieces of old personal belongings left in corners and on floors as if people had been evacuated quickly from the section. The warden informed me that ‘it will stay like this until somebody thinks of something better to do with it.’ And because South African law does not permit juveniles to communicate with adult prisoners, the idea of creating access to facilities for juveniles also quickly ran aground. When I spent time with the young men and boys in their recreation space, I discovered that they have to be kept inside their new unit at all times, with no access to the school or other facilities in the prison compound.
In the lives of the incarcerated, lives that are massively truncated into the terms of the prison diagramme, tiny changes in daily routine can mean a great deal. In fact, prison space in particular exacerbates the importance of small objects and interactions. Access to the telephone, the amount of food on a plate, the tone of a warders voice, ten minutes more time in the courtyard, the allowance of a personal item in the cell, a window bringing natural light or a view into a cell room, these are massively significant in prison life, and should not be underestimated. The brokering of what in the prison context are called ‘privileges’ plays an enormous role in the everyday experience of prisoners. I am not arguing here that the effort put into designing and conceptualising more humane prisons is a failed project. What I am arguing is that the reliance on the ideology of prison betterment as a means of imagining that punishment can become a democratic practice, fails to account for the fact that prisons are not just buildings, not even just diagrammes. They are complex assemblages of social processes that operate across the physical space of the prison. There are certainly some prisons that are better than others, that open onto the possibility of changing the individual lives of the incarcerated. There is certainly worth in the liberal commitments to improvement, incremental progress and the importance of each individual case.

The problem with prison reformist projects, however, is that they seldom take into their purview the more stubborn social processes that animate the prison as a space and as a practice. Significantly, the aspirations of reform create an agenda that argues for more and more money to be driven into the project of improving prisons, building better ones, and adding resources to existing ones. One of the central pitfalls of a liberal reformist approach is the implicit claim on the national budget for spending on prisons, drawing money away from other kinds of social spending that might ameliorate the very conditions that invoke the prison.

The beleaguered histories of reform and their faith in progress need to be addressed by critical work that explores the conditions of possibility for penal objects rather than takes their terms for granted. Rather than asking how we can improve the prison, this critical work asks ‘what kind of an answer is the prison, even the good prison, to apartheid’s failed project?’ What kind of politics uses as its means the ever-refining apparatus of institutions of security? What kind of politics justifies the massive fiscal expense of new prisons while basic services to the poor are withheld? And what is at stake in rendering these institutions ever more sophisticated in their techniques of management and design? It might be worth considering to what extent, as an international critic has suggested, architectural developments in prisons might be seen as a form of camouflage, masking the real problems at stake in criminal justice with good, well-meaning design.\textsuperscript{33} Malmesbury’s proposition, elegant and creative as it may be, remains cosmetic when it is read against its social relationship to Atlantis, and to the other racialised territories that produce its prisoners. The teleological project of prison design and building is ideologically driven, and must be subjected to

\textsuperscript{33}Markus, T. 1994.
What the history of Atlantis and Malmesbury New Prison demonstrates is that the construction of post-apartheid incarceration, ambivalent as has been, is premised directly on the construction of apartheid. Any straightforward validation of reform and the progressivist philosophy of history it implies fails to account for the larger social structures that surround and permeate the reforming institution. To abstract the institution out of this larger context in the interest of subsequential betterment is, to borrow Benjamin’s critique of modernist progress, ‘the greatest political danger’.