



'Urban society in South Africa has two major cultural streams, overlaid by international "norms". Historically, colonial settlement in South Africa (as elsewhere) imposed a European, metropolitan culture of cities. This included exotic flora and fauna, but most important a very different view about space, division and landownership'. (Lloyd 2003: 105)

Lloyd explains that the urban racial demography is increasingly reflective of the country as a whole and that rapid urbanization is overlaid with serious social and physical pathologies and wide-spread alienation.

The proactive central-city densification, as a viable solution, requires a particular sensitivity towards people's physical and cultural values. He calls into question the lack of enquiry in this regard and acknowledges that normative planning still prevails while a synthesized urban system, responsive to an African urban society, has not been conceptualized. A city, being an invention of society, is that which a society believes it to be, in space and time. Lloyd (2003: 105) quotes Kant's view that 'all our consciousness is bound in space' and explains that humans have complex ways to feel and imagine space. While some spatial imagination is universal, more is learnt from growing up in specific social, cultural and physical environments. He believes that European cultural tradition is never free from 'ordering devices' and that validation comes through material and aesthetic experience. African culture validates itself through personal and humanist values.

European colonial culture was built on four symbiotic factors: religion, trade, law and order; the Western sensitivity towards being in Africa consisted of transforming indigenous land to replicate a 'quasi-metropolitan culture in every physical respect' (Lloyd 2003: 105); this de-africanization was evident in the strong stamp of structure; the delineation of the earth; the comfort of large, exotic trees; and the recording of the ownership they imposed.

Lloyd's 'rural dream' theory (2003: 107) best explains the difference between Eurocentric and Afrocentric thought. He maintains that many urban dwellers, of all races, have experience and memory of an unstructured, rural childhood. Moreover, these memories influence their view

04.01. Alexandra township



of life and survival.

In an African village, the 'rural dream' is seen as the treatment of all space as public, except for space defined as private by ritual. In this sense, architecture surpasses the boundaries of the building; the true edge lies beyond...

In contrast, the European 'rural dream' renders all space private, except for specifically designated and regulated public areas, defined through legal process, walls and fences.

An African response emphasizes human relationships (Lloyd 2003: 109). This notion is epitomized in the ancient Africa maxim *umuntu ngumuntu nga Bantu*, which means a person is a person only because of other people. In Southern Africa, this understanding is called *ubuntu*, *obuntu*, or *utu*:

The concept of *ubuntu* describes this interconnectedness and turns it into a system of ethics. This includes one's relationship with Nature and with the spirit world, for what one does, dreams and thinks can have profound and unexpected repercussions on the entire network of life and energy. Therefore, great care is taken to maintain harmony between people and between the human world, the spirit world and nature. (Du Plessis, 2001: 376)

Therefore, the treatment of space is not bound to the boundaries of a structure. Du Plessis (2001: 374) emphasizes this concept when she states that the outlook of most African communities is holistic. All things are seen as interdependent and interrelated, including their architecture. The sense of interconnectedness is very much a spiritual understanding of life and leads to a reverence and respect for all of nature. This attitude is expressed not only in ritual but also in the placement of buildings and utilization resources. The Western tradition of urban form is captured in Plato's theory of idea and form through the search for a pure ideal for all function and form. Lloyd notes that current city design aims essentially to satisfy technical and economic efficiencies and, through tacit neglect, allows diverse human cultures to be suppressed or to mutate into a bland and universal city culture. Lloyd (2003: 107) remarks that spatial imagination in agrarian cultures



04.02. The African rural dream



04.03. The European rural dream



04.04. The noise and activity within Hillbrow business centre



04.05. A vibrant social atmosphere in Claim street, Hillbrow. The surrounding buildings are residential apartment blocks

04.06. Hillbrow



is both complex and holistic and that urban systems do not necessarily require rigid and dominant geometries and highly defined edges to be understood. Equally, the African rural dream shows that, in a public realm, private space may be minimal and understood through ritual, therefore suggesting different systems of urban land settlement and delivery are both possible and necessary.

Therefore, the design focuses on transitional spaces; the in-between spaces usually treated as residual ground in a figure-ground study are treated as figure. These spaces, through psychological barriers and physical spatial indications (such as level differences, variations in texture, and extent of enclosure or protection), denote public or private, and inside or outside.

'Architectural meaning resides in human experience. It is evoked in the acts of occupying and inhabiting space, in ones experience of space, matter, gravity, and light.'
(Pallasmaa 2000: 83)

'Architecture calls simultaneously for expression and restraint, innovation and a consciousness of history, courage, and modesty.'
(Pallasmaa 2001: 51)

'Architecture creates frames for action, thought, and emotion.'
(Pallasmaa 2000: 83)

TACTILE ARCHITECTURE

Wells (1981: 43) explains that the crisis in architectural aesthetics did not appear until the late nineteenth century. He believes that industrialization created a market for specialized designers. In this new era, the architect worked for the wealthy businessman or entrepreneur and prioritized his needs. The architect consequently lost touch with the common man and his needs. 'The result of the architect's isolation from his real client is the increasing prevalence of the abstract, the formal, and the platitudinous in architectural terms' (Ibid.)

Juhani Pallasmaa, a practicing architect and professor at the University of Helsinki, believes that architecture has become a shallow emphasis on 'image over essence'. It is an environment where masculine architecture seeks to overpower and impress with visual stimulation from afar, while leaving the surroundings and community uninvited. Buildings are believed to have lost their tectonic presence and material authority because of modern man's speed- and control-obsessed culture that favours the architecture of instantaneous imagery that is visible from afar (for instance, the MacDonald's chain and Las Vegas). 'Today the built environment is increasingly detached from its cultural context and collective soil ... instead of structuring an integrating experience, our buildings frequently contribute to disorientation and meaninglessness' (Pallasmaa 2001: 51). The task of architecture is not to free buildings from anything, but to weave them into an existing cultural continuum that has collective significance.

'Architecture that focuses on aesthetic effects emphasizes the photogenic, instantaneous qualities of visual imagery detached from existential reality.' Our ocular-biased society is criticized for transforming architecture into an art form of instant visual image. Flatness of surfaces and materials, uniformity of illumination, and the elimination of micro-climatic differences further reinforce the uniformity of the experience. This standardization of environmental conditions causes buildings to lose their 'opacity and depth, sensory invitation and discovery, mystery and shadow.'

Therefore, Pallasmaa argues for fragile or tactile architecture: architecture of weak image

that promotes sensory interaction and intimacy and is comprehended and appreciated gradually. He reasons that perspectival space leaves viewers as outside observers, whereas simultaneous space encloses and enfolds them in its embrace. Such architecture is described as 'contextual and responsive', designed to include and inspire, to embrace and nurture, and to create identity and integrate (Pallasmaa 2000: 83).

According to Proshansky (1974: 73-4), environmental psychology is concerned with the relationship between the physical environment and the human behaviour and experience surrounding it. He stipulates that what is meant by 'physical environment' is not the physical stimuli of traditional psychology, that is light, sound and temperature or even the integration of these basic stimuli with others such as shape, colour and density into specific objects and spaces.

The 'physical environment' means the complexity that constitutes any physical setting in which man live, interact, and engage in activities for either brief or extended periods of time ... at the centre of the environment psychologists concern with the physical environment is the *built environment*: its design, content, organization, and meaning. (Proshansky 1974: 73-4)

The phenomenologist Norberg-Schulz describes the *structure of place* in terms of *landscape* and *settlement* analyzed by means of the categories *space* and *character*. Whereas *space* denotes the three-dimensional organization of elements that make up a place, *character* denotes the general atmosphere, which is the most comprehensive property of any place.

In *space*, two uses are distinguished: space as three-dimensional geometry and space as perceptual field.

Place-making theory

- *Existential space* is not a logical-mathematical term but comprises the basic relationships between humans and their environment.
- A place is a space that has a distinct character. While architecture is a means to visualize the 'spirit of the place', the task of the architect is to create meaningful places, whereby he helps mankind to dwell.
- *Phenomenology* is a qualitative understanding of architecture.
- The existential meaning is determined by the structures of humans' being-in-the-world. This is the functional and emotional dimension of architecture.
- The place is the concrete manifestation of a person's dwelling; humans' identity depends on their belonging to places.
- The architect's purpose is the concretization of *genius loci* (Norberg-Schulz 1976: 412).

In a joint venture, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Massachusetts Institute for Technology (MIT) performed studies on the spatial environment of adolescents living in varied urban conditions. The aim was to establish how children and teenagers perceive, understand and use the environments they live in (Lynch 1977: 13).

Lynch (1977: 13) remarks that universal similarities exist in the way thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds use the 'un-programmed spaces' near their dwellings: the streets, the courtyards and the apartment staircases. They talk and meet and walk about together; they play informal games, and they saunter about aimlessly. The street is the most important extension of the crowded home. According to Lynch (Ibid.), the studies show that when asked about the places they like to spend their time, children do not talk much about school, the playground or even their own private yards. They talk about the street or courtyard, their own room, if they have one, the sports facilities, the wastelands, the natural open spaces and the city centre:

The shape of the local streets, stairs, and courtyards is important to these children: the paving, the trees, the safety, the suitability for informal play, the corners, doorways, nooks, and benches they can meet their friends, the opportunities those places give them to slip away from the parental eye while still being thought safe and under control. (Lynch 1977: 13)

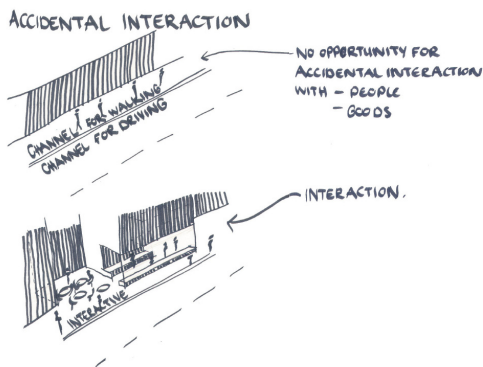
Lynch (Ibid.) suggests that children's community identity should be deepened and that their environments should have a clear social and spatial identity and be places they can understand and take pride in. Furthermore, taking part in community maintenance and celebrations should heighten children's participation in their neighbourhood and increase their sense of ownership of the area. Their sense of past and future should be connected to their locality and should relate to the conservation of natural resources and their historical heritage.

Conclusions

Design aim, therefore, is the creation of spaces that would incorporate accidental interaction. The aim is for unplanned activities to happen. To achieve this aim, the functional use of standard architectural elements has to be questioned and broadened. For instance, stairs should not only serve as vertical circulation elements but should also incorporate space for people to step out of the movement zone for a quick chat or to sit down or to slide down on a skateboard or bicycle. Similarly, ramps become movement and pause and rest spaces. Walls become pavilions, and roofs become terraces for resting and socializing. The stage becomes an exhibition box that is visible over the landscape, but it is also used as a pavilion for sports functions. Spaces such as the exhibition foyer are intended to accidentally expose the public to cultural activities and exhibitions.

04.07. Concept sketches:

The pedestrian sidewalk used as a movement channel as opposed to its use as space for interaction



04.07. Concept sketch:

Interaction of the building and its users with the sidewalk and its activities

