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“When I concentrate on a specific site or place for which I am going to design a building, if I try to plumb its depths, its form, its history and its sensuous qualities, images of other places start to invade this process of precise observation; images of places that I know and that once impressed me, images of ordinary or special places that I carry with me as inner vision of specific moods and qualities; images of architectural situations which emanate from the world of art, of films, theatre or literature”

Peter Zumthor 1998 p. 36

Context Study

Philosophical context

A significant amount of the less privileged's time is spent in the public realm as their individual dwellings are unable to facilitate all their daily rituals and activities (Dewar, Uytenbogaart 1995, p. 13) This places the responsibility on the designer to create spaces that not only meet these needs, but which go beyond, to create vibrant and meaningful places for them. However, exactly what transforms a 'space' into a 'place', and the role of the architect in this process, has been under debate for almost as long as the existence of the profession itself.

A place to which people can flock. A comfortable place for spending time in

Vitruvius described dreamers as those who do not tell the birds how to build their nests, but rather who help the birds to build their own nests according to their nature (Dewar, Uytenbogaart 1995, p. 13). Many since have held the opinion that the 'birds', the individual or end user, play an important role. This relationship between user and structure is not static and therefore buildings are not inflexible rigid structures, frozen forever to meet the needs of one specific moment in time. Lucien Kroll views his buildings as being in a timeline without a definite start or end. Incompletion is not a flaw but a condition of the evolution of life. He feels that it is always better to live with the decisions of previous tenants than with the decisions of an architect. Architecture is justified through the will of those for whom it's constructed (Lucien Kroll 1988, p. 9-11) The Built Environment resembles an organism rather than an artifact. It is people who imbue a space with life and a spirit of place, but only for as long as people find the space worth renewing, and if they are included in it's processes. A building endures through transformation of its parts (Habraken 1998, p. 6-7). One way in which buildings can be designed for change was developed by Richard Rogers. He divided the building into different zones, that of technology (short life span) and that of humans (long life spans), calling it open ended architecture. But this 'high tech' architecture became dominated by technology, which was all well according to believed August Comte. He believed that progress is linear and progressive and that eventually all problems will be accounted for and solved. Technology and progress were seen as the one great hope for humanity (Hale 2000, p. 1,17,47-48). Technology on the other hand has proved to be subjected to such rapid and drastic change that designing for a specific technology has proven disastrous. This brings us to yet another important point, the role which a designer's ethos plays in determining the product. This will be discussed later in

Building as a living organism. Continuous growth process. Incompletion, reevaluation and changees a sign of life. This process will only occur if the occupants find the building worthy.

Building should be an activity
(the act of space making)
and a memory, a way of
expressing identity and history,
which can't be separated

We express our world through
myths. A synergy of the known
to explain the unknown. We
define who we are by referring
to things outside of ourselves

Using the inherent meaning
of symbols and elements
in architecture to create
meaning. Understanding and
utilizing the qualities of myths
and memes in architecture.

The communication of purpose, intention and vision through architecture changes according to this interface and can be viewed and implemented in many different ways. It largely lies in how the building communicates its purpose and function, and how the user interprets this function. According to Geoffrey Broadbent architectural language is divided into two groups, the syntactic- which is a preoccupation with rules of combination and structure, and the semantic, which considers meaning in architecture as important. For a long time in architecture the semantic was largely ignored by the modernist. It was the post-modernist who returned to poetic language once again. Robert Venturi felt that the modernist failed in trying to signify function only through form for this caused stigmatation and limitations in the profession. Instead he found that humans understand the use of buildings through the use of signs (Learning from Las Vegas) (Hale 2000, p.146-149).

Micheal Graves divided the language of architecture in rather the same way as Broadbent (mentioned above). He grouped the pragmatic and technical under common Language, and the expression of myths and rituals in society under poetic language. Graves again linked poetic language to history. Building elements are named, and this memory gives a sense of place. The unchanging condition of man can be found throughout his past (Hale 2000, p.152-157). Hartzberger considers syntactic language to be so abstract as to create a feeling of alienation in the user (Hale 2000, p. 163).

The Structuralists are concerned with the "how" of building and meaning. In order to study this they use a philosophy cornering language developed by Heidegger, who studied the history of Language, to find the deeper meanings and relationships that shape language. Structuralists apply this method in the field of architecture to determine the laws, symbols and meanings which underlay an object (Hale 2000, p.132-133). By studying an element and its history, it is possible to find the meaning which connects the element to our world today, thus establishing a link between the architecture and the user.

According to the Structuralists we understand the world in terms of the myths we use to describe it (Hale 2000, p. 133). Ferdinand de Saussure studied this phenomenon in language. He found that communication is due to mutual

agreement that a word's meaning is not necessarily linked to the object. De Saussure dreamed of a science of meaning, which he called semiology. Levi-Straus used the term 'mythemes' to refer to the meaning within a story. He perceived a myth to be an interpretive and mediating device (Hale 2000, p. 138-158).

Gaston Bachelard in his book, *The Psychoanalysis of fire*, describes science as a tool, which can provide precise definitions of things, but that the human beings experience life rather differently. In his opinion, we understand life in terms of images and "stories" (Hale 2000, p. 109).

Philosophy has always been a guiding factor in architecture. Plato first divided our world between the imperfect everyday, and the intangible truth. This relationship finds its way into some of the most influential thoughts of recent times. Hegel formed the concept of Geist, a spiritual, singular consciousness common to all beings. The recognition of an absolute consciousness that is not bound by the peculiarities of individuals, but rather by the properties common to all, is furthermore important. Paulo Ghoelo, in his book *"The Alchemist"*, describes geist as the spirit of the universe, a guiding and nourishing force which binds all beings. Phenomenology is the demonstration of this absolute knowledge. Husserl studied the way in which a mind perceives an object in order to find the true nature of that object. The mind produces its own version of the truth, according to Kant, and therefore by studying this process, it is possible to glimpse the true nature of the object (Solomon 1987, p.3-6). Nietzsche rejected the idea of absolute truth outright, "God is Dead" he claimed, instead he formed the notion of a superhuman. A man who redefines his own world through private contemplation (Abalos 2001, p24-26). The pragmatist considers the mind and the body to be inseparable. The truth is justified and formed through events. Theory and practice influence and adapt to each other and cannot therefore be divided. The everyday is a creative and poetic force (Abalos 2001, p173) Maurice Merleau-Ponty viewed the body as the interface between the physical world and the mind (Hale 2000, p. 106). He believed that we receive all knowledge and information on the world through our bodies. The social constructivists disagree. According to them the knowledge and cognitive processes that produce, form and evaluate knowledge is formed through a persons' social experiences (Brophy 2002, p. 43).

Expression of a universal truth, God.
An underlying force that binds all

In addition to expressing the universal truth, it is important to illustrate the connectedness of all things. That all elements function within systems, that one influences the other, and nothing happens in isolation

Throughout it is evident that all these different philosophies are connected by common themes although the focus may differ. Consider the role of the individual. Nietzsche considers it the individual's responsibility to determine his/her own truth. Dewar and Uytendogaart pleaded for the individual's right to influence and determine his own environment. The phenomenologists consider the way in which an individual's mind perceives an object, the structuralists, like Harzberger, strive to create a sense of identity between an individual and space by leaving it up to the individual to determine its use. These links only prove that the world consists of a complex network of interconnected concepts surrounding the individual. Each separate school of thought only considers a problem from a specific vantage point and within specific constraints.

Throughout this exploration I consciously left out systemic thinking since it is the one train of thought which influenced my world view the most. This is partly due to the training I received. I therefore tried to ignore it in order to consider other philosophies with attempted objectivity. In the end, however, it is impossible to ignore systems thinking, for it proved the validity of its theory even through my study of architectural thought. Thoughts such as the importance of the whole over that of the elements and diversity are used in bringing together apparently opposing views, to create a vibrant entity, capable of adapting to different situations. A systemic approach to architecture would be to consider all the different elements and processes connected with the specific problem and site. Understanding lies in considering the connections, rather than the separate elements.



Historical Context of Mamelodi

The past is an ever present memory, preserved in every aspect of human existence. Imbedded fragments become integrated into the modern fabric to such an extent that the historical meaning often recedes into obscurity. Mamelodi is a case in point of this phenomenon.

Development and dynamics are historically based. The present

The settlement

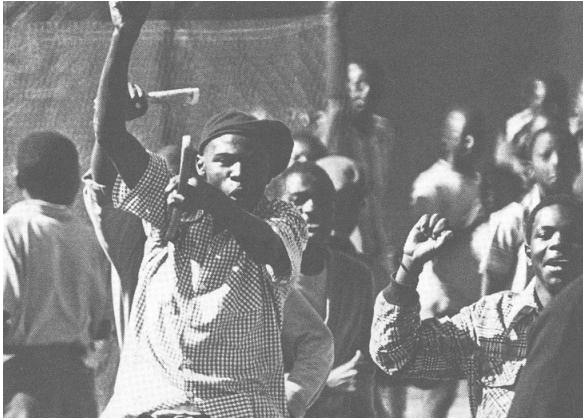
Republic

maker and sold glass bottles, produced from sand found in the Pienaars River, to the newly formed SA Breweries (Walker *et al* 1991, p2-3)

The Anglo Boer war also touched the area. Remains of trenches used in skirmishes between the fighting factions can still be seen in the area. A military graveyard was located in the Mazakhele area of the Site and Service until 1970, when the remains of the soldiers were exhumed and reburied in the military graveyard at Donkerhoek. The Masingita Primary School was established on the site.

The

the farm Vlakfontein 329 JR from the African and European Investment Company Ltd for the establishment of an “Black Location” under the Native (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act, No 25 of 1945 (Walker *et al* 1991, p. 3).



Struggle History

While not as famous as other townships for the part it played in opposing apartheid, Mamelodi played host to a number of important movements and acts of resistance. One such was a strike in 1956 by a group of women against appalling facilities and the regulations against home-brewing of beer. Important riots took place in 1976 and between 1985-1986. The government's decision to institute Afrikaans as the mandatory language of instruction in 1976 sparked much anger among young people and resulted in a number of riots. The most infamous of these riots took place in Soweto and resulted in the death of Hector Pieterse (Walker *et al* 1991, p. 30). In 1985-1986 rent increases resulted in the death of thirteen people in what is known as the “Mamelodi Massacre”. 80 000 people had collected outside the MCC offices, but were dispersed with gas grenades dropped from a helicopter and shots fired by the police (Walker *et al* 1991, p. 24). Rent further caused the residents to organize a rally in the HM Pitje Stadium on 9 July 1990. Of the 16 000 people present about 230 were injured when the crowd was dispersed by means of rubber bullets and tear gas.



Fig. 5 Soweto youth during riots in 1976

fig. 6 Arrest of a protestor in soweto, 1976

Governance of Mamelodi has been the providence of many different bodies over the years. First there was the Urban Bantu Council established in 1961 and abolished in 1970 when the Administration Board of the Central Transvaal took over. In 1977 community Councils were established. Authority was finally transferred to the Mamelodi Community Council in 1980. These governing bodies were never accepted by the greater populace. In 1981 the Vulamehlo-Vukani People's Party was established to counter the Mamelodi Community Council, who was seen to be too much in agreement with the Transvaal Administration Board. In 1985 three counselors including the mayor resigned in protest (Walker *et al* 1991, p. 23).

Churches

The value of churches in Mamelodi goes beyond that of a simple place of worship. They provided warmth and comfort to the ill, the low-paid and the unemployed. Churches were a place of meeting, where residents could share experiences and views. Apart from the social value, churches contributed to the culture of the township in a great way. Singing and choirs were very popular, with a number of competitions being held regularly. These include both national and international competitions (Walker *et al* 1991, p. 27)

Churches provided valuable infrastructure to the community, and lent vitality to the surrounding areas (Walker *et al* 1991, p. 27).

Characteristic of many of the Mamelodi churches is the separate belfry, as pictured below in fig. 7.

A large number of denominations are represented in Mamelodi, The largest being the Zion Christian Church (ZCC). One of the first churches was the African Methodist Episcopal Church built in Riverside before 1947 before the relocation of the community to Vlakfontein (Walker *et al* 1991, p. 2).

Historically the church was a place of gathering, a refuge and a social node, It was an anchoring force in the community. Design needs to recognise this dynamic and strengthen it.

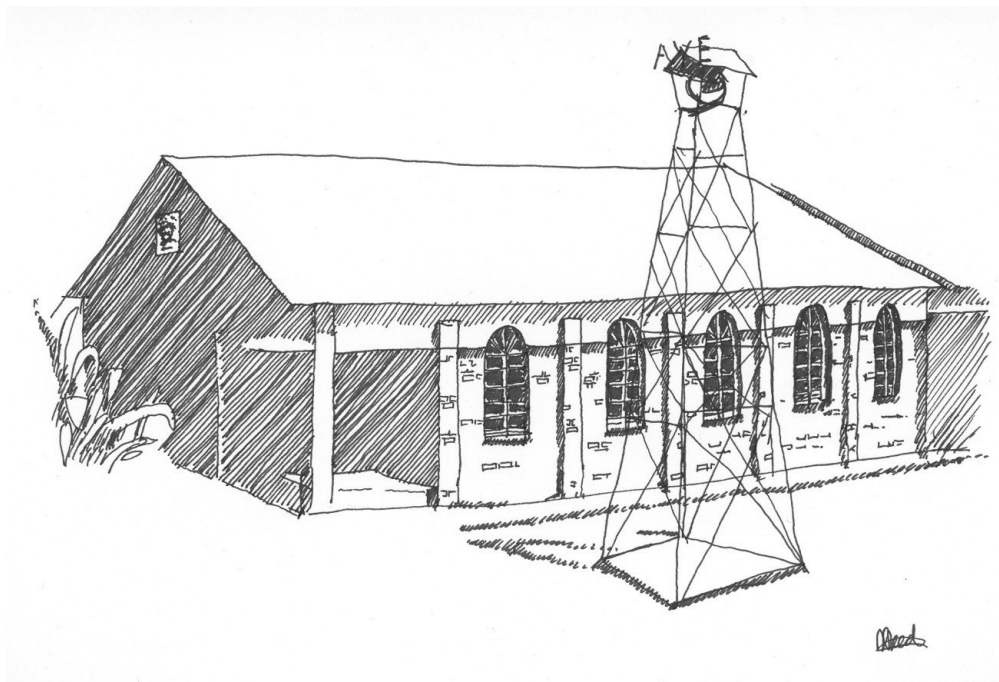


Fig. 7 American Methodist Church, Mamelodi, 1957 (Walker *et al* 1991, p. 20)

Due to historical processes, there exist an significant backlog in the provision of quality facilities.

Regulations set out by the Department of Native Affairs during the 1950's required that any clinic in a black township had to be located outside the township, while being closed enough to serve the people conveniently (Walker et all 1991, p.15). In 1967 a feeding scheme was introduced as an extension of the African Children's Feeding Scheme's drive to combat malnutrition in children. A similar scheme was established in 1976 (Walker *et all* 1991, p. 18).

Despite frequent requests by the community for facilities to shelter needy children, the first orphanage in Mamelodi was only established in 1983. Even then it was externally funded by a Swiss-founded movement for children, and was the first children's home for black children to be built in a urban area for twenty three years. (Walker *et all* 1991, p.17).

The first crèche in Mamelodi was built in 1957. It was named Mxolisi, which when translated means "we are sorry". The reason for this rather odd naming is the result of much fighting over which ethnic group would be allowed to use the facility. By 1991 there were 8 public and 24 private crèches in the area.

People's Parks

Parks and gardens an element of community expression and remembrance. The public open space has to be designed as such a element

Mamelodi was particularly rich in these parks, with the Mamelodi Youth Organization a driving force behind these projects. The parks were constructed with the aid of the community from materials commonly found in the streets. The aim was to clean-up the area and to uplift the spirit of the community. These parks became targets for the security forces as they were commonly named after banned hero's such as Walter Sisulu. Many of these parks are now just overgrown vacant lots. Self-initiated street gardens however are still very popular in Mamelodi (Walker *et all* 1991, p25).



Living conditions

Housing schemes in the area went through a number of different phases. The first scheme implemented was the “Vlakfontein Native Housing Scheme” in 1947, which was a dismal failure. The scheme consisted of thatched “rondavels” situated in a “tribal” yard to create a traditional tribal “Bantu” v

for a generation, the scheme was extremely unpopular.

In 19

Building Research Institute. These houses were soon nicknamed the “matchbox” or “four-room house”. According to some sources these houses had no floors and no ceilings. (Walker et al 1991, p. 10). According to the Pretoria News(27 April 1956) 6000 of these houses had been constructed in the Vlakfontein area by 1956 (Walker et al 1991, p. 11).

Andrew Borraine reported that in 1987 Mamelodi consisted of about 13 478 houses, while a shortage in houses was officially reported as 4 606 houses (Walker et al 1991, p.13).

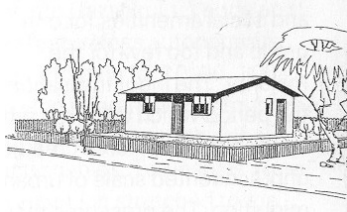


Fig. 8 View of township consisting of house type 51/6

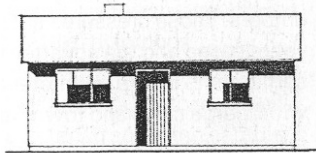
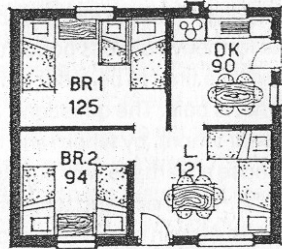


Fig. 9 house type 51/6



By 1991 a number of hostels still operated in the far West of Mamelodi. Between the four hostels 10, 948 men were accommodated. The men paid R22 per month. Most returned to homes outside Pretoria on a regular basis (Walker *et al* 1991, p13). The serious lack in housing can be partially attributed to a government decision taken in 1958 to seize all subsidies and loans for housing for blacks (Walker *et al* 1991, p.9).

Norbert Schingerlin, a graduate of the University of Pretoria, did his BArch thesis project in Mamelodi during 1987. He found that the township had very acted as a dormitory for the workforce needed in Pretoria. The house designs were all according to the municipal house type 51/6 or 51/9, and the erven laid out in a rigged grid. The result was a place reminiscent of the Roman Tent Camps, the monotony removing all sense of place and community. Mamelodi was serviced by the City Council through the provision of electricity and water, but refuse collection was rudimentary at best. Thus an informal collection system was instituted, consisting of pensioners, mostly women, collecting and burning refuse. (Schingerlin 1987, p5-13).

Name Giving

The Moretele River is named after chief Maridile of the Ndebele. (Walker *et al*, 1991, p4)

The origin of the name Mamelodi varies. Apparently it is a praise name for Pretoria, or as some accounts have it, President Kruger. (Walker *et al* p.4).

Stanza Bopape is named after the General Secretary of the Mamelodi Civic Association, who disappeared after he was picked up by the Police in June 1988 along with Peter Maluleka (Walker *et al* 1991, p. 33).

The HM Pitje Stadium was named after Hezekiah Mothibe Pitje, born in 1914, who was the first Mayor of Mamelodi (1967-1969). Pitje was a keen businessman who was actively involved in the community. He supported a few people with bursaries and loans for further education, and was involved in sport development in the area (Walker *et al* 1991, p. 36).

Conclusion and Application to Design

Ignoring the historical context of a place creates a spirit of transience, much akin to that of the Mamelodi created by the Apartheid Government. History creates an understanding for current trends since much of the present is rooted in the past. By honoring and remembering history one adds a layer of meaning and depth to a project and creates points of contact between the user and the facility.

Mamelodi's origins lacks meaning and a sense of ownership. Created as a camp to house the black labour force for Pretoria, for which it is named, a sense of impermanence can still be perceived in many parts. Despite the bleak impersonal surroundings created by rows and rows of house 51/9 and the oppression of a hostile government, people found ways of expressing themselves and of improving their surroundings. The people's parks, created with rubble, to beautify the surroundings and boost the morale, is a very good example. The church played an important role in supporting the community. The church building was a place of refuge and warmth. A place where the needy could find comfort and the community could gather for support and upliftment.

The historic context of Mamelodi informs the design of the importance of the church facility within the community. It is evident that an anchor is definitely needed within the social and urban fabric of Mamelodi. Refraining from relying on geometric rectangles and the grid system will break the pattern set down by the apartheid government. Instead, historic activities such as people's parks, will be continued as a way of honoring the past and allowing self expression.