

CHAPTER

Background



This chapter provides general background information about the thesis subject matter, the selected site and other influencing factors.



[1] Background

1.1 Introduction_

Pretoria, once acclaimed as the capital administration city, held the heartbeat of South Africa's previous dispensation. Currently it is characterised by an underutilised urban core. The political power associated with the city centre has shifted to its perimeter. The majority of the population is also living on the outskirts of the city, either in mono-functional suburbs and gated communities or in the historically disadvantaged township settlements.

Posel (1998, pp. 236-247) observed that "a glance at the map of Pretoria city centre in the mid-1970 suggests more than a third of the buildings were occupied by state departments." This predominant presence of the previous government in the inner city of Pretoria has branded the city as a historic symbol. Internal political strife and cultural prejudice against this symbol have paved the way for the present unbalanced polycentric economic system. The gradual emigration from the inner city to the eastern suburbs after the 1994 election have left governmental, public and private sector buildings partially abandoned. These abandoned structures need to be reinterpreted urgently.

Uncovering some of the layers of history, cultural significance and individual memories rooted in the subconscious sensory experiences of several of the city dwellers, can assist in the proposed reinterpretation and lead to city rejuvenation. Through this thesis I propose that city rejuvenation can be initiated by the improvement of the public sector. The introduction of better public amenities and facilities, which are civic in nature, is suggested. It is with this in mind that the governmental TPA building is selected for reinterpretation as an inviting civic building which will fulfil various functions which include a conference facility and a new home for Pretoria's Art Association.

Lynch (1992, p.1) states that every instant in the city represents more than what the eye can see or what the ear can hear. Every setting is waiting to be more deeply explored. Nothing is experienced in isolation, but always in relation to its surroundings. The sequence of events leading up to the experience represent the memories of the past. Consequently, this reinterpretation of the TPA building will introduce the new with respect for the presence of the past.

1.2 Problem statement_

A design problem can be defined as an undesirable condition which one aspires to alter through a design intervention.

The underutilised state of abandoned buildings within Pretoria's CBD can be classified as such a condition. These vacant structures lead to the gradual stagnation and deterioration of the city fabric. Not only do these buildings rapidly deteriorate, they also become inviting vacuums for negative elements to enter the city and further enhance the perception of the city being a dangerous place.

This thesis is concerned with the following problem: Can the insertion of multi-sensory design elements play a rejuvenating role in a building of which the life line has been severed?

1.3 Dissertation topic_

This dissertation is an investigation into the possible adaptive re-use of the TPA building, a significant structure in Tshwane inner city, as a public building housing different functions including a convention centre and a new home for the Arts Association of Pretoria.

1.4 Research Question_

Can sensory experiences be measured and improved in an existing building? If so, by what means?

Can design with a multi-sensory objective improve spatial experience?

How does one adapt a governmental building with a private nature to accommodate multiple programs with varying degrees of public interfaces?

How can one activate a lifeless street front and improve its sense of place?

1.5 Choice of site_ TPA building.

The Transvaal Provincial Administration (TPA) building on the corner of Pretorius and Bosman Street is selected as the proposed study area for this interior architecture thesis. The dissertation investigates the possible adaptive re-use of this significant structure in the inner city of Tshwane to function as a public building.



Fig. 1.5.1 Perspective of the Transvaal Provincial Administration building by H. Meiring c.1955



Fig. 1.5.2 Aerial image of Pretoria centred on Church Square.

The building complex which housed the former seat of government administration was designed by Meiring & Naudé in association with Moerdyk & Watson and was constructed from 1955 to 1963 (Transvaal Provincial Government 1963, p.5). The building's design originates from Afrikaner Nationalism and Apartheid ideology. It represents the regional mutation of Modernist thought in design which took prevalence in Pretoria's architectural circles in the forties and fifties (Gerneke 1998, p. 211).

In true Modernist fashion, the TPA building is visually biased. Bloomer and Moore (1977, p. 32) explain that this visual dominance found in Modernism is symptomatic of the intellectual prejudice found in European academies, derived from Platonic thought. Plato exalted the sense of sight above all the other bodily senses to discover the purest medium of knowledge to create perfect forms. This thesis, together with the design intervention, strives to be the antidote to the TPA's strong visual language.

The TPA building complex displays incredible attention to detail indicating a high standard of architectural design. It is one of the best civil buildings built at that time in South Africa, bearing witness to the incorporation of some of the newest technologies found in the late sixties.

The current neglected state of the TPA building can be attributed to the gradual evacuation of the building, following the Gauteng Provincial Government's relocation to Johannesburg in 1996. The building's strong reference to the previous government's rule labelled it as an unfavourable historic symbol. This has led to the building's underutilised state, fluctuating between 10% and 15% occupation over the last thirteen years (Tshwane Municipality 2005).

Architecturally, the TPA building remains a prime example of a Modernist civic building. As stated by Zumthor (1998, p.17) every new work of architecture intervenes in a specific historical situation. Therefore it is essential that the quality of the intervention should embrace qualities that can enter into meaningful dialogue with the existing situation. "Since our feelings and understanding are rooted in the past, our sensuous connections with a building must respect the process of remembering" (Zumthor 1998, p. 18).



Fig. 1.5.3. Transvaal Provincial Administration building.

1.6 Objective_

This dissertation aims to create a multi-sensory architectural space within the TPA building. This approach will move away from a singularly visual design approach to one that experientially accommodates all the senses within architecture.

1.7 Outline of the Study_

The design proposal is limited to the two southern wings of the TPA building, referred to as the study area illustrated in Fig. 1.7.1.

The primary focus of the design is the provision of additional vertical circulation within the study area to better accommodate the main two proposed programs; a conference facility and a facility for Pretoria's Art Association.(Fig. 1.7.2) Both of these programs require architectural spaces with strong civic character.

In addition, the eastern section of the study area is further limited to the ground and first floor, which form part of the design proposal as shown in Fig. 1.7.3.



Fig. 1.7.1 Proposed study area.

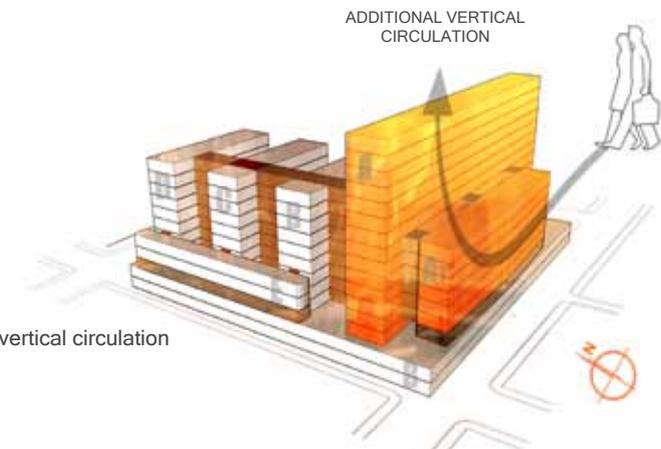


Fig. 1.7.2 Additional vertical circulation within the study area.

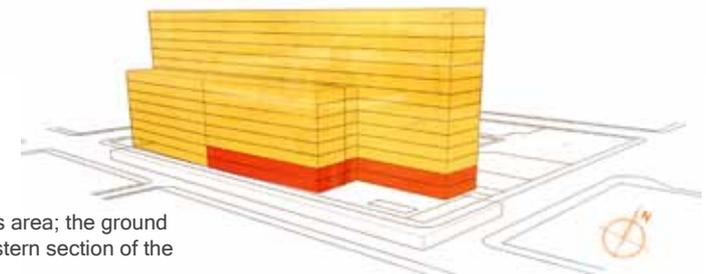


Fig. 1.7.3 Design focus area; the ground and first floor of the eastern section of the study area.

1.8 The client body and user group_

Client _ Pretoria Association of Arts.

The Pretoria Arts Association, established in 1947, currently resides in Mackie Street, Nieuw Muckleneuk (Fig. 1.8.1) and is in need of larger facility.



Fig. 1.8.1 Pretoria Arts Association current facility.

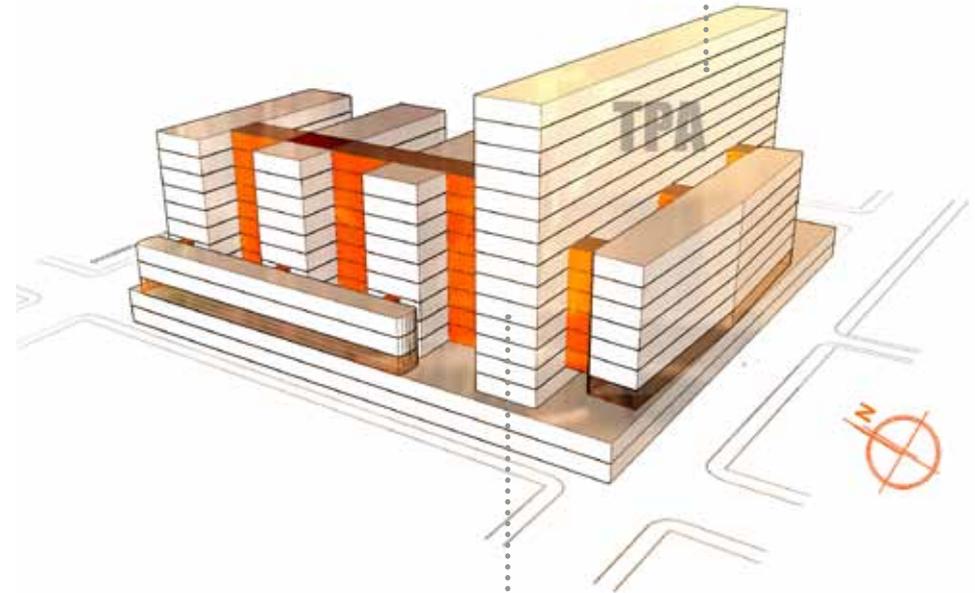
The association hosts:

- Thirty exhibitions a year
- Lectures
- Art classes
- Workshops

[With a public attendance of 500 to 1000 people per month.]

The association additionally hosts three major competitions

- PPC Cement's Young Concrete Sculptor Awards Competition.
- Sasol New Signatures Art Competition.
- Absa L' Atelier Competition



Client_ Conference facility

Providing the city with an additional conference venue with meeting facilities equipped with the latest technology.

1.9 Delimitations_

The design proposal is made on the assumption that the government completely evacuate the TPA building and hand it over to the municipality to be reinterpreted as a civic building.

The design proposal is limited to the two southern wings of the TPA building with the assumption that the remainder of the building will be developed in relation to the proposed design program.

1.10 Methodology_

The document is written in the first person due to the personal nature of the dissertation's theme: sensory experiences in architecture based on an individual's own perceptions, memories and feelings.