Chapter 6

Design philosophy & approach

Design philosophy: space and the city

Cities, on their own and in association to other cities, are spatial phenomena, but they are more than their mere spatial reality. Increasingly the spaces through which we live our lives, and through which the world (and cities) come to be organised are understood as being social products (Lefebvre 1991) formed out of the relations which exist between people, agencies, and institutions. One way of understanding cities, then, might be as particular patterns of such connections set within wider patterns of the relations with other cities and with the rest of the world (Massey 1999:159).

Three elements outline what can be meant by thinking the city spatially. These are discussed below.

The city as specifically spatial

Intensity is one of the outstanding features that characterise cities. This characteristic can be witnessed in the way in which cities congregate and merge people and activities. Mumford (1937:185) coined the term "geographical plexus" to try to capture this.

For Mumford, one of the best definitions of the city had been given by John Stow. For both John Stow and Lewis Mumford:

"Men are congregated into cities and commonwealths for honesty and dignity's sake, these shortly be the commodities that do come by cities, communities and corporations. First, men by this nearness of conversation are withdrawn from barbarous fixity and force, to certain mildness of manners, and to humanity and justice…Good behaviour is yet called urbanitas because it is rather found in cities than elsewhere" (John Stow; cited by Mumford 1937:184).

Stow's definition condors up images of privileged merchants and aristocratic Englishmen, but Mumford is especially interested in what Stow has to say about the character of social relations within the city. In particular, Mumford (following Stow) is suggesting that forms of social interaction occur in cities that are not found anywhere else.

The city can thus be likened to the human body that lives on its different functions such as manufacturing and assembling, warehousing and storage, sheltering and domestic bliss, and personality clashes and political intrigue. These functions have both particular physical locations, and also sets of networks which sustain them.

However, what Mumford is suggesting is characteristic of urban life goes even further. A mere simplistic view of the city does not do justice to its vibrancy and creativity. In addition to being a personal drama, the city is also a social drama. The sheer quantity of possible social interactions means that the city becomes a stage for all kinds of stories. All the more, the city exaggerates and focuses these interactions (Pile 1999:17).

6.01 Displaying particular systems of symbols in public space develops a visible framework to establish patterns of similarity and difference and a distictive identity for an urban area (Times Square, New York City)

What both Pile (1999) and Mumford (1937) stresses is the sheer quantity of possible social interactions in the city, and that the city has the distinctive nature of bringing people together.

To capture even more of this notion of intensity, one might add the simple density of built space, and the city as captor and transformer of nature. Massey (1999:159) argues that, what is most important is that this intensity is something which "emerges as an effect of all these constellations and intersections".

Allen (1999:95) states that this intensity can be felt in what is termed "this expressive side to city life". Jane Jacobs (1972) in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* describes this in observing street life in New York in the 1950s. She likens the movement and flow to an "intricate ballet" in which individual dancers with their own choreographed parts move around and across one another to compose a daily dance of the street. City intensity is therefore the result of the gathering of large numbers of people and from this emerges the social interactions within the city.

6.02

Therefore, the city can at first be conceptualised as a specific spatial phenomenon, as a region of particularly dense networks of interaction, from which emerge intense effects, set within areas where interactions are sparser and spaced out.

Henri Lefebvre (1996:230) draws attention to the fact that the experience of the city is more than our mere perception. It is also, as Jane Jacobs (1972) relates, about what distracts or assures us through its familiar and not so familiar sounds and smells. According to Allen (1999:95) the distinctive feel and presence of the city is the result of this close proximity of many others in all manners of arrangements and relationships between them. The discovery of many worlds in the form of multiple narratives and rhythms is enabled by this intensity of the city. Shift of rhythms, and of those who live them, bears witness to the coexistence of the formal and informal worlds. There are different social stories, with distinct rhythms, and which create and weave together their own spaces. Such are the daily rhythms and movements of cities which routinely code and divide city space (Allen 1999:56-62).

The city as a kind of open intensity enables us to imagine the complexity of the many worlds inside it (Massey 1999:161). These connections enable cities to both hold together and maintain their individualities. Furthermore, it emphasises movement, fluidity and mixing, which in turn, emphasise the dynamic order of cities.

Spatial configuration as generative

That cities have a particular spatial form only introduces the discussion. The city's spatiality produces effects. Lewis Mumford (1937) argues that the city is not just a place where lots of things happen to be. By assembling people, cities both allows new relations to be formed, and also requires of people to interact in new ways.

As one of the earliest modern thinkers George Simmel (1908) was one of the first to consider these effects. He argued that the effect of concentrated spatial closeness was a necessary social distancing. Others followed him in this. Louis Wirth (1938), for example, explores how people's behaviour might be affected by the intense spatial proximities of the city. He argues that the close physical contact of numerous individuals necessarily produces a shift. People tend to acquire and develop sensitivity to a world of artefacts and become progressively further removed from the world of nature. This kind of social distancing is also described by Sennett (1994:18) in his account of single, enclosed drivers cruising along the freeways of urban America.

From these accounts it becomes clear, either implicitly or explicitly, that spatial configurations produce effects. That is, the way in which society (and more specifically, the city) is organised spatially can have an impact on how that society/city works. The city itself is not a sole actor, and yet, cities in the specific form of "city-being" can indeed have effects. It is in this sense that Simmel, Wirth and Sennett seek to capture it.

Massey argues that the impact of the city can be detected at levels beyond that of the social interaction of individuals. These are effects of spatial interconnections and of what Massey (1999:110) calls "geographical juxtapositions". These new "geographical juxtapositions" produce new histories. So, too, do interconnections over long distances. The networks of communication, power and influence which connect cities together have their effects on each of them. Interconnections of this sort somewhat contributes to that which make cities the cosmopolitan places they so often are.

Detachment can have equally major repercussions. Castells (1996) writes of the inequalities which can be entailed in disconnection, and of the potential social consequences. Detached cities may

6.03

struggle to find a new role. Mumford (1937: 184) laments on the potential outcomes of the low-density spreading-out of the city.

It thus becomes clear that cities may be understood spatially. The particular form of the spatial configurations which constitute them will affect what happens next.

The openness of the outcome

It is a mistake to think that a particular spatial form necessarily gives rise to a particular social effect. It is not a simple cause-and-effect relation. In contrast to Simmel's (1908) statement on the impact of city life, Jane Jacobs (1972) describes a much more active mixing and interaction. It could, perhaps, mean that both these things co-exist at the same time. Wirth (1938) argues that cities present the opportunity for people to form new kinds of social interaction and form bonds that do not rely on kinship ties, neighbourliness, communal sentiments, tradition, and "folk" attitudes (fig 6.04).

Richard Sinnett's (1994) account of the disconnected drivers of the motor-centred urban community was a lament, but also something he believed could be changed. Both Pile (1999) and Massey (1999) argue that spatial proximity is not enough to guarantee any particular outcome. For proximity to be turned into a city, something else needs to happen.

The article entitled *A decent life* by Ismail Serageldin (1997:25) presents a clear case of the openness of such outcomes. The spatial juxtapositions which are "Third World" cities do not have inevitable outcomes. What can be made of them will depend on resources, on what happens to levels of inequality, and on political commitment.

Conclusion

The relation between space and the city is an open one, as it depends on human action. Cities can embody in general terms particular spatial forms, but what is made of them, and what can be made of them, and indeed how they can be altered, is up to human actions, ingenuity, and human political will.

6.02 Trafalgar Square, London, England (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trafalgar_Square)
6.03 Effect of spatial configuration as seen in New York City (http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/New York City)
6.04 People form bonds that do not rely on kinship ties, neighbourliness, tradition or "folk" attitudes

6.04

Design approach: adaptive reuse

According to Feilden (1994:1) an historic building is "one that gives us a sense of wonder and makes us want to know more about the people and culture that produced it". A historical building is a symbol of our cultural identity and continuity and as such it has an emotional impact on us. It is a document of our history and a source of information. According to Strike (1994:18) historical buildings are "evidence which can be experienced by each generation". It provides answers to the "what, why and how" questions of those who come after us.

Causes of decay

Several sources are responsible for the decay of historical buildings and can be grouped in one of two overarching categories, namely natural disasters (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, floods, landslides, fires caused by lightning) or human factors (generally the by-products of industrial productivity) (Feilden 1994:2).

According to Cunnington (1988:113) one of the human factors causing historic building to become redundant is that the original use for which it was constructed has ceased to exist. A second reason is that it was superseded by new processes for which the old building is unsuited. Furthermore, the use could have expanded to such an extent that the old building is no longer large enough to house it. Finally, decay could be the result of a general economic decline in the area, as is often the case with railroad services due to a decline in the transport system.

It is this decline in passenger railroad services on all but a few rail corridors that requires creative new uses for the stations. Adaptive reuse of railroad stations can be economically feasible and also assists in taking major action to preserve and rehabilitate historic or architecturally significant structures and cultural resources (Webber 1978b:1). Many railway stations have in the past been converted in this way while still retaining their original function, though at times in a reduced manner. Other times adaptive reuse results in an increase in the passenger service of railroad systems (Webber 1978a:22).

What is conservation?

Feilden (1994:3) defines conservation as "the action taken to prevent decay. It embraces all acts that prolong the life of our cultural and natural heritage, the object being to present to those who use and look at historical buildings with wonder the artistic and human messages that such buildings possess". When it comes to the conservation of historical buildings, the slogan of "less is more" rings true.

On the other hand, Austin (1988:4) prefers to speak of "preservation" rather than "conservation". According to Austin (1988:4) preservation is "the act of retaining all or any part of the structure, even if it is moved from its original location". Restoration on the other hand is "any treatment given to a building after the decision has been made to preserve it". Such acts of restoration include rehabilitation, remodelling, repair, adaptive reuse and so forth.

Rehabilitation of historic buildings: adaptive reuse

Often it is necessary to find an appropriate use in order to prevent a building's decay or destruction (Cunnington 1988:17). Problems time and again arise with the disappearance of a building's original use. Providing a new use could ensure the survival of such a building.

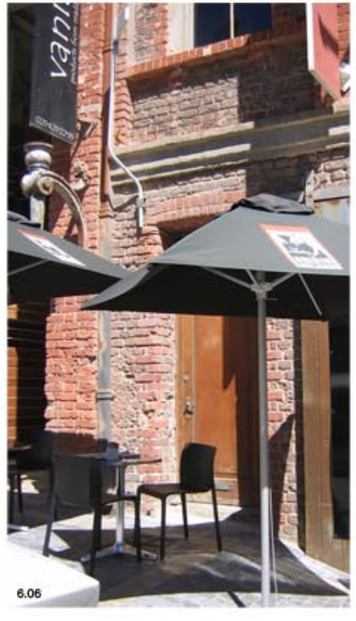
Austin (1988:49) describes adaptive reuse as the principles through which "structurally sound older buildings are developed for economically viable new uses". This simply means that buildings are "modified to some degree to meet contemporary demand" (Reynolds 1982:45).

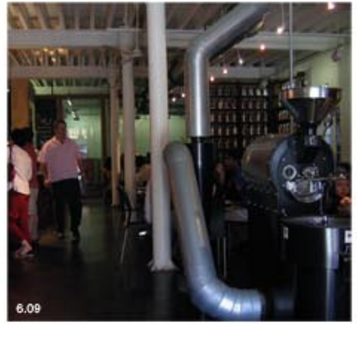
Adaptive reuse of historic buildings was a common pattern until the start of the Industrial Revolution by the mid-19th century, and spread all over the world during the 20th century. Only since then has it become more usual to demolish the old and build new buildings (Cantacuzino 1989:8).

There are social, cultural and economic advantages to adaptive reuse (Feilden 1994:259):

- Social in that people and towns keep their identity;
- Cultural in that artistic, architectural, archaeological and documentary values can be preserved both for their intrinsic value and their contribution to the identity of the town; and
- Economic in that existing capital is used, energy is saved, demolition costs are avoided and the existing infrastructure of roads and services is utilized.

In addition, it causes far less human upheaval, political friction and physical delay, so when the total budget is considered, in most cases, money is saved.


6.06


6.09

6.05 Adaptive reuse in Cape Town, Origin Coffee
6.06 Waiting area
6.07 Surface detail
6.08 Street facade
6.09 Origin Coffee interior
6.10 Contrast between old and new

Conclusion

The need to transform and re-generate Rissik Station has previously been identified in chapter 4. An approach of adaptive reuse provides some answer as to how the station can be re-generated while remaining sensitive to its history. From chapter 4 it is also clear that not all of the existing structures can be preserved as is advocated by proponents like Feilden and Austin. There has to be a balance between preserving the existing station and addressing future development needs. For this reason, selected structural elements will be retained, while others will be demolished in an attempt to address such needs. This will become clearer in chapters eight and nine.