

**VEGGING OUT** **MESSAGE IN A MUSCLE**

**BODY & SOUL**

**What's really making you fat?**  
If the thought of going on another

**HAPPY EATING**

**HEART MARK**  
THE HEART AND STROKE FOUNDATION SOUTH AFRICA  
**ONE PUFF GETS YOU HOOKED!**

**THE BODY EXPERIENCE**

**THE FOUR FACTORS THAT AGE YOU**

**ARE YOU A HEALTH GURU?**

**SIZE MATTERS**

**the sex doctor**

**DIABETES SA**  
Fresh vs

# INTRODUCTION

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**Figure 2:** Collage indicating the obsession society has developed with physical image.



Figure 3: "All you can eat special".

Health centres like hospitals and clinics tend to be unwelcome, sterile environments. This dissertation is about the making of a conventional and complementary Health Centre that aims to be a place-making building. This intervention will create a sense of place and give identity, which the Modern Movement has so clearly disrupted. The intention would be to emphasise place through sensory experiences. By this the user will be connecting (identify and orientate) to a sense of place and then ultimately to him or herself through the various therapies.



**FEEL YOUR BEST!**

Hooked on  
happy pills?



BREAK  
YOUR  
BAD  
HABITS



BRAIN FUEL

HEALTH NEWS

USING YOUR MIND?

HAPPY  
LIVING



think  
yourself well

# THEORETICAL INVESTIGATION

## Introduction

This dissertation will investigate the relationship between man and architecture. The history of man and the development of civilisation have been carried on the shoulders of its architecture. History can be recognised through the buildings people have lived in - a fact that is not coincidental.

The existentialist movement that started with Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and reached its pinnacle in the insights of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was instrumental in establishing the invaluable connectedness (and in fact, fluidity) between man as subject and his surroundings as object. Since then, the integral relationship between man and the built environment has been readily accepted and explicated by the likes of theoreticians like Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926-2000) and Juhani Pallasmaa (1936-), who integrated the insights of the existential movement with architectural theory. Their insights will be used to how man and his built environment are inextricably linked.

In contemporary society however, the link between man and his built environment is subjugated to immense pressure. Modern man, especially since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has inexorably been involved in a process where he is progressively removed from his environment. This alienation has been

brought about by a number of factors, in which architectural approaches played a significant role.

These factors and the role that architecture played in the alienation will be commented on. Lastly, suggestions will be made towards restoring man to his rightful place in relationship to his built environment, and helping man regain his sense of belonging that is integral to authentic existence.

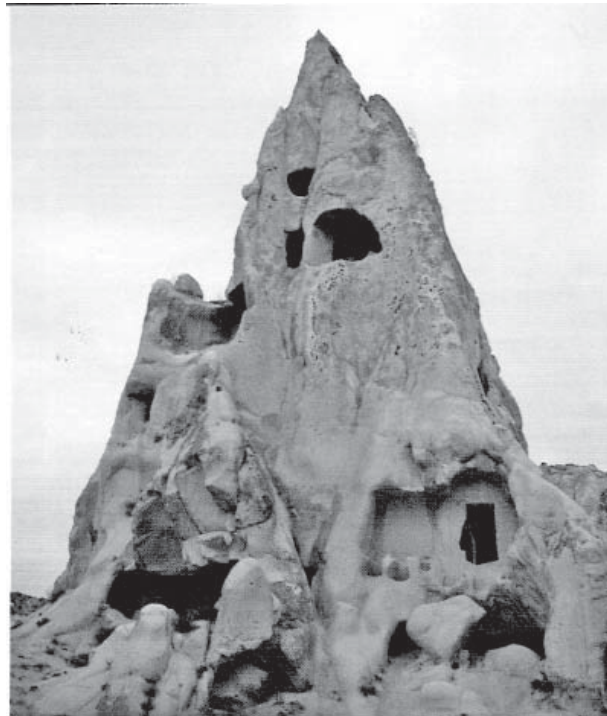


Figure 5: Caves dwellings in Cappadocia, Turkey c. 1000.

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Figure 4: Collage indicating the role of stress in people's lives.

## Identity and meaning

Norberg-Schulz, relying on the works of Heidegger and Gadamer, has written extensively on the relationship between man and his environment. His approach is based on the terms *meaning*, *identification* and *orientation*.

According to Norberg-Schulz (1985:22) *meaning* is found in the relationships in which things stand to one another. The meaning of a roof can be found in the fact that it is connected to a wall, and provides cover to the people underneath it. Without these relations the roof would cease to be a roof. The same can be said for walls and floors.

Meaning is essential for *identity* - the identity of man is determined through the relationships he has with his environment. True identity is only found through meaningful relationships. According to Norberg-Schulz (1980:24) identity is "to have a meaningful relationship".

To find identity is a process in which memory plays an important role. The meaningfulness of a relationship can often only be unlocked by repeated encounters - to know something and to identify something takes time and repetition. Norberg-Schulz (1988:44) states that a building speaks through its environment, the materials it is made of and its form.

When a person responds to what the building says, the possibility of poetic dwelling arises. But since poetry is spoken in images, he can only respond to images that he has a memory of. Therefore, through the interaction between meaning and identity, poetic dwelling takes place. Poetic dwelling can be understood as man's ability to truly exist integrally with his environment. This results in the deliquescence of subject and object and the authentication of existence - a sign that man is orientated in his environment. Thus, *orientation* is the product of the successful interaction between man and his environment.

Caudill (1978:53) states that the built environment has a great psychological effect on people:

- bad buildings contribute to suicide, good buildings help prevent it
- round rooms encourage social intercourse
- old people in nursing homes die sooner in the rooms at the end of halls

Sociologists and psychologists agree that the physical appearance of buildings is fourth in line after motivation, management and policies in the reaching of user satisfaction or - stress. Even in early times Christian and Islamic theologians argued that beautiful buildings have the power to improve us morally and spiritually (De Botton. 2006:117).

People observe and then react towards the built environment, but they also interact. They will modify their environment to suit them: they will paint the walls and put up pictures. But people feel different towards the same space. Therefore it is important for architects to design with as much flexibility, identity and orientation. Because, as Caudill (1978:57) states it, if a building fits someone's physical, emotional and intellectual needs, the person will have a sense of ownership.

A question arises, raised by the likes of De Botton (2006:98) as to the possibility of creating beautiful buildings. How would one know if a building is beautiful, since everyone has a different perspective of beauty?

The question is answered in different ways, all pertaining to the same underlying truth. Norberg-Schulz (1985:67) states that an architect has to give meaning to a place in a specific environment with a specific task at a specific time. These factors all contribute to the concept of a beautiful building.

According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Pallasmaa 2000:78) the task of architecture is 'to make visible how the world touches us' and that 'architecture concretises and frames human existence in the flesh of the world'. Pallasmaa (2006:29) holds that architecture should let people experience themselves as absolute embodied and spiritual beings.

Architecture gives meaning and lets people relate, it helps them experience being-in-the-world and strengthens their sense of reality and self. Architecture should address all the senses simultaneously; it should structure people's understanding of the world and their existence.

Therefore, architecture is beautiful when it achieves the objective of giving meaning to a place and helping one towards orientation and identity.



Figure 6: Aboriginal lean-to habitat, Northern Territories, Australia

### The arrival of the schism

According to Pallasmaa (2000:79) the modern movement was the main culprit in the alienation process that led to the separation of man from his environment. The process has its origin in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when architecture started to adhere to the slogan "*form follows function*". Adherence to the principle form-follows-function led to the loss of meaning and identity as the importance of the relations within architecture were neglected in favour of a functional approach.

This approach resulted in the dominance of characterless environments with inadequate possibilities for human dwelling (Norberg-Schulz, 1988:48). Modern architecture lost its relation to its environmental and cultural context (Pallasmaa 2001:51), which caused man to lose his sense of identity and orientation. An environmental and cultural crisis is looming as a result.

This looming crisis is further aggravated by the westernised capitalist society, according to the Tanner lectures on human values by Axel Honneth (2005:10), in which everything is reduced to potential economic values.

Honneth states that man has been alienated from his fellow men and their feelings, due to the fact that man observes them as mere objects to enhance himself for his own selfish reasons. Man is the centre of his own individual universe, in which he surrounds himself with "objects" that contribute towards his perceived happiness. Since everything is mass produced, no special moments are left.

The westernised capitalist society has thrown out the mystery of life, exchanging mystery with an obsession for facts and figures. This insatiable hunger led to the illusion that 'everything' can be known and discovered, leaving no room for dreams and hopes of things undiscovered (Honneth 2005:27).

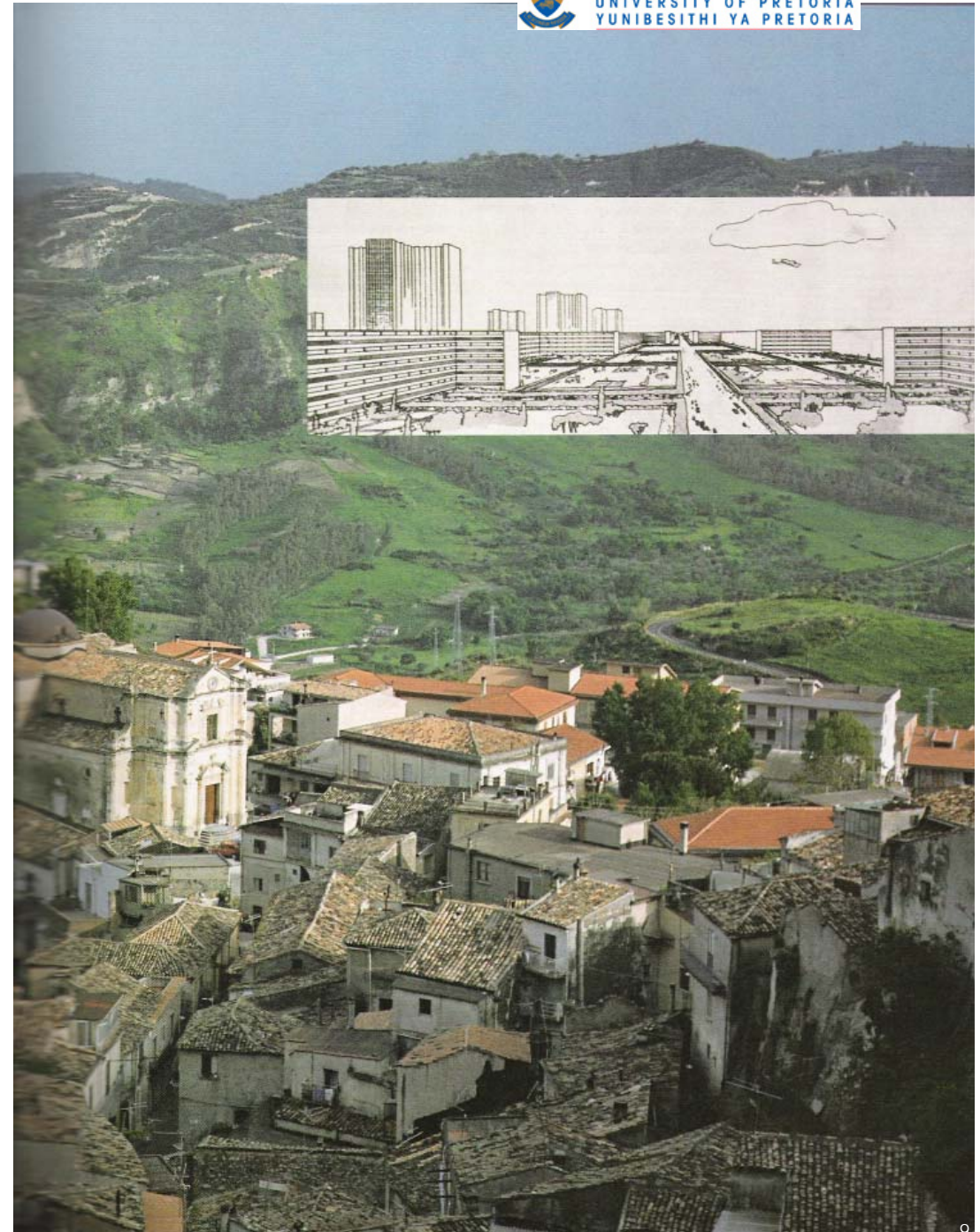
Honneth (2005:29) further explains that when man lost sight of the fact that his actions were grounded in his perceiving of the world, he started to put himself outside the context of his actions and started to deny that which was familiar. The consequence was that man lost all emotional connection with his environment.



**Figure 7:** Pruitt-Igoe Housing, St. Louis. This building was demolished on 15 July 1972. For Charles Jencks (1939-) this was a symbol of the end of modern architecture.

In his explication of the problem Honneth explains the alienation of man from his surroundings by comparing it to the emotional development of a child. During the first nine months after birth a child develops an emotional connection to his psychological parent, a process in which he learns to communicate and interact with his world, even on a subconscious level.

Autistic children however, do not have the ability to identify emotionally with another person, resulting in emotional blindness, and an inability to interact with people on an emotional level. As a result, autistic children struggle to distinguish between the different facial and bodily expressions of people, isolating them from meaningful relationships. According to Honneth (2005:29), this is the social malady underlying to every aspect of modern society.



**Figure 8:** Contrast: A hill town in southern Italy (c. 1400) vs Plan Voisin by Le Corbusier (1887-1965), Paris, France (Project 1925).



### Towards a rediscovery of meaning and identity

It is not enough to merely diagnose a problem or malady - once a diagnosis is made, a concerted effort must be made towards finding and implementing the cure for the malady. This is also true of the challenge that contemporary architecture is facing. It has to restore the crucial link between man and the built environment. Only then will man rediscover the meaning and identity of things, a link that seems ever so elusive.

How can this be achieved? The sociological insights of Axel Honneth are invaluable for a re-assessment of the enormous task facing those that conceptualise and design buildings today. According to Honneth (2005:40) the very notion of social interaction presupposes the ability of man to put himself in other people's shoes. Only then can man truly understand another's underlying motivations behind their actions.

In an existential sense, through this process, one can become aware of the other's intentionality towards the environment, even if it remains intuitively. If this does not happen, the relationship between man and man is incomplete and the possibility of true understanding is lost.

Because every individual reacts differently to the objects that surround him, it is vital that man must be able to intuit the intention of the other towards his surroundings. This can only be achieved by identifying with him, by putting oneself in the other person's shoes.

When these insights are applied to the designing of buildings, it becomes clear what is asked of the architect. They need to immerse themselves in the context of a building - in the surroundings, the people that will eventually use it, as well as the spirit of the time. Only through thorough contextualisation can buildings be created that are true to their calling: to give identity and orientation through meaning.

The functional approach to designing needs to be replaced by a relational approach. We need buildings to speak to us, to enhance the mood, not only to do certain things. Once this is said, we find that the characteristics we expect from buildings are the same as we expect from people. The reaction we get from a building resembles the reaction we get from people: a cold shoulder, a warm smile, an inviting face. This is echoed by De Botton (2006:88), who states that what we want in a building is not far from what we want in a friend. Buildings that we identify with and remember fondly have characteristics that we cherish, characteristics achieved through shapes, colours, textures and materials.



**Figure 9:** Eighty year old man skiing. What does it take to have a long fulfilled life?



*"We do not have architecture, therefore, but rather, a part of us is architecture. Architecture is a way of being, just as science, art, and the other major culture forms are ways of being. So when we come to define the true and deeper functions of architecture, we will not be simply describing the production of a certain type of artefact, but explaining one of the original ways in which we know ourselves" (Abel. 2000: P150).*

Figure 10: Woman embracing her surroundings.

According to Pallasmaa (2000:84) architecture should not try to overpower the foreground, but rather be a supportive background for human activities and perceptions. Just as we react negatively towards bombastic and overbearing people, buildings that try to say too much leave us uneasy. What we wish for in buildings is a humbleness, an impression that can grow and develop as we interact with the building. And since nothing in life can be rigidly perfect, we wish our buildings also to have imperfection and irregularities (Pallasmaa. 2000:83).

De Botton (2006:248) states that if architects do not succeed in creating meaningful places, we as a people will not be able to be content in other parts of our lives. Therefore bad architecture is not only a failure of design but also a failure of psychology. We have to care for and respect our environment and have an understanding for it, a predisposition that can only be achieved through an integral connectedness with one's surroundings. In this, architecture plays an invaluable role. Otherwise, as Norberg-Schulz (1985:67) states, we will "forever dwell disorientated in a meaningless world".

**Figure 11:** Man made object embraced by nature.

