

chapter 3
THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the supplementary theories of the *Flâneur* and the *Blasé Attitude* will be explored alongside the primary theory of the *Derivé*. The *Derivé* is a theory concerned with making individuals active participants of their urban context. The *Flâneur* is an individual who strolls the city's streets to experience it. The *Flâneur* engages in an objective non-participative observation of the city's activities (Porter: 2004: 62-3; Tankard, 2004: 41). It should be noted that the *Derivé* is linked to the *Flâneur* (Porter: 2004: 62-3; Tankard, 2004: 41). How the city has impacted on its users and on society will be analysed in light of the *Derivé*. This will inform the design approach of the building.

3.2. THE INDUSTRIALISED CITY

The academic Lewis Mumford (1895–1990) was interested in the culture and architecture of cities and wrote extensively on these topics. Mumford's book *The Culture of Cities* discusses the emergence of the industrialised city. He noted how the mechanisation and industrialisation of cities in the 19th century resulted in new pressures, challenges and complexities in the growing urban societies (1938: 191). As the basic infrastructure of newly-developed cities was established, it was realised that for a well-developed society to materialise the social and cultural aspects of a city should be developed (Mumford, 1938: 482). Mumford argues that it is the responsibility of the city to educate and to uplift the urban individual and to instill human values. This would allow for the individual to contribute positively to the city (Mumford, 1938: 484).

The American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1869–1959) believed that sensitive and socially-conscious architecture could positively influence a city's civilization and culture (1966: 112). He further believed that designing

for man and not machines created personal and positive relationships between architecture, city spaces and man (Wright, 1966: 113).

Considering the speed of urban industrialisation, cities were not designed in the “spirit” of people. City users and dwellers became disillusioned and overwhelmed by the city's activities (Simmel, 1971: 329) and were not culturally or socially “elevated”, as hoped for by Mumford and Wright. The city did not take on the responsibility to educate and uplift the urban individual.

The proposed building will allow city individuals the opportunity to educate and enable themselves positively within the city.

3.3. FLÂNEUR

Charles Baudelaire, the French poet, initially coined the French term the *Flâneur* (literally translated as “to stroll”). The theorist Walter Benjamin conceptually developed the theory to comment on urban socio-economic relations (Porter, 2004: 62–3). The *Flâneur* is a voyeuristic observer that experiences the city streets by walking or wandering (Tankard, 2004: 41; Porter, 2004: 62–3). Such observers are distanced from their urban surroundings as they do not participate - they are impartial (Porter, 2004: 63). Essentially, the *Flâneur* accommodates leisurely exploration of pedestrian environments or city streets (Porter, 2004: 63). The *Flânerie* is an unbiased and objective exercise that is used to contribute to the observer's understanding of the city's urban activities (Porter, 2004: 63).

The *Flânerie* can encourage a greater dialogue between the building and the city's everyday users who are not actively involved with the building. This can be approached through the spatial planning and the treatment of surface

planes. Allowing for passers-by to wander or walk through public or pedestrianised spaces of the building will allow them to experience the building on a more intimate level. Creating architectural elements that allow for the city's users to observe the building's activities will facilitate in exposing people to art. Observing the city's activities around the site in an unbiased manner can also serve as an educational tool that can inform the design outcome of the project.

3.4. BLASÉ ATTITUDE

The *Flâneur* is closely related to the *blasé attitude*. Georg Simmel, the German sociologist, whose paper *The Metropolis and the Mental Life* (1903) criticises modern city life, states how a *blasé attitude* has emerged from the rise of the modern city (Simmel, 1971: 329).

The modern city is an aloof and overpowering environment (Simmel, 1971: 329). The individual's sensory nerves are so overwhelmed by the city's multiple sensory experiences, activities and constant change that the *blasé attitude* emerges as a coping mechanism for the individual (Simmel, 1971: 329).

However, the *blasé attitude* extends beyond merely a reaction to external stimuli, but also to the individual's response to objects. Objects are apathetically judged on the same level: they bear no “differences” (Simmel, 1971: 330). When distinguished, objects are assessed through their monetary worth: they are judged not by their uniqueness but by their perceived value (Simmel, 1971: 330).

In the dissertation the “indifferent” industrialised city and the *blasé attitude* will be challenged through the building design. The proposed building will jolt the urban individual out of the *blasé attitude* that does not

acknowledge the city's art. This *blasé attitude* needs to be confronted so that society can understand, appreciate and contribute to the arts scene.

3.5. DERIVÉ

The city is reconstructed as a site where freedom of choice in direction, experimentation and play could result in the liberation of the individual and society, creating the potential for the boundaries between politics, art and action to dissolve (Tankard, 2004: 41).

The *Derivé*, or “the drift”, is a mapping technique in an urban context formulated by the Situationists International (SI). Headed by Guy Debord (1931–1994), this anti-establishment “group” existed between 1957 – 1972 in Europe (Graafland, 2008: 12; Tankard, 2004: 41; Sadler, 1998: 1). The Situationists were controversial as many of their beliefs and concepts challenged the academic and creative worlds of art and literature (Tankard, 2004: 41). Their ideas were unusual and non-conformist (Graafland, 2008: 12).

The mapping techniques related to the *Derivé* will not be explored as this dissertation is primarily concerned with the *Derivé*'s theory of individual active participation and exploration in an urban context. This participation does not necessarily speak to the spatial planning of the proposed arts facility. Instead the theory influences the building programme and its relationship to its urban context, the proposed site and the community. Debord envisioned the *Derivé* as involving planned but accidental encounters of “...organised spontaneity” (Sadler, 1998: 78). The individual does not enter the building by pure “chance”.

The programme of the proposed building entices the

observer or city user to become an active participant within the building and the urban context (Tankard, 2004: 41; Porter, 2004: 62–3) (thereby breaking down various psychological barriers to art as discussed in Chapter 2). In the public realm of the proposed creativity facility – on the ground floor – urban activities and encounters between the building and city user will be inevitable. The accidental encounters as argued by the *Derivé* will be introduced into the design primarily on the ground floor.

The *Derivé*'s focus is on the “capitalist city” (Ref. to Fig. 3.1.) (Tankard, 2004: 41) and emphasises the importance of pedestrian and street activity and participation. The Situationists felt that modernist urban forms (and thus cities) contributed to banality and routine in people's lives (Sadler, 1998: 4, 94) and in this way acknowledged Simmel's disillusioned and overwhelmed city users with the *blasé attitude*. The Situationists encouraged “... rereadings of the city” (Sadler, 1998: 98) by its users. Where the *Flâneur* is an objective non-participation of the city's processes (Tankard, 2004: 41, 62–3), the *Derivé* opposes and reacts against such an attitude. The *Derivé* attempts to reconnect the individual with the city (Ref. to Fig. 3.2.). It aims to encourage and coerce the city user to become the controlling and active participant in a psycho-geographical context, (Graafland, 2008: 13; Porter, 2004: 63) through experimentation, participation and creativity (Tankard in Porter 2004: 41) thus “maximi[sing one's] freedom and potential” (Graafland, 2008: 12). The *Derivé* actively “interrogates...[and] engages with ... the constructed landscape” (Tankard, 2004: 41).

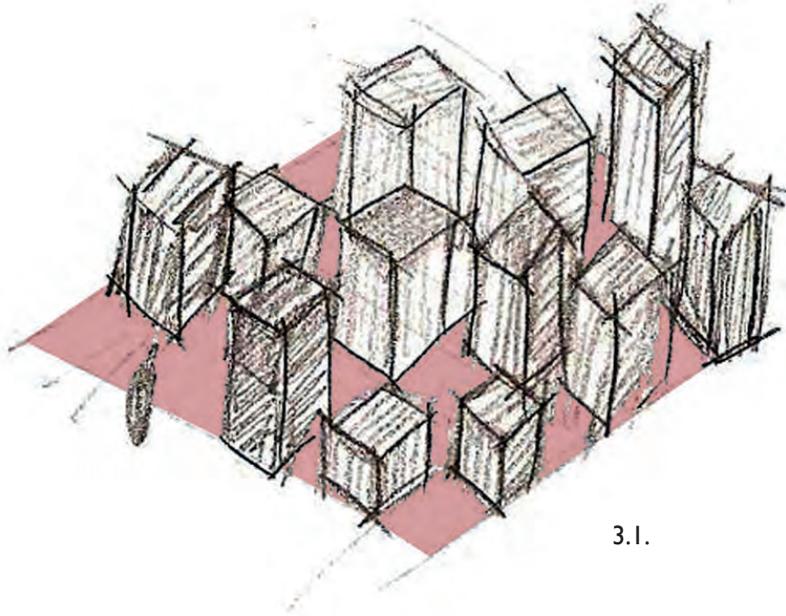
It is important to note that whereas the *Flâneur* is a bourgeois activity, the *Derivé* is neither bourgeois nor proletariat, as its focus is on the pedestrian and the pedestrian's activity (McDonough, 1994: 73). However, the *Derivé* realises that the pedestrians, the working classes, are the everyday users of the city (McDonough, 1994: 73) and is therefore closely connected to politics

as it attempts to engage with the working classes (Graafland, 2007/8: 12).

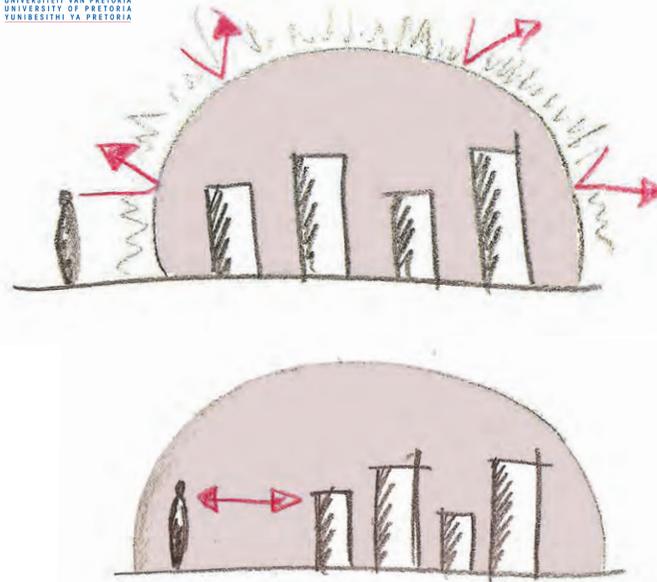
Jane Jacobs (1916–2006), a journalist who explores the demise of American cities, discusses how streets and sidewalks are the most important elements within a city (1993: 37). Streets are inevitably the veins of activity and social culture, as people interact with one another and their context on a daily basis through them (Ref. to Fig. 3.3). The neighbourhoods, the building programmes, the users, the inhabitants and even the sense of security within an area can influence the atmosphere of the street culture, which can encourage or discourage public participation in the streets (Jacobs, 1993: 37). In all cities, the streets are the spaces for public engagement for city users and are the primary factor that impact public spaces. The streets thus accommodate the requirements of the *Derivé* adequately.

The theory ultimately allows for the city user to “...reappropriate...public space” resulting in the rediscovery of the user's and the city's “...fullness...richness, and its history” (McDonough, 1994: 77). Essentially, the Situationists attempted to challenge the way the city is perceived and how it is “inhabited”. They encourage encounters of unknown spaces and to appreciate the potential of such spaces (McDonough, 1994: 77).

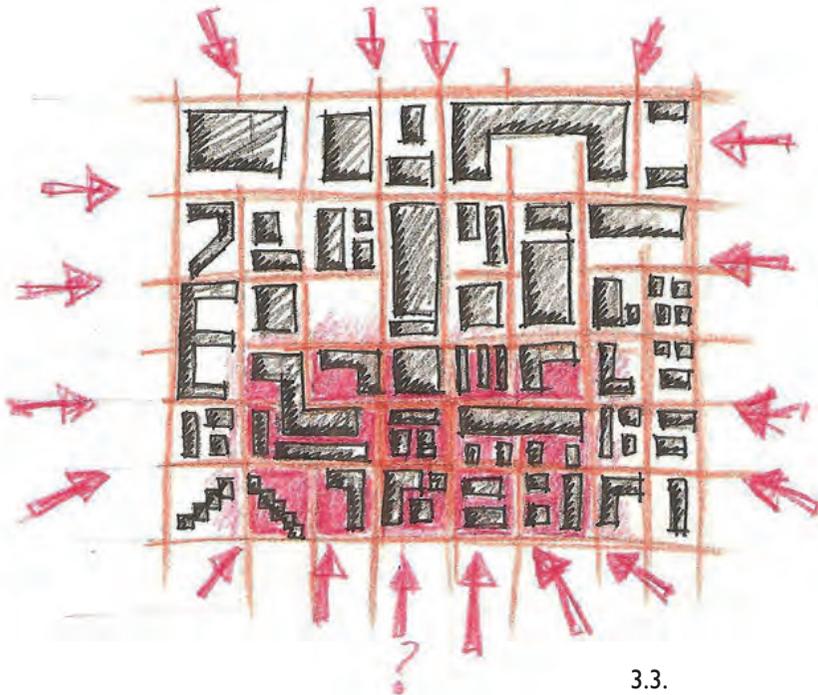
The proposed creativity facility will seek to encourage an engagement with the public through the theory of the *Derivé* that essentially encourages the city user to become an engaged and active participant within their context (Porter 2004: 63). By employing the *Derivé*, experimentation and creativity is encouraged and reconnects the city and its users (Tankard, 2004: 41). The architecture will speak of this theory and will create a more accessible interface and relationship between art, the city, and the city users (Ref. to Fig. 3.4.). This will be explored further in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.



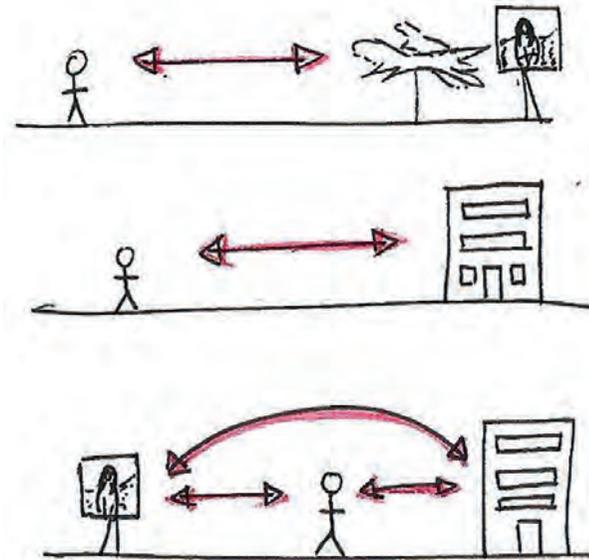
3.1.



3.2.



3.3.



3.4.

Fig. 3.1. The streets of the capitalist city form the public realm that allow for city users to explore and to experience the city (Author, 2011).

Fig. 3.2. The Derivé argues for the reconnection of the individual with the city (Author, 2011).

Fig. 3.3. The streets are the veins of activity within a city (Author, 2011).

Fig. 3.4. It is desired that the proposed arts facility connects and establishes a relationship between the city, users of the city and art (Author, 2011).

3.6. CONCLUSION

The *Derivé* promotes interactions and relationships between people and buildings, architectural spaces and objects in an urban context. It advocates a dialogue between city users and artworks. The *Derivé* is relevant because city users should be able to identify and relate to their context (Sadler, 1998: 77). The *Derivé* reacts against the passivity of the urban theories of both Simmel and Benjamin by expecting the individual to become active within an urban environment. importance of the *Flâneur* is acknowledged insofar as the *Derivé* reacts against it. This chapter draws attention to the *Flâneur's* activities so that the participatory nature of the *Derivé* can be better understood. The *Derivé* will encourage the design to incorporate the city's users as active participants within the creativity facility, counteracting the indifference of the *blasé attitude*. This will be achieved programmatically and spatially.

The programme of the proposed building will allow for engagement with the city user. The ground floor is where urban activities and encounters between the building and city user occur. The approach to the ground floor, the public realm, is important. The spatial manipulation for chance encounters and movement in these spaces should also be considered in order to allow for the city user to be the active, controlling participant and to explore the building with ease. It will allow for individual freedom, experimentation, creativity and play (Tankard, 2004: 41), allowing the user to engage, explore, and discover different characteristics of the building for themselves. Essentially, the building will facilitate the creative freedom of the individual, simultaneously maximising individual potential (Tankard, 2004: 41). Creating spaces that encourage the user to engage, explore and discover initiates a process of reconnection with the building programme, the art world and the city. The facility will focus on creative production and

exhibition as its primary elements. The *Derivé* will impact on the outcome of the proposed building and its architecture, which will acknowledge the public realm, the context and the site's street activity.

The *Derivé*, although formulated in the 1960s, is relevant today as many spaces within the Pretoria CBD require reactivation through architectural interventions (du Toit, 2009: 4). The *Derivé* outlines the importance of pedestrian and street activity and participation with "... constructed landscape[s]" (Tankard, 2004: 41), allowing for a reactivation of abandoned sites (that have been identified and selected) within the CBD.