05

RESPONSE TO CONTEXT

1. Introduction _ 2. Critical Regionalism _ 3. Relevance of Critical Regionalism in the Design of a Satellite Museum _ 5. Precedents _ 5. Response of Design to Global and Urban Context 7. Response of Design to the Atrium Building _ 8. Conclusion

FIGURE 5.1

FIGURE 5.2

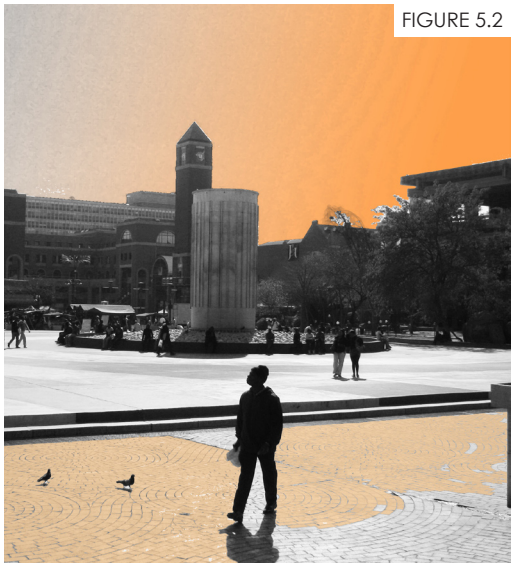

FIGURE 5.1 Digitally modified photograph of the Standard Bank Centre atrium.
FIGURE 5.2 Digitally modified photograph of the Lilian Ngoyi Square

Chair One
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The Architectural theory of critical regionalism promotes architecture that is influenced by the needs and characteristics of its location. The theory is also concerned with issues of individual and cultural identity, authenticity and meaning.

(Canizaro, 2007:18)

5.1 Introduction

An initial investigation into the architectural theory of critical regionalism led the author to question the intervention's response to its context. This chapter starts with a description of how critical regionalism plays a relevant role in the design of the satellite museum. Four museums are investigated in terms of how these museums respond to, or reflect their surrounding context.

Based on the way in which the precedent studies reflect the context, the intervention's response to its context is described.

5.2 Critical Regionalism

Critical regionalism's acknowledgement of local environments makes it a relevant theory in any new design project, as the world faces a growing ecological crisis (Nesbitt, 1996:583). The theory is concerned with issues such as sustainability, site-specificity, quality of place and cultural identity (Canizaro, 2007:11).

The theory of critical regionalism falls within the ongoing architectural discourse of regionalism, a method by which tensions are resolved between globalization and modernity on the one hand and localism and tradition on the other (Canizaro, 2007:16). Regionalism promotes the establishment of connections between new constructions and existing local and regional characteristics (Canizaro, 2007:21). As a whole, regionalism is concerned with connectedness to place (Canizaro, 2007:17). Similar to regions that must be continually reassessed, regionalism is a living concept that grows and changes (Canizaro, 2007:21).

Critical regionalism is intended as an alternative to both the dehumanizing aspects of modernism and the superficiality of postmodernism (Ingersoll, 2007:387). The term 'Critical Regionalism' was coined in 1981 by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre. Similar to regionalism, the theory aims to create a balance in the tension between the regional and the universal; every culture must both be itself and transcend itself (Mumford, 2007:101). Tension exists between tradition, as the necessary cultural continuity and modernity, as the desire for progress (Canizaro, 2007:22).

5.3 Relevance of Critical Regionalism in the design of the Satellite Museum

An exhibition space for a cultural museum in the centre of the city should respond to its context, in the same manner that critical regionalist architecture draws inspiration and form from the context (Lefaivre & Tzonis, 1996:590). Critical regionalism is based on the understanding of place and tectonics (Nesbitt, 1996:568) and promotes the employment of local materials and craftsmanship (Alofsin, 2007:370). This will be taken into account during the design of the satellite museum.

Kenneth Frampton (2007:378) defines critical regionalism as a recuperative, self-conscious, critical endeavour. The tactile perception and experience of space is important, not only the visual perception or image of it (Frampton, 2007:385). Critical Regionalism respects the immediacy and situations of everyday life and suggests that local, everyday experiences should serve as the basis for architectural design (Canizaro, 2007:12). This corresponds with the role of the satellite museum as a point on a person's everyday route, rather than being a destination.

By establishing a relationship between people and place, the satellite museum functions as a catalyst project based on the poetics of critical regionalism. Critical regionalism aims to re-embed people in the reality and diversity of their local places. The architecture should be able to adjust to the constancy and change of the local environment and create opportunities for understanding where and with whom one lives (Canizaro, 2007:12). This links to the design concept of a museum in flux. (The concept is further explained in Chapter 7.)

Critical regionalism advances authentic architecture that stands in opposition to the universal conformity of the built environment. Authenticity, defined by Canizaro (2007:26) as a quality of engagement between people and things or places, is a central concept of critical regionalism. The notion of authenticity is described as connectedness, participation and the possibility of real local experiences. Authenticity is an important concept when designing a museum and dealing with the exhibition of museum objects.

Critical regionalist architecture should speak the language of its setting and reflect the current conditions of culture in the region (Alofsin, 2007:370). It selects place-defining elements and incorporates them strangely, rather than familiarly in order to evoke a dialogue between the building and the viewer (Lefaivre *et al.*, 1996:589).

FIGURE 5.3 Everyday experiences that serve as the basis for architectural design: people sitting in public spaces.
FIGURE 5.4 Everyday experiences that serve as the basis for architectural design: people walking in the CBD.

FIGURE 5.3

FIGURE 5.4

5.4 Precedents: Museums that respond to the context

5.4.1 Kirchner museum

FIGURE 5.5

FIGURE 5.6

Architect: Gigon/Guyer

Location: Davos, Switzerland

Description: The Kirchner museum expresses the regionalism of Switzerland as its glazed surfaces reflect light in a dialogue with the surrounding snow and ice (Newhouse, 1998:87). The building's exterior form blends into the snow-capped, mountainous landscape, with a varying opaque, translucent and clear glass cladding. The museum houses the art of the German expressionist painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. The interior spaces of the museum focus the attention on the objects. The influx of natural light is regulated by louvers adjusted by an electrical or manual system (Newhouse, 1998:87). Matte glass ceilings diffuse natural and artificial light in the galleries.

Design Application: The building's exterior reflects the environment, while the interior is simple and form a back-drop for the objects on display.

5.4.2 The Menill Collection

FIGURE 5.7

FIGURE 5.8

Architect: Renzo Piano and Richard Fitzgerald

Location: Houston, Texas

Description: The Menill Collection is a deeply poetic reaction to the culture, climate and urbanism of the region it is located in (Ingersoll, 2007:387). The museum echoes the surrounding area's vernacular scale and materials. The long, low structure is a single storey wood-and-exposed-steel rectangle that is reminiscent of the siding of local farm buildings (Ingersoll, 2007:391). The 'Living Light' concept and the platform roof with leaf-shaped diffusers ensure that natural light will enter the building and will vary according to time of day (New-house, 1998:21).

Design Application: The museum building directly responds to the light and climate of the context with the leaf-shaped diffusers. The 'living light' concept can be applied in the design of a museum in flux.

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5.4.3 Hiroshige Ando Museum

FIGURE 5.9

FIGURE 5.10

Architect: Kengo Kuma

Location: Batoh, Japan

Description: The scale of the Hiroshige Ando Museum relates to the scale of the surroundings (Lefaivre, 2003:110). The architect Kengo Kuma combined new and traditional elements to produce a truly Japanese architecture. A main element of the building is the gridded wooden structure that creates the walls and roof of the building and changes with the light that pours into the space. This allows the building to become a sensor of light by becoming a translucent plane.

Design Application: The material palette can be used to express how the new intervention fits into or contrasts with the existing conditions. Familiar materials can be used in a new manner to express the specific qualities of the site and context.

5.4.5 Quaker Live Oak Friends Meeting Hall 'Skyspace'

FIGURE 5.11

FIGURE 5.12

Architect: Leslie Elkins
Artist: James Turrell

Location: Houston, Texas

Description: In the Quaker Live Oak Friends Meeting Hall the focal point is the skylight in the centre of the ceiling. 'Skyspace' is an ethereal installation and collaboration between the artist and the architect. The skylight frames the view of the ever-changing sky and aims to encourage the visitor to meditate (Lefaivre, 2003:116). During night time the skylight is covered with a solid retractable segment of the roof and offers a blue neon-installation. This is classified as a regionalist project, because it combines highly sophisticated artwork with a simple, traditional house that fits into its context.

Design Application: A combination of technology and traditional materials can create an interesting new outlook on the context of the new museum exhibition.

FIGURE 5.5 Exterior of the Kirchner Museum (Silloway, 2005).
FIGURE 5.6 Interior of the Kirchner Museum (Brown, 2008).
FIGURE 5.7 Eastern facade of the Menill Collection (Karczmar, 1996).
FIGURE 5.8 Interior of the Menill Collection (Longo, 1988). FIGURE 5.9 The Hiroshige Ando Museum (Altermatt, 2007) FIGURE 5.10 Interior of the Hiroshige Ando Museum (Thompkins, 2008).
FIGURE 5.11 Interior space during night time (Turrell, 2000). FIGURE 5.12 Cross section through the auditorium and galleries (Lefaivre, 2003).

FIGURE 5.13 The world-wide culture of consumption in the CBD of Pretoria.
FIGURE 5.14 People in Pretoria with global fashion trends.

FIGURE 5.13

FIGURE 5.14

5.5 Response of Design to Global and Urban Context

According to Paul Ricoeur (2007:55) humanity is on the brink of a single world civilization. Evidence of this statement is the standardization of housing and clothing that represents a universal way of living and a world-wide culture of consumption (Ricoeur, 2007:55). Whilst this universal civilization represents progress in the form of the multiplication of human relationships, it constitutes the subtle destruction of traditional cultures (Frampton, 1996:570). Both the philosopher Paul Ricoeur (2007:57) and architectural critic Kenneth Frampton (1996:570) speak of the spreading of a mediocre civilization, where throughout the world one finds the same bad movie, fashion trends and slot machines. The global conformity of architecture can be included in this list of universal atrocities.

The conflict between globalization and local identity is a crucial problem in nations rising from underdevelopment (Frampton, 1996:570). Though South Africa does not fall into the category of being underdeveloped, the search for cultural identity within the aftermath of the disassembly of Apartheid and its legacy is evident in the name changes that are occurring throughout the country (Deckler, 2006:1).

The design intervention responds to this so-called universal civilization by providing exhibition spaces where the users of the city can express themselves and share their memories and recollections of Pretoria. This reinforces the identity of the people and the role they play in the city. The stories that people record inside the satellite museum become a part of the museum collection.

The museum spaces become part of the public spaces of the city and whilst international objects are on display, the museum experience is rooted in the CBD of Pretoria. A visitor entering the Standard Bank Centre specifically for the museum experience will find him- or herself surrounded by regular users of the city. The atrium building is a living museum that displays the reality of city living.

5.6 Response of the design to the Atrium Building

The Latin word 'atrium' refers to the open court in an ancient Roman house that formed the social center. Enclosed rooms led off from the atrium (Bednar, 1986:63). The technological development in structural steel manufacturing and the availability of larger glass panes created new possibilities for covered courtyards. Weather protected interior spaces which benefit from natural light, can be designed. A similar building form is the arcade (a glass covered passageway which connects two streets and is lined on both sides with shops) that also developed out of the new use of glass and steel (Geist, 1983:3).

Today the definition of an atrium is a central, interior, day lit space which organizes a building (Bednar, 1986:63). The atrium creates inherent spatial order in a building and serves as a place of orientation for the hallways or spaces surrounding it. In the late 1970's, around the time when the Standard Bank Centre was built, the atrium concept enjoyed a revival among architects, clients and the general public (Bednar, 1986:30).

5.6.1. The function of the Atrium

Bill Hillier (Bednar, 1986:70) identified four reasons why a building exists, in other words: four functions of a building. The atrium building is discussed in terms of these functions, namely the cultural, economic, shelter and accommodation function.

a. Cultural function:

An atrium encourages social interaction through people-watching, movement through space and places where people can pause and linger. Atria put people at the centre of things and contribute to the city by combining the idea of the street line and the plaza (Saxon, 1983:5). An atrium encourages people to come to the city not only for work or shopping, but also for enjoyment (Saxon, 1983:6). Atria provide the necessary catalytic common space that is needed for users of a building to get to know each other through frequent visual contact and informal meetings (Bednar, 1986:v).

The Standard Bank atrium space has the potential to be a place where people can gather and meet accidentally. The design intervention aims to articulate the cultural potential of the atrium by providing it with another function. The atrium is positioned in the city amongst other atrium buildings and is part of a network of interior public spaces.

b. Economic function:

Atrium buildings are successful because of their extra attraction and income power (Saxon, 1983:6). In office blocks atriums provide 'shallow' space for perimeter offices rather than the deep spaces of a block-covering building. This is premium rentable space that can be sub-divided more easily (Saxon, 1983:6). In commercial centres atria provide occasions for public gathering, events and exhibitions, thereby attracting shoppers (Bednar, 1986:72).

The additional function of a museum in the atrium will increase the income of the building and present new users.

c. Shelter function:

The sheltered central court of an atrium creates an all-weather public gathering space. The atrium brings in light, but keeps out wind, rain and extreme temperatures, reducing costs and increasing comfort. The atrium acts as a buffer space, a transitional area from outside to inside (Saxon, 1983:6).

d. Accommodation function:

The atrium space and the adjacent spaces interact with each other. The atrium is a useful space for exhibition, performance or a market area. The vistas and accessibility it creates can enable upper levels to work as extension of the ground level (Saxon, 1983:6). The atrium creates circulation in a building.

On the street level of the Standard Bank Centre the atrium is surrounded by passages and retail spaces. This causes the passages to function in a similar circulation manner as arcades.

FIGURE 5.15 *The atrium encourages people to come to the city not only for work, but also for enjoyment*, Digital collage.

Buildings are four-dimensional: not only do they have three dimensions of space, but they respond through time to the demands of the day (Saxon, 1983:35). What makes older buildings work for new uses is their concentration on the general functions of the building rather than on the specific needs of their original use. Older buildings have good entrances and circulation to give orientation, generally good structural and thermal performance and provide daylight and air to most areas (Saxon, 1983:35).

The design intervention aims to make the public aware of the atrium space and to create opportunities for people to spend time in the atrium. A ramp is positioned in the atrium space on the lower three floors of the atrium. People walking on the ramp would experience the atrium space from the centre of the volume.

5.7 Conclusion

The critical regionalist approach emphasizes that one should not design a building based on image and form, but rather to allow the site to determine the aesthetic of the building. Local materials and craftsmanship should be used and accommodated in the design. This contributes to the sustainability of the design intervention.

The satellite museum is a response to the specific needs and characteristics of Pretoria. The Standard Bank Centre is a shell into which the satellite museum is placed. Similarly a museum building functions as a shell in which layers of exhibitions and installations are inserted.

The new satellite museum responds to the context by contrasting with the rigid modularity of the building. The shape of the ramp is curved and suggests an organic element that grows in the atrium space. Designed elements in the museum spaces such as sound pods and computer stations reflect the sleek light-weight shape of the ramp.