

02. Introduction

Background

Since 1994, the 'new' city of Pretoria has been released from the confinements of Apartheid past. Like most cities in the country, Pretoria has undergone major changes in the last 10 years. As in Johannesburg, the once controlled and manicured streets, office spaces and parks have been released to all of its citizens and the city has taken on the character found in most cities in a developing world. The streets have become packed with unregulated informal trade, small-scale manufacturing and cross-border trade. Ethnic enclaves have found their place in the shadows of corporate headquarters while middle-class residents have secured themselves in suburbia behind electric fences and guardhouses (Bremner 2004: 19).

Pretoria has rapidly transformed, developing new bonds, intimacies and identities in the midst of or in between the existing rigidities and spatial enclosures of the city. This has resulted in either destructive or constructive practices. Since democracy, streets and intersections have been overrun by practices claiming space in messy and overlapping ways (Bremner 2004: 19). Life within Pretoria's divided landscape continues to be made up of hybrids of real, everyday experiences (Deckler, Graupner, Rasmuss 2006: 4).

Within two contrasting urban experiences of the city of Pretoria – the dilapidated ghettoised existence at the northern periphery of the apartheid city in the township Marabastad, and the theme-park retail space of Menlyn mall – lie complexities of urban life within the post apartheid city. It is within this lived space, somewhere between the themed shopping utopia and the rough-edged, everyday poverty and dystopia, that South African practitioners in the spatial disciplines find themselves practising their art (Deckler, Graupner, Rasmuss 2006: 4).

Within this context, the practice of architecture finds itself confronted with a new set of challenges. There is a complex physical and social landscape that is equally hybrid and diverse, a space in which a multiple of diverse cultures exist and compete for resources and opportunities. Such landscapes within our cities, townships, towns, farmlands and rural 'homeland' spaces are merging as South African society 'opens up' to globalizing forces. As a result tensions have emerged from these landscapes. Tension between wealth and poverty has led to the creation of an ever-increasing division between the rich and poor, the migrants and citizen, men and women and between the spaces people occupy by virtue of their mobility or lack of it (Deckler, Graupner, Rasmuss 2006: 4).



(Opposite: Anti-clockwise from top)

Figure 2.1. Unregulated Informal Trade outside the State Theatre (Author, 2010)

Figure 2.1. Unregulated informal trade on the corner of Boom and Potgieter Street (Author, 2010)

Figure 2.3. Small-scale manufacturing: Welding (Author, 2010)

Figure 2.4. Small-scale manufacturing : Garment industry (Author 2010)

Figure 2.5. Small-scale manufacturing : Undertaker (Author 2010)

Figure 2.6. Ethnic Enclave: Mosque situated within the city centre (Author 2010)

It is within this 'jammed space' of previously distinct cultures and their associated distinct spatial practices that opportunities are created for invention and interpretation within the field of architecture that are fundamentally different from those offered at times of socio-political stagnation. Tensions arise from the current cultural uncertainty of the post-liberation era which offers the rare opportunities for creativity and interpretation of the inherited world (Wolff 2009: 178).

However identifying a series of tensions that exist within Pretoria, will not reveal the manner in which tensions should be dealt with. The aim of the dissertation is to identify such tensions and to explore how they affect the city urbanistically and architecturally. The dissertation will investigate the possible architectural/urban interventions that will arise from the resolution, synthesis or conflict of these tensions. Murray states that the visible appearance of buildings and other assembled material objects that make up the cityscape always gives rise to intuitive or evocative allusions. He further states that city-building processes oscillate between creative interventions, the fashioning of something new that never existed before, on the one side, and selective destruction on the other (Murray 2008: ix).

Urban spaces that are in tension in Pretoria can provide the city with the opportunity to foster a new post apartheid way of city making that encompasses the hybridity and intersections of diverse cultures. In order for an architectural intervention to succeed within a spatial field of tensions certain aspects need to be taken into account:

- Understanding the fractured nature of Pretoria's urban landscape. After apartheid, as with most cities in South Africa, Pretoria's production of urban space was the outcome of unstable mixture of opposing fields of force where the latent tensions between the anxious rich and the desperately poor were never completely out of sight and occasionally erupted into outright conflict in the most unexpected places (Murray 2008 : 4). Can urban space be designed as a cosmopolitan entity – a place where all differences mix together, whether ethnic, racial or religious?
- The design of democratic environments that are inclusive rather than exclusive.
- Establishing points of linkage and connectivity to maximise legibility of the urban fabric.

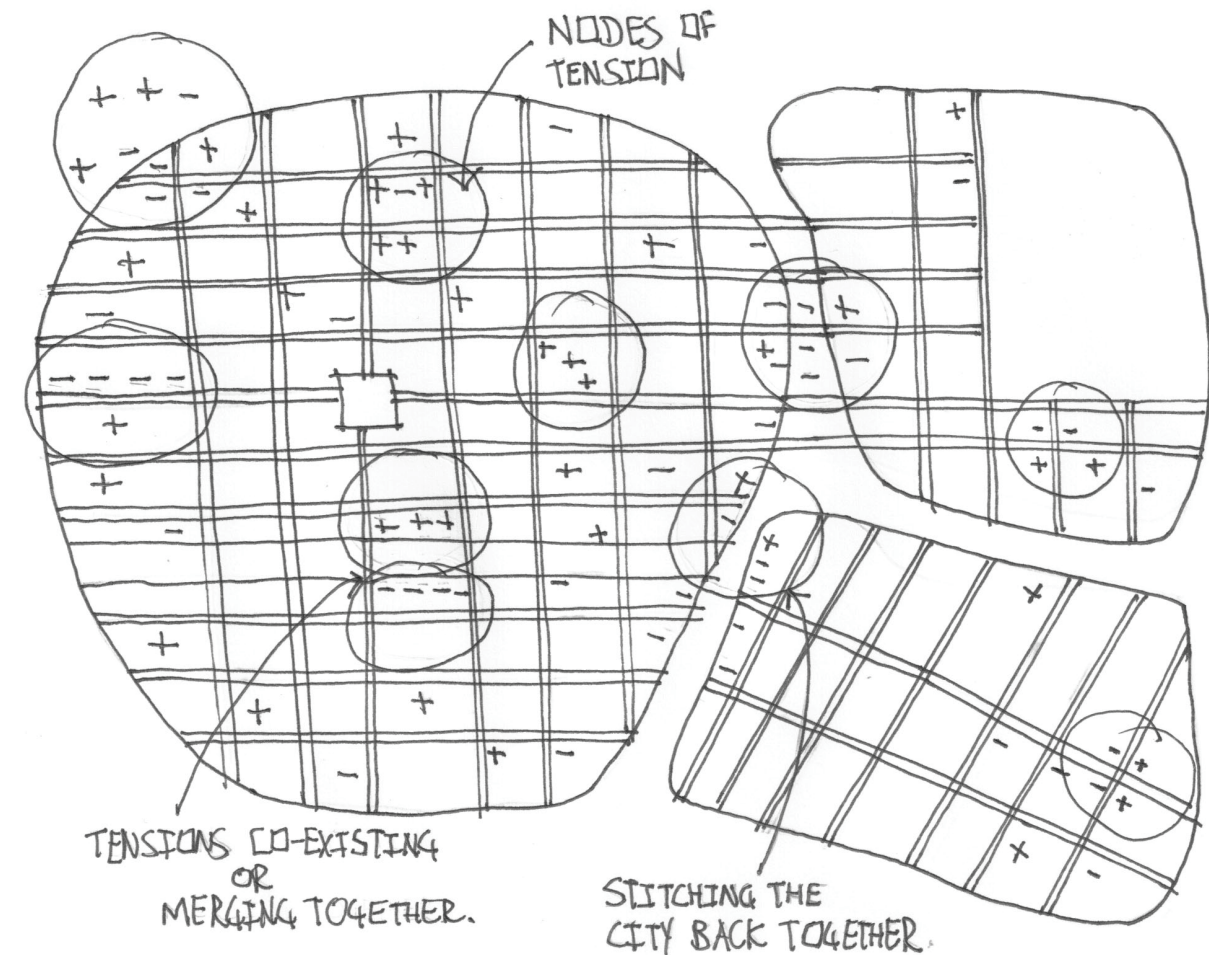


Figure 2.7. The city of Pretoria within a spatial field of tensions (Author 2010)

- Understanding that the urban landscape of Pretoria is an evolving field of spatial tensions and contradictions, in which the physical features of the cityscape are saturated with symbolism and meaning and where the collective memories and imagined futures are inscribed in the built environment (Murray 2008 : 6).
- Understanding that the inner city needs a diversity of functions and facilities to be able to serve an urban society.



Figure 2.8. (opposite)
A man lying in shrubbery along the canalized Apies river. This is a result of the lack of inclusive environments that exist within the city (Author 2010)