



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Chapter 3

Context



#3 - "Kanseliers"
Finished in 1960 (South) & 1964 (North)
Function then: Lecture Halls
Function now: Lecture Halls



#2 - Old Chemistry
Finished in 1911
Function then: Lecture Halls
Function now: Offices & Kiosk



#7 - Student Centre
Finished in 1995
Function then: Food & Offices
Function now: Food & Offices



Old Arts
Finished in 1911
(few months after Old Chemistry)
Function then: Lecture Halls
Function now: Exhibition space / Archives
Architect: P Eagle/JC Cleland
Style: Late French Renaissance
(Transvaal Sandstone)



#4 - Marketing Services Building
Finished in 1960
(together with "Kanseliers")
Function then: Lecturer's Offices
Function now: Research Support Offices



#5 - Old Merensky
Finished in 1939
Function then: Library
Function now: Exhibition space
Architect: Gerhard Moerdyk
Style: Persian/Egyptian



#1 - Merensky Library
Finished in 1975
Function then: Library
Function now: Library
Architect: Louw Marais Marquard & Kuhn / Tectura (Heirs to Norman Eaton's Practice)
Style: New brutalism (after humanities block)



#6 - Humanities
Finished in 1973
Function then: Lecture Halls/Offices
Function now: Lecture Halls/Offices
Architect: Brian Sandrock
Style: New Brutalism

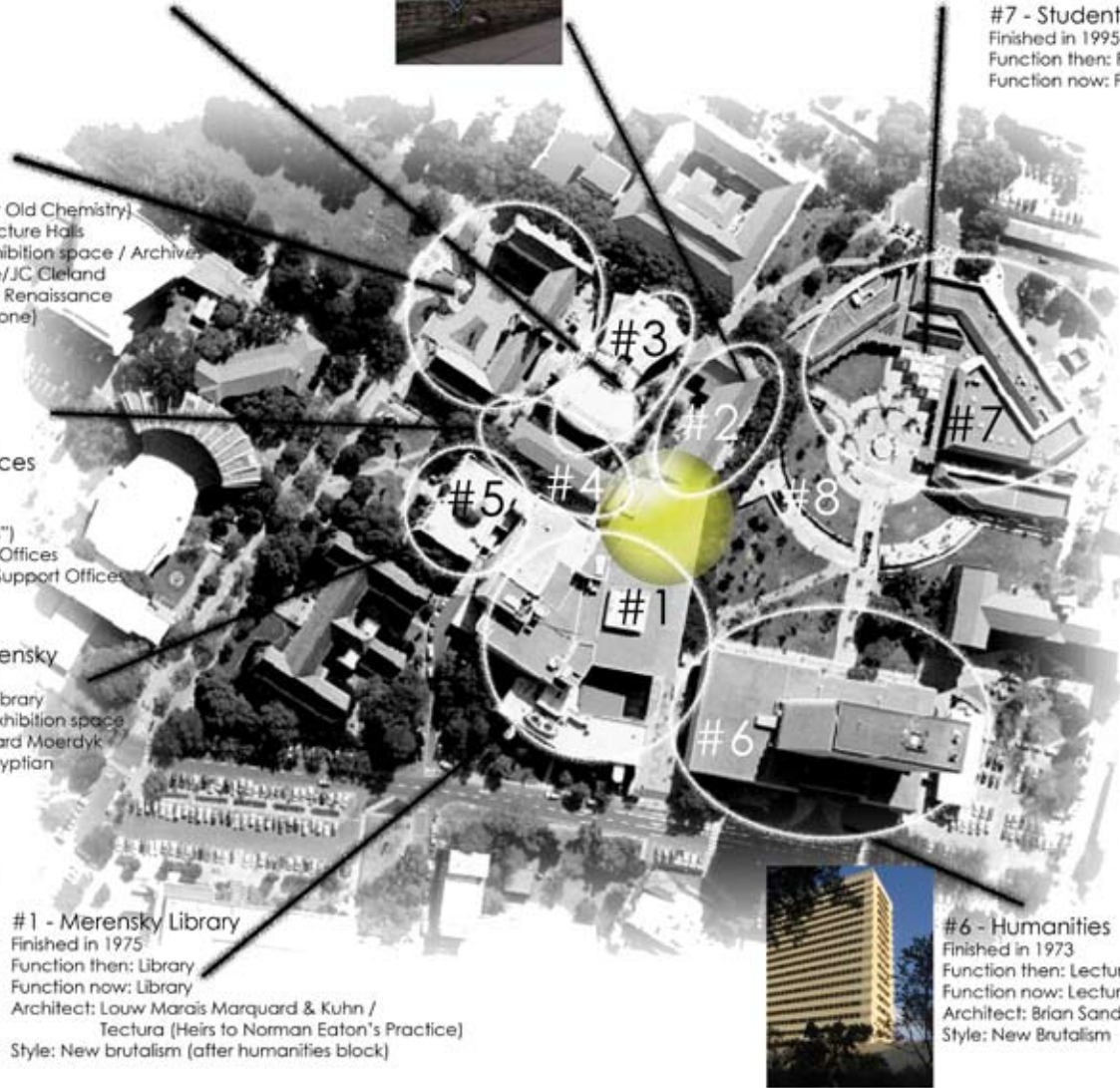


Figure 3.1: Historical Context



3.1 Historical

The site is situated in-between some of the oldest buildings on Campus. Over time buildings evolve, changing aspects that seem unimportant at the time, only later to reveal a certain lost legacy. It is therefore important to consider the historical context of the site so that the new architectural intervention improves the legacies represented by each building rather than detracting from it.

The old chemistry building, the oldest building on campus, was partially demolished in the early 1970's to clear space for the erection of the New Merensky Library. The only memory of this older building is an arch structure, detached from its previous context and slightly out of place. The historical plans of this building are not available, but

photos from the University's archive indicate the demolished section. In its original state, the building represented a mirrored J plan form with the remaining arches indicating some symmetry in the original. As this project does not aim to recreate the old, but rather highlight the memory of it, this information will suffice to conclude the necessary shape and size of the historical plan.

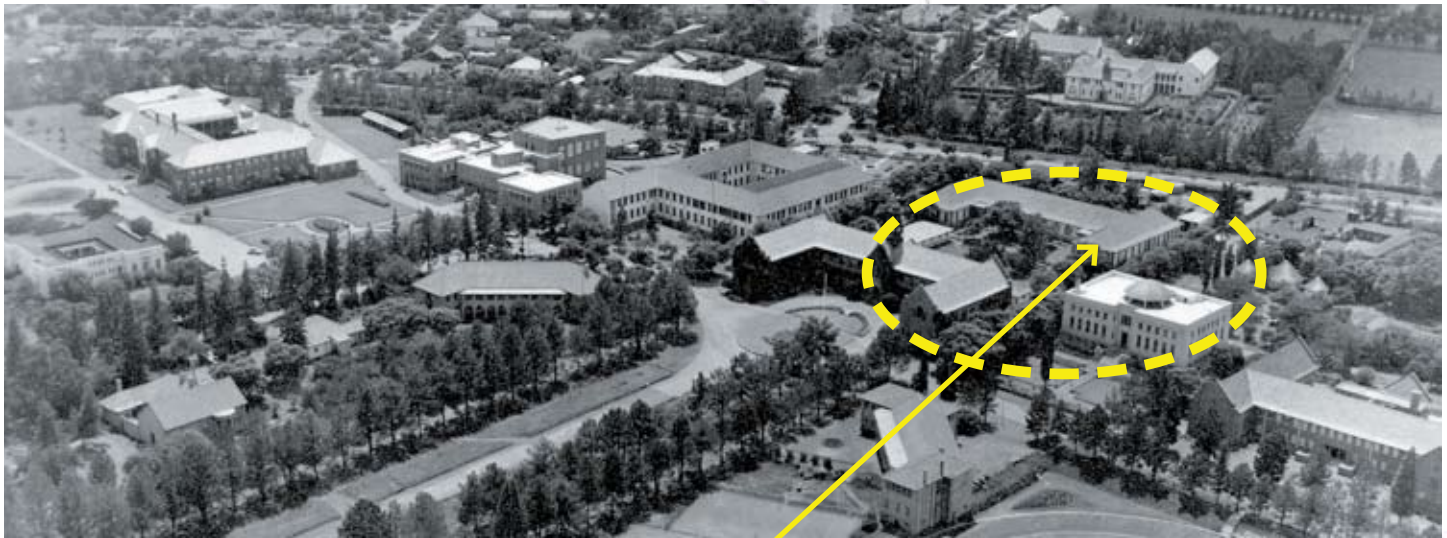


Figure 3.2: Historical aerial photograph of the site indicating the Old chemistry building in its original state



Figure 3.3: Construction of the New Merensky Library, to the left the partial demolition of the Old Chemistry (the arches were left in tact)



Figure 3.4: Construction of the New Merensky Library



Figure 3.5: The Old Arts building in the foreground with the Old Chemistry building in the background

3.2 Structural

Concurrent to the historical context are the structures that envelop the buildings. Within the chosen site, the structural context pertains mainly to the overhang of the New Merensky Library. Peripheral to the site are the exterior walls of the Old Chemistry Building, the Marketing Services Building and the Library itself.

As the Library forms most of the boundaries of the project it influences most of the technical decisions. The Library itself relies on a structural grid of concrete columns (8m x 8m). The Library's footprint (excluding the overhang), extends two levels below ground to the level of the Library's basement floor. The supportive

columns under the overhang terminate a meter below the floor of the basement. This structure allows for some excavation around the columns.

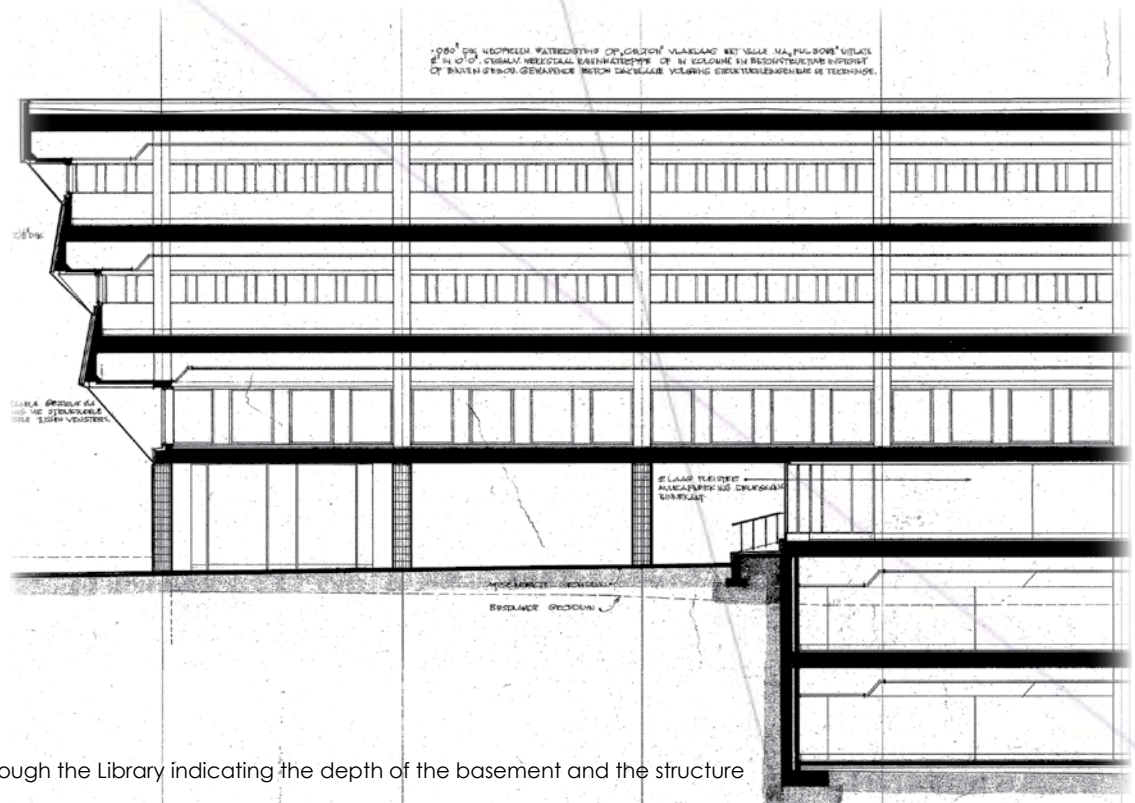


Figure 3.6: Original section through the Library indicating the depth of the basement and the structure



Figure 3.7: Physical Context

3.3 Physical

Located under the existing New Merensky Library Overhang (#5) and currently not utilised for a specific function, the chosen site serves as a thoroughfare for users walking to and from classes, the Library (#1), the Client Services Centre (Humanities #6), and the Student Centre.

Given that a large number of students and staff walk through the site on a daily basis, the location of the site is central to most activities on campus. Situated between the food suppliers: Campus Kiosk in the Old Chemistry Building [#2] and the student centre

[#7], lecture halls: "Kanseliers" [#3], Humanities [#6], Economics, Zoology, Geography, Engineering, Musaion and Theology and the Merensky Library (#1) the space serves as an important transitional zone.

These buildings define this movement of users by forming corridors of negative space between them, and in so doing provide visual links to other parts of the campus. The most effective visual link is the corridor between the Old Merensky Library and the Marketing Services building, which links the area surrounding the

Aula, Amphitheatre and Musaion to the public space adjacent to the Student Centre.

Defining the space to a certain extent is the graffiti wall, on the southern perimeter wall of the Old Chemistry building. Even though this element was not part of the original, it is significant to the site in its own right. Informing students of activities and allowing the expression of opinions foretells the necessity of a space to evolve this concept into information that will trigger memory.



Figure 3.8: Approaching the site under the overhang from the west past the Old Merensky Library



Figure 3.9: Approaching the site under the overhang from the east from the Piazza



Figure 3.10: Approaching the site under the overhang from the west past the "Kanseliers" Building



Legend

Existing Movement
(Users of the site)



Gathering of Students



Entrances of Buildings
(More students)



NEEDS:
(current attractions to site)

WC Facilities



ATM

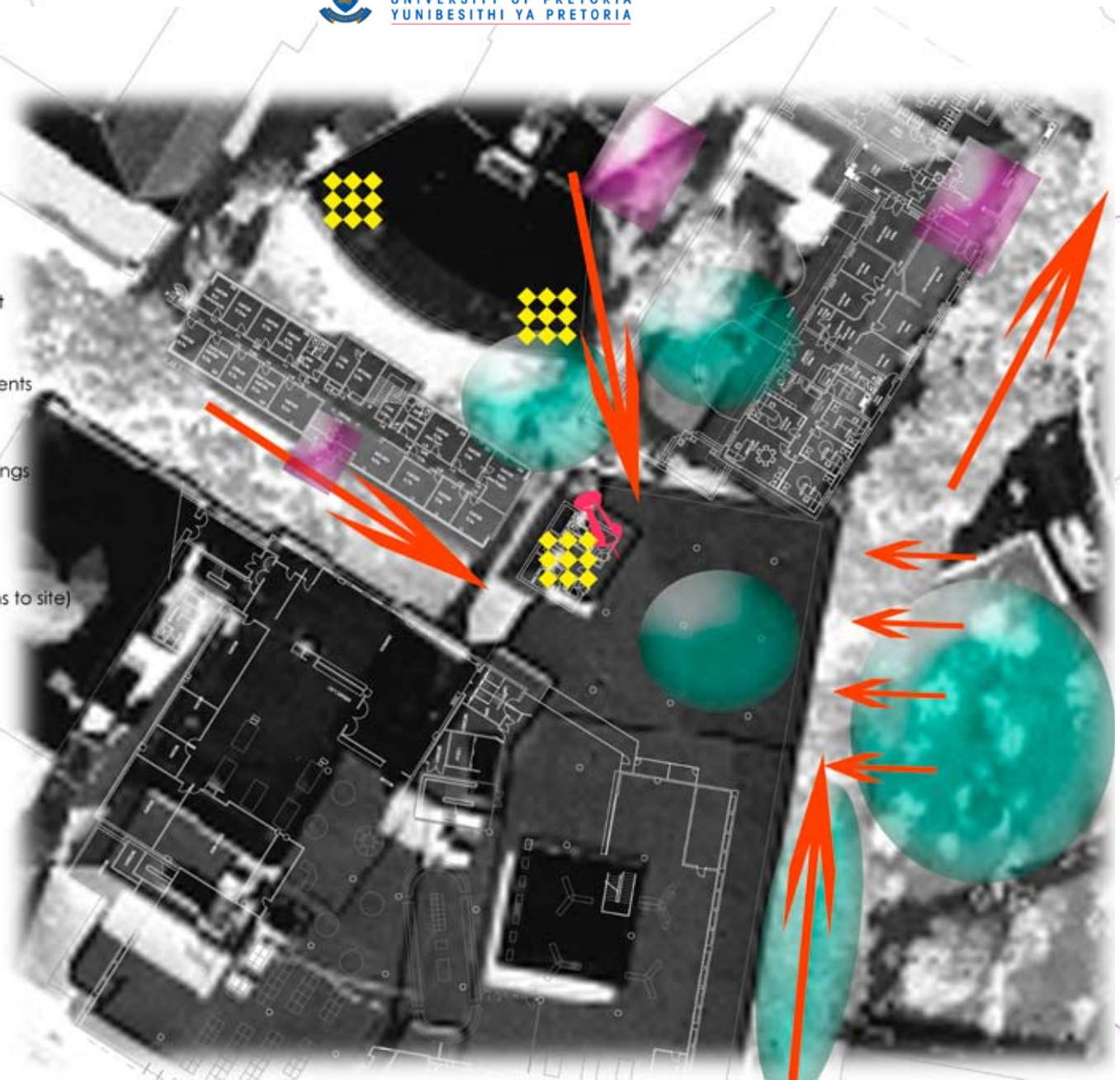


Figure 3.11: Social Context



3.4 Social

Student activities currently present on site are limited due to the nature of the site and its surroundings. Elementary seating within and around the site allows some students to linger in the space. Also present are an ATM and WC facilities in the “supporting column” of the Library as well as the “Kanseliers”, which draws a fair number of students to the site. Most of the gathering spaces seem to be utilised simply because that is the only space provided. The scale of the Library and some of the surrounding buildings provide a significant amount

of shade, which in turn encourages the gathering of students.

Another factor influencing the number of activities present on site is that most of the surrounding space is left-over negative space (outside of buildings). The only spaces with an end-use are the entrance to the Library, the entrance of the “Kanseliers” and the Campus Kiosk.

Social space in the vicinity seems limited to the Piazza and student centre. However, the piazza seems largely dysfunctional due to the openness of the exterior area: exposure to elements, performance limitations and seating limit activities. The Student Centre is utilised as a big cafeteria, and does not lend itself to many other activities.



Figure 3.12: Existing ATM under cantilever



Figure 3.13: Existing benches provided outside the Library (Eastern wall)



Figure 3.14: Negative space between “Kanseliers” and Old Chemistry

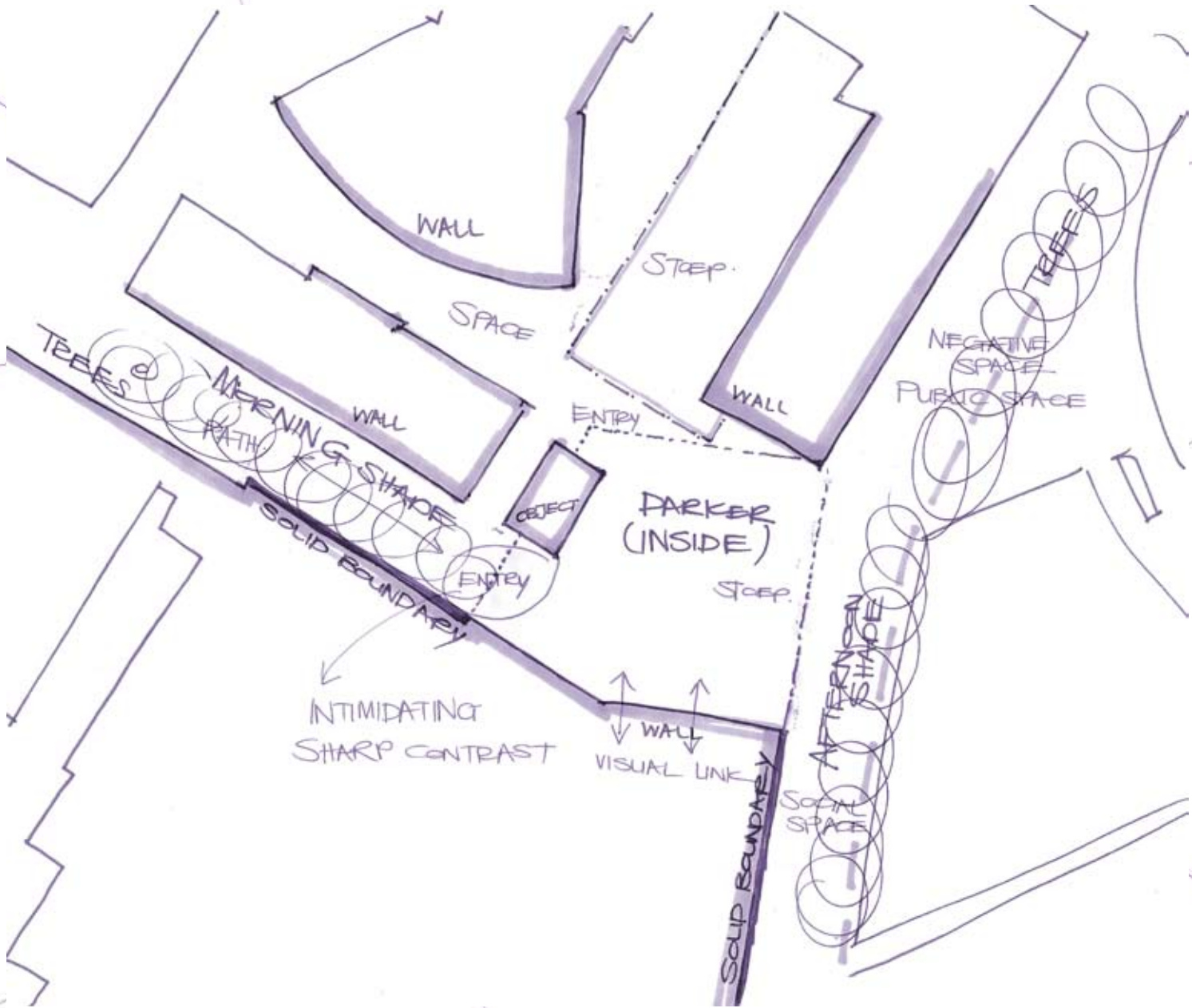


Figure 3.15: Diagram indicating haptic qualities of the site

3.5 Climate

The corridors formed between the surrounding buildings create some wind between the buildings. Due to the moderate climate of Pretoria, wind is limited to strong breezes that do not cause discomfort. Due to the orientation of the site, the main climatic consideration would be the sun and then rain water as affected by the slope of the site and the proposed excavation.

Discomfort on the existing site that is experienced because of the sun has a twofold implication. Firstly the stark contrast between light and shade when moving into the space actually highlights the monumental scale of

the Library overhang. The light colour of the in-situ concrete walkway as well as the surfaces of the building further add to this experience by causing uncomfortable glare, almost blinding the user before they enter the relatively dark space under the overhang. Secondly, by altering the space to become habitable, any direct sunlight entering the space would be detrimental to productive workspaces because of glare. On the contrary, however, natural light within an interior space is favourable, meaning that the sunlight within the space should be managed accordingly.

The site slopes toward the western side and the existing concrete surfaces add to the amount of runoff water on the site. This needs to be addressed in the design. Together with the sun, the rain entering the site also needs to be managed in order to use the site as an interior space. To fully utilise the site, more protection from these elements needs to be added to enhance the spatial properties of the site and make it habitable.



Figure 3.16: Slope of site
(Old Chemistry in the background)



Figure 3.17: View from inside the space towards the western corridors, light difference creating glare



Figure 3.18: Approaching the site, darker space under the overhang