

### *3.1 Introduction to theory*

This chapter investigates the underlying themes within the proposal, used as a tool for understanding the intricately woven texture and palimpsest of the context and its networks.

The theoretical readings and premise also influenced and strengthened the architectural intentions and responses.

# 3

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## *Theory*

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Figure 36 : *Knowledge through observation, Collage, Author (2015)*

### 3.2 Theory

As stated by Pallasmaa in *The eyes of the skin architecture and the senses* (2005), architecture has become mono-functional in that it mainly communicates with users through a visual medium, whilst if architecture were created in a manner which allows for communication with all senses, it starts to simulate the body. Architecture can extend its memories into knowledge and adapt to multiple experiences. Hence creating allowance for a broader, more diverse user-scape to interact with space. Thus the experience of the inherent qualities of a new living and embodied architecture, as a form of existential knowledge.

Through the consideration of multiple senses within deliberated space, architecture has the ability to teach and create a platform through which the daily user, along with their ritual activities could engage with their environment. By experiencing architecture on a multi-sensory level, the user's body and their activities becomes an integrated extension of the original design intention (Pallasmaa 2005).

Existential knowledge allows for the unconscious perception and participation of the user to breathe life into traditionally static structures. This becomes apparent in the ability to grasp the *genius loci* (Norberg-Schulz, 1984) of the space without prior knowledge, and freedom of exploring the detail through nothing more than basic instinct.



Figure 37 : *Knowledge through participation, Collage, Author (2015)*

Interaction plays a crucial part in communication, culture and survival. A place that does not stimulate or enrich the user, adds no more value than the most basic of shelters.

*It domesticates limitless space and endless time to be tolerated, inhabited and understood by humankind (Palasmaa 2012).*

Hence architecture that acknowledges all senses and users, becomes accessible to all types of users, educated or uneducated, aware or unaware. Catering for the needs of the programme and users on an intimate level, the architecture becomes open to critical reflection or catharsis on a physical and cognitive level, through the creation of integrated and allocated space for the collective memory of the community.

The proposed space of intervention becomes a system, consisting of multiple elements where users can gather what they require from it.



Figure 38 : *Knowledge through experience, Collage, Author (2015)*

### 3.3 *Collective Cultural Memory*

The question concerning the lack of a collective memory, the clean slate, clean, but stippled in the collective memories of individuals, unbound, comes about. The growing body of residents of Phomolong are living for a possible reality, not investing in their immediate environment. This is related to the stories told by community members, who say they send money back to their 'real homes', meaning the places of their origin. This is partially because of their reminiscence to the memory of their place of origin, as sedimentary deposits.

*Nothing is more permanent than the temporary (A.E. Stallings 2012).*

More than anything it seems that the memory of the collective, of place needs to take root, sprouting from the clean slate, defining the temporary state as something having ownership. Memory follows on from itself in succession, using the previous instalment to inform the next, the connection between the existing and the possible needs to be realised in order for those memories to form a future.

*How people define their own spaces and experience them is important in constructing identities (Rendell, Penner and Borden 2000).*



Figure 39 : *Knowledge of the collective mind, Collage, Author (2015)*

The physical manifestation of the collective (non-)memory, one which begins to address the cultural amnesia currently burdening Phomolong, would need to appeal to a variety of users, a dichotomy of needs, it would need to be a device for integration, an ecotone. It is a place that is recognisable, a place where people have taken ownership, a place where knowledge and nurture can be passed on, bridging the intergenerational gap.

*In so doing, it maintains vital connections with our biological and cultural past, the soil of genetic and mythical knowledge (Pallasmaa 2010).*

In the proposed programme the controlled interaction with the context of Phomolong and its inhabitants in a safe environment will be emphasized for children and elderly women. This is to promote development of senses and skills by using intimate social structures, such as nurturing networks and spaces. The constant presence of activity and ritual creates a stimulating and enriching environment for all within certain space. Activities become synonymous with this proposed place, helping to establish a sense of identity.

*In earlier modes of life, the intimate contact with work, production, materials, climate and the ever-varying phenomena of nature provided ample sensory interaction with the world of physical causalities (Pallasmaa 2010).*

### 3.4 *Existential Knowledge*

*Young children learn through interaction with their physical, social, and cultural environments.... Among the most critical design considerations are the amount and organisation of both indoor and outdoor areas. Research studies confirm that limited space and poorly organised space negatively affect child and staff behaviours. (AECD 1996: 1 in Moore 2001)*

Existential knowledge is gained through experiences that develop into natural reactions or skills based on specific situations. *The built environment is a cultural artefact. It is shaped by human intention and intervention (Rendell, Penner and Borden 2000).*

Learning at a mother's feet through observing and interacting in a certain daily ritual, imparts the skills to apply the same ritual, eventually becomes inherent within memory. As Moore (2001) states that the environment we grow up in has an impact on our development and behaviour.

*The ability to touch, smell and taste everything that is observed teaches valuable tactile lessons, as well as seeing the potential and value that is extracted from the harvested and cultivated products, the children developing in their exposure to stimulation, all add to the user's existential knowledge (Pallasmaa 2010).*

Hence thoughts should not be separated from the physical environment, for it is an intertwined part of development.

The idea of architecture and learning, being lived, rather than being intellectually understood comes about.

*Bell Hooks looks at the role of space, both real and metaphorical, in shaping us as human beings in terms of lived experience and aspiration (Rendell, Penner and Borden 2000).*

The creation of a natural and enriching space within structure, where teaching happens through observance, while also enticing multiple senses, through the use of participation.

*The quality of the physical planned and designed environment of early childhood centres has an impact specifically on cognitive and social developmental behaviours (Moore, 1986, 1987 in Moore, 2001)*

These spaces help to manifest the existential knowledge of place and the investment of time from multiple users, adds to the collective repository of memories, bridging the intergenerational gap. The knowledge becomes inherent to the space rather than the people who are temporary.

### 3.5 *Dormant Potential*

*In Small Is Beautiful, Schumacher states that development does not start with goods [a category which includes buildings]; it starts with people and their education, organisation, and discipline (Schumacher 1973:140 in Carter, n.d.)*

As Schumacher states, context and the built environment is not always an adequate method of evaluating development. From the eyes of the uninformed, informal settlements can seem chaotic; never understanding what it is to truly experience such contexts, due to lack of exposure and often the spark of development is brought about by external forces, instituting change without casting a discerning eye.

Dormant potential refers to multiple situations; the site, the community, the children and the materials chosen. Portraying the mentioned potentials allows for the experience and inspiration of the memories of each user to come to a point of cultivation, in a collective space, from where it can be dispersed again through active participation.

*Architects do not invent architectural realities; they rather reveal what exists and what are the natural potentials of the given condition, or what the given situation calls for (Pallasmaa 2010).*

The daily ritual and culture surrounding labour and investing physically into a product creates a sense of gratification and speaks to a universal culture. It is seen throughout Phomolong that there is a need to cultivate beauty around the derelict spaces called home. This is often done through the creation of a garden in the small open spaces surrounding a shack.

*What distinguishes us in our humanity is the fact that we inhabit relatively permanent worlds that precede our birth and outlast our death, binding generations in a historical continuum (Harrison 2008).*

Mankind has the inherent compulsion of manifesting their presence within a place, through creating space. Be this through the creation of a basic shelter or an intricately planned and steadily grown town or city. By addressing the relationship and method of communication between the man-made and nature through architecture; *as concepts they interact in a dialectical fashion, to condition the way we approach nature and what we build (Crowe 1995).*

The need to create one's own environment or to add and change the one an individual may find themselves in is influenced and shaped by the past (Crowe 1995). The human race has become removed from nature and thereby lost a large body of knowledge, a previously intimate, visceral understanding of the world.

### 3.6 *Biophilia*

*Biophilia is the study of the human response to the natural environment and the relationship between humans and natural systems, which is, in its simplest form, a sense of place (Griffin 2004) (Newman 2013).*

In a context where there is a lack of natural space for children to play and learn, and a lack of sense of ownership, the simultaneous exposure to a growing natural environment that is cultivated and nurturing could promote positive spaces for the remaining community networks of Phomolong.

*There are no different kinds of architecture, only different situations which deserve different solutions so that human physical and psychological needs can be satisfied, Norberg-Schulz (1979) said in the preface to his book *Genius loci* (Těšitel, Kušová and Bartoš 2001).*

Considering that the site is located in a predominantly public realm, it allows sufficient opportunity to merge the private and public spheres through the integration of a natural environment that the community could benefit from.

*The hypothesis is that this affiliation leads to positive responses in terms of human performance and health – even emotional states (Griffin, 2004).*

The addition of the natural environment also has the possibility of becoming a metaphor for the community, of the establishing of their roots and growing as a collective to sustain their fellow community members and family. The collective space could promote the establishing of a collective memory forming, where anyone in need of catharsis or critical reflection could come and reminisce, extracting value from the existential knowledge embedded in their surrounds: Adding value to their everyday experiences of daily rituals and activities, through the creation of place making through the use of biophilic design attributes.





Figure 40 : *A gap in the fence, Collage, Author (2015)*

*These biophilic design attributes include: The use of dynamic and diffuse daylight, the ability to have frequent, spontaneous and repeated, contact with nature throughout, and between buildings, the use of local, natural materials, a connection between interior and exterior surfaces, natural ventilation, a direct physical connection to nature from interior spaces, and direct visual access to nature from interior spaces (Griffin 2004).*

The benefits of biophilic design attributes are that the inclusion of natural materials and plants aid passive cooling and heating. Biophilic design also improves biodiversity and the health of users that come in contact with it (Newman 2013). Early exposure to natural environments aids development of children by creating intuitive responses to natural situations.

*Like many other higher species, human being is not born as an accomplished being. It is formed by the environment at the ontogenetic level. Thus, the landscape accomplishes human phenotype, personality, identity and the existential feeling of belonging somewhere (Šimajs 1995; LibrovaÁ 1988). That is why humans need to live in the landscape, mainly at the young age, and to communicate with the nature in a non-verbal way (Těšitel, Kušová and Bartoš 2001).*

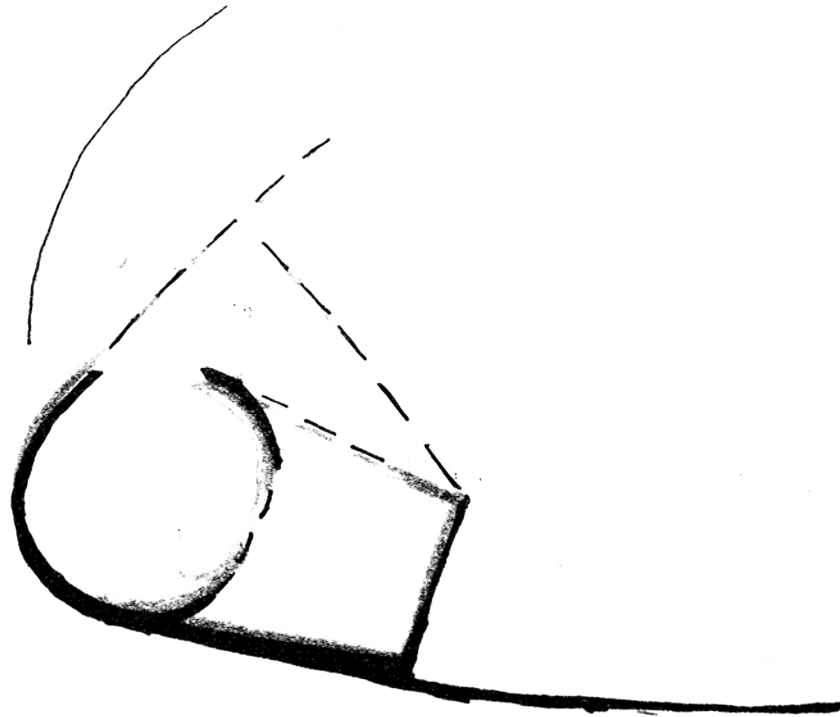


Figure 41 : *The matriarch, Diagram, Author (2015)*

### 3.7 *Matriarchal space*

*Young children need quality childcare to develop their innate potential and prepare for formal education. Quality care provides nurturing relationships, a mentally stimulating environment and basic health and safety (UNICEF 2007).*

During a concept workshop during February 2015, at the University of Pretoria, it came to the fore that the proposed programme of a food production scheme and early childhood development centre, leads to considerations of how thresholds and permeability should be addressed through the design.

It was also noted that the scheme has the essence and intentions of a matriarch, taking care of all who enter the peripheries and inner sanctum.

*Space is not a prior condition of something else, but rather an outcome, the product of an activity, and so it necessarily has a temporal condition (Colomina and Bloomer 1992).*

In the consideration of the programme the designed spaces should have certain traits that are characterised by the activities that take place at certain points. A day-care centre has the ideology of a caring environment, where children have freedom to develop and explore, whilst being watched by the elderly women, which is an existing network.

*In being exclusively identified with the home, women are associated with traits of nurturance, subjectivity, emotionalism (Rendell, Penner and Borden 2000).*

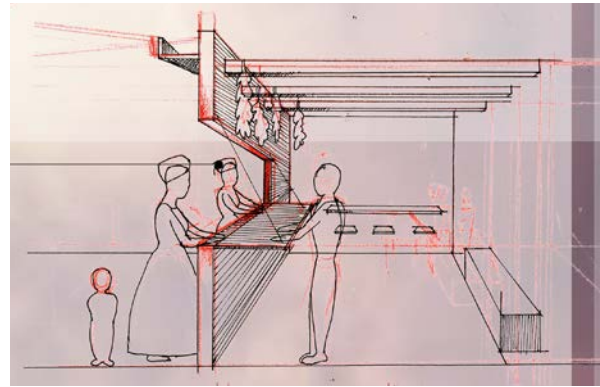
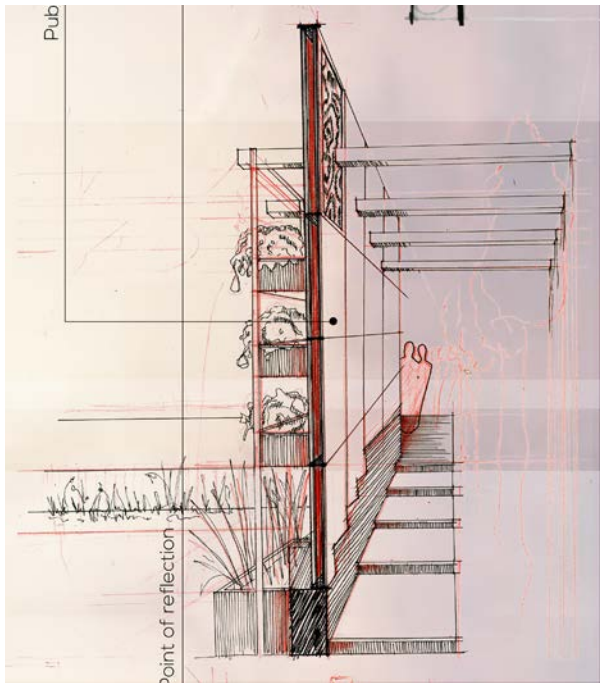
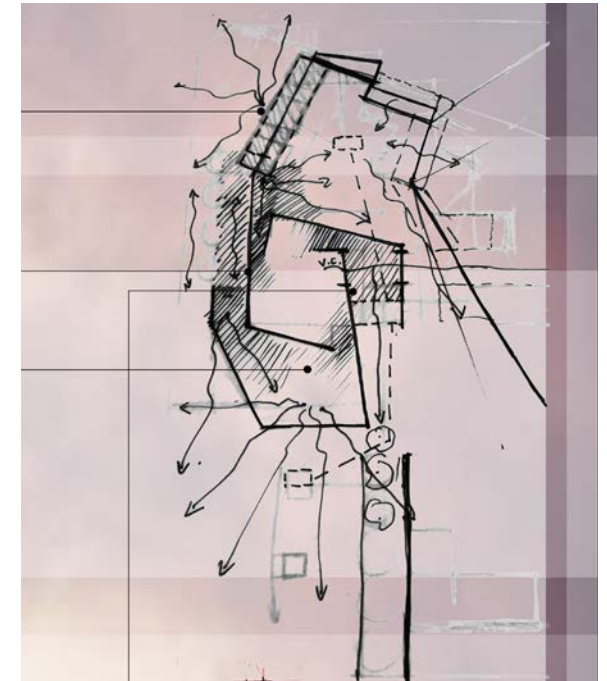


Figure 42 : *How thin can a barrier be?*, Sketch, Author (2015)

Figure 43 : *The Barrier between private and public realms*, Sketch, Author (2015)

Figure 44 : *Points of culmination and dispersal*, Diagram, Author (2015)



Certain aspects of a home environment would thus be incorporated into the scheme, like communal dining facilities and classrooms with the possibility of opening up into spaces where cultivation and harvesting takes place. The intimate spaces therefore should have an essence of feminine care attached to it.

*Spaces can enhance or restrict, nurture or impoverish (Rendell, Penner and Borden 2000).*

*Feminine spaces* have often been noted to be more orientated towards emotional care and healing, open to all in need of catharsis, as opposed to the patriarchal design rules, of set and strong thresholds, with many layers before being allowed to enter the inner sanctum. *Feminine space* can be described as domesticated space. Therefore how the space communicates with the public and urban spheres becomes of utmost importance. The specific social networks of the elderly dependents and neonates are in need of a space specifically designed for their social needs where they can flourish and build a collective identity for present and future generations.

*In defining the dialectical relationship between society and space, ... space is socially produced, but that space is also a condition of social production (Rendell, Penner and Borden 2000).*



Figure 45 : *Blurred and out of reach, Collage, Author (2015)*

### 3.8 *Conceptual and Theoretical Conclusion*

*A meaningful environment is necessary and essential to a meaningful existence (Rendell, Penner and Borden 2000).*

When all is barren, what remains except for children's laughter, willing, hardworking hands and nurturing hearts?  
The dormant potential of seeds, in need of water to grow.

Humans cannot thrive in isolation from one another; the need for knowledge to be passed on and to create a better future for the next generation is an inherent quality in all. It is often observed in biological systems, that where two networks overlap and intertwine, the most dynamic developments take place; this is referred to as an ecotone. The same can be said of where social networks meet; either a point of friction or a point of intense stimulation is borne from the existential knowledge of both networks.

The unearthing of the dormant potentials of a place and its users, becomes a place of cultivation. The feasibility of place becomes recognised for its possibility of legacy as an enriching and enabling space, inherently linked to the participation of its users.

*Lefebvre suggests that social production of space works through three different, yet interactive processes 'spatial practice' (material or functional space), 'representations of space' (space as codified language), and 'representational space' (the lived everyday experience of space). (Rendell, Penner and Borden 2000).*

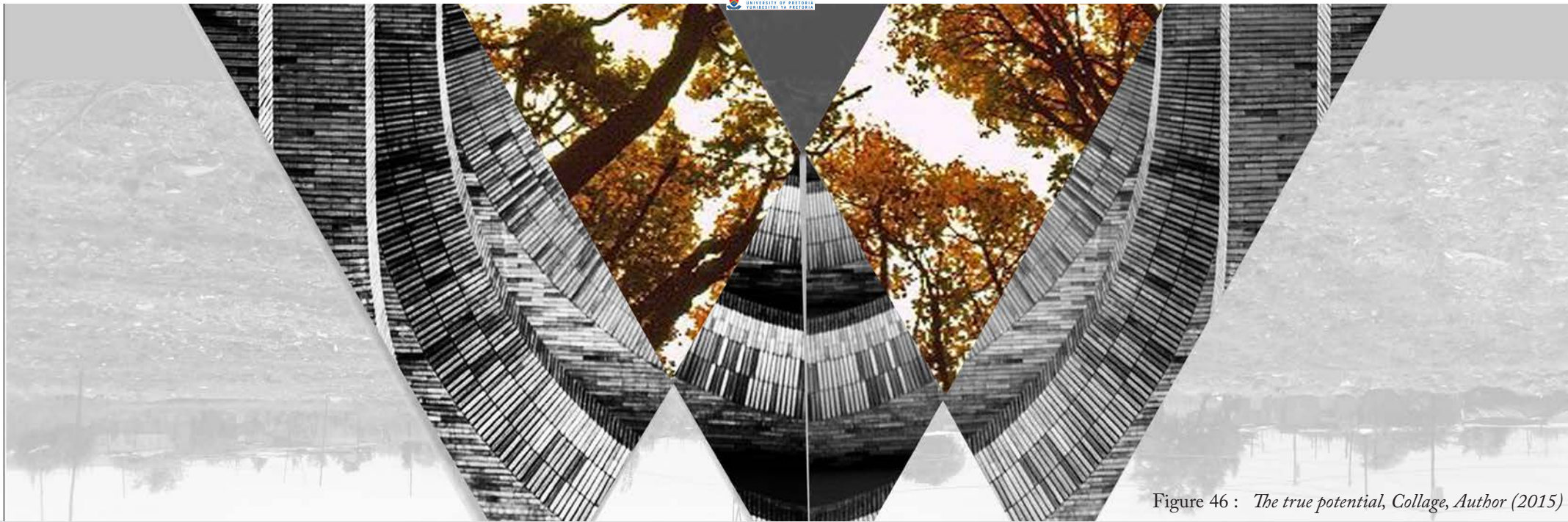


Figure 46 : *The true potential, Collage, Author (2015)*

Amorphous space has the potential to become defined through external influences, as well as what the space externalizes. Becoming a cornucopia of influences in itself, which empowers the user; a repository that decreases dependency through the strengthening of the collective.

*It is now also known that higher quality preschool education particularly in the social and cognitive spheres occurs when the architecture is appropriate (eg, Moore, 1986, 1987). In short, the quality of preschool education is in part related to the quality of the architecturally planned and designed physical environment (Moore 2001).*

Such a space has a warm embrace, accepting and without prejudice, but also guards and protects against harmful elements at its inner sanctum. A sanctuary to those, who are most in need of a place to call their own, to use as they need, in a sedated environment.

*As material culture, space is not innate and inert, measured geometrically, but an integral and changing part of daily life, intimately bound up in social and personal rituals and activities (Rendell, Penner and Borden 2000).*

Amorphous space becomes characterized through the addition of significance on a human scale. Adding value on an intimate and public level; the social palimpsest informing and moulding the legacy through daily interaction and rituals.



Figure 47 : *Children's shoes at creche, Photograph, M. Mkizi (2015)*