



[re]interpreting the Extramural Building

Navigating the complexities between
heritage practice and remodelling



[re]interpreting the Extramural Building

by Lionel Shaun Bates _ 22371461

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Course Coordinator

Prof. Arthur Barker

Study Leader

Nico Botes

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Abstract

Many buildings in Pretoria's central business district stand empty and abandoned. These buildings are being looted, stripped and vandalised, resulting in a great deal of damage that eventually leads to their destruction. The Extramural Building is an iconic modernist building that has served the city well over its lifetime. It has stood abandoned and empty for the last seven years, is in a state of disrepair, and is on the verge of being lost and forgotten.

The intention with the dissertation is to connect the past and the future by investigating the potential of old buildings with the aim of retaining their existing fabric and cultural significance. Heritage practice and theories of adaptation are investigated to generate a theoretical framework for the remodelling of old buildings. A statement of significance is developed by investigating the historical context of the building. The Tshwane Inner City Regeneration Framework is used as a starting point for the development of an urban framework for the project. An appropriate program is chosen, derived from the theoretical framework, statement of significance and urban framework. Appropriate precedent studies serve as examples of the discussed theory, urban framework, program and conceptual intentions.

The design of a proposed intervention is developed within the established urban framework by applying the theoretical framework. The navigation of the complexities between heritage practice and remodelling ultimately allows a new interpretation of the building to emerge. The argument and its eventual expression results in an intervention that allows the Extramural Building to reclaim its role in the city, unlocking its latent potential, and retaining its inherent cultural value.

'n Groot aantal geboue in Pretoria se sentrale besigheidsdistrik staan leeg en verlate. Hierdie geboue word gereeld deur vandale gestroop en geplunder; hulle rig verstommende skade aan wat uiteindelik tot die vernietiging van die geboue lei. Die Buitemuurse Gebou is 'n ikoniese, moderne gebou wat vir lank 'n positiewe bydrae tot die stad gelewer het. Die gebou staan al sewe jaar lank leeg en is baie vinnig besig om te verval, wat sonder drastiese ingryping ongetwyfeld tot die gebou se finale vernietiging sal lei.

In die verhandeling word daar gepoog om die verlede en toekoms te versoen deur die potensiaal van ou geboue te ondersoek met die doel om die geboue en hul kulturele waarde te behou. Erfenispraktyk en aanpassingsteorieë word ondersoek om 'n teoretiese raamwerk vir die herbenutting van ou geboue te genereer. 'n Verklaring van betekenis word ontwikkel deur die gebou se geskiedenis te ondersoek. Die Tshwane Middestad Ontwikkeling- en Herlewingstrategie word as 'n beginpunt vir die ontwikkeling van 'n stedelike raamwerk vir die projek gebruik. 'n Toepaslike gebruiksprogram word afgelei uit die teoretiese raamwerk, die verklaring van betekenis en die stedelike raamwerk. Die studie word deur toepaslike gevallestudies as voorbeelde van die tersaaklike teorieë, stedelike raamwerk, program en konseptuele doelwit van die projek ingelig.

Die ontwerp van die voorgestelde ingryping word binne die bestaande stedelike raamwerk in oorleg met die teoretiese raamwerk ontwikkel. Die ondersoek van die kompleksiteite wat tussen erfenispraktyk en aanpassingsteorieë bestaan maak nuwe interpretasies van die ou gebou moontlik. Die argument, en uiteindelijke uitdrukking daarvan, word gevolg deur 'n ingryping wat die Buitemuurse Gebou toelaat om weer sy rol in die stad te vervul en so die latente potensiaal van dié gebou te ontgin, maar ook die inherente kulturele waarde daarvan te laat voortbestaan.

Project Summary



Program

Justice College Resource Centre

Site Location

Erf 3060 Pretoria

Site Address

332 Johannes Ramokhoase Street
Central Business District
Pretoria

Coordinates

25°44'34.0"S
28°11'36.0"E

Site Description

The Extramural Building

Owner

Public Works

Client

Justice College

Research Field

Heritage and Cultural Landscapes & Human
Settlements and Urbanism

Theoretical Premise

Theories of heritage practice and adaptation are explored to generate an appropriate theoretical premise for the remodelling of old buildings.

Architectural Approach

The exploration of palimpsest as a means to understand and reinterpret the potential of derelict buildings brought about by urban decay.

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Thanks to all my friends for standing by me through this journey. Words cannot express how thankful I am to the people who played a positive role in my life during this time. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

Declaration

In accordance with Regulation 4(c) of the General Regulations (G.57) for dissertations and theses, I declare that this thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree Master of Architecture (Professional) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

I further state that no part of my thesis has already been, or is currently being, submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification.

I further declare that this thesis is substantially my own work. Where reference is made to the works of others, the extent to which that work has been used is indicated and fully acknowledged in the text and list of references.

Lionel Shaun Bates

Preamble

This dissertation serves as a record of and informant to the design process applied to a chosen project and should be seen as a vital part of the overall design process. While this document presents a linear argument, the design process is non-linear at times, and the document should be read with this in mind. The project is rooted in the current time and place, casting a light on issues that are relevant at the moment, and exploring existing realities.

In this dissertation the aim is to develop a strategy to retrofit an old Department of Public Works building in order to increase its lifespan in response to environmental and economic concerns. These economic concerns are expressed in the mission statement of the Department of Public Works to "... efficiently manage the asset life cycle of immovable assets under the Department's custodianship" (Department of Public Works, 2009). A great deal of value lies in these buildings as they have been a part of our nation for generations and they provide meaningful services to their communities. The current generation inherited these buildings and should ensure that they survive for decades to come. In an attempt to conserve them, innovative solutions must be sought to bring these buildings into the future and ensure that they perform to the high standards of our era. The intention with the dissertation is to connect the past and the future, by investigating the potential of old buildings with the aim of retaining the existing fabric.

It is intended that the dissertation makes a helpful contribution to architecture in South Africa, by showing that an appropriate remodelling strategy for an old building can substantially increase its lifespan and save valuable cultural significance in the process. The dissertation can assist practitioners by serving as an example of sustainable practice and development.



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Introduction

In Pretoria's central business district, the Extramural Building of the University of Pretoria is an iconic modernist building that has served the city well over its lifetime. It now faces a great threat; it has stood abandoned and empty for the last seven years, and is in a state of disrepair at a critical time of its life cycle. The building is fifty eight years old, only two years shy of a small amount of legal protection. It is on the verge of being lost and forgotten.

During an on-going archival project an opportunity for research was discovered. The "Public Works of South Africa" journals being preserved in the aforementioned project document a large portfolio of work that includes schools, post offices, police stations and a variety of public buildings that were built in an era free from climatic austerity. Many of these buildings have already been lost and forgotten. Something has to be done to protect the ones that are still standing from suffering the same fate – a fate that the Extramural Building faces today.

The dissertation is split into two parts, the argument and the expression. Part one will focus on the development of a theoretical framework for the remodelling of existing buildings by investigating theories of adaptation and heritage practice. An attempt will be made to develop a written statement of significance for the Extramural Building through a thorough understanding of the historical context that contributed to its existence. In an attempt to generate an appropriate Urban Framework, the argument will also focus on the physical context of Pretoria, investigating existing development plans, the overall structure of the city, and how the city is currently used. Finally, an attempt will be made to generate a programmatic intention for the Extramural Building that will hopefully be led by the developed statement of significance and urban framework.

Part two will start with the development of a conceptual premise, followed by an account of the development of the design and how it relates to the issues described in the argument. A technical development will outline the issues of structure, services, technology and ecology and how they are integrated and used to further develop the design. Finally a conclusion will attempt to summarise the dissertation and reflect on the issues that were discussed.

The General Issue



The city of Pretoria is plagued by urban decay and many buildings stand empty. These buildings are being vandalised and stripped of any precious material. This form of urban decay is a highly organised illegal act that views an empty building as an above-ground mine to be exploited for all its precious metals and items, a process colloquially referred to as 'building mining'. Many buildings within Pretoria have already been mined this way, including the Van Riebeeck Medical Building in Schoeman Street and Schubart Park in Madiba Street. The most recent mining activity is occurring inside the Transvaal Provincial Administration Building just west of Church Square, arguably one of the most important modernist buildings in the city. We are losing old buildings at a rapid pace and something has to be done about it.

The Extramural Building is a prime example of this kind of urban decay. During April of 2017 the building was mined and has been reduced to a shell. In an attempt to rescue it, the dissertation aims to gain a deeper understanding of urban decay by focusing on the Extramural Building and the treatment that it has received. It no longer plays a role in the city and has been abandoned. Can heritage practice and theories of adaptation help the Extramural Building reclaim its role in the city?

Urban Issue and Intention

Public space in Pretoria is often limited to street edges, affording few opportunities to enter the blocks; thus pedestrians are banished to the sidewalk, and forced to navigate the city alongside vehicular traffic. Similarly, public buildings are limited and often not very accessible, affording access to only a select few. These situations limit city dwellers in the way they can engage with the city.

The Tshwane Inner City Regeneration framework will be used as the starting point for an urban scale investigation. The Civic Precinct is further developed to improve the public realm and unlock the social potential of the chosen site.

The Architectural Issue

The dissertation focuses on the role that architecture plays in recognising and unlocking the latent potential that exists in old buildings that have undergone a considerable amount of vandalism and decay. A great deal of value is contained in these buildings, as they have been a part of our nation for generations and provided meaningful services to their communities. By means of an appropriate remodelling strategy, the dissertation intends to enable the Extramural Building to reclaim its role in the city by once again providing meaningful service to the community. Architecture is explored as an extension of the public realm.

Research Question

The research of this dissertation will attempt to navigate the complexities between adaptation and heritage in an attempt to generate a framework for the conservation of old buildings. The dissertation will approach past research firstly through the lens of heritage practices, focusing on acts and charters and secondly by investigating existing theories of adaptation. Can the combination of these two practices help protect an old building from destruction?

Dissertation Question

This dissertation aims to develop a strategy as well as design documentation to retrofit an abandoned building in order to increase its lifespan as a response to environmental and economic concerns. Can architecture recognise and unlock the latent potential in old buildings?

