

02

theoretical framework

This section serves as the spatial theoretical lens through which the subsequent research on homelessness and appropriation is viewed and through which the design conceptualisation is approached. With a human-centred approach to place-making, the themes explored deal with the ongoing process, layered traces (palimpsest), articulation (phenomenology) and overlaying of lived experiences of the users of space. The place and place-making lenses referred to in this section position the appropriation of neglected urban spaces by the homeless within contemporary discourse on appropriation, place-making and its role in shaping dynamic spaces and place-identities. It is argued that this form of appropriation provides potential for re-imagining and reshaping urban spaces into evolving, socially engaged spaces.

[a]

APPROPRIATION

the ongoing process of lived experiences

Noschis (1978: 451) defines appropriation as the actions we take to **express belonging** (or lack thereof) and to **take ownership** of our surroundings through their transformation. The “active and creative appropriation” of space is linked to the ongoing process of a user experiencing place: using, defining, occupying, changing and moulding it to suit their needs and to take ownership (Coelho 2015: 3, Hill 2003: 148). It is the result of an inextricable relation between body and space (Da Costa and Van Rensburg 2008: 43). Thus, the experience and meaning of place emanates from the inhabitants’ appropriation of it, continually (re) defining the place-identity (Coelho 2015: 3). Similarly, the informal appropriation of space by vulnerable people, which results from an effort to “(re)claim space”, establishes a sense of belonging or **expresses identity**, and should be acknowledged as spontaneous, creative and innovative because it leads to new emerging uses and meanings of place (Shaw and Hudson 2009: 4). This spatial practice “signifies an act of resistance” and resilience that attempts to “establish identity by celebrating difference” by collaging found objects into space and redefining boundaries (Rende 1998: 141). Therefore, through appropriation, the actions and events occurring within a space define and articulate it over time, contesting fixed boundaries (Da Costa and Van Rensburg 2008: 45). When experience and appropriation are considered in the design of spaces, architecture allows for user ownership and authorship (Awan et al. 2011, Coelho 2015: 3).

[b]

PALIMPSEST

the evolving identity of place and traces of lived experiences

The processes of lived experiences, appropriation and “cultural life” leave traces or “marks, residues, or remnants” that give meaning to place (Anderson 2015: 6). These traces can be tangible, physical additions to surroundings or intangible events, activities, emotions and memories (Anderson 2015: 6, 7). Place is dynamic and transient as “new traces react with existing” or past layers, “changing the meaning and identity” of place (2015: 7). This is echoed by Shaw and Hudson (2009: 3), who state that spaces in the city are “constantly reshaped and redefined” by spontaneous and “often temporary activities”. Da Costa and Van Rensburg (2008: 45) point out that space is a “product of interrelations”, ever-changing and constantly “in the process of being made”; therefore, it is **multi-layered and temporal**.

A dynamic view of space hinges on the consideration of human experiences and

time at its core (Da Costa and Van Rensburg 2008: 47). Understanding place as a palimpsest of experiences and meaning is to acknowledge its **transience** and temporality.

[c]

PHENOMENOLOGY

the articulation of lived experience and time in architecture

A phenomenological approach to space-making not only acknowledges the spatial role of lived experiences, but also offers tools to articulate, in architecture, the traces of lived experiences and the transience and temporality of place referred to above.

Norberg-Schulz (1996: 422) describes the purpose of architecture as making “a site become a place ... to uncover the meanings potentially present” (Norberg-Schulz 1996: 422). Architecture is thus a “sensitive container” of lived experiences, a stage and catalyst for life to evolve (Coelho 2015: 1) that engages memories and manifests sensory experiences (Pallasmaa 1994: 30, Zumthor 1998: 12). Therefore, architecture has the potential to integrate form, sensory lived experiences, temporality and event (Da Costa and Van Rensburg 2008: 43) by **engaging all the senses** in space-making, using sound, light, colour, texture, material choice and finish, etc. to evoke emotions and memories (Coelho 2015: 4, 5, Da Costa and Van Rensburg 2008: 45, Norberg-Schulz 1996, Pallasmaa 1994). Norberg-Schulz (1996: 419) advocates an expression of the elements that define built space, including the “formal articulation” of junctions and thresholds to further articulate the lived experience (Norberg-Schulz 1996: 420).

Furthermore, in acknowledging the identity of place as being a “function of time” (Norberg-Schulz 1996: 420), the transience and temporality of space can be expressed by showing the **effects of time and use** through material weathering and erosion (Pallasmaa 2000: 82, Zumthor 1998). Using materials that express “age and history” and develop a “patina” enrich the sensory experience and awareness of time (Pallasmaa, 1994: 29). Thus, spaces that express the effects of time and appropriation manifest the traces of lived experiences and the transience of place to create a dynamic identity of place.

[d]

OVERLAYING DIFFERENCE

overlaying lived experiences

In addition to the architectural articulation of the traces of experiences and time, the celebration of difference, multiplicity and the “other” further defines a **dynamic identity** of place. Sennett (1993: 147) exposes the problem of homogenous, disconnected cities that result from disengagement with the “other”. He suggests an alternative where designers and society embrace differences and engage the “other” (Sennett 1993: 167, 168) to allow for spontaneous appropriation and “overlays of difference” to enact “a **sense of connection** between people on the street” (1993: 168).

Neglected urban spaces (and the appropriation thereof) can be seen as manifestations of the “other”. Shaw and Hudson (2009) identify the creative qualities of spontaneous appropriation in such spaces and suggest that they be viewed as “social breathing spaces” and platforms for political expression, creativity, belonging and “new opportunities for urbanity” (Shaw and Hudson 2009: 1, 9).

Moreover, Da Costa and Van Rensburg (2008: 48) state that the African city should reflect its “multi-faceted society” through layered, democratic space that allows the “disenfranchised to stake their claims” and accommodates “unintended and spontaneous” appropriation. Where spaces are mixed, boundaries contested and overlays of difference celebrated, “cultures of engagement, **inclusion and hybridisation**” become possible (Da Costa and Van Rensburg 2008: 49).

Lastly, when spatial differentiation is “defined by events occurring within space” and “connections rather than distinctions”, the temporal condition of place is acknowledged (Da Costa and Van Rensburg 2008: 45). This allows multiple traces of lived experiences to be superimposed and integrated (Da Costa and Van Rensburg 2008:53). Additionally, event-driven spaces accommodate variation in programmes based on user **authorship** through **flexible, adjustable edges** between public and private realms (2008: 45, 53). This **event-driven strategy** builds on, incorporates, connects and intensifies existing spontaneous activities and layers of a place by allowing these activities to determine spatiality (Da Costa and Van Rensburg 2008: 43, 48).

[e]

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the theory unpacks appropriation as an ongoing process of lived experiences and expression of belonging, ownership and identity. These lived experiences leave traces that are superimposed over time, resulting in transient, multi-layered place-identities. While a phenomenological approach presents ways in which these traces of lived experiences and the transience of time can be expressed architecturally, the process of overlaying different lived experiences in event-driven space-making accommodates social engagement, inclusion and continued appropriation. Finally, these processes and strategies lead to the creation of a dynamic, evolving identity of place. Thus, it is argued that the spontaneous appropriation of neglected urban spaces by the homeless plays a role in this dynamic creation of space and place-identity. The dissertation research on homeless appropriation of neglected spaces is viewed through these lenses, which will also frame the intentions of the proposed design intervention.

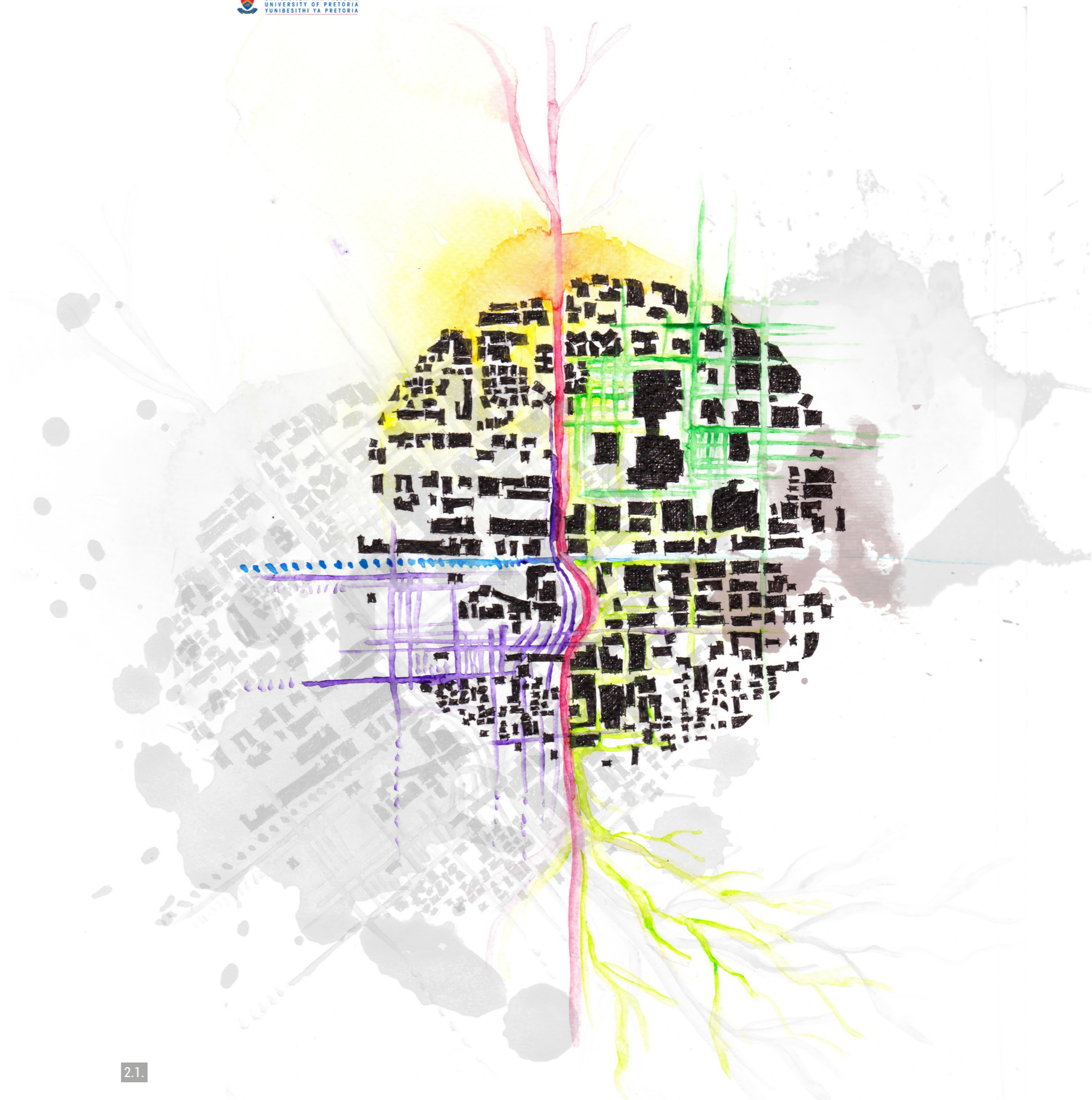


Fig. 2.1. Right: Abstract, conceptual image illustrating a combined view of the theoretical framework of appropriation, palimpsest, phenomenology and overlaying difference towards re-activating and re-integrating layered [urban] spaces. (Author 2021)