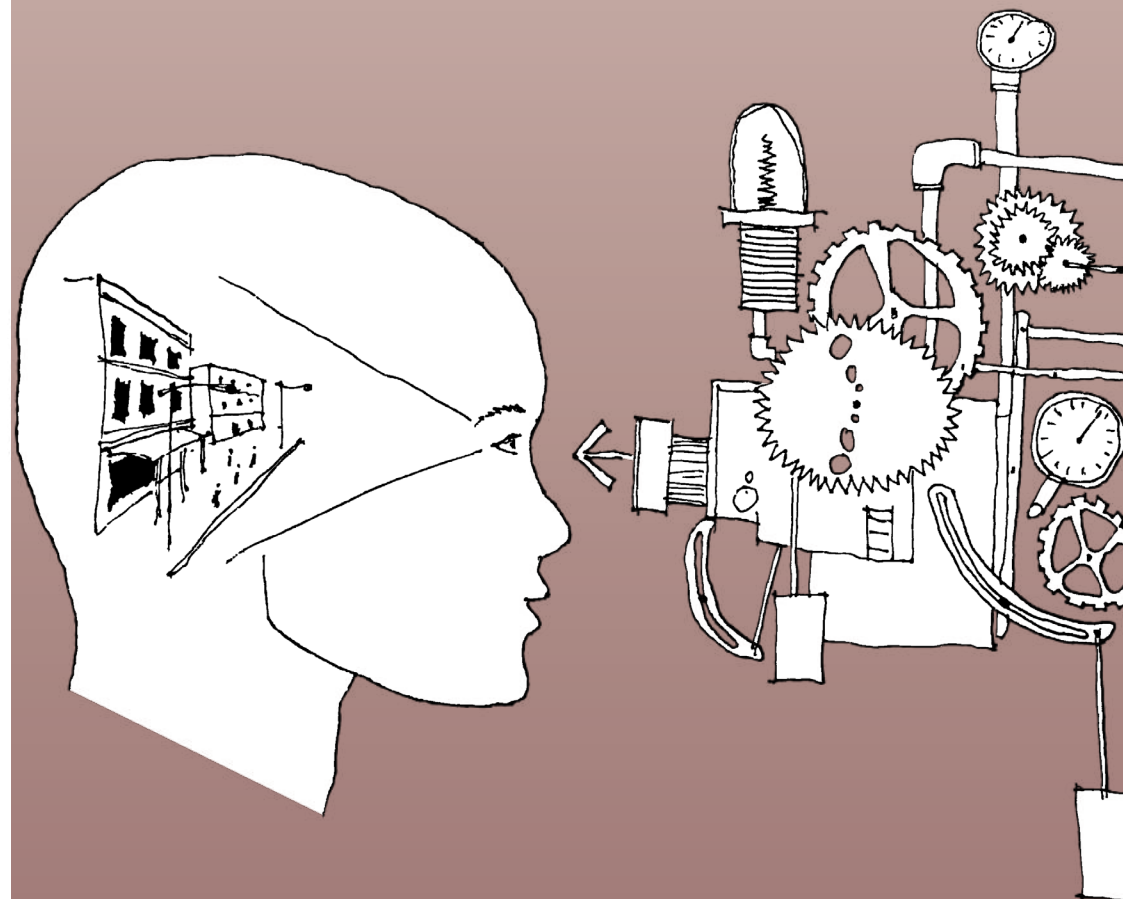


PART 4

Reflection

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4.1. Introduction

Starting this dissertation, the question of the real impact of architecture on political and systemic issues was raised. When engaging with socio-economic problems architecturally, are we not approaching design from a problematic angle by assuming architectural form can impact the politics that precede (and often undermine) the context in which design takes place as such? That is not to say that design is completely incapable of having a political effect, but rather that this effect is not as obviously on political processes themselves.

4.2. Argument

Perhaps it is more productive, from an architect's point of view, to approach the political through design not as a political practice as such but rather an ideological practice. It has been written that architecture has a fundamental ideological component to it which has political implications by the political meaning it can coerce through techno-aesthetic means (Mako 2014 and Šuvaković 2014). Approaching politics in architecture as an ideological exercise means framing the political in particular ways and thus through the question of what political meanings are hidden and revealed through form i.e. the question of what signifier a building becomes to assist in our understanding of the politics of the external world. Therefore to address political issues through design means to reveal political processes and relations between the people inhabiting and commissioning the spaces we ultimately design.

4.3. Intent

The notion of the *gedenkmal* (public critical thinking opportunity) provides a useful frame in which political issues can be revealed through the techno-aesthetic (and thus ideological) form of built structures (Stevens et al 2014). The intent of this intervention follows a similar logic: to provide an opportunity for the public to consider the political that influence their lives on a daily bases. Furthermore to consider the difference between this political influence on public life and the way the political is represented, i.e. the difference between the political (control and habitation of space) and the representational.

4.4. Site

The site chosen for this intervention is the interstitial spaces in front of and in the interior of the Capitol theatre on the city block flanked by Parliament, Church/ WF Nkomo, Bosman and Pretorius street in Pretoria CBD. The site is situated in close proximity to church square which has been historically used as a spring board for political events and processions (Vernon 2007: 160-161) and the history of its politics can be seen signified in its defining monumental structures (Van der Vyver 2018) and furthermore in the decay of these structures. The hidden sublime quality of the interstitial spaces on the block and the interior of the theatre works in favour of the intent of the project as it leaves something, a form of political meaning, to be revealed and discovered by the public.

4.5. Program

The site of the Capitol Theatre and its abandoned neighbours have been used in the recent past by local artists for exhibition, workshop and work spaces. This combined with the political function of church square in the larger city points towards a creatively driven program that serves the political interactions on church square. Due to the necessary media element that accompanies political processions, a political media printing works is proposed. This involves local artists, designers, writers and film producers, designing and producing the media that is used in political movements playing out on church square such as pamphlets, posters, journals and videos. During periods of political stasis, the intervention gets used as a public educational amenity where the same artists, designers, etc. use the spaces to host workshops on design, art, media and political studies and writing.

4.6. Design

The design follows from three conceptual approaches dealing with the organisation of the building on different scales. On the general scale, the notion of the separation of building envelope from its interior components (separation of representation from interior use/program). On the intermediate scale, the organisation of the program from a central, shared brief space from which other elements of the program radiate outwards (according to three themes of graphic media, written media and video media) allowing the public to discover the process of media production as they move deeper into the building. Finally on the personal scale having interfaces between public and private spaces in which the public engages with the political through their interactions with the program.

These conceptual approaches were formalised in tectonic steel armature structures organised around public courtyards where private functions are either elevated above the public ground floor or recessed into the basement below the public courtyards depending on the type of interaction (interactive or passive) the public has with the programmatic elements. The exterior skins of the structures are separated from the interiors behind them leaving a type of double skinned structure which exaggerates the sizes of the structures housing the program creating a moment where representation breaks down and reality is revealed when moving through the facades of the building.

4.7. Contribution and Future Opportunities

What this project means to the architectural profession is a different way of approaching/ engaging with the political that will inevitably influence the success of a building i.e. through the lens of ideology theory. It may therefore be seen that the largest contribution of this project is theoretical. This approach is perhaps, in our current zeitgeist, a difficult and at times painful way to think about the world in general and architecture specifically as it requires one to ask difficult questions about the political impact and awareness of ones project such as: what does this building do politically? Who really benefits from an intervention? What political disfunction will this project reveal or obscure from public view and as such what important conversations does a building inhibit through the meaning it projects? This frame of thinking about design ideologically puts forward to not only

consider what is done/ seen, but also to consider exactly that which is negated in the meaning of a building and, more specifically politically negated through the ideological mechanisms of architecture. Perhaps in the future this project too will fail/ be undermined by the very political processes it tries to highlight, engage with and bring into the public consciousness. If that be the case, it will, however, still serve as a precedent/ and illustration of the political processes that underpin our material conditions and as such still serve the ideological purpose of revealing the political by virtue of it having functioned as a thinking opportunity; not only for the public but also for future academics. Because of the limited scope of this dissertation, there are opportunities for further exploration into this field of study in design. Deeper academic research can be done into more complex systems of political influence

and ideological subversion through design as this field is highly unsaturated. This project provides but one way in which a formal interpretation of 'ideologically conscious' design can be done and as such the horizon of possibilities in terms of form, program and context is endless.

4.8. Conclusion

Looking at the abundance of failed building projects, throughout this city and the world, whose failures can be attributed to shifts in the political landscape over which the designer has little to no direct power, it is easy to fall into a state of nihilism regarding the building industry's susceptibility towards political processes. The urban sociologist Robert Park provides us with an enduring definition of the city which aids in addressing these concerns:

“...man’s most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart’s desire. But, if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself.” (quoted in Harvey 2008: 23)



Fig.188: Communal drawing by the students of the master class 2021 (Master class 2021).