INTRODUCTION

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Chapter One sets out to define the key issues that will be investigated in the dissertation, from an over-arching, broader scope to a site-specific scale. Thereafter, the relative questions to these issues are posed, the normative position expressed, and an outline of the research methodology is given.

CHAPTER

01

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The convergence of different personalities, cultures and social groups, just in passing but not necessarily to remain, is a characteristic of what one might call transient spaces. This rich patchwork of characters take part in an interchange and exchange of activity that is opportune for place-making. However, when these spaces of transience are more closely observed, it becomes apparent that they often remain just that, spaces, in essence non-places.

This points to the following issues:

Figure 1.1

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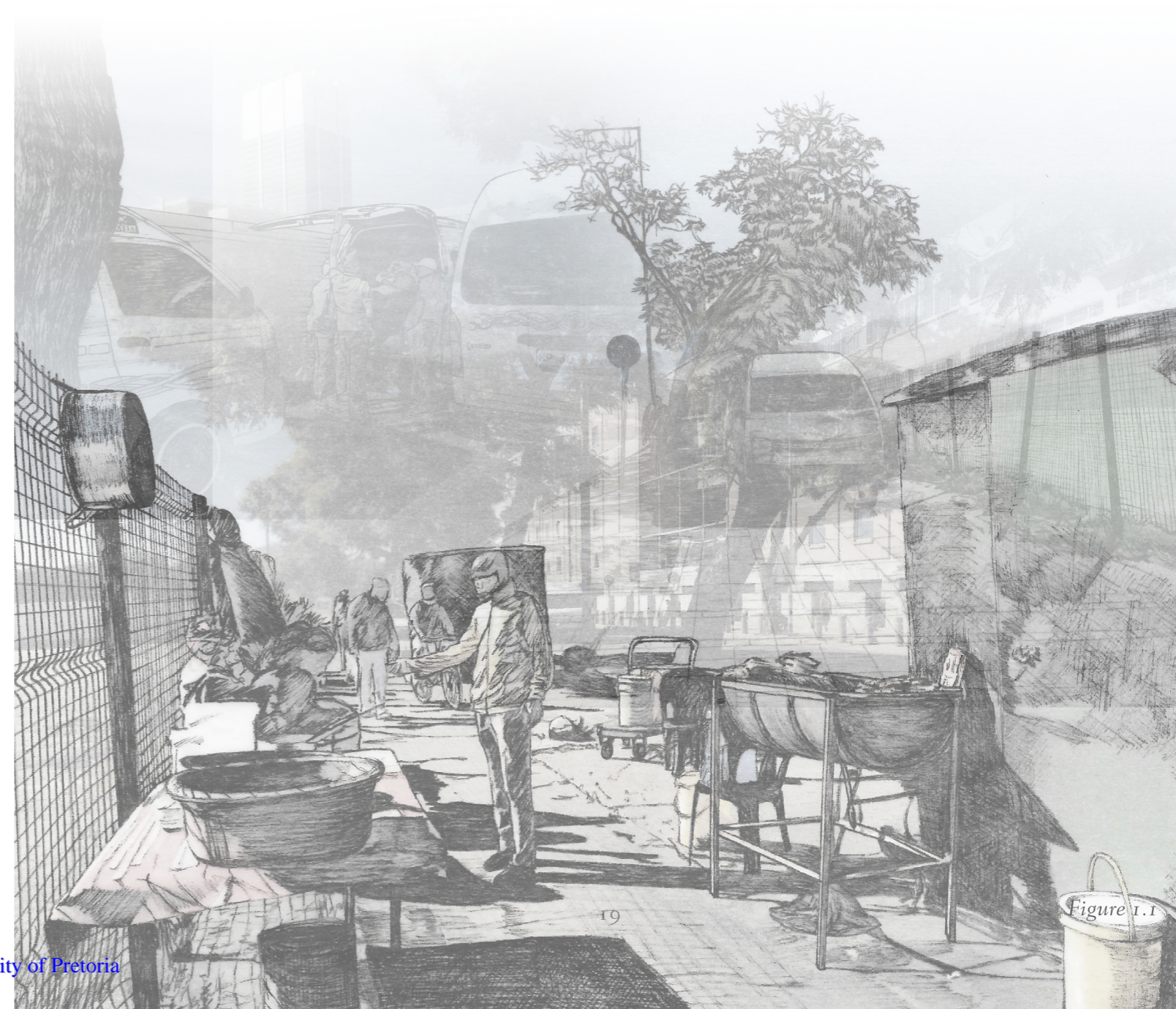
ISSUES

QUESTIONS

General Issue

Transient spaces follow typologies that become "non-places" by virtue of not being destinations. The term refers to transient spaces where the individuals remain unacknowledged, and the space is regarded as too insignificant to be considered a "place", such as motorways, airports, public transport nodes, hotel rooms and shopping malls.

General Question

How can transient spaces be transformed into meaningful places without the necessity of becoming a destination?

Urban Issue

The meaninglessness often associated with these places of transience are exacerbated by apartheid urban planning legacy, with specific reference to vital transport junctions situated in formerly marginalised areas.

Urban Question

How can the marginalisation through urban form or lack thereof be undermined or mitigated through the development of the transient spaces of taxi ranks?

Architectural Issue

The Boom Street taxi rank is a purely utilitarian space, where minibus taxis are parked and washed, and commuters are picked up and/or dropped off. Even though there is a strong presence of informal activity, as evidenced by the prevalence of small tent-like structures for taxi drivers, hawkers and pedestrians, the site can still be considered a "non-place". The absence of space-making devices means that a level of permanence is missing, preventing the creation of meaning associated with the space over time.

Architectural Question

How can form be used to create meaning and subsequently a sense of place in the context of the transient spaces of taxi ranks, specifically with regards to the Boom Street taxi rank?

Figure 1.2

Figure 1.3

Figure 1.4

Figure 1.5

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NORMATIVE POSITION

"Architecture is an extension; a modification establishing absolute meanings relative to a place." – Steven Holl.

'Contextualism' emerged in the 1960s as a form of protest to the 'placelessness' of the international style, focusing instead on rehabilitating meaning associated with space in a specific context and thereby using architectural form to create a sense of place (Ots 2011:56). The origin of the word 'context' denotes a 'weaving' or 'knitting' together, establishing an interdependence between architectural design and existing site conditions, especially taking into consideration that architecture, in its built form, cannot detach itself from its context. This approach gains insight and knowledge from the setting, and all that it encapsulates, history, terrain, climate, memory; both the physical and intangible factors are essential in forming a thorough understanding of the context before the design process can commence (Porter 2004:37).

Similarly, Frampton, K. (1993) defines "critical regionalism" as a theoretical approach that denies the 'placelessness' and mass production of modern architecture, favouring instead the experience of the user by creating meaning. It draws its

influence from both the physical and historical context and embodies minimalist ideals whereby the architecture is stripped of excessive decoration, revealing its true materiality and at the same time celebrating the construction, where every join, every joint and every material has to be carefully considered (Frampton 1995:299, Ots 2011:64).

These concepts lend themselves to potentially construct a more inclusive architecture, an architecture that is less preoccupied with itself, and more attentive to the needs of the surrounding community, especially in addressing the previously disenfranchised or marginalised members of society at a time when architecture was often used as a tool of dispossession. The emphasis should turn towards 'humanising modernism' and establishing a South African architecture that is focused on redressing sites of scarcity in the city, recognising difference and bringing together rights, resources, and meaningful place-making interventions (Ots 2011:89-90, 132, Tomer 2014:27-29).

"Architecture – like all productions of space (Levebvre, 1974) is a social act, and as such bridges social relations of encounter with the making of the built form." (Tomer 2014:29).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Looking at IDEO and the UK Design Council's Double Diamond Method, Tim Brown, executive chair of IDEO (IDEO Design Thinking 2021) characterises their strategy as "a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer's toolkit to integrate the needs of people...". The Double Diamond method, already in use at IDEO in the late 90s, was adopted by the UK Design Council to describe and simplify the design and innovation process (Design Council 2021). Jonathan Ball holds that this method can be used "to tell all sorts of design stories in really helpful ways", representing how divergent and convergent thinking, in terms of scope, is appropriate within each phase. This process of iteration, study, designing, and testing is based on four well-defined phases named: "Discover, Define, Develop and Deliver".
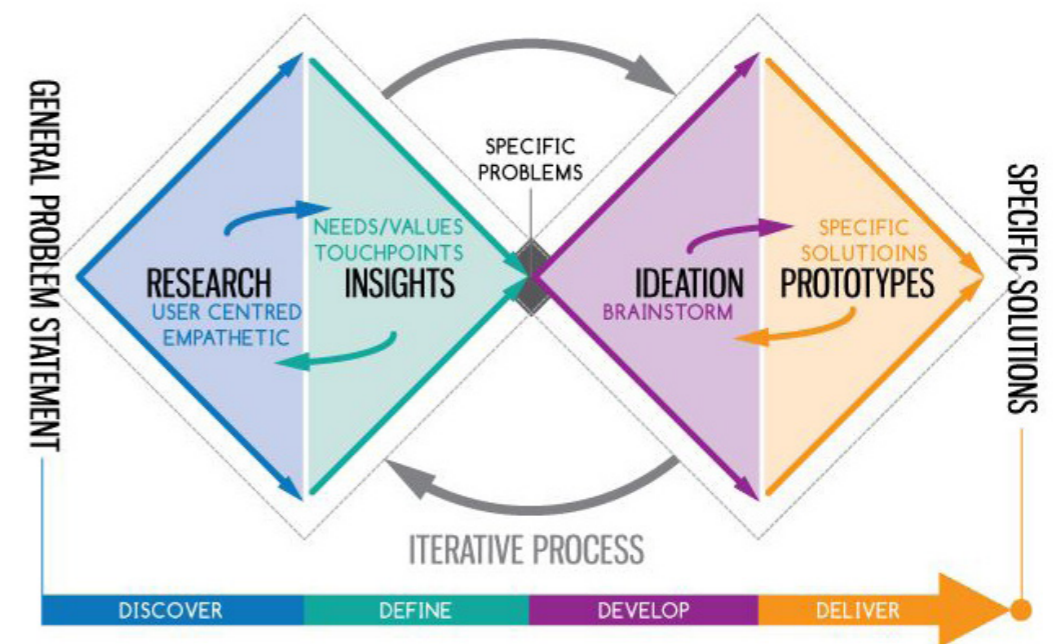

Figure 1.6   The Double Diamond Design Process, as laid out by IDEO and the UK Design Council (Service Design Vancouver 2021).

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This strategy aids the designer in understanding the scope and specificity of a particular research question, where it starts by identifying and unpacking broader systemic issues relevant to the problem statement, succeeded by very specific small-scale, personal questions and scenarios, and interpreting issues on site through these theoretic lenses. The second phase is characterised by a creatively driven process, as opposed to a research driven one, where design iterations and prototyping investigations are used with the aim of resolving issues identified within the first phase. Following the second phase, this process, as a whole, can be iterated to address the complexity and nuances discovered in the first phase, by tackling new issues that weren't yet evident at the start of the project.

For the purposes of this dissertation, specific issues and related questions were identified at the start of the research process (see page 13-14), concerning transient spaces.

For the second phase, a literature review was done looking at the broader context of South Africa's urban system as well as the taxi industry.

Moving to a smaller scope of specificity, the third phase comprised of a deep immersion into the context: talking to stakeholders, observing the use of the site, and storytelling (similar to IDEO Design Thinking 2021), whereby objects from the site were collected and narratives of seven personas were created to craft an emotive and empathetic perspective and understanding of the site's nuances, whilst at the same time delivering insights into what spatial conditions could support these individuals in bringing about greater self-actualization, and interpreting these perspectives within the broader theory analysed within the literature review.

The fourth phase looked at moving into the creative phase of the methology, whereby a broad conceptual approach was conceived. An analogous approach between choreographic dance pricniples and the implementation of permanent architectural form was developed to establish a better understanding of the relationship between the human body and the spatial responses as a result of dance, as well as this relationship to the formation and creation of space within the architectural discipline.

The aim of this being to capture and enhance the essence of a place that is defined by human movement.

Homing in on specific applications of this broad conceptual approach, appropriate precedents were identified from similar contexts, to aid in understanding the applicability of this design approach in the context of transient spaces and/or places.

From here the creative process is repeated by testing the analogous choreographic principles, identified in the conceptual framework, in building form as a new intervention on the Boom Street taxi rank.
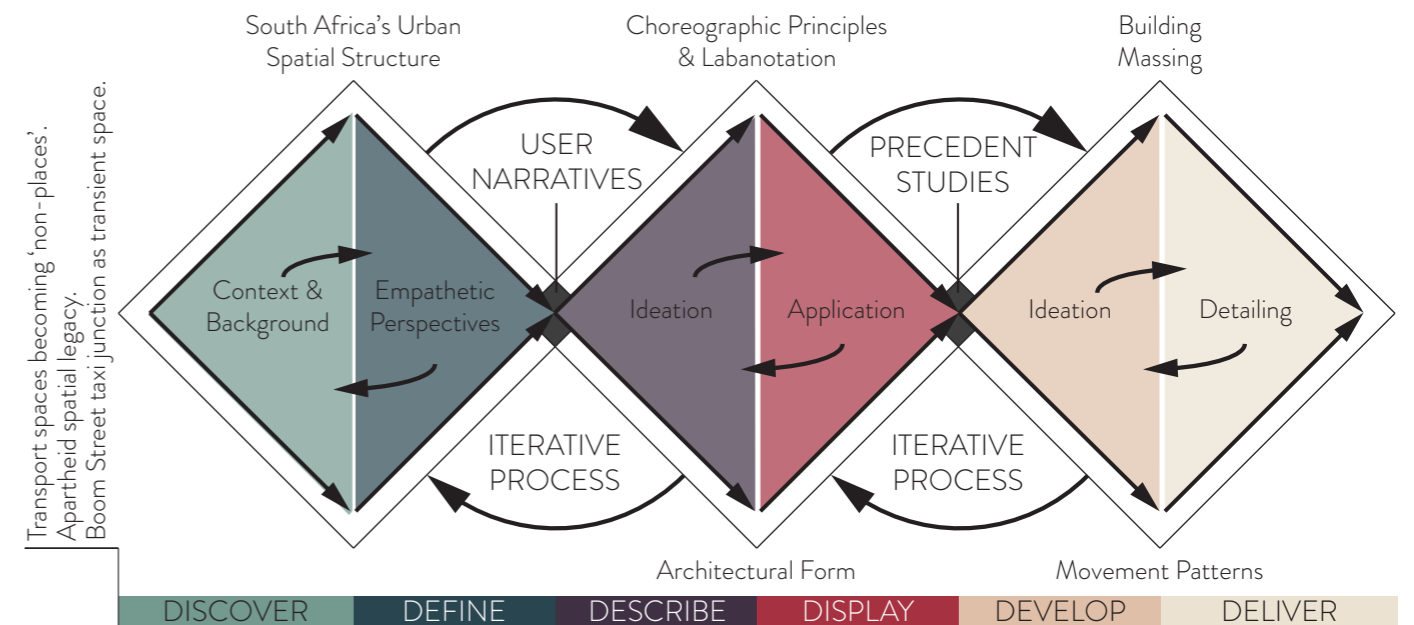

Figure 1.7   The Double Diamond Design Process, adapted to suit the research methodology outlined above (Author 2021).

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