

CONCLUSION

Critical Reflection.

CHAPTER 09

A CRITICAL REFLECTION

In reflecting on the course of this project, the complexity of the site and of its multiple constituents come to the fore. The programmatic and architectural interventions may appear as simple place-making solutions to the rich patchwork of characters and activities that compose the movement and unique culture of this specific space of transience, offering a layer of permanence, security, identity and significance owed to the everyday users.

This dissertation has afforded me the opportunity to investigate and understand the importance of the widely used minibus taxi industry, specifically within the increasingly polycentric city of Tshwane. The site is situated on Boom street, on the northern edge of the Pretoria CBD, and is recognised as a vital nodal point of activity from where commuters diverge to their various destinations and used as a taxi rest site for taxi drivers between peak time traffic hours.

The dissertation argues that ranking facilities in conjunction with contextually appropriate architecture can be used as a catalyst to not only improve the quality of life for industry stakeholders, but also the

at-risk individuals in the greater surrounding area. The empathic research methodology utilised at the start of this project drew attention to the need for a transitional haven that comprises a medical clinic, counselling centre, public courtyard, transitional housing units, informal vendor marketplace as well as the incorporation of shading structures for the taxi rest junction.

As designers we have infinite scope for introducing an increasing layered dynamic into our design-scapes with the goal of capturing a revitalised “sense of place” that stimulates curiosity, creativity and/or comfort at a specified time.

The main theoretical intent delved into the understanding of the relationship between the human body and architectural built space and ways in which the architectural intervention can be precisely choreographed creating a guided sequence of spatial experiences, encapsulating as well as enhancing the existing behaviour of the person within it, as well as the motivations for the manifestation of those behaviours.

An analogy was drawn between the act of composing architectural

spaces to the act of choreographing a dance, where dance principles such as design, dynamics, rhythm and motivation were used as a compositional exercise for the architectural intervention. Labanotation, which can be defined as a quantifiable method to map user movement through a space was incorporated to firstly assess taxi ranks in the greater South African context as well as the Boom Street taxi junction, to understand the various movement patterns prevalent in dense public transport transient places.

Drawing from the observational study done on the user movement patterns and behaviours already prevalent on site, i.e., the pedestrian axis that journeys through the site, providing a clear motivational gesture towards and away from the central informal marketplace and courtyard, with the more private functions situated towards the north of the site away from the most busy and vibrant areas.

From an architectural perspective, a critical regionalist approach underpinned the overarching design philosophy, striving for the creation of a contextually sensitive contemporary south African architecture.

The choice of materials incorporated therefore comprises red facebrick and concrete walls that offers a structural stereotomic element to the haven, which is offset with tectonic steel and timber pergolas that articulate the more transient inside/outside spaces along the pedestrian walkway, traders' market, and taxi junction.

By exploring new innovative methods and forms of materials as well as ways of thinking about communication and how we influence how structures not only to speak to their occupants, but communicate with them in a two-way dialogue, the investigation into the expansion of the relationship between building and body can begin.

The main contribution of this project to the architectural profession lies in a different approach to understanding site. Instead of looking at site as a series of static elements, the focus rests on the kinetic facets dictated by the fluctuating movement patterns and activities which is a function of the existing users. Given this fluid understanding of site, a design methodology incorporating the fluid relationship of people to surrounding objects as well as to

space, which in this case resulted in the track mapping in Labanotation provides an opportunity for future architects to incorporate similar conceptual approaches of fluidity to design on site. And it is therefore that the notation needs to initially map the natural behaviour, so as not to impose on what is organic and already established.

The Labanotation system with specific regards to the architectural profession, can be further explored to create a more robust notation template specifically aimed to assist architects when working with complex transient spaces.

Drawing from the words of Francis Kéré, (Louisiana Channel 2015) "They're free to use the space like they behave, like they feel. Architecture is about people." The human body and architecture adapt to one another and can be expressed as being engaged in a "dance". The architect needs to find the right balance between the two and question how the design might touch the senses of its occupants, how this interplay will occur, investigating where the two will meet, exchange, and part ways and influence one another. The relationship between

the human body and architecture is as much about being "still" as it is about "movement".

CONCLUDING THE USER NARRATIVES

Thankeray Mashiane

Age: 35
 Sex: Female
 Description: Informal Vendor
 Location: Informal Eatery under Bloed Street Mall bridge
 Site Object: Coca-Cola bottle wrapper – source of refreshment during long hours in harsh working conditions, especially in a low-income area where there is no fresh running water. The wrapper is also indicative of an unhealthy and sugar abundant diet usually prevalent in low-income and/or urban areas.

Thankeray clutches the pile of Tupperware in her hands as the taxi mounts the edge of the walkway at the Boom Street taxi junction. Some of the commuters help Thankeray and her mother unload the items with one of them making an off-hand joke about how much she (Thankeray) must carry every morning. Thankeray smirks knowing that this isn't even close to what she used to cart to the stall. The storage space next to the stall has made carrying boxes of serviettes, cutlery, and condiments a thing of the past. She actually manages to offload everything in one trip these days. The sun peaks through the little clerestory overhead, warming up the stall while little drops of rain from the night before fall from the metal sheet roofing overhead, protecting them from the elements. A rainstorm would usually mean close of business, but these days,

usually amounts to only a few minutes of wiping the outer-most table. It's Wednesday, so the foot traffic will be heavy from about 11h00 with the first batch of tourists. The shop has since become a local attraction and is no longer just reserved for the daily commuters and taxi drivers. Thankeray smiles warmly at Frank lounging beneath the steel and timber pergola structures in the fractured sunlight, devouring his chicken and pap. The tunnel may be far behind her, but some familiarity is comforting. She bends down to pick up a Coke bottle wrapper and throws it in the nearby bin.

Frank Mthiyane

Age: 28
 Sex: Male
 Description: Mechanic
 Location: Old shop turned into mechanic's workplace on Boom Street
 Site Object: Lucky Star pilchards can – the need for nutritious and whole some food, this offers insight into the socio-economic status of the occupants of the area.

Frank strides down the road with a sense of purpose and glee. The cool evening air graces the nape of his neck as Dr Savage Road disappears behind him. Frank is met with the lights of the annex and a barrage of excited voices. Fridays tend to have a boisterous energy amidst the new buildings at the Boom Street Junction, especially at the end of the month. Frank gently pushes past the waddling customers of the bustling night market (selling artisan food and clothes) and makes a beeline for Thankeray's stall. Just a few months ago having a beer at Thankeray's or even going to the taxi rank at night would be a laughable proposition, but with the advent of the new annex (and transport being readily available) Thankeray's had become a necessary stop for the discerning socialite. He washes his hands at the furthestmost basin and takes his last

sip of water for the night from the adjacent drinking fountain. From here on his lips would only be touching an ice-cold beer to wash out the taste of his lunch time pilchards.

Mpho Sihosana

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| Age: | 21 |
| Sex: | Male |
| Description: | Vagrant / 'Nayope' addict |
| Location: | Parking Garage under Bloed Street Mall, looking for a place to sleep. |
| Site Object: | Kiwi shoe polish tin – taking care of oneself and your surroundings in the sense of polishing one's shoes – the care of this area has been forgotten as has the tin. |

“Mpho, my brother, is that you?” the statement clangs against the inside of Mpho's skull and at once he is thrown back several years. Mpho shakes as he reaches his hand out “Tshe...Tshepi is that you?”. Tshepi smiles broadly and nods. Mpho hadn't seen Tshepi in years. He had run the streets with him, begged with him, shot up with him and huddled with him under the overpass on cold winter nights. One day Tshepi left the overpass and never returned. Mpho simply assumed him to be dead. The two share a hug, Mpho's bony and ragged finger contrasting with Tshepi's vibrant blue button up shirt and muscular frame. After the initial elation fades Tshepi looks at his pained brother and without saying a word leads him to the annex. The two of them walk down the walkway past the spaza shops and hooting taxis. As hungry as Mpho is

he is driven to follow Tshepi, with the same unrelenting trust he once had for him while they were hustling on the street.

Tshepi leads a reticent Mpho into the building. Mpho was used to being denied access or shooed away from anywhere with four walls and a roof. Instead Tshepi leads Mpho to an elevator lined with glass. Mpho becomes uneasy. Its truly surreal for him to survey the streets he wanders beneath him through the shards of morning light. Tshepi squeezes his shoulder and gives him a knowing smile.

The elevator dings and the doors slide open to reveal a quaint waiting area of the small clinic. The receptionist catches Tshepi's eye and smiles. “See, I told you I could get him to come” said Tshepi boisterously eliciting a laugh from the secretary. The secretary turns his

attention to Mpho and says “Tshepi will show you to your room so you can get showered and a nurse will be with you in 30 minutes.”

Mpho is guided down a warmly lit corridor until he is finally lead to a small peaceful room boasting a navy-blue clad wooden bed and serene white walls. Mpho is astounded taking it all in. “Towel's on the bed m'fetu and shower's through there” Tshepi says pointing ahead. “Let's hope you still remember how” Tshepi says cheekily as the two share a dignified laugh. Today was Mpho's first day of addiction treatment and for the first time in over a year, he felt at peace.

Meghan Louw

Age: 26
 Sex: Female
 Description: Office worker
 Location: National Department of Health
 Site Object: Lion matches box – imagery of lighting a match comes to mind, whether it's the lighting of a cigarette or a fire, the match provides light and may represent a beacon of social activity and gathering.

“An unpleasant conversation can be foregone by simply taking a moment and breathing deeply” the soft crackle of the audio book narrator dances through Meghan’s earphones. She smiles as she lets the sentiment sink in while journaling in a small leather journal on the table in front of her. Settled in the sunken seating of the Haven’s triple volume courtyard, the plants creating an enclave of security around her, she takes a moment to survey the serene break area, the light hum of conversation and the smell of fresh coffee had been a sanctuary for her over the last 3 months. Three months since she had smoked a cigarette or drank a cup of coffee. Her anxiety and irritability at work was almost non-existent. Even Adam’s crumb addled lunch visits failed to anger her these days. Even on the most annoying days she would work with a wry smile, know-

ing that she had a place to escape to go should things get too overwhelming. She tossed her cigarettes the day she found this place. She kept the matches though. They’re pretty useful to light scented candles before she takes her weekly bubble bath.

Siya Mtsweni

Age: 43
 Sex: Male
 Description: Taxi driver
 Location: Boom Street, walking past National Zoological Gardens
 Site Object: Chicken Lickin’ seasoning sachet – not only a signifier of the choice of food enjoyed by the users of the site, but can also symbolise the relationship between the informal and formal food networks, and the importance that the ritual of eating holds within a community.

Siya hummed along to Miriam Makeba’s Ha Po Zamani as the water cascaded over the bonnet of his taxi. Siya had been washing cars since he was 11 to make a little extra pocket money on the side, not to mention as a son of a taxi driver his Sunday evenings were often relegated to polishing the wheels of his father’s VW combi. The rhythms of wiping, scrubbing, and lathering a minibus was something of a ritual for him. A quiet meditation away from the frantic energy of the Johannesburg streets.

Siya gave the final wipe down on the left light, as he always did, flashing a content smile in the nearby rear-view mirror. Satisfied Siya sauntered to the shaded area – timber and steel pergolas that stretched from the trader’s market all the way to the sidewalk - where his contemporaries

were sitting or playing cards (while a few dozed off in the back benches). Siya didn’t feel like socializing just yet. Instead, he took a moment to admire his handiwork. He had washed hundreds of cars hundreds of times, but today was different. He had made his final instalment payment today and this gleaming taxi (with a single bump on the right driver’s side door) was his.

The water gently flowed down the gutter channels to the catchment pond on the west of the Boom Street Junction and Siya enjoyed the cool summer breeze - happy he didn’t have to spend his lunch break in a stuffy taxi, as he had done so many times before these new shading structures were built.

Lesedi Baloyi

Age: 56
 Sex: Female
 Description: Domestic worker
 Location: Walking towards the Boom Street taxi rank to catch a minibus taxi
 Site Object: Chappie wrapper – like a chewed-up piece of gum, spat out and discarded once the flavour has dissipated, signifies an undesirable part of the city.

“Did you know the ‘hash tag symbol’ is actually called an octothorpe?” Lesedi reads from the Chappie wrapper between intermittent chews to Naledi who raises her eyebrows impressed. Lesedi sighed and leaned back against the bench and gave a wistful sigh. Arriving at the Boom Street Junction and waiting for the next taxi used to cause Lesedi anxiety. Now it had become something of a ritual. Lesedi knew the taxi normally departs around 16:20, once the first flood of taxi commuters has reached the interchange, but Lesedi insisted on arriving at the terminal a few minutes early, just to enjoy a moment to herself. In-between the cleaning, child minding and commuting there was something so wonderfully relaxing about just sitting on a bench, enjoying a warm summer day while eating a Chappie. She felt like she was 6 years old

again waiting for the school bus. She unwrapped the second Chappie. “Yes” she exclaims. The green ones were her favourite.

Refilwe Mosimane

Age: 19
 Sex: Female
 Description: Sex worker
 Location: Leaving the office quite late (already dark) heading to her car.
 Site Object: Heineken beer bottle – serve as a symbol of the importance of social activity within a community, but can also be indicative of a more negative disillusionment of the members within the area, the prevalence of drug use and violence.

Refilwe continued to trudge down the bricked walkway through the annex. She had learned how to walk on blistered feet. She was a survivor. Refilwe made it through the doors of the clinic, she had heard that her friend Luyanda had received the help she needed here, Lesedi had just hoped that she would never have to come here herself. Refilwe was greeted by the warm glow of natural light basking the waiting room and was immediately approached by a nurse with a broad comforting smile. “Hello sister, are you ok?”. Refilwe is unable to answer and instead shoots the nurse a knowing look. The nurse nods with understanding. She’d seen this before and knew exactly what to do. “No problem. We have an opening with the doctor in about 20 minutes, bathroom is down the hall to the left if you’d like to freshen up” the nurse

said with a quiet aplomb. Refilwe walked down the corridor and by the time she was in the bathroom she was heaving massive fat tears of relief. She was going to get treatment. She was going to be safe. She was going to be ok. A sentiment she had not felt in a long time.