

Design of Strijdom Square & Informal Trade Structure along van der Walt Street

The re-design of Strijdom Square and the structure that will come along van der Walt Street will be solved on a conceptual level. The symbiotic building as a is of sufficient size for the architectural dissertation.

Strijdom Square, as a public space is the most important space in this thesis. As mentioned in the introduction, the architectural intervention on the site is to regenerate and re-activate Strijdom Square, and by doing so, re-program the space. By introducing the symbiotic building on the western façade of the State Theatre, the building is layered, creating interaction between the State Theatre and the square, using the symbiotic building as a transitional space.

The intentions for re-designing Strijdom Square have already been discussed. The design and design theory will be dealt with from here on. The main issues that need to be dealt with for Strijdom Square are:

- >> Accessibility
- >> Provision of shelter (shading)
- >> Places to walk, stand and sit
- >> Creation of usable spaces

Public spaces allow the coming together of strangers, who seek a comfortable place to pause and either become involved in the activity or become a spectator thereto. Jane Jacobs likens the city sidewalks to a dance, "We may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to a dance - not to a simple-minded precision dance with everyone kicking up at the same time, twirling in unison and bowing off en masse, but to an intricate ballet in which the individuals, dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole. The ballet of the city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place, and in any one place is always replete with new improvisations (JACOBS 1961: 60). People are drawn to other people's activity and this creates a magnet for other people to join in.



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5.132

Fig. 5.131 photo of public space in Copenhagen of people being entertained by musicians, this in turn attracts more people

Fig. 5.132 sidewalk cafe in Copenhagen illustrating people's fascination with other people's activity

The square must have access from every possible side. In order to deal with the level difference between the AD5A building platform and that of van der Walt Street, the concept of a false floor was initially explored. However, this was replaced with stairs which move down into the square from the higher levels, allowing access where needed. Providing a structure along van der Walt will not merely improve facilities for the informal traders. In many cases, when infrastructure for informal traders is provided, the people tend not to use it. In these cases, either the original flow of users is disturbed or something else has caused the activity to change for the worse. The structure is to create a boundary and a definite edge for the square. As observed by Jane Jacobs "Although buildings should not cut sun from the park—if the object is to encourage full use—the presence of buildings around a park is important in design. They enclose it. They make a definite shape out of the space, so that it appears as an important event in the city scene, a positive feature rather than a non-account leftover. Far from being attracted by indefinite leftovers of land oozing around buildings, people behave if repelled by them" (JACOBS 1961: 116).

To create a defined space outweighs a hesitance to interfere with the van der Walt Street informal traders. This does not mean that the design will destroy their trade. If the right decisions are made, and participation from the traders is encouraged, existing activity can be used and enhanced, benefiting the traders. A structure over the existing pedestrian route along van der Walt will become a colonnade under which the people can walk. Together with the improved access into the square, the informal trader's exposure to pedestrians will be optimized. Most importantly, structure will define the square as an event within the city environment. The spaces the structure creates will allow the traders to set up stalls as they currently do. Additional facilities will be introduced, providing water and electrical points that can encourage diverse activity and trade. This new diversity will benefit the space, the varying products attracting a variety of users at different times. The space thus hosts an intricate sequence of use and users (JACOBS 1961: 106).

All the activity in van der Walt Street will add to the safety of the square. According to Jane Jacobs, stores, bars and restaurants as chief examples, work in several different and complex ways to promote sidewalk safety. Firstly, they give people—both residents and strangers—concrete reasons for using the sidewalks on which these enterprises face. Secondly, they draw people past places which have no attraction for public use in themselves, but which are traveled as routes to somewhere else. This influence does not carry very far geographically, so enterprises must be frequent in a city district if they are to populate with walkers those other stretches of the street that lack public places along the sidewalk. Moreover, there should be many different kinds of enterprise, to give people reasons for crossing paths. Thirdly, shopkeepers and other small businessmen are typically strong proponents of peace and order; broken windows, holdups and nervous customers discourage business. They are great street watchers and sidewalk guardians if present in sufficient numbers. Fourthly, the activity generated by people on errands, or people aiming for food or drink, is itself an attraction to others. (JACOBS 1961: 47).

The staircase from the underground arcade enters into the square below the colonnade. People moving between the Standard Bank Centre and Strijdom Square will be entering or exiting from this point. This will also generate activity. From this staircase, people will either move through the square or along van der Walt Street. Jane Jacobs describes the city sidewalk: "we may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to a dance – not to a simple-minded precision dance with everyone kicking up at the same time, twirling in unison and bowing off en masse, but to an intricate ballet in which the individual dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole. The ballet of the city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place, and in any one place is always replete with new improvisations" (JACOBS 1961: 60).

A staircase will take people down from the ABSA level into the square. This staircase will include deep treads to be used as seating as well as for movement. Trees will be planted along the east-west axis of this staircase. The trees define the threshold of the square and create shade for the staircase.

Gehl believes that it is important that all meaningful social activities, intense experiences, and conversations take place where people are standing, sitting, lying down, or walking. One can catch a brief glimpse of others from a car or from a train window, but life takes place on foot. Only "on foot" does a situation function as a meaningful opportunity for contact in which the individual is at ease and able to take time to experience, pause, or become involved (GEHL 1987: 74). What is then needed are places designed for walking, standing and sitting, on other words, places for staying



Fig. 133

Fig. 133: concept model indicating colonnade along van der Walt Street

Fig. 134: concept section sketch indicating the various spaces through the site and how symbiotic building will layer the State Theatre

Fig. 135: public space in Copenhagen indicating how the space allows places for walking, standing and sitting

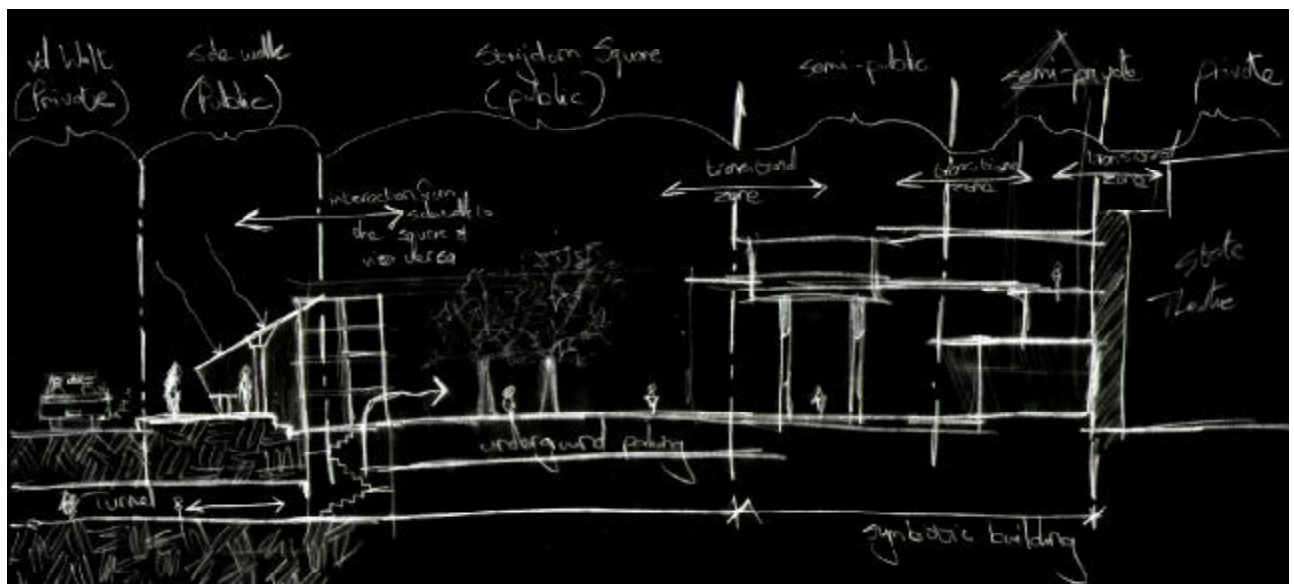


Fig. 134

It is not enough to create spaces that enable people to come and go. Favourable conditions for movement and lingering within the spaces must also exist, allowing participation in a wide range of social and recreational activities. In this context the quality of the individual segments of the outdoor environment plays a crucial part. Design of the individual spaces and of the details, down to the smallest component, are determining factors (GEHL 1987: 131).

#### Walking

Walking is first and foremost a means of transportation providing an informal and uncomplicated possibility for presence in the public environment. One walks to do an errand, to see the surroundings, or just to walk (GEHL 1987: 135). Walking demands space; it is necessary to walk freely without disturbance, without being pushed, and without having to maneuver too much (GEHL 1987: 135). When large spaces are to be crossed, it is usually more comfortable to move along the edge than having to traverse a broad surface or walk through the middle of the space. Movement at the edge makes it possible to simultaneously experience both the large space as well as the small details of the street façade or the spatial boundary along which one walks. Two varied experiences instead of one are provided, and in the case of bad weather, the protection offered by the façade is a further advantage (GEHL 1987: 144).

#### Standing

It can thus be concluded that events grow inward, from the edge toward the central space. It can be said that the design of details plays an important role in developing possibilities of staying in public spaces. If spaces are desolate and empty – without benches, columns, plants, trees, and so forth – and if the facades lack interesting details – niches, holes, gateways, stairs, and so on – it is difficult to find places to stop. Good cities for staying out in have irregular facades and a variety of supports in their outdoor spaces (GEHL 1987: 155).



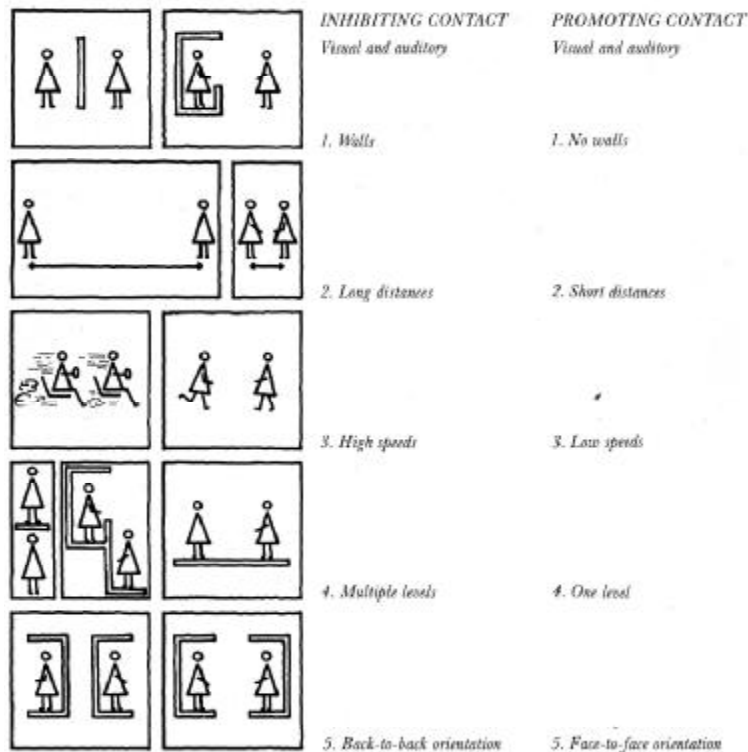
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Sitting

Only when opportunities for sitting exist can there be stays of any duration. If these opportunities are few or poor, people just walk by. Stays in public are not only brief, but many attractive and worthwhile outdoor activities are precluded. The existence of good opportunities for sitting paves the way for the numerous activities that become prime attractions in public spaces: eating, reading, sleeping, knitting, playing chess, sunbathing, watching people, talking, and so on (GEHL 1987: 157).

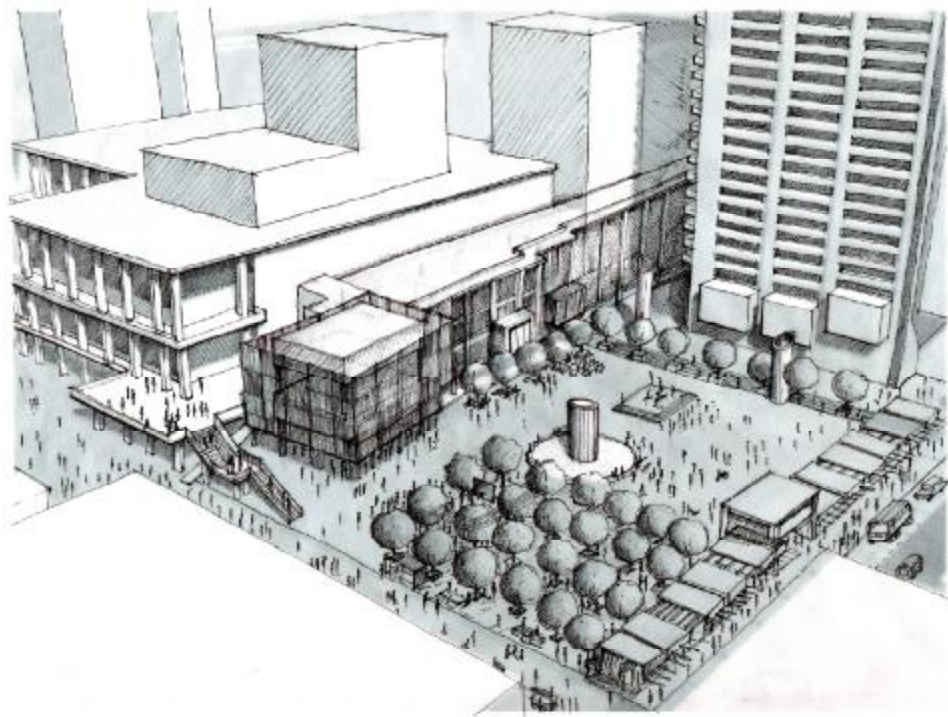
Possibilities and limitations can be manipulated in several ways. Five different means with which architects and planners can promote or prevent isolation and contact are illustrated by Gehl below, see Fig 6.29 (GEHL 1980: 74). Using all these tools, the design evolves.

- in 4.0.60 diagram drawn by Jan Gehl indicating how to design spaces that promote or prevent contact
- in 4.0.61 perspective sketch from the north west of building and how it relates to the square also shown is an impression of how the square will function in relation to the building
- in 4.0.68 perspective sketch of the square from the south west

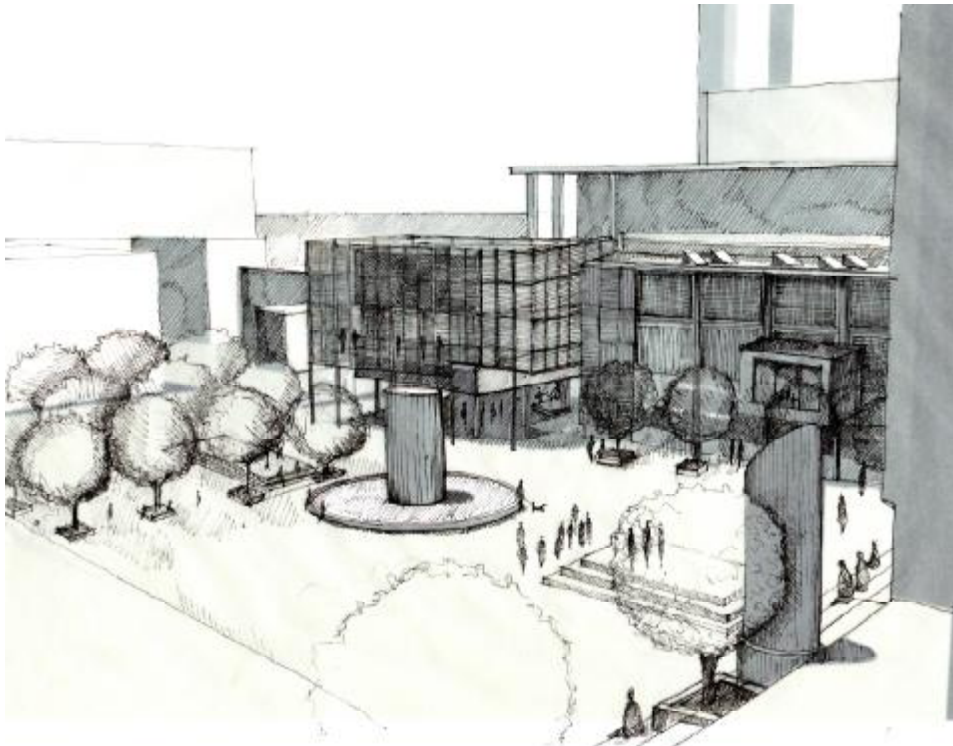


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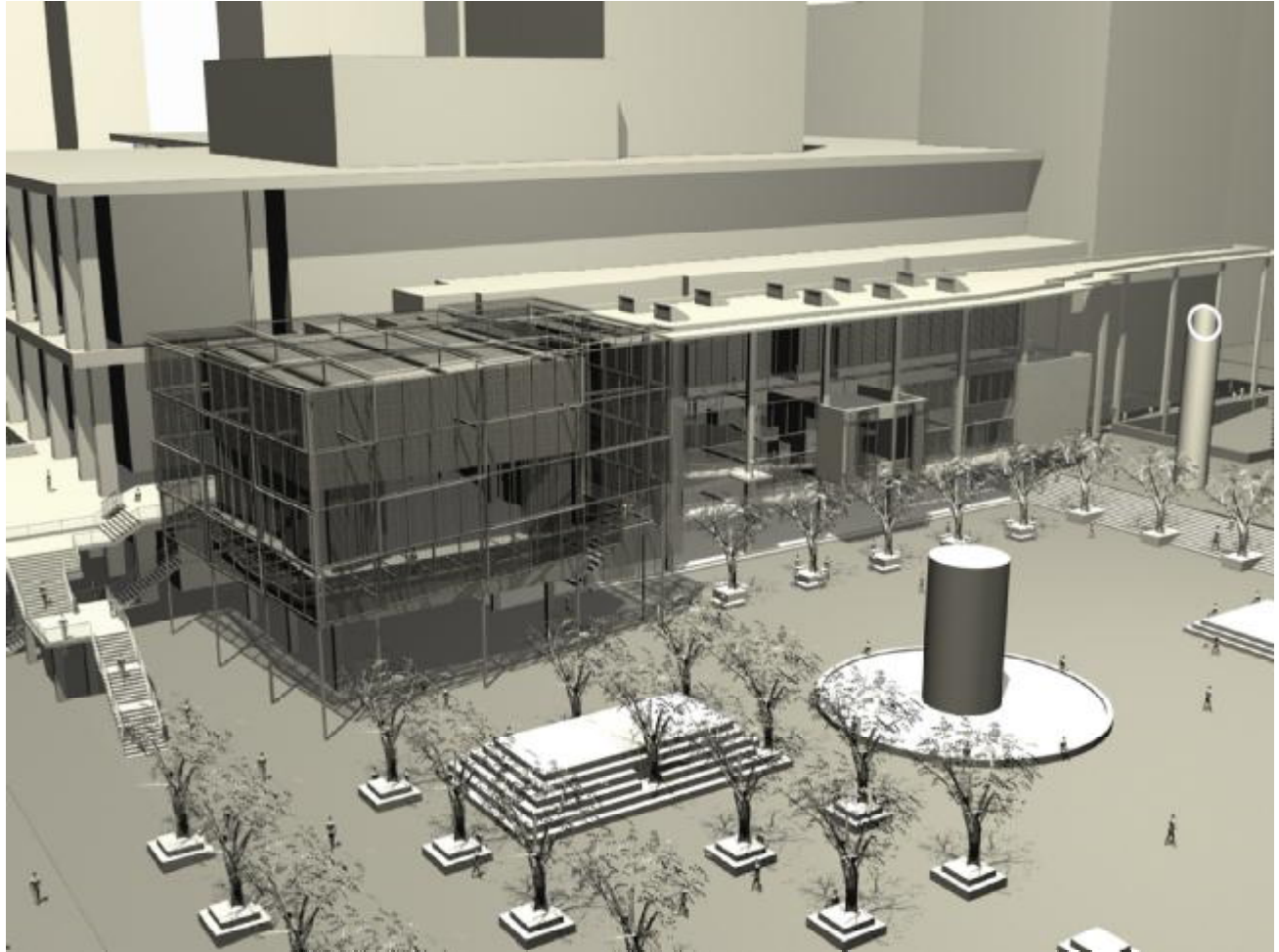




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Fig. 4.139 Elevation view of the north western side of the symbiotic building with its context

