2.1. Introduction to the contemporary cultural context

2.2. Literary investigation of core theoretical concepts:

2.2.1. Loss of orientation and identity

2.2.2. Reconnection to the natural environment

2.2.3. Orientation in time

2.2.4. Time in the natural environment

2.2.5. Conclusion

2.3. Physical translation as proposed by theory:

2.3.1. Dwelling

2.3.2. Gathering

2.3.3. Enclosure: Exposure

2.3.4. Weak architecture
The human mind is a great city in which the individual is always lost. He spends his lifetime groping, trying to locate himself. (Heller 2003: 69)

The urban dweller, however, is completely unaware of his or her link to the earth and has therefore worked back to the individual. Although oversimplified, the idea serves to illustrate the cultural link that the individual fitted into the family, that fitted into the community with similar beliefs and rituals, which fitted of which connects one to the biophysical realm. Very simply put, the system looked something like this: the 

Contemporary urban dweller spends their life in the belly of shopping malls and office blocks, finds sustenance in supermarkets and drive through windows with no connection to the sacred or the physical realm. This is a stark contrast to the following extract which is a description of a rural community in Bali:

"The whole idea of Bali is a matrix, a massive and invisible grid of the spirits, guides, paths and customs. This is in stark contrast to the following extract which is a description of a rural community in Bali:

2.2.1 Loss of orientation and identity

"The human mind is a great city in which the individual is always lost. He spends his lifetime groping, trying to locate himself." (Heller 2003: 69)

2.2.2 Reconnection to the natural environment

"When we identify ourselves, we use the place as our reference." (Norberg-Schulz 1985: 9) The importance of the environment around us emerges from this statement. The idea of reconnection to our own identity is incomplete when set in a void. Reconnecting to the physical world is essential. Norberg-Schulz stresses the importance of being at home in a world that can be manufactured in unison, but terrifying in alienation.

"The human mind is a great city in which the individual is always lost. He spends his lifetime grooping, trying to locate himself." (Heller 2003: 69)
Various authors have been intrigued by the mysterious connection of mankind to his surroundings. In any attempt to establish a connection between an individual and the physical environment, the experience of that environment is of significance. Architecture is the vehicle of experience that enables it to play this role.

**Orientation in time**

Orientation, however, is not restricted to physical presence or even the place of the individual within a social and cultural context. We are also orientated within time. This is what determines the world into which you have been ‘thrown’, as Heidegger describes it. All the factors that influence the identity of an individual that have been mentioned, such as the physical and metaphysical context, have history and a result is a singularly unique story. To fully understand your surroundings as they exist today, as well as your own identity, one must be made aware of your orientation in time.

Both St John Wilson and Pallasmaa discuss how the concept of time becomes integral to that of space.

From the above arguments, experience is cited as the main connection to the environment around us. In any attempt to establish a connection between an individual and the physical environment, the experience of that individual is of significance. Architecture is the vehicle of experience that enables it to play this role. The Mapungubwe Interpretation Centre

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### 2.2.2 Materiality

Peter Rich

Peter Rich

The Mapungubwe Interpretation Centre

### 2.2.3 The Mapungubwe Interpretation Centre

This approach can be seen in the selection of materials and structural system of the centre. The Mediterranean tradition of vaulting was selected based on the desire to use local materials and labour-intensive methods in order to emphasize the earth’s production capacity. The earth tiles are produced locally and have low embodied energy. (Richet et al. 2009: 29) The structural form seeks the need for visual reinforcement and takes in human labour instead of machines. (Richet et al. 2009: 30)

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### 2.2.4 Time in the natural environment

Being disconnected from tradition, history and culture and the natural environment means an existence isolated in time. (St John Wilson 1995:10) One that resists modern architecture succeeds in boxing us in, that the tension remains, that we are disconnected from the natural environment.

### 2.2.5 Conclusion

The Mapungubwe Interpretation Centre

We consider the manufacture, transport, lifespan and demolition of materials as a direct and visible reflection of a cultural shift in our perception of the environment and the exploitation thereof. (Norberg-Schulz 1985: 9)

The Mapungubwe Interpretation Centre gives them common identity and hence the basis for a fellowship or society. The permanence of the place is what enables it to play this role. (Peter Rich)

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2.3 Physical Translation

2.3.1 Dwelling

To dwell implies the establishment of a meaningful relationship between man and a given environment... (Norberg-Schulz 1985:13)

Dwelling, thus, is an important idea as terms of establishing a connection with the environment. Although this is a very philosophical idea, Christian Norberg-Schulz does offer some suggestions as to how one can achieve this meaningful relationship. Breaking down the meaning of the term, Norberg-Schulz identifies the key ingredients of dwelling to be a how, that relates to identification, and a where, that relates to orientation. (Norberg-Schulz 1985:15) These are both subject that have been raised previously and are simply worth investigating further.

Identification refers to the ‘qualities of things’. (Norberg-Schulz 1985:15) Again, we see the implication that objects contain an inherent meaning with which one can identify, and that aids us in understanding our world or its events. (Norberg-Schulz 1985:18)

Orientation, on the other hand, has to do with... spatial interrelationships. (Norberg-Schulz 1985:15) He describes the elements of spatial interrelationships as centres, paths, goals, and domains. (Norberg-Schulz 1985:24) Domains can be defined as the larger plane on which paths and goals occur, which makes up the environmental image of the mind, and thus the structure within which the environment is connected with paths and centres. (Norberg-Schulz 1985:24) A centre denotes a place of importance and a destination, where horizontal movement comes to an end. Also important is that he claims a centre to be a how, that relates to identification, and a where, that relates to orientation.

Identification and orientation are the key ingredients, in the act of building can gather the world around it. We have to have an open mind, and the places have to offer rich possibilities for identification. (Norberg-Schulz 1985:11)

To dwell in the qualitative sense is a basic condition of humanity. When we identify with a place, we dedicate ourselves to a way of being in the world. Therefore dwelling demands something from us, as well as from our places. We have to have an open mind, and the places have to offer rich possibilities for identification. (Norberg-Schulz 1985:11)

2.3.2 Gathering

The existential purpose of building (architecture) is... to make a structure become a place, that is, to make the meanings potentially present in a given environment manifest... (Norberg-Schulz 1985:12) This comment was made after a discussion of the presence of a bridge gathering the environment around it and making it meaningful. (Norberg-Schulz 1985:12) This single construction does not give the environment its meaning, but makes us aware of the environment and its inherent meaning. Thus, the task of building can gather the world around it.

Identification and orientation are the key ingredients, in the act of dwelling the world. Although this is a very philosophical idea, Christian Norberg-Schulz does offer some suggestions as to how one can achieve this meaningful relationship. Breaking down the meaning of the term, Norberg-Schulz identifies the key ingredients of dwelling to be a how, that relates to identification, and a where, that relates to orientation. (Norberg-Schulz 1985:15) These are both subject that have been raised previously and are simply worth investigating further.

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2.3.3 Enclosure and exposure

We may conclude that dwelling means to gather the world as a concrete building or ‘thing’ and that... the architectural act of building is Umfriedung or enclosure. (Norberg-Schulz 1985:15) Following from the concept of gathering, Norberg-Schulz approaches that of enclosure. Previously, we have also discussed the polar range of enclosure and exposure suggested by Colin St John Wilson. (St John Wilson 1992:14) Here, we encounter a link between the two theories that may result in an interesting... practical application. While Norberg-Schulz focuses on the environment, St John Wilson shifts his focus to the human body in what he calls the ‘body language’. (1992:5)

Enclosure and exposure also make the user aware of... the enclosure in term of the human experience.

The precedent is a good example of the impact that enclosure and exposure can have on the experience of a place. Here, by means of obscuring view and focusing the eye on certain elements... of the landscape in turn, the traveller is made acutely aware of his surroundings. What would merely have been a landscape quickly passed by, becomes an experience of the sky, the surface of the earth, the experience of natural elements and lastly all of these things are gathered in a single view. What we may conclude is that enclosure and exposure makes the user aware of the environment and the key ingredients. These theories may result in an interesting practical application. While Norberg-Schulz focuses on the environment, St John Wilson shifts his focus to the human body in what he calls the ‘body language’.

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In the precedent (discussed to the left), both these theories can be seen. A complete experience is created by means of enclosure and exposure. Attention is focused on the elements in the landscape, gathering the environment. The play of enclosure and exposure makes the user aware of the comfort and discomfort experienced as a result of climatic conditions, as well as leading them through different spatial sensations of being between, under, inside and outside.

Enclosure and exposure also make the user aware of... the enclosure in terms of the human experience.
2.3.4 Weak or fragile architecture

"Whereas the latter [image architecture] desires to impress through an outstanding singular image and consistent articulation of form, the architecture of the weak image is contextual and expansive." (Pallasmaa 2000:7) Precisely, we have read the objective of Alvar Aalto’s approach to visually based architecture. Here, an alternative is offered: the concept of ‘weak’ or ‘fragile’ architecture is introduced. (Pallasmaa 2000:7) Fragile architecture attempts to become a supportive background to human perception, rather than dominating the foreground with a purely visual image. (Pallasmaa 2000:10) The Japanese garden is cited as an inspiration for this: it explores weak architecture as containing more than one meaning, as being subtle and a fusion of the man-made and natural environments. (Pallasmaa 2000:10) This is reminiscent of the DMMG (dune house) by William Morgan, and the idea that “…the moments of greatest poetic intensity gather around the points of ambiguity.” (1992:11)

Incorporating the architecture into the physical environment implies it being subject to the effect of time and natural processes. As opposed to image architecture which is manufactured as a final product, weak architecture is open-ended and subject to change. (Pallasmaa 2000:11) The flexibility and sensitivity may be an indication of an architecture that is compatible with the constants and opportunities presented by the subject of sustainability.

One way in which weak architecture may be created is to employ shapes that have a reciprocal relationship with the landscape. The Dune House is an example of such a construction. The house is located adjacent to the beach in Florida and is barely visible as a planted mound with ocular shaped window openings. (Orton 1988:231) The stereotomic structure is achieved with a sprayed concrete shell and the 500mm soil cover improves thermal performance in the hot climate. (Simon 1988:231)

The summer house is set in a lush landscape on a large site where the architect could be close to the influence of the environment. The building served as laboratory for Aalto to experiment with materials and building techniques, thus different parts of the building have different characters. However, the use of materials and space exhibits a profound awareness of the surrounding landscape and is constantly either repeating or inviting the landscape into the design. Along with experimenting with materials and texture such as that of brick and stonework, different plants and mosses were incorporated to test the durability and effect. (Alvar Aalto Foundation)