infill
reconfiguring public space

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The study explores the infill of public presence in an urban gap on site 281/3 in Pretoria’s CBD. Urban cultural diversity is used as a point of departure, to propose a public facility in the city centre to become part of a network of public spaces in the area and provide a backdrop for restorative action through the lived experience of the user.

Site investigation initially takes place on three sites, and explores the potential of each to produce an appropriate identity and programme for the intervention. Site selection reduces the intervention to one appropriate site illustrating the most opportunity for social interaction and design exploration. The proposal includes the design of a series of multi-faceted spaces, simultaneously re-using an existing building to densify the urban fabric and develop an interactive public environment.
The role of architecture is to structure our understanding of the world and of our very existence, or as Juhani Pallasmaa (2001:51) describes it: ‘how the world touches us’. He addresses architecture that creates frames for action, thought and emotion, which gives expression, and structures experience. Architecture of diversity provides concepts of order and expression which exceed the present and the known, in order to initiate a dynamic resonance between the citizens of the city. Pallasmaa (2000:81) speaks of a ‘fragile’ architecture, that is architecture of a weak structure and image that relies on appropriateness, responsiveness and contextuality.

Building in the context of the modern city, is based on Rowe and Koetter’s (1981:50) ‘collage city’ approach. The reappraisal of modern urbanism calls for an end to the destruction of city centre areas by new construction, and proposes an alternate strategy of ‘contextualism’. The latter proposes an approach to urban renewal without the total loss of urban fabric and a return to memory and experience.

The objective is to create a middle-ground position between new and old. Depth, layering and acknowledgement of the existing is favoured over sentimentality; and memory, awareness and reaction over a tabula rasa. Intention is to integrate the project as part of the phenomenological city, having a fragmentary and complex quality, with a dense sum of elements that experience and time has gradually distilled.
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