

## BASELINE STUDY

### INTRODUCTION

One of the main phenomena facing the youth of today is the advent of globalization which is transforming youth identities and making them adopt eclectic identities. For many youth, the engagement in a specific type of culture is a way of connecting with a global youth culture and engaging through forms of hybridization, as glocal subculture. According to Malone (2006), culture can be constructed in local and global environments or both, “glocalisation”. Furthermore, culture signifies the particular ways social groups live out and make sense of their given circumstances and conditions of life. This can be identified as a collection of practices, ideologies and values from which different groups draw to make sense of their world.

The baseline study conducted is a theoretical investigation into the understanding of how youth subcultures are formed and represented. The baseline study informs the design process prior to conceptualization. The study proposes a number of issues that the designer should be aware of in understanding the users of the building. This will ensure that the building does not become a static ensemble of elements but rather a collection of ideas transformed into an architecture that best resembles or relates to the topic of the thesis.

### THE CITY AS A HYBRID

The city is made of more than just relations of individual men and social conveniences – the streets, buildings, electric lights, tramways, and telephones etc. It is also something more than a mere constellation of institutions and administrative devices – courts, hospitals, schools, and police. According to Park, the city is rather, a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of the organized attitudes and sentiments that inhere in these customs and are transmitted with this tradition. Therefore the city is not just a physical mechanism and an artificial construction, it is ‘involved in the vital processes of people who compose it; it is a product of nature, and particularly of human nature’. (Park, 1916: 16)

As time evolves, each section and quarter of the city takes on something of the character and qualities of its inhabitants. The separate parts of the city are stained with the peculiar sentiments of its population. This population manifests itself with diverse identities through a combination of complex interactions with each other, thereby creating a hybrid activity of new identities or ethnicities. Hybridity according to cultural theorist, Homi Bhabha (1994), describes the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity. ‘Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the

**“A city is an idea first, an expression of the idea which the society believes itself to be, it is made up of built fabric and people. City forms their actual function and the ideas and values that people attach to them make up a single phenomena”. (Lynch, 1960:46)**

“authoritative”, even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign.’ (Bhabha, 1994:55)

‘At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal’. (Bhabha, 1996:58) This contestation becomes a struggle between the dominator and the subaltern, hence Bhabha emphasizes that such negotiations are neither assimilation nor collaboration. ‘This makes possible the emergence of an ‘interstitial’ agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism’ (Bhabha, 1996:58).

‘Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of the community, and gives narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole’(Bhabha, 1996:58). The interstitial agent can be related to the concept of youth and the supreme dominator as mainstream society. This mainstream society stands for a symbolic order in authority; hence the image of youth is regarded as the ‘other’ in society.

Fig.4 Youth media comic.



#### YOUTH CULTURE AND GLOBALISATION

'The term 'youth' is popularly used to refer to people aged between 16 – 25 which bears no correlation with any of the diverse legal classifications of childhood or adulthood'. (Skelton, 1998:5) Certain people perceive that teenagers on the street are considered a polluting presence – a potential threat to public order – and 'thus they are often subject to various adult regulatory regimes including various forms of surveillance and temporal curfews'. (Skelton, 1998: 7)

'Youth' defines a moment of disturbance: a space in – between, that of childhood and adulthood. It is this period that the youth practices or engages with diverse identities hence there being 'moral panics of youth – as – ungovernable mob'. (Oswell, 1998:39) The disturbance expressed by the youth is a complex contestation by the individual in forging his or her own identity.

The fundamental image of 'youth' is displayed through style, music, culture and resistance. The construction and negotiation of cultural identities depends upon a contestation of dominant representations' (Dwyer, 1998: 50), therefore certain aspects such as dress, music and

television are imperative cultural spaces through which identities are negotiated.

Youth cultures are not closed local cultures, nor are they undifferentiated global cultures, but rather they are in fact complex products of interaction. Local youth cultures are not a closed system of social relations 'but a particular articulation of contacts and influences drawn from a variety of places, scattered, according to power – relations, fashion and habit, across many different parts of the globe'. (Skelton, 1998: 124)

**The reach of youth cultures into a global environment has paralleled the acceleration of new technologies and their use by global youth.**

#### GLOBALISATION:

The aid of new technologies has made cultural spaces such as dress and music images propagating a youth culture's posture, its style, and its gestures have spread throughout the global youth community. Content transmitted directly

across internet downloads has created the technology for youth to manipulate and appropriate youth cultural expressions.

Media plays an imperative role in defining youth cultural expressions since they provide us with the most available categories for classifying out the social world. 'It is primarily through the press, television, film, etc. that experience is organized, interpreted, and made to cohere in contradiction as it were'. (Hebdige, 1979:85) The mass media are more and more responsible 'for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an image of the lives, meanings, practices and values of other groups and classes; for providing the images, representations and ideas around which the social totality composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces can be coherently grasped'. (Hall, 1996:13)

'By mixing and blending the forms and meanings of the overtly inner city expression with their own cultures, musical tones and lived experiences, youth whether in urban or rural, low or high income nations are constructing

a hybridized transnational youth culture'. (Decker, 1994: 28) In this way Gilroy (1996:56) argues that youth culture becomes a global culture, its style, music and images crossing with a range of different national and regional sensibilities throughout the world and initiating a plurality of 'localized' responses.

This transnational youth culture renders local youth culture as a subculture since they become a minority in the context of the larger whole with their own shared beliefs and consumption of style.



Fig. 5 Kudzanai Chiurai, Congestion: Oil paint on canvas 344 X 222cm



Fig. 6 Kudzanai Chiurai, Working class hero: Photograph 100 X 100cm



Fig. 7 Kudzanai Chiurai, Untitled: Oil paint on canvas 100 X 120cm



Fig. 8 Kudzanai Chiurai, Battle for Zimbabwe: Oil paint on canvas 120 X 230cm

### SUBCULTURE AND ART

Sub cultural theories are diverse across many fields; the point of departure is the measure used by subordinate groups to resist the dominant culture by creating their own meanings. According to Hebdige, subcultures tend to be represented as an independent organism functioning outside the larger social, political and economic contexts. The term subculture tends to suggest a group displaying integrated behaviour, beliefs and attitudes. 'The complex interplay between the different levels of the social formation is reproduced in the experience of both dominant and subordinate groups, and this experience, in turn, becomes the raw material which finds expressive form in culture and subculture'. (Hebdige, 1979:84)

According to Hebdige, subcultures represent symbolic challenges to a symbolic order, but they normally end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones. In terms of style, 'the communication of a significant difference, then (and parallel communication of a group identity), is the "point" behind the style of all spectacular subcultures'. (Hebdige, 1979: 102) It is therefore through the distinctive rituals of consumption, through style, that the subculture at once reveal its 'secret' identity and communi-

cates its forbidden meanings. It is the way in which commodities are used in subculture, which mark the subculture off from more orthodox cultural formations.

Members of a subculture share a common language, 'they manifest culture in the broader sense, as systems of communication, forms of expression and representation'. (Hebdige, 1979: 129) Sub cultural styles do qualify as art in particular contexts; not as timeless objects 'judged by immutable criteria of traditional aesthetics, but as appropriations, thefts, subversive transfections, as movement'. (Hebdige, 1979: 129)

Art produced by the subculture becomes a commodity which is 'sold' to the youth and other parts of society interested in the cultural interpretation of subcultures. This will hopefully spark an art scene in the context where this initiative will be located, thereby becoming a catalyst. The art scene is a type of culture that needs the city to survive since it needs artists, galleries and patrons that only an urban landscape can provide on consistent basis. The youth subculture becomes the artists and will uproot diverse art forms within the area, 'an area or group of galleries becomes known as an art scene in a city, and the patrons and other artists follow to locate in this area.

The art scene becomes part of the unique urban culture of that city'. (Turley, 2005:37)

The location of artists with diverse artistic expressions in one area will manifest culture and their forms of expression and representation within this art scene promotes recognition for these artists. The abstract and experimental art found in New York's Soho district belonged to a specific community of artists, 'Andy Warhol to Jean-Micheal Basquait created works and persons that could be part of an underground New York artistic culture'. (Turley, 2005: 37)

Cultural theorist, Mike Turley states that welcoming art communities are located in large, metropolitan areas that have other, more established, art centers of production and consumption. The viability of this centre will depend on the more established art centers allowing for experimental communities to grow around them, because the institutions (art galleries, museums, art stores, media coverage) that service the more established art community can also aid the experimental community.

This art world will therefore take control over an identifiable space in the city which becomes connected with

production and consumption of art, and this area becomes a catalyst that then spawns auxiliary businesses and associated culture as well.

### Conclusion:

Sub cultural styles are more usefully regarded as mutations and extensions of existing codes rather than as the 'pure' expressions of creative drives, and above all they should be seen as meaningful mutations. Subcultures are therefore expressive forms but what they express is a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives. The interpretation of subculture therefore is merely a form of resistance in which objections to this ruling ideology are obliquely expressed or represented in style.



Fig.9 Graffiti mural by Charlie's Vandals.



Fig.11 Graffiti mural by Fearuff.

'A popular understanding of subcultures is that it refers to groups that are smaller than say, nations, while still existing within these larger groups, and which can be distinguished in terms of their ideologies and identities from the larger group'. (Zaayman, 2005: 155)

#### HIP HOP SUB CULTURAL EXPRESSION

Fig.10 Parental Advisory logo.



The advent of globalization and the hybrid nature of our cities has fashioned the fact that young people tend to embrace a range of musical and other styles. In other words, their interests and aesthetic preferences have become increasingly eclectic and fragmented. The choices that young people make are shaped merely by an underlying sense of self.

According to (Polhemus, 1994:14), young peoples' tendency to embrace a range of musical genres and clothing styles is therefore not necessarily indicative of the seemingly inevitable triumph of postmodern individualism. Rather, style(s) provide meaningful

opportunities for affirming a sense of belonging in an increasingly cosmopolitan world filled with a seemingly endless array of options and possibilities.

A sub cultural affiliation that many youth of today engage with is the Hip Hop culture. Dr. Karen Malone, a cultural theorist from Monash University (USA) states that Hip Hop as a cultural product and marketed commodity of youth culture has emerged as having a significant influence on young people seeking to explicitly celebrate and support ethnic diversity, individualism and collective communities – simultaneously.

'Hip-hop originated in the appalling social conditions facing African American inner-city youth in the 1970s and 1980s. During those decades, manufacturing industries left the cities for suburban or foreign locales, where land values were lower and labour was less expensive. Unemployment among African American youth rose to more than 40 percent. Middle-class blacks left the inner city for the suburbs. This robbed the remaining young people of successful role models they could emulate. The out-migration also eroded the taxing capacity of municipal governments, leading to a decline in public services. Meanwhile, the American public elected conservative governments at the state and federal levels. They slashed school and welfare budgets, thus deepening the

destitution of ghetto life'. (Wilson, 1987)

Understandably, young African Americans grew angrier as the conditions of their existence worsened. With few legitimate prospects for advancement, they turned increasingly to crime and, in particular, to the drug trade. Stridently at odds with the values and tastes of both whites and middleclass African Americans, hip-hop music and expression described and glorified the mean streets of the inner city while holding the police, the mass media, and other pillars of society in utter contempt. Furthermore, hip-hop tried to offend middle-class sensibilities. Black and White, by using highly offensive language. (Davis, 1990)

Hip Hop was a way that urban black youth expressed themselves in a rhythmic form. As a culture, it includes four main branches of expression, namely: 1) "DJing" (combing sounds using turntables or other sources); 2) break dancing; 3) graffiti art (not vandalism); 4) "MC'ing" (mistakenly called rapping); 5) Basketball. 6) Fashion

1) **DJing:** This expression takes a lot of technique and hard work. DJ's learn to master such things as creating cuts styles, matching beats, and working with pitch so that everything can flow naturally. A cut is when the DJ produces new sounds off a record by "scratching" it. This aspect is the most important because it is the basis for the whole Hip Hop culture. The DJ is constantly striving to make the music reach new heights to satisfy the mind and ears of its followers. (Clarke,2006)

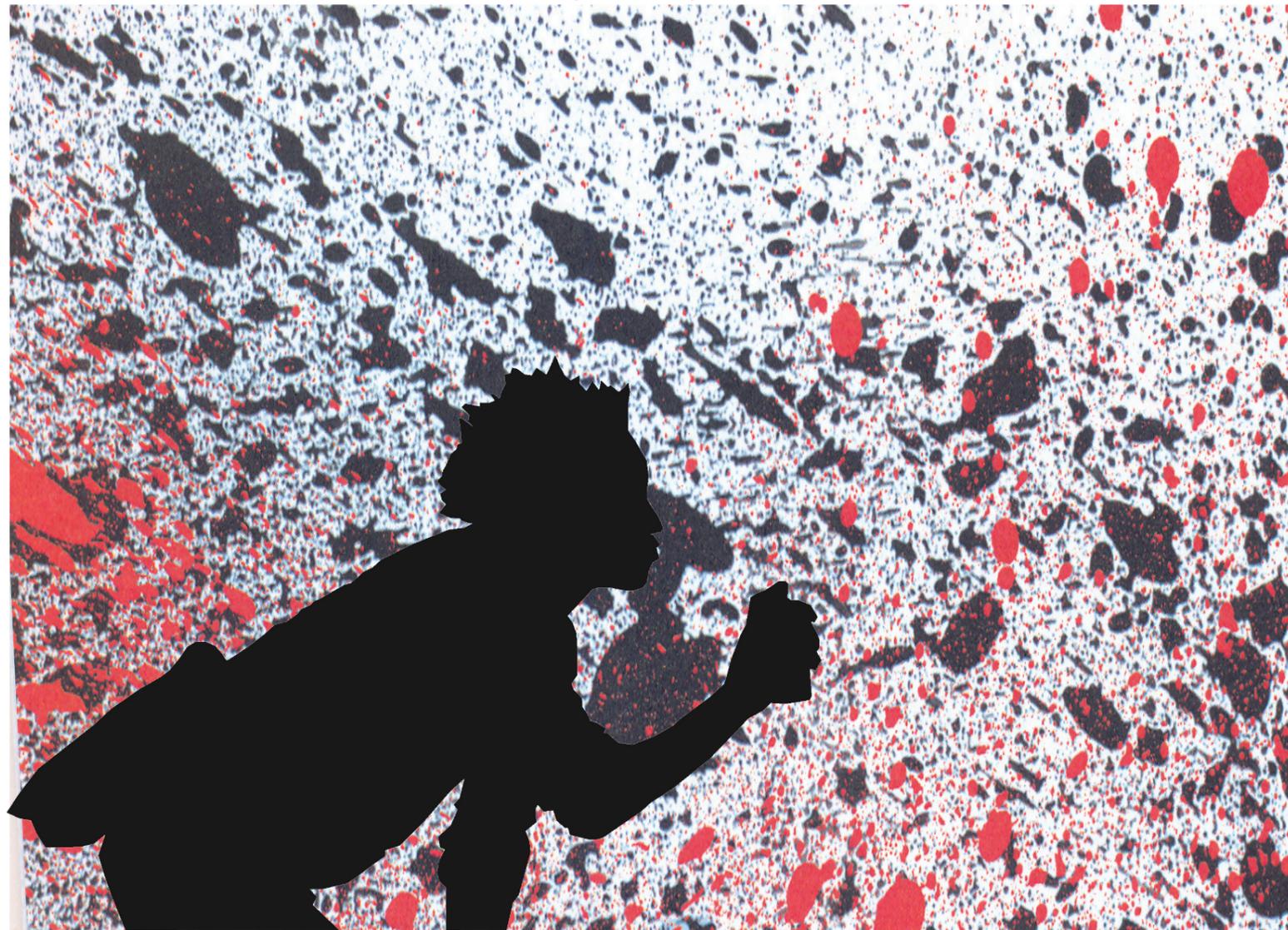
2) **Breakdancing:** This is a type of art form that originated in places like New York. It requires a lot of physical strength which enables one to perform such "power" moves as flares, shoulder rolls, and head spins. These require upper body strength to lift your lower body into the air while performing a series of twists and turns. (Clarke,2006)

3) **Graffiti:** This expression is a way for people to show how they feel through paint and piece books. Piece books are hard covered sketch books traded between artists who wish to show their style and originality. (Clarke,2006)

4) **MCing:** Beats that the deejay supplies benefits the M.C. (Microphone Controller) because it provides music for his/her poetry. While breakdancing is mostly physical, the art of writing lyrics or freestyling shows a strong mental strength. If one "listens" to the words, you can see the originality and expressions that the writer wishes to pass on. (Clarke,2006)

**Conclusion:** Sub cultural expression is communicated through its style, which is, in turn an aspect of its visual identity. In examining the style of a subculture, we are reading the language that subculture has produced – this language not only communicates, but it delimits its membership and inscribes its own identity.

Fig. 1.2 DJing activity at TUKS FM radio station (Author 2006)



Geordie - "Hip Hop isn't a Black thing; it's a street thing y'know, where people get so pissed off with their environment that they have to do something about it. And the way to do it and get the word to the people is to do it creatively, be it writing on a wall or expressing it in rap...wearing baggy clothes y'know. It's all part of this one thing of going 'oh look man, we've had enough of this and we're gona change it our way'." (Bennett, 1999: 15)



## DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

The building should be a robust expression that signifies it as a building with an affiliation with street culture. Spaces where Hip Hop expressions can be conducted must be considered with the intention of also promoting this culture to the street.

It should be visually stimulating in relating to sub cultural expression as a communication through style, which is, in turn an aspect of its visual identity. In examining the style of a subculture, we are reading the language that subculture has produced – this language not only communicates, but it delimits its membership and inscribes its own identity.

The architectural style for the building should be based on the aspect of mutations and extensions of existing codes rather than as the 'pure' expression of creative drives. This implies that it would be against sub cultural motives for the building to occupy a vacant site; hence the building should be attached or be part of an existing intervention.

## ACCOMMODATION SCHEDULE

The accommodation schedule is perceived as a general design guideline and not as a fixed programme that has to be adhered to. The building will rather focus on the adaptability of a programme to suit the ephemerality of buildings.

The building is a public initiative for youth expression; hence majority of the building's function will cater for the public realm. The building will consist of:

Public spaces:

- Community wall
- Restaurant
- Basketball court
- Skate park
- Stage
- Community radio station
- Retail



Fig.13 Graffiti mural by Kemo.

Semi public spaces:

- Lobby
- Foyer/Reception
- Media Lab
- Archive
- Lounge
- Club
- Temporary exhibition space
- Open air exhibition space
- Galleries
- Gallery store

Public spaces:

These spaces should be situated on the ground level of the building, it should facilitate for public interaction since the idea is on the exposure of youth sub cultural activities. The access to this space should have control points in the form of 'urban doors' that can be closed on certain occasions. An 'urban avenue' is created whereby the community becomes part of this culture and interacts with their diverse activities. In this area, the architecture should be transparent in terminating the congested nature of the site.

The purpose of this initiative is on the exposure of sub cultural artists and art forms, hence the retail component becomes the interface of the project, and it is within these spaces that the users of the space will gain most recognition. The retail space should then be situated strategically and form part of the existing urban commercial orientation. The restaurant will cater for the users of the space and can be used for evening functions; it should work in tandem with the club space.



Fig.14 Graffiti mural by Sane Smith.

The community radio station addresses community based agendas and promotes the artists on air; it should be transparent to the public and be linked to the music studios. The community wall becomes the wall of expression whereby the youth have the opportunity to express their artistic abilities; this will also enhance the visual character of the space.

Semi public spaces:

The foyer, reception and vertical circulation of the building should be combined to maximize surveillance. The media lab is a space where the youth connect with other youth sub cultures globally; therefore, it should offer transparency so that it is easily identifiable from the public space and to allow natural light. The temporary exhibition space is utilized as storage space for artworks that are exhibited externally and through the building.

The archive space is employed as a reading space which

will mostly house books and magazines; the lounge space will work together with this space providing seating for readers during the day. The lounge space should become part of the club space during night functions as seating for clubbers.

The club is a space in which the clubbers can express themselves and feel an affiliation or affection with others, forging and re-forging their self and group identities. It should interact with the external environment and be linked with the restaurant.

- Ablution facilities
- Art Studio
- Loading bay
- Music studio
- Parking

Galleries:

The building should provide a series of galleries for the exposure of artists and also function as social interaction spaces. It should be connected to the open air exhibition space.