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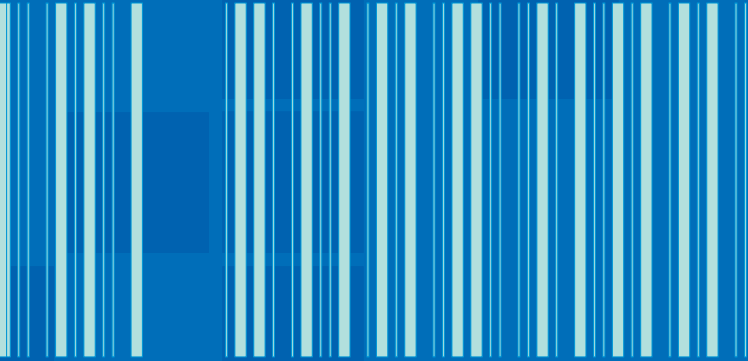
AL PREMISE

Urban Regeneration

> Cities can be designed_

> A Manifesto for Change_

Digital technology represents the leading industry of our times. Computers and the internet are all the outcome of developments in digital technology. Existing forms and boundaries of media genres have fused through the development of this technology. Multimedia emerged. The prevalence of multimedia is also changing and intermingling the entertainment industry as well as the visual arts. New industry, new technology and new visual arts are developing at an ever increasing pace. The primary role of the proposed cultural precinct is to facilitate contact and interaction between its users. Exhibition venues throughout the city should enable this. Various projects are proposed (within the Group Framework) throughout the city to act as multimedia platforms.

With the ever-accelerating development of information and media technologies, there is an unfolding of the *terra incognita* (Tschumi, 1990:88), the emergence of the digital world with all its unknowns and potentials. Pretoria, like many other contemporary South African cities, suffer repercussions of rapid urban development and economic growth of the last three decades. The city now has to confront these resultant issues .(Bothma, 2004:11).

The functioning of a city as a system relies on urban design and planning, whereby the city is broken down into smaller systems which need to function in conjunction with each other and involve multiple levels of connection and communication.

One can compare a city to the functioning of a computer, in essence it is a network consisting of multiple components working together. It has various elements for the multitude of functions which need to exchange information and electrical current in the form of 0's and 1's. The faster and more fluid the exchange of information, the more efficient the system becomes, be it computer or city. Thus ease of movement becomes an important phenomenon in the functioning of a city, and involves people changing location and interacting with different elements of the city, such as solids and voids. It could be argued that humans in the network of the city are the 0's and 1's which are carried from one element to another and flow through the system and form part of the city fabric.

This thesis, entitled "Digital Media (Exchange)", explores media in all its diverse forms as an extension of current events occurring in Pretoria.

Definition: Urban design

"Urban design is the generally accepted name for the process of giving physical design direction to urban growth, conservation and change. It is understood to include landscape as well as buildings, both preservation and new construction, and rural areas as well as cities" (Barnett, 1982:12).
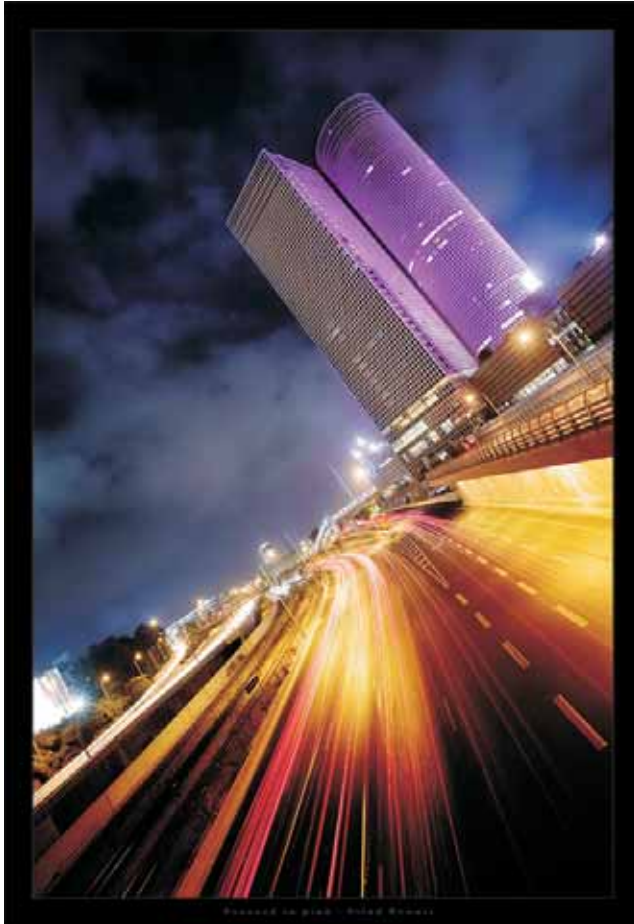
"A city is far more complex than even the most complicated building, but there are ways of introducing... coherence and beauty that are the products of design." (Barnett, 1982:7)

In the publication "An Introduction to Urban Design", Barnett proposes that cities can be designed, but the distribution of funds when rebuilding cities and developing the countryside are misguided. Countryside developments have strong connotations with images of sprawling suburban subdivisions, highway strip developments, billboards, shopping centres and the like. We have been conditioned to think of these as a 'blight on the landscape' [Barnett,1982:3]. The convenience of developments of a retail or investment nature have become such a necessity that we overlook their 'aesthetic liability'. Barnett notes that with "A little forethought, a little coordination.... It could all have been different".

It is the lack of connections between developments in the city, which ultimately creates problems. There exists a need to design (or rather redesign) the relationships between buildings and spaces in the city fabric. Often, a lack of resources is cited as an excuse for poorly designed components of the city.

Barnett poses the question "...as a society we are getting what we asked for, why cant we ask for something better?" He suggests that a redesign is perhaps more beneficial, as this could add to the design value of a city. (Barnett, 1982:5)

Making better use of the resources allocated to development and the environment will not alleviate the problem of social failures and inequities in our society and in our cities. For major improvements to be possible in our environments, a methodology to deal with the accelerated pace of change is required.

"... The urban crisis is last years problem" (Barnett, 1982:6).

In South Africa, we are faced with major infrastructural problems, the most recent being the energy and fuel crisis, although these are also global problems. These newer and more 'conspicuous' problems have overshadowed the older and sometimes forgotten ones, although they haven't disappeared or solved themselves. They still exist.

Pretoria has experienced rapid urban growth and development in the last thirty years. This (in addition to the failure of the Modern) has forced the city to operate with a post-modern consciousness, which erases the clear boundaries and singular identities that typified the modern project.

"Design is a methodology that... can help solve some of the problems of misallocated resources, misused land and the unnecessary destruction of historic buildings" (Barnett, 1982:7).

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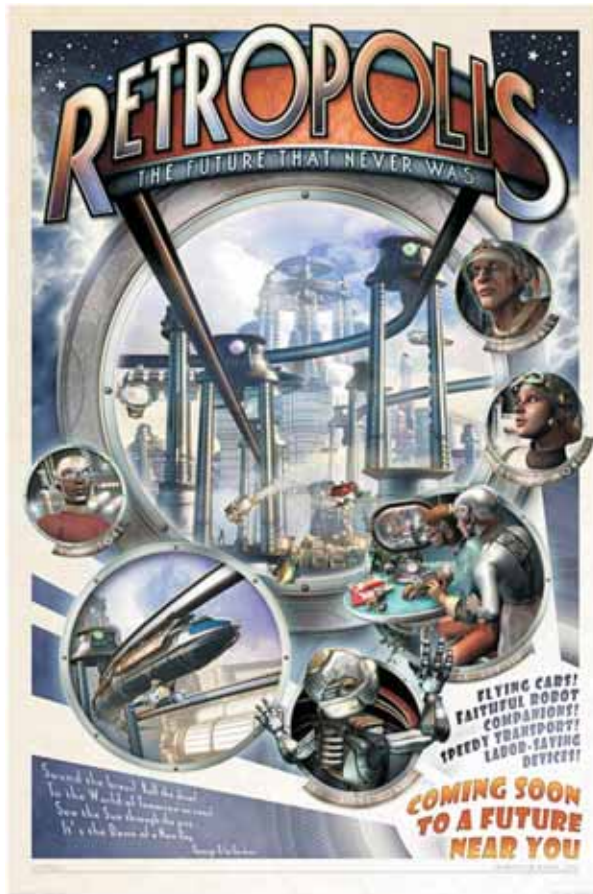
The task designers are faced with today, is to decide how to respond to the way societies work. The process of physical improvement in cities is closely linked to the social and power structures within the city.

"Today's city is not an accident. It's form is usually unintentional, but it is not accidental" (Barnett, 1982:9).

The key players in the design of cities are usually engineers, surveyors, planners, lawyers and investors, each making individual decisions in the planning process, with design and designers being added to the process at a later stage. Decisions on development and planning are usually made in isolation, without the inter-relationships and side-effects being fully understood or considered.

Professionals within the built environment need to have appropriate visions to play an active role in the development of the city. Especially, if they want to influence change in the city. With this in mind, a group urban framework of the proposed study area was created. The framework encouraged appropriate contribution to the built environment, both collectively and individually.

The Group Framework encompasses a set of guidelines to shape the proposed development site, establishing a process whereby the framework can be modified as times and needs might change.

Problems that need to be addressed in the framework:
- The design of networks (cities) must include the design of individual components (buildings or spaces) as the components are vital for the network to function properly.
- Developmental controls need to find a middle ground. If rules are architecturally explicit, they will fail. If too general, they will also fail.
- A public open space plan must integrate indoor and outdoor spaces for public use. Streets must not be considered leftover spaces, but should be seen as the basis for the design of many components.

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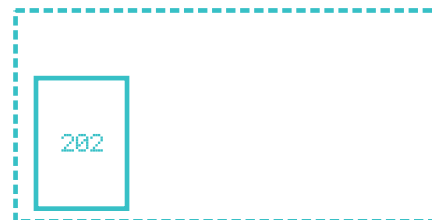
The possibility that the development of the environment is driven purely by motives of profit raises concern. The majority of buildings will continue to be initiated by private enterprise, even though it has not been successful in creating satisfactory cities, or in conserving the natural landscape.

What is needed is an "...underlying coherence in the plan itself" (Barnett, 1982:60). The design implications of the frameworks provided by the municipal agencies are inadequate where the city is concerned. The vision of the Group Framework is to overcome these inadequacies by ensuring coherency in the overall planning and by permitting projects to have an individual identity within the proposed framework.

"Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky-tacky,
Little boxes, little boxes,
Little boxes, all the same.
There's a green one and a pink one
And a blue one and a yellow one
And they're all made out of ticky-tacky
And they all look just the same."

(Malvina Reynolds, 1962)

The above song, entitled "Little boxes" (repopularised by the television show 'Weeds'), lampoons the development of suburbia and what many consider to be its bourgeois conformist values (Http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Boxes).

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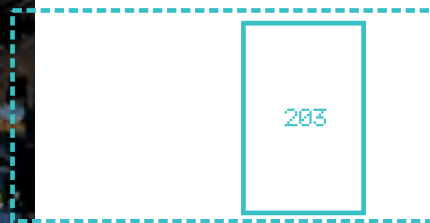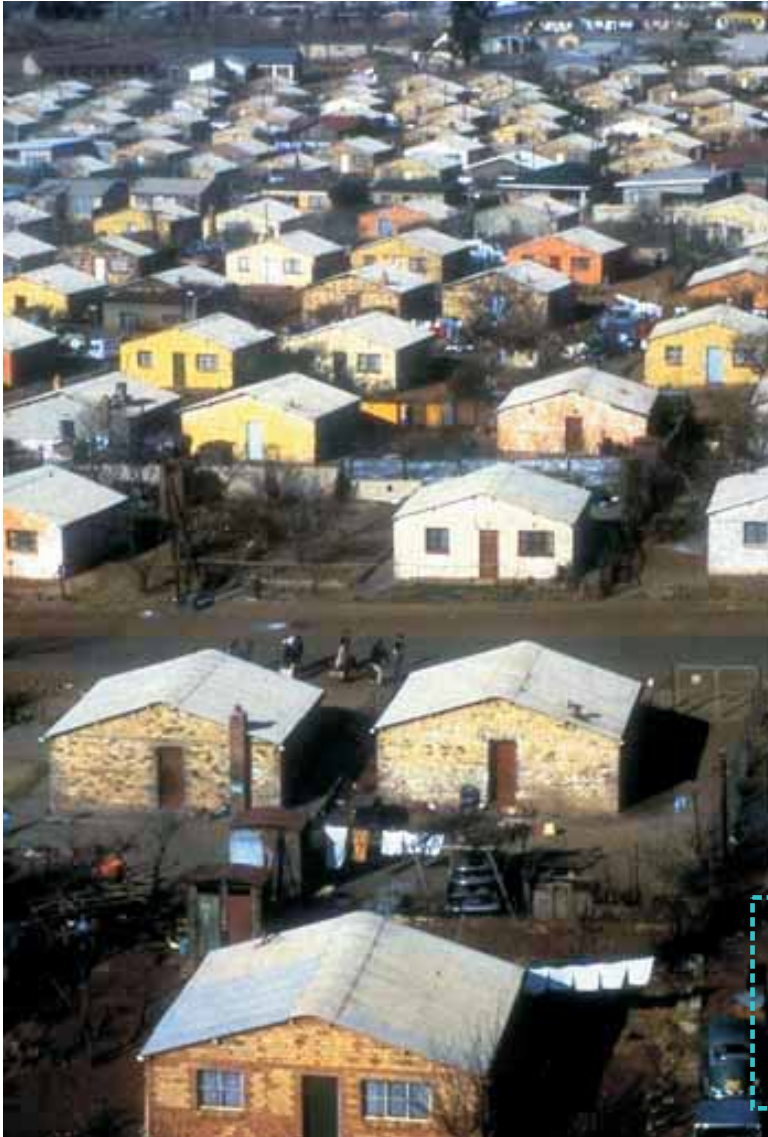
In the publication "South African Cities: A Manifesto for Change" by David Dewar and Roelof Uytenbogaardt, the concept of Integrated Urban Design is applied to a South African context. A strong focus is placed on the principle of access and connection to opportunities and events in a city. They recommend a well connected and evenly distributed system, with the pedestrian mode of movement seen as the lowest common denominator when interacting with the city, and thus the starting point of all design (Blanche, 2006:29).

Providing access to opportunities in South Africa is vital in alleviating all forms of poverty.

"Places of greatest interaction in cities" are invariably "places with of greatest opportunity" (Dewar + Uytenboogaardt 1991:17).

'Urban Performance' is quantified by the creation of opportunity as proposed by Dewar and Uytenboogaardt. They also state how 'Structural Configurations' can generate greater opportunities which can enhance urban living. The aim is to create people friendly environments and definite 'space experiences'. The complexity of the environment can contribute to the richness of the human experience and it is in the making of these environments that cultural expression can be reflected (Dewar + Uytenboogaardt 1991:17).

Dewar and Uytenboogaardt outline strategies for the enhancement of cities, that can be applied in the case of the proposed Digital Media (Exchange) in Pretoria:

Needs

- Urban generation

- Access

- Promotion of the collective

- Individual needs

Programme

- Balance

- Freedom

- Equity

- Intensity, diversity and complexity

- Integration

- Community

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