



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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Surfaces & Services

A Public Space for Communication,
Information & Discussion

Submitted as part of the requirements for MArch(Prof), Faculty of Engineering,
Built Environment and Information Technology, The University of Pretoria,
South Africa

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2007

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*To Pai, Mommy, Christopher, Tony, Bella, Andre' & Matthew.
Thank you for believing.*



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2. Abstract

The contemporary urban condition is one that has experienced significant alterations in recent years. It manifests in cities where the flows of people, information, vehicles and goods have increased exponentially. These alterations have forced a re-evaluation of what is understood by city processes. As important as processes themselves may be, the focus shifts towards a transformation of the manner in which they take place.

Transformation is a common factor that can be identified in all cities. However, it is not universal and so it only allows a general understanding of the contemporary city to be formed. Particular reference is made to the African City as it is characterised by its inherited and distinctive cultural, social, political and economic circumstances.

Therefore, the question of what architecture and open space should be in the unique African urban context arises. The aim is to propose a possible solution, and to test the notion of a valid African Architecture, without excluding further possibilities.

The criteria for legitimate African spaces are extracted from Doreen Massey's¹ book *For Space* where the notions of space are not only challenged but alternatives are put forward. The first is to recognise space as the product of interrelations as constituted through interactions; secondly, that space is to be understood as a sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity and lastly the coexistence of heterogeneity (Massey, 2005:9). Space is seen as always under construction, never complete and never finished. In this model social exchange and temporal conditions supersede the physical, homogenous and static. Thus space is a dynamic phenomenon that challenges current practice and is a result of processes, attitudes, perceptions and transactions. It is a social space that is dominated by communication, exchange and experiences and its identity is characterised by temporal qualities.

Consequently, based on these notions of a valid space, the African urban condition is an indeterminate one in which the emphasis shifts from urban forms, to urban processes. It is capable of absorbing endless extensions and intensions; and in terms of the South African city, it should be able to absorb cultural, social and political differences as well.

This in turn leads to a new conceptualisation of the city, and the role architecture plays within it. Here, a city goes beyond architecture; where the architectural project is not dealt with in isolation. It is where architecture no longer sees itself as the sole contributor to shaping the city, but rather part of a multi-disciplinary activity. It is where architecture becomes a synthesis of building and landscape with the intention of becoming an urban surface, where its significance lies in what it does, as opposed to what it is.

This dissertation is a speculative work that proposes tactics, which incorporate multi-disciplinary strategies, intended to stimulate and redirect the urban landscape to more relevant and enabling urban environments. While suggestions are made, this dissertation shows that due to the complexity and intricacy of city procedures, this is only the beginning of a lengthy process.

1. Doreen Massey (born 1944), is a contemporary British social scientist and a professor of geography