

CHAPTER FOUR

Precedents

CRITIQUE ON SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE ARCHITECTURE

The following section provides an introductory critique on general aspects common to South African heritage architecture. The critique is substantiated by Fig 4.1 on the pages directly following. The table was compiled by the author after a selection of post apartheid heritage developments were visited. The research done by Liana Muller and Professor Karel A. Bakker on South African heritage places and intangible landscapes is employed to further substantiate the findings.

1. *In most cases the unfolding of the experience is pre-determined through the employment of a single narrative.*

Through the imposition of a pre-determined narrative the memorial or site does not allow for “the community to attach their own [complex and evolving] heritage narratives” (Bakker & Muller, 2010 : [4]) thereby virtually privatising the experience. Eisenman’s Museum of the Murdered Jew in Berlin (Fig 2.15) offers an alternative, he proposes that the visit itself completes the narrative, this way the building can learn from it’s visitors and the visitors can learn from it in turn.

2. *A great deal of the structures are not within active public realms.*

Although an argument exists that it places the structure within the realm of the informal settlement (where a great portion of South African history was created), it should be carefully considered in terms of public accessibility and contextual relevance. One such example is “the isolated position of the Apartheid Museum, immediately adjacent to the Gold Reef City theme park and casino complex, which riddles it with irony and perhaps fallacy, making it a decontextualised monument positioned in an artificial surrounding” (Low 2005: 136).

Other examples of monuments that may fall into the same category are Freedom Park outside of Pretoria and The Cradock Four Memorial outside of Cradock in the Eastern Cape.

4. *The spaces are predominantly privatised and access is controlled.*

A case should also be made for the monuments that are positioned immediately within communities but do little to interact directly with its context through its private nature. Examples are Red Location Museum situated in the Red Location outside Port Elizabeth, Constitution Hill in Braamfontein and The Hector Pieterse Memorial Museum in Soweto and Walter Sisulu Square in Kliptown, Soweto. Although these developments are appropriately placed to allow critical public engagement, their private nature ‘dislocates’ them from their context and they are “perceived by residents as foreign entities in their midst” (Bakker & Muller, 2010 : [3]).

5. *In most cases the subject matter is displayed statically and does not contribute actively to the socio-cultural arena.*

The “emphasis on the use of static monuments, blunt and simplistic use of symbolism, , ignorance of the cultural dimensions of landscape, a lack of interpretation of place, event and locally-based oral history, and subsequent deficiencies in presentation and meaning.” Bakker (2008: [s.p]) creates monovocal and exclusive monuments that essentially fail in their principle duty of expressing South Africa’s complex, multifarious cultural history.

6. *Most of the spaces are mono-functional and only operate only during the daytime.*

The ‘static monument’ has the function of memorialising an historical event or influential person beyond which it has very little (or no) further utility. The memorials that only operate during business hours do little to contribute to their environments after closing time. This dissertation proposes that South African heritage architecture assume more responsibility than the mere memorialisation of history and contribute actively to their direct social environment.

	Freedom Park	Red Location Museum	Apartheid Museum	Constitution Hill	Walter Sisulu Square	Hector Peterson Museum	Sharpeville Memorial	Cradock Four Memorial
<i>Access is controlled and entry fee is required</i>	●	●	●	●		●	●	●
<i>Positioned on the outskirts of main developed centre</i>	●		●					●
<i>Mono-functional and only operates during the daytime</i>	●	●	●				●	●
<i>Single pre-determined narrative</i>		●	●			●	●	●
<i>Does not allow for everyday critical public engagement</i>	●		●	●			●	●
<i>Subject matter displayed statically as 'artefacts' not 'systems'</i>	●	●	●			●	●	●
<i>Formal strength more apparent than contextuality</i>	●	●	●	●			●	●
<i>Connection with time based on "Zeitgeist" approach</i>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<i>Pathological permanence. (minimal contribution to societal evolution)</i>	●	●	●	●		●	●	●

Fig 4.1
Comparative table illustrating tendencies in South African Heritage Architecture
Author

4.2

THEORETICAL PRECEDENTS

4.2.1

PROPELLING vs. PATHOLOGICAL PERMANENCE

In “The Architecture of the City” Aldo Rossi (1982) explains that time affects different built artefacts in different ways and through it contributes to the transformation of the built environment. “Structures that delay the process of development are deemed to be pathological, whilst buildings that accelerate development are defined as propelling” (Rossi 1982: 6).

Rossi’s theory supports this dissertation’s argument that commemorative architecture has the ability to do more than merely commemorate past events and contribute actively to the continuous development of culture.

The following synopsis clarifies Rossi’s theory and illustrates the relevance of its application to commemorative architecture.

PATHOLOGICAL

In response to Rossi’s theory, Christine Boyer (1996: 186) defines pathological permanences as “unmodifiable artefacts whose dynamic linkage with the rest of the city is severed.”

Most monuments in South Africa tend to fall into this category, as supported by Mizan Rambhoros in his critique on “South African Commemorative Architecture” wherein he states that “they are signs of a specific epoch and bound to a certain period or event in the historic course of the country” (Rambhoros, 2009:34).

Although valuable artefacts in the recognition of history these “preserved presences and unusual characters are isolated within a certain context, which defines their form and static usage” (Rambhoros, 2009:34).

Older examples of South African pathological permanences are structures such as The Taal Monument (Paarl) and The Voortrekker Monument (Pretoria), whilst contemporary examples would be The Cradock Four Memorial, The Apartheid Museum and Freedom Park.

PROPELLING

Rossi’s notion of the propelling permanence stands to support the central argument of this dissertation in its reasoning that a process of dynamic memorialisation allows its subject a life in the present instead of isolating it in the past. He states that “propelling permanences serve to bring the past into the present, providing a past that can still be experienced” (Rossi 1982: 6).

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is of the opinion that memorial architecture “can no longer stand aloof from the major issues of our time” (UNESCO: n.d.), therefore it stands to reason that the act of commemoration should be merged with everyday life in an attempt to contribute actively to the social environment. The propelling permanence allows for this integration to occur, for they have the ability to “endure time and transform from their original function to become characteristic fragments of the urban landscape” (Rambhoros, 2009:40).

The contemporary notion of memorialisation would benefit from the recognition that history only maintains its vitality through use. For “when form and function are severed, and only form remains vital, history shifts into the realm of memory. When history ends, memory begins” (Rossi 1982:7).

History may be kept functional in the present through the act of dynamic memorialisation. The architecture should provide the platform upon which its historic subjects may be “overlaid with contemporary processes, allowing for the continuity of the historic processes” (Rambhoros, 2009:45).

Upon such a platform the old can enter into dialogue with the new, allowing for a critical superimposition of history and present and the ultimate recognition of one another. “Thus, this framing of memory through palimpsest is essential in making connections with the context” (Rambhoros, 2009:45).

Contemporary examples of propelling permanences are: The Sans Souci cinema and the Vilakazi street art project, both situated in Soweto. They are discussed in more detail in Section 4.3 – Local Precedents.

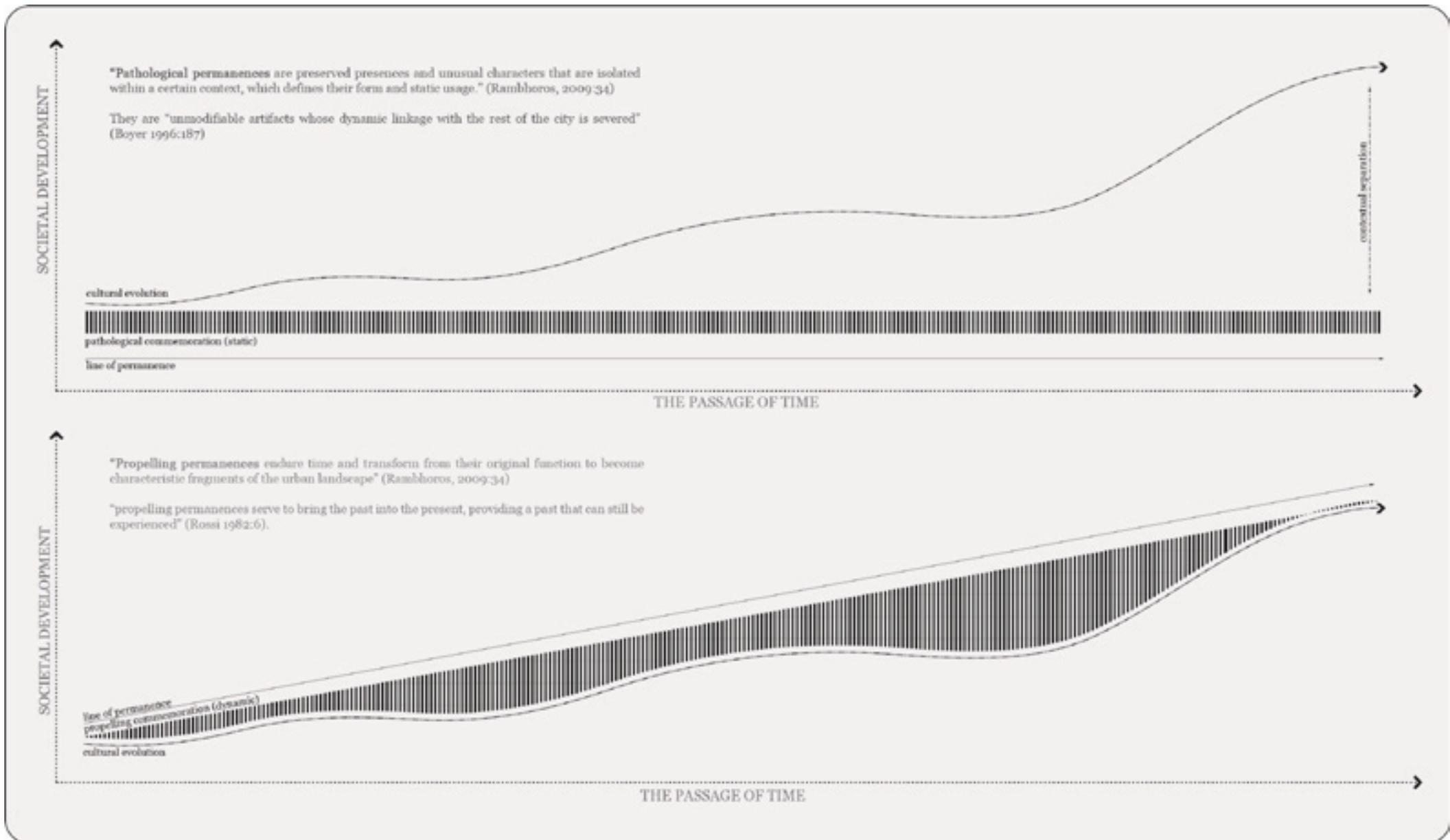


Fig 4.2
Pathological vs. Propelling Permanence
Author

4.2.2

THE ARCHITECTURE OF FRAGILITY

In “Hapticity and Time: Notes on Fragile Architecture” (2000) Juhani Pallasmaa explains that Western architecture generally tends to embody the qualities of the “strong” image. ‘Strong’ formal elements seek to impress through idealized conceptual manifestations and striking articulation of space. Although admirable in the physical sense, the architecture of the “strong image” tends to have shortcomings in terms of contextuality and responsiveness. He defines “strong” architecture as architecture that “attempts to conquer the foreground instead of creating a supportive background for human activities and perceptions” (*ibid*, 2000: 75).

When considering the current predominant typological approach to South African heritage architecture through the critique established in section 4.2 and the studies conducted by Muller and Bakker it is evident that the majority of the examples discussed could be classified as architecture of the “strong” image.

Contrary to the “strong image, Pallasmaa continues to define a “weak” or “fragile” architecture as “an architecture of courtesy and attention, which invites one to be a humble, receptive and patient observer” (*ibid*, 2000: 76). Where “strong” architecture imposes itself upon its context in “hegemonic, dominant voice” (Bakker and Muller 2010: 3), fragile architecture engages with its context through an active, evolutionary process of “listening and dialogue, evoking a sense of humility and duration” (*ibid*, 2000: 76).

A noteworthy exponent of “fragile architecture” is Greek architect Dimitris Pikionis. His work is described as a “dense conversation with time and history to the degree that the design appears as a product of anonymous tradition without drawing attention to the individual creator” (*ibid*, 2000: 82). The work of Carlo Scarpa and Alvar Aalto also embodies “fragility” as defined in this context. Their work is said to “aim at a specific ambience, a receptive emotional state, rather than the authority of form” (*ibid*, 2000: 82).

Some architects succeed in the reconciliation of the “weak” and the “strong” Herein lies the strength of Zumthor, he possesses the ability to reconcile “formal strength with sensual subtlety” (*ibid*, 2000: 80). Also Barragan, whose “apparently strong images glide into the world of dreams” (*ibid*, 2000: 80).

The architecture of this proposal endeavours to achieve a similar “fragility” in order to

respond to the evolution of its subject and cultural environment to such a degree that it too may appear to be a construct of its context instead of the ideology of a single designer.

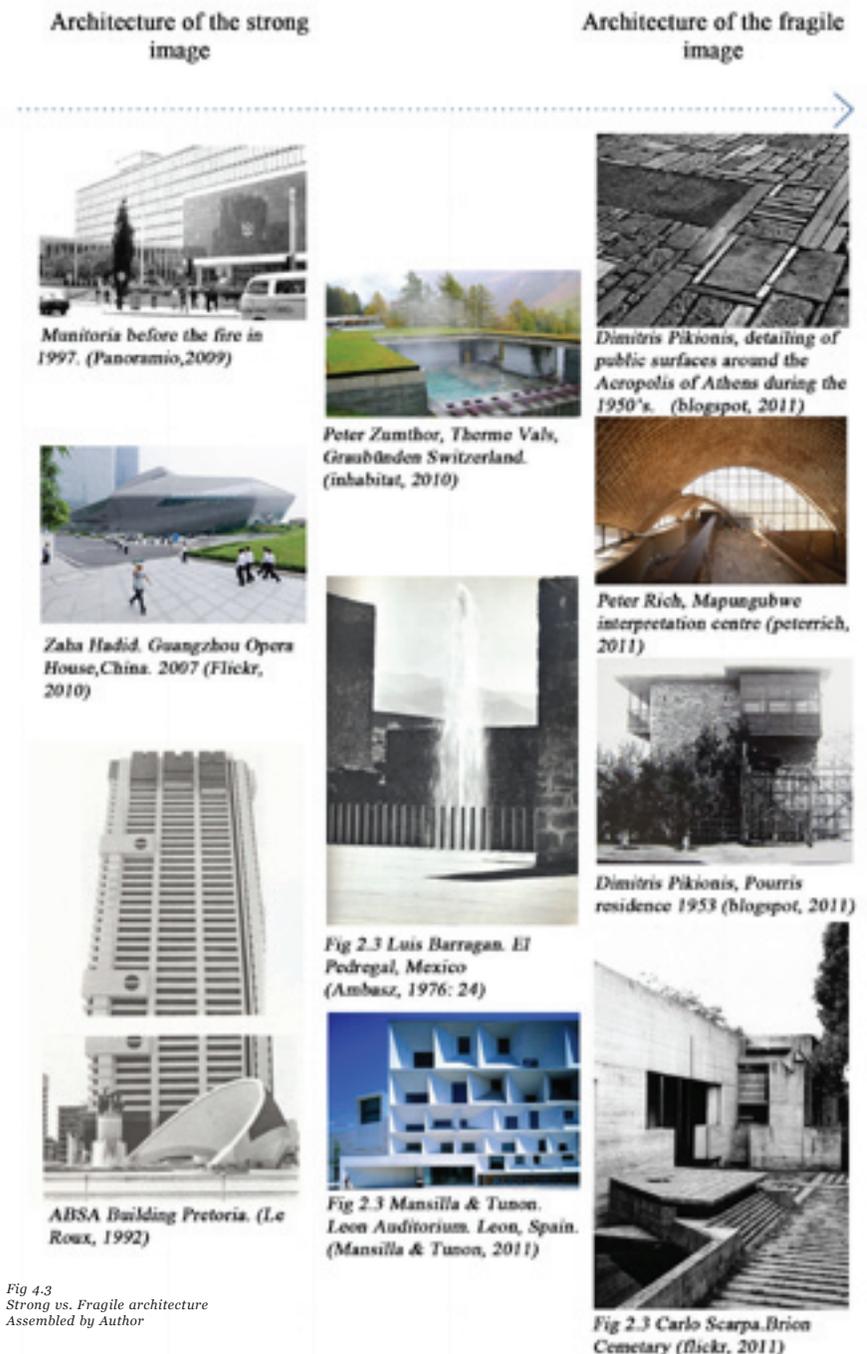


Fig 4.3
Strong vs. Fragile architecture
Assembled by Author

4.3

LOCAL PRECEDENTS

4.3.1

THE VILAKAZI STREET PRECINCT ARTWORK PROGRAMME

Orlando West, Soweto.

Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA), 2008

Vilakazi Street in Soweto is the only street in the world to house two winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, namely Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. This street is also a key site of the fateful 1976 Student Uprising against Afrikaans as a language of instruction at schools which saw the death of 176 local students, among them the 12 year old Hector Pieterse.

Vilakazi street now connects a number of tourist destinations and heritage sites including the Hector Pieterse Museum which was built in 2002 to commemorate the 1976 Uprising and the events surrounding it.



Fig 4.4
Artwork at the Vilakazi Street Precinct Artwork Programme (represent, 2011)

The Vilakazi Street Precinct Artwork Programme is a framework for the introduction of public art along the street. According to Bakker and Muller (2010:4) “it is intended as a diverse tourist movement armature to which the community could attach their own heritage narratives and management initiatives, including multivocal interpretation and presentation of the historical events of the uprising, as well as the actors in it”.

The project intends to better integrate the Hector Pieterse museum with its “still unexplored context” (Bakker and Muller 2010: 4) by creating an “abstract space for conceiving local reinterpretations and multivocal expressions of the historical events, not sufficiently addressed by the Museum” (Bakker and Muller 2010: 4).

An example of an initiative generated by the programme is the The Vilakazi Street Oral History Exhibition which was opened there on the 2nd of April 2011. The Exhibition aims to record and display “the day to day lives of ordinary Sowetans living on Vilakazi Street, using photographs and video recordings” (Gaule, 2011: 1) thereby allowing the inhabitants of the area to tell their own story, from a multitude of perspectives.

“Through introducing the concept of the anti-monument, the exploration of the historic urban landscape, and celebrating the use of abstract representation, this public art project is creating the potential for a new form of inclusiveness and multivocality at one of the country’s important legacy sites. It provides the opportunity for more voices and authentic interpretations, which can be an alternative layer of understanding different from the monolithic, historical representations constructed in the first fifteen years of democracy” (Bakker and Muller 2010: 5).



Fig 4.5
Offstreet public activity at the Vilakazi Street Precinct Artwork Programme (witsvuvuzela, 2010)



Fig 4.6
Artwork at the Vilakazi Street Precinct Artwork Programme (thecityfix, 2011)

4.3.2
THE SANS SOUCI CINEMA

Kliptown, Soweto.

Lindsay Bremner Architect & 26'10 South Architects

The Sans Souci (meaning “without a care” in French) was a cinema in Kliptown, Soweto built in 1948. Before the cinema was installed it had been a stable and later, a dancehall. As with the theatres of Marabastad this cinema was more than a place for watching films, it offered a rare public place for social gathering and was used to accommodate political meetings, jazz concerts and community events (www.thesanssouci.org, 2010).

Since it burned down “community surveys indicate that there are no public outlets for cultural expression or social or political meeting places in Kliptown” (www.thesanssouci.org, 2010). One hundred and twenty five interviews conducted by the Kliptown our Town initiative (led by architect Lindsay Bremner) revealed that the Sans Souci was an important cultural locus for the people of the area and that it is still very much alive in their memories.

The proposal by Lindsay Bremner and 26'10 South Architects seeks to reinstate the cinema using the remaining ruins and thereby restore its cultural influence on Kliptown. The theatre will once again be a multi-use space which can be used to “project both popular and educational films, live theatre, and concerts... as well as school functions, conferences and meetings” (Deckler, Graupner & Rasmuss, 2006: 51).

The implementation of the proposal will not start with a completed structure, instead it will be incrementally constructed through community engagement with the project. The incremental reconstruction of the structure together with the “film screenings, film and dance festivals, audience development, dance training and film production will allow visitors and residents to actively participate in excavating and remembering/recreating/imagining the history of Kliptown and the Sans Souci” (Deckler, Graupner & Rasmuss, 2006: 53).

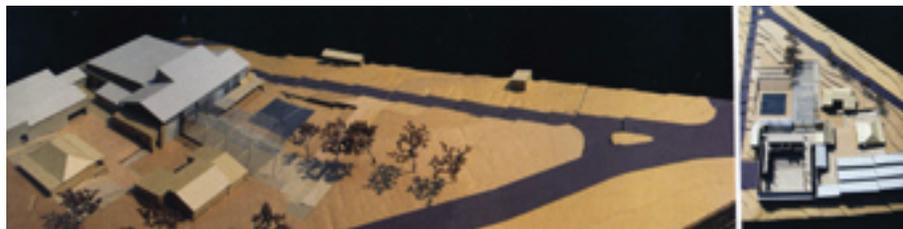


Fig 4.7
Model of proposed Sans Souci
(Deckler, Graupner and Rasmuss, 2006: 52)



Fig 4.8
Existing ruin
(Deckler, Graupner and Rasmuss, 2006: 50)



Fig 4.9
Existing ruin
(Deckler, Graupner and Rasmuss, 2006: 54)



Fig 4.10
The Old Sans Souci
(Deckler, Graupner and Rasmuss, 2006: 54)

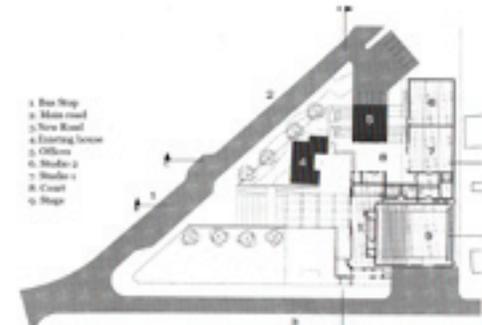
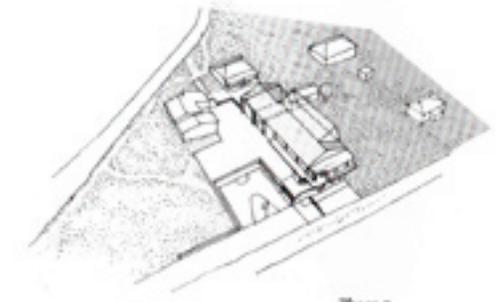


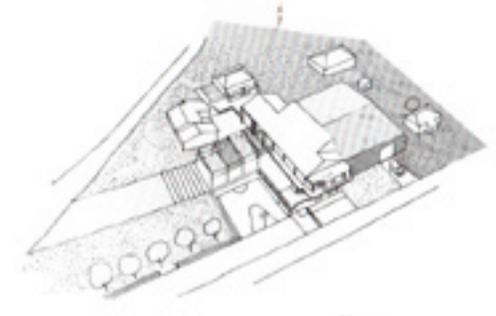
Fig 4.11
Groundfloor Plan
(Deckler, Graupner and Rasmuss, 2006: 51)



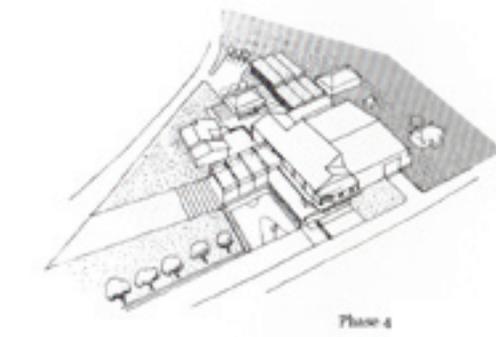
Phase 1



Phase 2



Phase 3



Phase 4

Fig 4.12
Development Phases
(Deckler, Graupner and Rasmuss, 2006: 53)

4.4

FUNCTIONAL PRECEDENTS

4.4.1

THE DEE AND CHARLES WYLY THEATRE

Dallas, Texas. USA.

OMA

Where the traditional theatre generally has its support spaces around the auditorium, buffering the space from the outside world, the Dee and Charles Wyly Theatre stacks its support spaces vertically above and below the auditorium, exposing all the edges of the auditorium to the city around it. (See Fig 4.13)

The re-imagined form also facilitates the unique mechanics of the theatre. The Wyly theatre is based on the multi-form principle where the performance arena can be modified into a variety of configurations. Stage elements, seating, scenery, lighting and audio equipment are all contained in the space above the performance hall and their positions can be mechanically manipulated in order to adapt to different configurations. The typical “backstage” is also accommodated above the auditorium instead of behind the stage and the foyer is positioned beneath in order to allow the groundlevel plain to be uninterrupted, thereby inviting the outside world into the performance space.

All surfaces of the auditorium space are constructed from non-precious materials in order to accommodate adaptations to the space. Floors and walls can be drilled, painted, nailed or even removed completely if necessary.

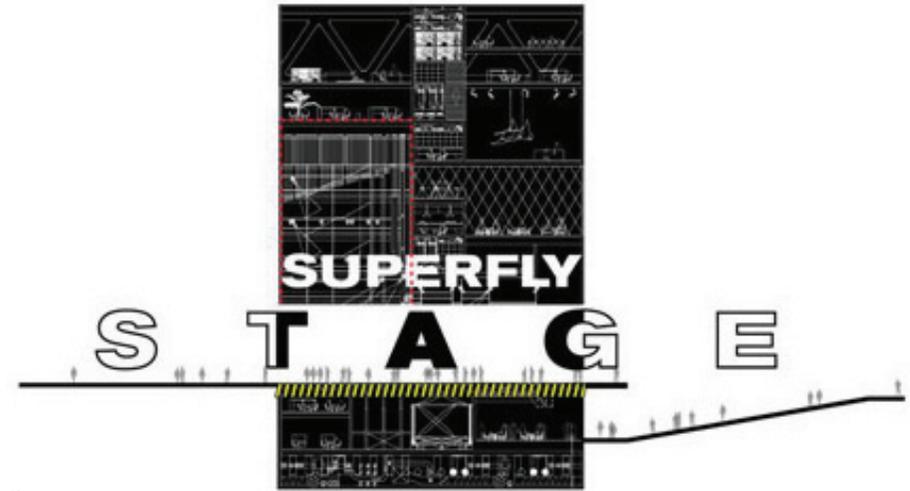


Fig 4.14
Sectional diagram illustrating spacial dynamic.
(rex-ny, 2011)



Fig 4.15
Section model
(rex-ny, 2011)

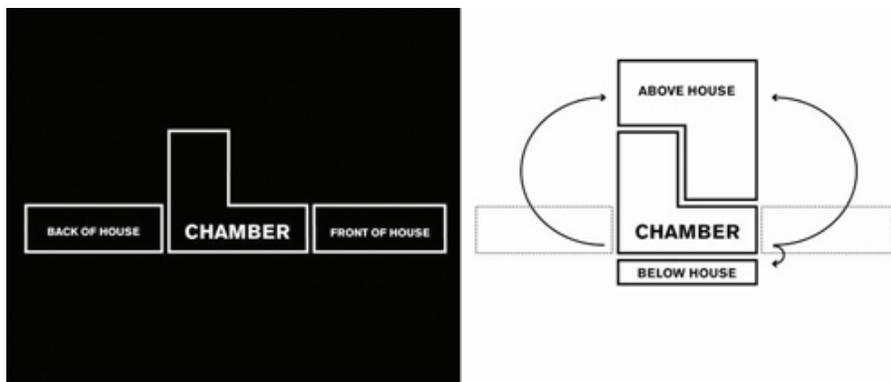


Fig 4.13
Stacking of support spaces frees periphery of performance space
(rex-ny, 2011)



Fig 4.17
Approach to lower level foyer
(rex-ny, 2011)

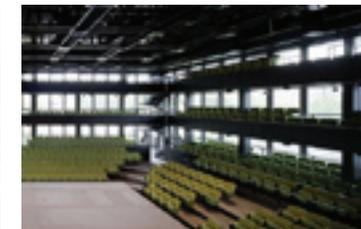


Fig 4.18
Adaptable seating configurations
(rex-ny, 2011)



Fig 4.19
Public space around building
(rex-ny, 2011)