

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

Since the implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme in 1996, masses of homes have been produced through social housing schemes all over the country – “*during the last decade, the South African Government has provided 1.6 million housing units to more than 7 million people*”¹. The increasing amounts of vast, ‘industrially’ produced neighbourhoods that are sprouting up on previously open pieces of land have caught my attention during the last few years. Why is it that the physical aspects of public spaces within these new developments are in such contrast to the social vibrancy of the newly shaped communities?

I have come to realise that the making of places for people has been very low on, if not scratched from the agenda, when financial constraints are present. It came as a shock that this is not only the case with the newly provided governmental housing schemes that have previously been described as a “*senseless repetition of social housing units in soul destroying environments*”², but that most marginal areas in South Africa suffer from the same problem. It seems as though the public realm has slipped the minds and wallets of authorities in the areas that need these places the most.

*“Positively-made and celebrated public spaces are the essential social infrastructure of successful urban environments. They are the places through which people experience the city and engage, both formally and informally, in its collective life. They are the primary elements affecting the quality of cities as experienced by all people. While being important for all, the role of public spaces in the lives of the urban poor is critical.”*³

Setting

Contained in the vision of the Municipality of Tshwane, the marginal area north of Church- and west of Paul Kruger street, containing Marabastad, has been identified as one of the seven precincts within the Inner City Spatial Development Framework⁴. This part of the city (Fig. 1), with its many derelict sites and neglected open spaces, as well as history of fragmentation and divide, offers the perfect opportunity to study the lack of humanised formal public space within an otherwise socially vibrant community. The Pretoria Inner City Partnership⁵ describes this area’s “*sounds, colours, scents and activities*” as an “*onslaught on the senses*” and mentions an ambience as “*reminding of the District Six of old*”. With such character as well as already existing interest from the authorities, the area of Marabastad is more than ripe to be turned into an anchor ‘place for the people’ within the larger city of Pretoria.

¹ Ural. 2005.

² De Villiers, Osman & Hindes. 2005.

³ Dewar & Uytendogaardt. 1991. p. 56.

⁴ Coetzee. 2006.

⁵ Zylstra. 1998. p. 2.



Fig. 4: Marabastad - mechanic workshop



Fig. 5: Marabastad - Putco bus terminal



Chief Directorate: Surveys and Mapping, 1996

Fig. 6: Mogul street in context

The study began with a number of on foot explorations of Marabastad. Here, Mogul street (Fig. 6), that forms the main pedestrian connection between the Belle-Ombre railway station and the Putco bus terminal, jumps out as one of the places where public space is not only at its worst, but where the improvement of space and place will have a significant effect on the lives of the users. The street, running in an east-west direction, is used by large numbers of pedestrians as well as the occasional taxi-bus. It crosses 7th street, running north-south, which is one of the main roads leading into the town of Marabastad. It is believed that a closer study of this street and its people (the indirect clients of this project), as well as their activities and patterns of movement will reveal the specific requirements and appropriate functions that need to be addressed in the design and will also point to the specific focus area of this study.

The Problem

The idea of the environment as a major influence on the lives of its inhabitants is not new. In 1988 Walmsley wrote: *“It is now widely accepted that manipulation of the neighbourhood itself can have a major bearing on such integral components of well-being as a sense of belonging, personal relationships, and health.”*⁶ It is a pity that the concept of creating public environments as supportive to the lives of ordinary people so often gets lost between the financial budgets of the government and the need of the designer to make an impression on his/her surroundings. Are we still creating places for people or have we altogether lost touch with the meaning of the word ‘place-making’?

This study aims to investigate the role of public space-making in improving the lives and experiences of the individuals in marginalised urban areas. It will be pursued with the vision to enhance, rather than change, current patterns of social activity and movement as well as accommodate possible demands of future users. It is not intended for the outcome of this design dissertation to shape a ‘pretty picture’, but rather to create ‘platforms of opportunity’ that will provide the individual with the public environment that is of such great importance within a marginalised community. In this regard five key issues have been identified that need to be addressed in the design process:

- (1) ‘How does the design improve the individual experience and how does it respond to the individual needs of the area?’
- (2) ‘Is the design creating ‘enabling’ environments?’
- (3) ‘Does the design enhance the existing activities of the area?’
- (4) ‘Will the design improve the quality of life of the individual as well as his environment?’ and lastly
- (5) ‘Is the design responding to, and improving, patterns of interaction, movement and social networks?’

Investigation

Because of the historical background and sensitivity of Marabastad and its people, it is believed that any design process should take into account as many aspects as possible that might influence the already ‘scarred’

⁶ Walmsley. 1988. p. 125.

community. As this is impossible to do within a year, this study will limit itself to the following topics which it perceives as most relevant.

Investigation topic 1: Psychological interaction with the environment

Before one proceeds with making assumptions of what people need, it is important to know and understand how people react to space and place and what influence the characteristics of space and place have on the individual. Given the fact that each individual thinks differently and experiences differently, this is a difficult task. Studies have however been done on the reaction or interaction of people with their environment and some general assumptions can be made – we are, after all, all human and thus have the same basic needs and assumptions of the things that we expect our surroundings to provide us with. According to Maslow⁷ (Fig. 7), the most basic of all human requirements are the physiological (biological) needs: the need to breathe, regulate body temperature, sleep, eat, dispose of bodily wastes, as well as the need for water and need for sex. Second is the need for safety, third the need for love and belonging, and fourth the need for status and self esteem. Only after these four categories of ‘deficiency’ needs are mostly or entirely satisfied, the fifth category, the need for actualisation, comes into play. It is this unrealisable higher need that drives the individual to constantly achieve more and reach higher and as a consequence play his/her part in the bettering of human society.

From the above it should be clear that especially in Marabastad a supportive and encouraging public environment is a prerequisite for the advancement of the individual and local community. Although the designer of the public open space can not directly provide for the most basic physiological needs of an individual, he/she nevertheless has the important responsibility of providing an enabling environment that fulfils the human requirements of the second to fourth category. Walmsley reiterates: “*One of the most fundamental needs is the need for a sense of belonging*”⁸ and this manifests itself through belonging to a certain place. It is this ‘place’ that we as designers are creating, and we are creating it, not for ourselves, but for the people who need to belong.

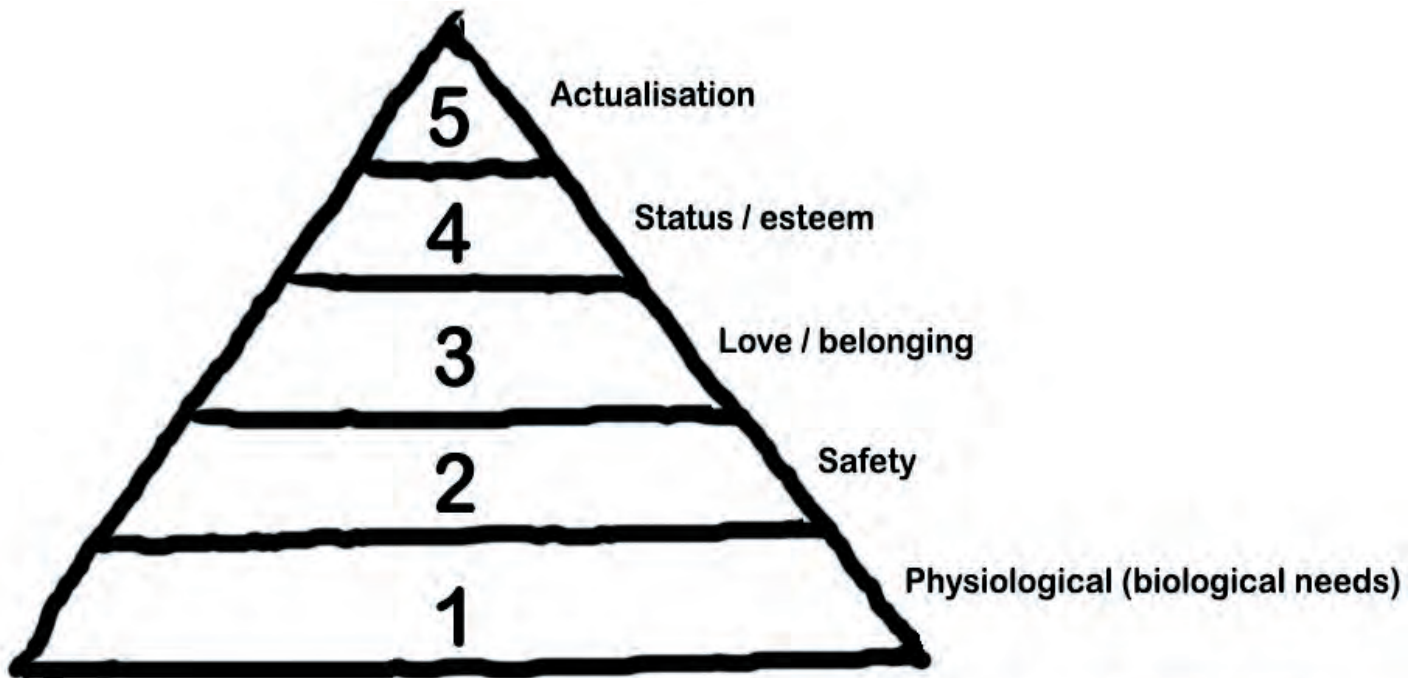
In describing the interaction of the individual with his environment, the study limits itself to the direct relationship between place and the individual. It hereby chooses to ignore many other secondary influences such as the particular economical or political situation of the area as well as any deviating mental conditions individual might suffer from.

Investigation topic 2: Urban design theory

For the past 5 decades followers of the humanist movement in design have been focussing on the needs of the individual within his environment. Ideas such as ‘pedestrian friendly design’ and ‘easy access for all’, as

⁷ Maslow, 1943. p. 370-396.

⁸ Walmsley. *op.cit.* p. 8.



Maslow, A. H. 1943

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Fig. 7: Maslow's hierarchy of needs

described by authors such as Dewar & Uytendogaardt⁹ and Tibbalds¹⁰, are not new, but are easily overlooked when contemporary design problems seem to be much larger than the individual. The aim is to investigate how the principles of urban design are supported by the above research into the psychology of experience in order to obtain a better understanding of what is really needed. The question arises whether it is in fact even necessary to follow such principles of urban design when a humanist approach is taken?

In this regard it should be noted that it is not a question of whether or not the principles of urban design are supported by psychological research, as it is assumed that they are. It is rather a question of how they are supported and how the understanding of this can inform the design process.

Investigation topic 3: Investigation of the chosen space

The psychological experience and design principles of the above two topics are in their nature very generalised, and although they lay down the basic rules, it should always be remembered that individual needs are much more varied from place to place and from person to person. In addition to the more generalised research, a truly humanist approach would only be possible if the local users of the chosen space were consulted and fully understood before any design is finalised. This will be done through first hand field research by means of the Descriptive Survey Method, using photographs to capture the ungraspable essence of the place and interviews to understand the thoughts and feelings of the local people. In addition, it will also be necessary to understand the history and context of the place through the use of the Historical Research Method – why have things turned out to be the way they are and what aspects from the contextual past as well as present need to be taken into account and perhaps learned from? This will include the study of written documents on the area (under the assumption that previous studies are correct and usable), but also the collection of greatly important personal experiences of individuals in the area. Except for consulting with as many individuals as possible, effort will also be made to approach existing community leaders and people who have a rich knowledge of the functioning and history of the area. In this way it will be possible to determine the most pressing and most relevant needs of the people for each particular space.

Investigation topic 4: Precedents

From another perspective, the study of relevant precedents will inform the design in a more practical way. Through this method, alternative examples of how specific problems have been resolved will be investigated and evaluated on their success. Precedents will include the development success of public space within a railway connection corridor on the Cape Flats, the study of Mary Fitzgerald Square and surrounding Newtown as an example of area upliftment and Faraday Station in central Johannesburg in the way it provides for the economic activities of the local community as well as the daily commuters.

⁹ Dewar. & Uytendogaardt. *op.cit.*

¹⁰ Tibbalds. 1992.

PART TWO

THEORETICAL INVESTIGATION

“... the places in our lives get ‘under our skin’ and influence our behaviour in ways that we often don’t suspect.”¹¹

“It is now widely accepted that manipulation of the neighbourhood itself can have a major bearing on such integral components of well-being as a sense of belonging, personal relationships, and health.”¹²

Hippocrates was definitely not the first person to understand the influence of our surrounds on our behaviour, thoughts and feelings when he observed that there was a correlation between our well-being and the setting we find ourselves in¹³. However, within the urban life-style that exploded as a result of the industrial revolution, the effect of the environment on human beings was often ignored or just simply not seen. Since then, urban society has come a long way and through the ages several movements such as Romanticism and the age of the hippies have tried to go ‘back to nature’ in order to search for a deeper meaning and connection with our surroundings. Today, designers and scientists are more and more starting to realise that *“an individual and its environment (is) best understood not as separate entities, but as a dynamic feedback system”¹⁴*.

A Changed Society

During the industrial revolution, as explained by Walmsley¹⁵, the tight knit pre-industrial community with its similar interests, thoughts and behaviour – the ‘*gemeinschaft*’ – was replaced with the new and larger urban society – the ‘*gesellschaft*’. Through this process the individual not only lost his sense of identity and security that he would normally derive from his community, but city dwellers are now also faced with a sense of information overload where understanding all aspects of society and the environment is just not possible. Walmsley explains that in an attempt to cope, the brain cuts out all unnecessary information about one’s surroundings and that as a result the experiential world of the individual is divided into two parts: the **public realm** and the **private realm** of which the public realm is forced to the background and only dealt with when absolutely necessary. In this way the individual sometimes alienates large portions of the society he lives in, turning the public realm into a strange and unfamiliar place that is difficult to understand and interact with. Because of the lack of emotional security that comes with being part of, and understanding a place, the urban dweller will often find himself in situations of fear or confusion when he moves beyond the boundaries that he has consciously or unconsciously set for himself.

From another perspective, Ghallager¹⁶, reiterates how the industrial revolution brought on technological and subsequent cultural changes at such a fast pace that society was not able to adjust properly. *“According to an*

¹¹ Gallagher. 1993. p. 127.

¹² Walmsley. *op.cit.* p. 125.

¹³ Gallagher. *op.cit.* p. 12.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 103.

¹⁵ Walmsley. *op.cit.* p. 1-4.

¹⁶ Gallagher. *op.cit.* p. 13.

early hypothesis, the city simply provides too much stimulation of almost every kind, bombarding us so relentlessly that in self-protection, we tune out and turn off. The price of this coping strategy can be a reduction in the quantity and quality of our experiences, as well as the erection of social barriers and hierarchies that relegate traditional communal responsibilities to bureaucracies.¹⁷ She explains how people were turned away from nature to an indoor urban environment where our human biological functioning that is shaped around the cycles of nature, started to fail. With the rise of modern psychology and giants such as Freud, attempts were made to solve the problems of emotional confusion of the body internally (within the human brain) as opposed to externally (within the environment). It is only recently that questions about the influence of the environment on an individual's well-being are being asked. In this regard she explains that what was previously perceived as 'running away' from problems is now often seen as a good solution in the sense that it offers a change of environment and thus a change in the well-being of a person.

Interaction with our Environment

In an attempt to understand and explain the link between human well-being and the environment, many books have been written by urban sociologists and psychologists over the last few decades – perhaps spurred on by the newly found interest in the environment during the 1960's. From these writings, it seems that the experience of our surroundings can be divided into four distinct ways of interaction with the environment: The first entails our sensory experience or the **perception** of the environment through our sensory organs. This, however, does not happen in the form of pure data, but is often a reflection of our own interpretation of the world – *"I distribute through my body perceptions which really belong to my soul, and put into the thing perceived."*¹⁸ In contrast to perception, **cognition** refers to the ways in which we understand and learn about the environment, this also entails the mental manipulation of the information received through the process of perception¹⁹. The third aspect of interaction with the environment is in the form of **meaning**. It not only includes the connotations that each individual has with a particular environment, but also the identity that that person derives from being part of a particular place – *"Place identity is, after all, a part of self identity"*²⁰. Lastly, within our modern urban environments, our interaction with our surrounds is said to still be partly determined by our natural **instincts**. In addition to choosing a location or space on principles of instinct, the experience of space and place itself is also something that is born into every bit of information of the outside world that reaches the brain – it is *"impossible to touch without touching in space, since our experience is the experience of a world."*²¹

¹⁷ Gallagher. *op.cit.* p. 149

¹⁸ Meleau-Ponty, 1962. p. 213.

¹⁹ Walmsley. *op.cit.* p. 6.

²⁰ *ibid.* p. 59.

²¹ Meleau-Ponty. *op.cit.* p. 221.

Perception

Our five senses: see, hear, touch, taste and smell, are the information feeders to the brain. It is through these human receptors that the designer reaches the individual. Of these five senses, sight is the most spatial of all – where as the other senses experience only parts of the outside world, sight is the main means by which we understand and ‘feel’ the whole of our environment. Merleau-Ponty quotes a blind individual as he describes this: *“Those who can see are related to me through some unknown sense which completely envelopes me from a distance, follows me, goes through me, and, from the time I get up to the time I go to bed, holds me in some way in subjection to it.”*²² Because all streams of information from the different senses get united the second they meet, our experience is one of a totally enveloping environment where, for example, no smell can be appetising when the sight of waste is surrounding us. Merleau-Ponty continues to explain that *“space belongs primarily to sight and that from sight it is transmitted to touch and the other senses ... and that they become integrated into a total experience in which they are ultimately indiscernible.”*²³

Apart from experiencing static space through vision, vision also tunes into other qualities of an object or environment that determine its ‘behaviour’ – such as colour, texture and movement – in order to dynamically perceive it. (*“Movement does not necessarily presuppose a moving object ... it is sufficient that it should include ‘something that moves’ or at most ‘something coloured’ or ‘luminous’ without any actual colour or light.”*²⁴) In this regard, Merleau-Ponty determined that objects and spaces are defined and experienced in terms of their dynamic ‘behaviour’ and not only their static properties. The many studies of the effect that colour has on the actions and moods of people, thus also help determine how we experience the object or environment containing that colour. According to Gallagher²⁵ *“the idea of linking colour and behaviour is reasonable enough”* and so she writes how warm colours – red, yellow and orange – can stimulate the senses even to the point of aggression, and how cool colours – blue and green – calm the nerves. The extreme cool colours – grey, black and white – are however under-stimulating and thus invite feelings of depression. Merleau-Ponty²⁶ further describes that cool colours induce response and concentration with blue ‘yielding’ to the gaze and prompting one to look, and green inducing feelings of restfulness and peace. The warm colours instead are said to induce movement away from the centre with a feeling of being torn away – red is described as ‘invading the eye’ and representative of effort and violence, whereas yellow is said to have ‘stinging’ properties.

²² Merleau-Ponty. *op.cit.* p. 224.

²³ *ibid.* p. 218.

²⁴ *ibid.* p. 274.

²⁵ Gallagher. *op.cit.* p. 50.

²⁶ Merleau-Ponty. 1962. p. 210-211.

Cognition

“Modern psychology treats thought as a process of fitting new situations into existing slots and pigeonholes in the mind. Just as you cannot put a physical thing into more than one physical pigeonhole at once, so, by analogy, the processes of thought prevents you from putting a mental construct into more than one mental category at once. Study of the origin of these processes suggests that they stem essentially from the organism’s need to reduce the complexity of its environment by establishing barriers between the different events that it encounters.”²⁷

In order to better cope with our overwhelming urban environment it is said that we simplify our surroundings by restructuring our worlds into cognitive maps or ‘schemata’ – as described by ‘gestalt theorists’. These ‘schemata’ that are formed in order to understand the environment in a simplistic and manageable way, are said to act as *“frameworks in the mind in which information can be hung”²⁸*. According to the Personal Construct Theory²⁹, the constructed frameworks are constantly tested and altered by experience of the environment. It is further said that individuals learn about place and thus also understand it through first learning about separate **locations** and subsequently about the **links** between the locations after which whole **areas** start to be understood. Through linking up with this process of learning, the designer is able to shape the environment in such a way that it is easily understood by the individual and added to the cognitive understanding of his surroundings. This does, however, not mean that the design of space and place should be over-simplified or designed in the shape of the (simplistic) tree that Alexander warns against: *“When we think in terms of trees we are trading the humanity and richness of the living city for a conceptual simplicity which benefits only designers, planners, administrators and developers. Every time a piece of a city is torn out, and a tree made to replace the semi-lattice that was there before, the city takes a further step toward dissociation”³⁰*. Nevertheless, ensuring the individual’s understanding of the public realm through design will return the emotional security that normally lacks when a person feels lost or confused in a space that is unfamiliar to him. Gallagher explains: *“...most of us ... depend on places to provide the external frameworks that help us structure our inner lives...”³¹*.

Because the mind understands its surroundings in a holistic way (see perception), Merleau-Ponty explains that the whole of an object is understood as one experience rather than the sum of all its parts. In the same way as the object, the experience of the environment is not one of individual objects and objective relationships, but one of space in its totality through its connections and flow – *“I have a flow of experiences which imply and explain each other both simultaneously and successively.”³²* This flow of experiences is obtained by the individual through movement of the body relative to its surroundings. Our movement through space enables us to perceive places

²⁷ Alexander. 1965. p.15.

²⁸ Walmsley. *op.cit.* p. 22.

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 26.

³⁰ Alexander. *op.cit.* p.18.

³¹ Gallagher. *op.cit.* p. 172.

³² Merleau-Ponty. *op.cit.* p. 281.

and objects through time in order to comprehend their totality and connection to the frameworks by which parts of the environment are already understood – *“Every perception presupposes, on the perceiving subject’s part, a certain past, and the abstract function of perception, as a coming together of objects, implies some more occult act by which we elaborate our environments.”*³³. From the designer’s point of view it is important to allow for this movement through connections and patterns of flow within the spaces we design. As designers we must realise that *“space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the positioning of things becomes possible. This means that instead of imagining it as a sort of ether in which all things float, or conceiving it abstractly as a characteristic that they have in common, we must think of it as a universal power enabling them to be connected.”*³⁴

Lastly, the role of the human body in the understanding of space should not be underestimated. According to Merleau-Ponty³⁵, self-perception of the body informs the perception any object or space from the moment we set foot in the world – *“The consciousness of the body acts as anchor point to understand and contextualise one’s surroundings”*³⁶. The body is thus the means by which we proportion our surroundings as well as orientate ourselves on the ground (forward or backward) and within space (top and bottom).

Meaning

In contrast to the public realm, the private realm remains familiar to the individual in the same way the community was a familiar entity in pre-industrial society. This private realm mostly consists of closely related family and friends and acts as a base for the individual to constantly return to. According to Walmsley, *“one of the most fundamental needs is the need for a sense of belonging” that manifests itself in belonging to a certain ‘place’*³⁷. The return to this same ‘place’ is identified as human territoriality³⁸ and described as a *“learned response to small scale environments that satisfy basic human needs for security and identity”*. Territoriality can be further explained to regulate social interaction through the appropriation of space – the area of territory provides personal security, self-esteem and self-identity.

By the creation of a sense of security and identity, *“place ... may make a fundamental contribution to the meaning of a person’s life”*³⁹ and it is for this reason that the design of smaller local areas where people spend a lot of time is of the utmost importance. Walmsley states again that *“the nature of the local area may have a major influence on the quality of urban living”*⁴⁰. Not only does it define a part of personal identity, but it has a particularly high

³³ Merleau-Ponty. *op.cit.* p. 281.

³⁴ *ibid.* p. 243.

³⁵ *ibid.* p. 203-206.

³⁶ *ibid.* p. 249.

³⁷ Walmsley. *op.cit.* p. 8.

³⁸ *ibid.* p. 89.

³⁹ *ibid.* p. 57.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* p. 59.

influence on the social life of the individual that spends his time there. For this reason it is of utmost importance that a design considers the existing social patterns of an area – it is ultimately the social interaction between the people at a place and between the people and the place that gives the place meaning⁴¹. (Marleau-Ponty speaks of a mental space: “*a world of meanings and objects of thought which are constituted in terms of those meanings.*”⁴²) In addition to social interaction, aspects of history and culture significantly add to the meaning that is attached to a place. In this regard it is necessary that thorough research into the historical layers of the place as well as the individuals using that place accompanies and informs the design of an area. It is of course impossible to obtain the personal history of experiences within a specific place for every individual, but according to Walmsley⁴³ the ‘urban image’ – defined as the overall mental representation including distance, direction, information and feelings – of the individual is similar for similar people in similar environments. If this is the case, it should be possible to obtain a general impression of the experiences, actions and feelings within a specific place.

The amount of identity derived from a place is of course variable from person to person. A well-travelled person with a wide knowledge of the world grows less attached to a specific place than a person with low mobility and a limited knowledge of other places. Walmsley⁴⁴ identifies five types of people with low mobility under the cumulative name of YOPHS (Young, Old, Poor, Housewives, Sick) for whom satisfaction with the environment is of greatest importance in defining personal identity – needless to say, these people need to be well-incorporated and catered for in the design of local areas. It should also be remembered that, in the same way that a place influences the identity of its users, the users also determine the identity of the place. This is an important consideration in the question of why a place is the way it is, and what impact the changing of the place will have.

Instinct

For the designer it is important to note that human instinct still plays a subconscious role in the use of space and that the degree to which designers provide in the basic needs of an individual ultimately determines the success of the place. Searching to define our preference for the basic human needs, the Habitat Theory, as described by Walmsley⁴⁵, states that a landscape is evaluated by the individual according to its shape, colour, spatial arrangement and visible attributes in order to establish if it would be suitable for survival. Linking with this, the Prospect - Refuge Theory⁴⁶ makes the statement that landscapes where one can see and not be seen are the most satisfying to human individuals. The theory calls for a combination of panorama, vista and vantage areas from where a person can see out, with enough hides, shelters, woods and buildings as areas where a person feels protected.

⁴¹ Walmsley. *op.cit.* p. 63.

⁴² Meleau-Ponty. *op.cit.* p. 293.

⁴³ Walmsley. *op.cit.* p. 36-37.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 126.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p. 73.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p. 74.

As described under Meaning, humans, like animals, also display territorial behaviour; the difference, however, between the human territory and animal territory is that animals attach themselves to a general area whereas humans need a specific location to return to every day. “A secure base is a safe haven to explore from and return to when the world feels dicey.”⁴⁷ This aspect of human territoriality⁴⁸ is said to be an instinctively applied socio-cultural phenomenon ‘invented’ by the individual in order to diminish the randomness of his environment, add order to the environment as well as increase the predictability of the environment. The human territory is explained to consist of three grades or scales of intensity defined as the primary territory (areas of permanent occupancy where invasion is resented), the secondary territory (areas with individual control but general open access) and lastly, the public territory (areas where the appropriation of space is only short term). The design of urban public space should take into account the existing patterns of human territorial behaviour as well as provide areas that can be appropriated in each of the different territorial scales.

“*Being is orientated*” and “*Existence is spatial*”⁴⁹ – our experience of the world, whether it is a familiar sound or an appetising smell, is spatial in nature. For that matter, our whole existence is spatial so that we make part of the very environment that we perceive and attempt to understand. “*To experience a structure [or open space] is not to receive it into oneself passively: it is to live it, to take it up, assume it and discover its immanent significance.*”⁵⁰ Being human means understanding the environment not only in a spatial way but also as part of one’s own being. It is thus in the nature of our existence to constantly orientate ourselves according to, and within our surroundings. If this is not possible or if our sense of orientation is distorted, we feel confused and lost within our environment. The task of the designer therefore is to facilitate and enhance the association of the individual with his environment and create places that are orientated towards people the same way people are orientated towards their environments.

⁴⁷ Gallagher. *op.cit.* p. 161.

⁴⁸ Walmsley. *op.cit.* p. 88-90.

⁴⁹ Meleau-Ponty. *op.cit.* p. 252.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p. 258.

PART THREE

DESIGNING THE INDIVIDUAL PLACE

The Humanist Approach

During the 1950's and 1960's, and perhaps not by coincidence in the same time as the development of increased interest in the effects of the environment on the individual, the humanist⁵¹ stance developed as a reactionary urban design approach to the, then more prominent, functionalist way of urban design. The humanist approach “seeks to realise and enhance [the] pre-existing and underlying social structures⁵²” of communities as well as enhance the human experience of general urban activities such as the exchange of goods and sharing of information. In approaching a design, followers of this approach, rather than using urban design principles to guide them, are more likely to analyse a potential site with drawings or photographs from a human perspective and questions such as: “How do the users perceive and experience a particular place?”, and “What are the behavioural patterns of the area?”. As a counterpart to city planning that is mainly focussed on a macro scale, humanists seek to investigate the impact of small-scale design interventions on the everyday person. A general feeling of designing ‘for people’ resonates as “decisions are based on user’s needs and circumstances rather than on concepts” – “There is no logic that can be superimposed on the city; people make it, and it is to them, not buildings, that we must fit our plans”⁵³. Tibbalds⁵⁴, supports this vision when he makes his case that the design of places should take preference over buildings and traffic. It is however true, as critiques of this approach have stated, that through a localised approach, the designer stands at risk of ignoring some larger-scale issues of the urban environment. In addition, the humanist designer should be cautious of falling into a trap of superficial design where places appeal to the senses but include nothing of the depth or dimension of the local community. Nevertheless, in a specific community with specific problems, the humanist approach is the only approach that is truly focussed on the needs of the people from that area. It seeks to enhance rather than replace, facilitate rather than demolish and most of all, support rather than degrade people and their activities.

Urban Design and the Individual

Because of urbanisation and other forms of migration to and within the city, “increasing numbers of people struggle daily to satisfy basic needs in the face of tremendous difficulties, while having to accommodate and inculcate changes in almost all dimensions of their lives – behaviourally, socially, culturally, economically and politically.”⁵⁵ Although the designer is not equipped to solve all problems of urban society, his goal is nevertheless to improve the lives of the users of the specific building or area at hand. Because design is “essentially for and about people”, it is the task of the designer to ensure that the needs of its current as well as future users form part of the design

⁵¹ Attoe & Logan. 1989. p. 5.

⁵² *ibid.* p. 9.

⁵³ *ibid.* 1989. p. 7.

⁵⁴ Tibbalds. *op.cit.* p. 16.

⁵⁵ Dewar & Uytendogaardt. *op.cit.* p. 10.

from the start⁵⁶. In correlation with the humanist stance, the investigation and understanding of a local area and its people, is thus of greater importance than the strict application of urban design principles.

“The client of planning is ultimately people and, since built environments outlive any one generation of users, generations yet to come: the discipline, therefore, does not represent the sectional interests of any individual, group, class or political ideology. Settlements of quality enrich the living conditions of all people, both rich and poor. They are not dependent upon technological pre-conditions to perform successfully, and they accommodate ideological and political transitions. They are not based upon ephemeral conditions, but are rooted in a basic understanding of human activity and human need. If they work well under conditions of minimal technology, and if they positively accommodate the lives of those with limited means, additional means and superior technological conditions are a bonus.”⁵⁷

Although humanist orientated authors still call for the application of concepts and principles such as balance, freedom, equity, intensity, diversity, complexity, integration and community identity⁵⁸ as well as mix-use, pedestrian freedom, access for all, clarity and legibility⁵⁹, these principles are merely an attempt to define the aspects that enable communities and create platforms of opportunity. Different places, will, after all, require different degrees and combinations of these principles. Perhaps the best way to get behind what is needed within a particular space in order to enhance the quality of life of the individuals using it, is to really understand the space, its functioning and the people using it, as the humanist stance suggests.

In addition to understanding a specific space and its people as it is at present, it is also important for the designer to learn from the existing context and draw on the appropriate historical references⁶⁰. It should be kept in mind that a design is not for any one purpose, any one generation or any one time – the urban plan is *“based upon concerns about urban living which are non-exclusionary and which transcend political, ideological or technological stereotypes. Although responsive to immediately perceived needs, [it is] made with a generosity and generality which supersede the conditions which called the plan into being. [It] thus allow[s] discovery and re-discovery by future generations and in this way impart a sense of timelessness. Finally, [it is] partial, in the sense that [it] allow[s] for complex processes of development, involving many different decision-makers, to emerge, while still giving unambiguous directions concerning relationships to be promoted and preserved.”⁶¹*

⁵⁶ Tibblads. *op.cit.* p. 4, 24.

⁵⁷ Dewar & Uytendogaardt. *op.cit.* p. 13.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* p. 18-22.

⁵⁹ Tibblads. *op.cit.* p. 27-74.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p. 19, 23.

⁶¹ Dewar & Uytendogaardt. *op.cit.* p. 24.

The public realm is described by Dewar & Uytendogaardt⁶² as the first level of the urban order through which the private realm can be enabled as well as controlled. This is done through the application of three main ‘types’ of actions that should form part of any urban design or planning process: **structural actions** that aim to create opportunities for individual people, **controlling actions** that, where appropriate, consciously reduce the freedom of decision making, and lastly **holding actions** that are implemented in order to reserve options for future generations. These actions alone will by no means generate an urban space of the complexity that Alexander⁶³ speaks about, but they are aimed to shape the basis for appropriate private response that will successively create more organic and complex levels of order within the urban setting. According to Hamdi⁶⁴, “*it is about finding that balance between the structures we must design [strategically] and those that must emerge [practically and locally]*”. In this way environments can be created as “*opportunity fields*”⁶⁵ that facilitate choice and freedom of expression so that the individual can influence the place as much as the place influences the individual.

Lastly, concerning the character of an area, Walmsley⁶⁶ explains that “*creations need to be in sync with the ‘genius loci’ of that area*”. The use of external or foreign ideas and styles in just any urban space will not result in the re-creation of another space (as is sometimes attempted), but rather in the creation of a certain placelessness or homelessness. Careful consideration should thus be given to the techniques and design ideas that are implemented in the existing urban fabric.

The Wicked Urban Design Problem

In their article, ‘Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning’⁶⁷, Rittel & Webber, describe the difficulty of planning or designing within the social processes and integrated networks that underlie the urban environment. They are of the opinion that the “*classical paradigm of science and engineering – the paradigm that has underlain modern professionalism – is not applicable to the problems of open societal systems*”⁶⁸. They have therefore defined all planning problems as ‘wicked problems’ because they “*are never solved. At best they are only re-solved – over and over again.*”⁶⁹

In description of the ‘wicked problem’ ten distinguishing properties are described: (1) “*There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem*”; (2) “*Wicked problems have no stopping rule ... the would-be planner can always try to do better*”; (3) “*Solutions to wicked problems are not true-or-false, but good-or-bad*”; (4) “*There is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem*”; (5) “*Every solution to a wicked problem is a*

⁶² Dewar & Uytendogaardt. *op.cit.* p. 26-29.

⁶³ Alexander. *op.cit.*

⁶⁴ Hamdi. 2004. p. 101.

⁶⁵ Walmsley. *op.cit.* p. 88.

⁶⁶ *ibid.* p. 68.

⁶⁷ Rittel & Webber. 1973.

⁶⁸ *ibid.* p.160.

⁶⁹ *ibid.* p.160.

'one-shot operation' because there is no opportunity to learn by trial-and-error, every attempt counts significantly"; (6) "Wicked problems do not have an enumerable set of potential solutions, nor is there a well-described set of permissible operations that may be incorporated into the plan"; (7) "Every wicked problem is essentially unique"; (8) "Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem"; (9) "The existence of a discrepancy representing a wicked problem can be explained in numerous ways. The choice of explanation determines the nature of the problem's resolution"; and lastly (10) "the planner has no right to be wrong when working with a wicked problem ... he is always liable for the consequences of the actions he generates".⁷⁰

Although the above makes it seem impossible to design within the social context of the urban environment, it is not a reason for the designer to step away and turn his back. In fact, it sets the challenge to the designer to understand as much as possible of the people and the context surrounding the area that he is involved with. The aim should not be for the designer to achieve the perfect once-off design, but rather to initiate an urban transformation process that enables the local community and lifts the area to a higher platform from where new aspirations can be achieved.

⁷⁰ Rittel & Webber. *op.cit.* p.161-167.



Fig. 8: Marabastad - Putco bus terminal



Fig. 9: Marabastad - paper recycling

PART FOUR

APPROACH

From the very first experience it is clear that Marabastad is a place that is shaped by its people. Unlike urban open spaces in wealthier parts, the ambience of this part of the city is greatly determined by the thousands of commuters that pass through every day and the multiple traders that open shop or stall to cater for these commuters. It is thus not surprising that the character of the open spaces in this area is determined, not by the badly neglected surfaces or by the piles of waste that accumulate on the street corner, but by the interaction of the people with each other and the human energy that flows between train, bus and taxi rank. *“This then is the ‘soft city’ of dreams, expectations, interests held in common and webs of relationships, not easy to explain or model because its structure is largely invisible and, in any case, always changing.”*⁷¹ When investigating Marabastad it is impossible for the designer to ignore the common, everyday activities of the place and its people. In fact, it would be wrong for any design project to start without a thorough understanding of these activities on street level.

As part of the analysis, this study will aim to understand Marabastad on street level – the patterns of movement on a specific street corner or the way in which a sidewalk is appropriated as a restaurant. *“Then observe how, in every nook and cranny, under stairwells, between houses, in every leftover space, people put up small kiosks for selling goods and services, small shelters for mechanics or a single washing machine advertising laundry services. And in the street, every evening, an informal market appears that, by midnight, disappears again.”*⁷² In addition to observing, an effort will be made to understand the local area from the perspective of its everyday users in order to identify the most relevant issues and their appropriate solutions.

The study thus aims to follow a bottom-up approach where the findings on the ground will greatly influence the end solution. This will ensure a supportive rather than dictatorial end result that provides enough support to the local community without smothering its spirit. Although the aim of the project is to design spatial structures (‘platforms of opportunity’) that facilitate the activities of the local community, it will be wary of providing too much structure in a community that often needs to change and adapt in order to survive. – *“The question facing [the designer] is: how much structure will be needed before the structure itself inhibits personal freedom, gets in the way of progress, destroys the very system which it is designed to serve, and becomes self-serving? At what point does it disable the natural process of emergence, with all its novelty and creativity?”*⁷³

Along with creating a spatial (physically determined) support structure – a place that is open for appropriation by its users – it is also the aim of the project to enhance the social structures and internal networks of the local community. *“How a city [place] looks and how its spaces are organized form a material base upon which a range*

⁷¹ Raban, J. 1974.

⁷² Hamdi. *op.cit.* p. 4.

⁷³ *ibid.* p. xviii.



Fig. 10: Marabastad - street games



Fig. 11: Marabastad - pumpkin & pap

*of possible sensations and social practices can be thought about, evaluated, achieved.”⁷⁴ From the many ways of self employment and the wide range of innovative stalls, it is clear that Marabastad is overflowing with individual aspirations and energy. All this energy, however, somehow seems to get lost in the fast moving and frustrating environment. Perhaps it is possible for a design to assist in joining these individual energies into local networks – a better enabled and connected local community can assist in the bettering of the individual which, in turn, will benefit the whole community of Marabastad again. “*Studies in Mexico City and elsewhere have shown how ... social cooperation is one of the most important resources of the poor, a way in which the social risk of individuals is insured collectively.*”⁷⁵*

⁷⁴ Raban. *op.cit.*

⁷⁵ Hamdi. *op.cit.* p. 25.

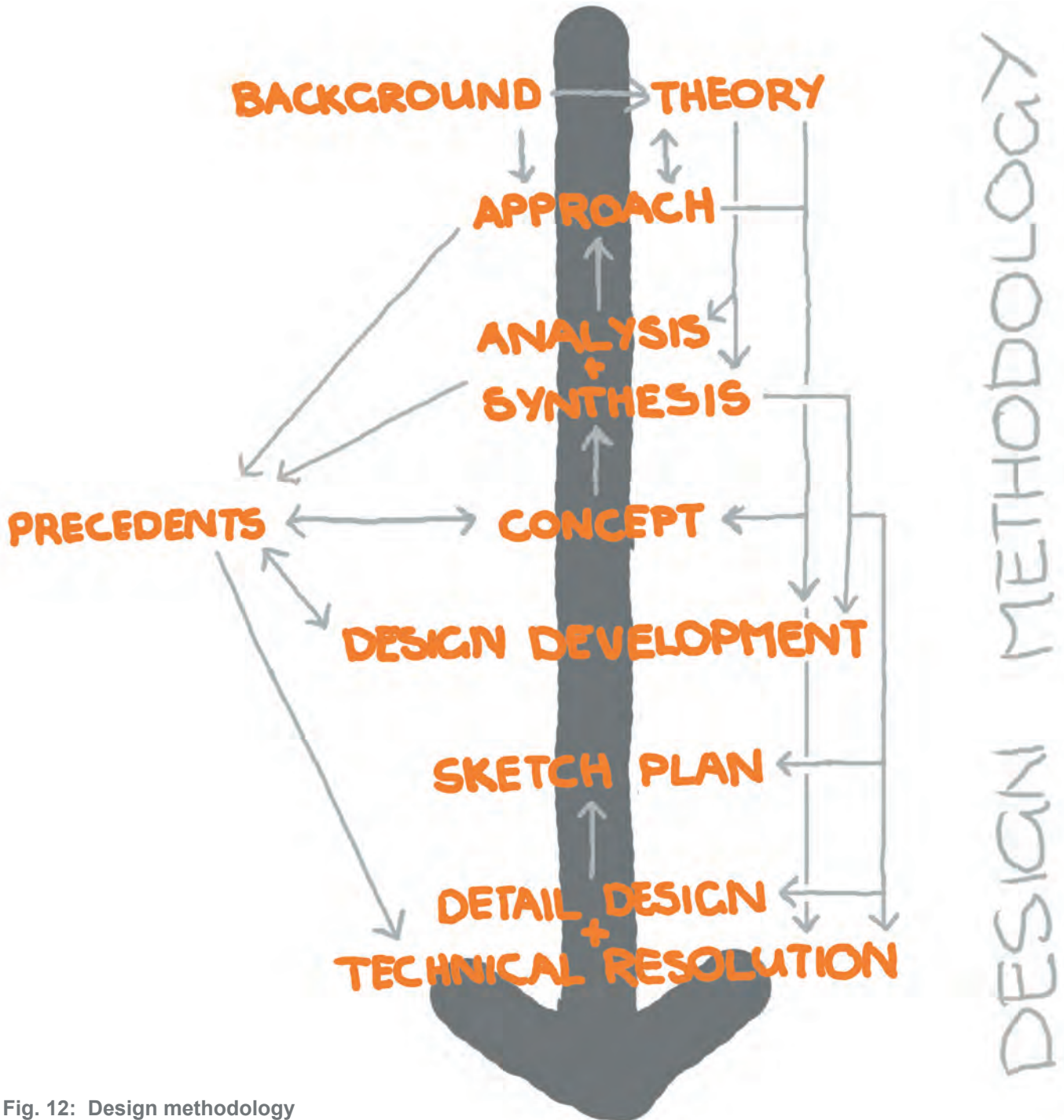


Fig. 12: Design methodology