

# 01 | INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 | CURRENT THEATRE PRACTISE

Current theatre trends follow the ideals of great dramatists such as Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco to name a few (Gronemeyer, 1996). These dramatists were the founders of the “Theatre of the Absurd”, a style of theatre that renounced the realistic character depictions and traditional plots of the theatre before the 1960’s.

It was after the 1960’s that the obscure theories of Antonin Artaud took hold in the theatre world. His ideas were based on the works of a Jerzy Gratowski. Gratowski formulated ideals on moving away from the art of staging as a synthesis of different artistic genres. Instead he was convinced that true performance is depicted through the language of the human body that is used to tell a tale. This theory suggests that performance needs not go to great lengths to imitate the media world with which theatre has had to compete. Theatre should be a subject that focuses on the body in space; no props, costumes, decorations or stage machinery (Gratowski, 1991). This mode of theatre would educate the actor by showing what performance really is; an intense physical and psychological training. Experimental theatre is about breaking down boundaries between the actor, the stage, and the spectator.

Because this movement brought meaning back to theatre, theatre became a way in which one could understand life. It seemed as though life had escaped the human senses and the stage was a space that enabled the invisible to become visible again. The aim of the theatre was to give back to the audience a source of food for thought and an experience to free their minds. Theatre is as dependent on the public for its existence as the public is dependent on the arts that feed the mind.

Contemporary theatre is set in contrast to the immense entertainment industry. The problem with commercializing this experimental theatre trend is that the theatre as entertainment has been overshadowed by the multimedia industry such as T.V. and film. Only commercially-oriented theatre seems to have regained its niche in the public eye as a form of entertainment, i.e. *Hairspray*, *African Footprint*, and *The Lion King*, to name a few. .

Both forms of theatre, experimental and commercial, tend to deal with the idea that through performance, entertainment and art can coincide to produce varying entertaining performances (Gronemeyer, 1996:155). The move from classical theatre is what opened up the possibilities to a freer and a more experimental theatre movement. Theatre practise would seem to be headed in the direction of a combination between the three entertainment genres, which will allow for the creation of new theatre which will exceed its current limitations by use of new technologies. This is where the stage must work against the general degeneration of the power to imagine. Theatrical language must constantly evolve in order to surprise the public and not allow for the theatre to become yet another static routine.

The common point between the various types of theatre is that its proponents redefine theatre as a space of experience. These forms of theatre now place the presentation upon the actor; the interaction between the performers and viewer take centre stage. This is where the viewer is transformed into an active co-operator of the performance. The audience get a sense of freedom and inclusion because they have a chance to choose the way in which they perceive what is going on, and they get to exercise their own imagination in the process.

This clearly shows an evolution of theatre from the classical “removed” styles to a performance method

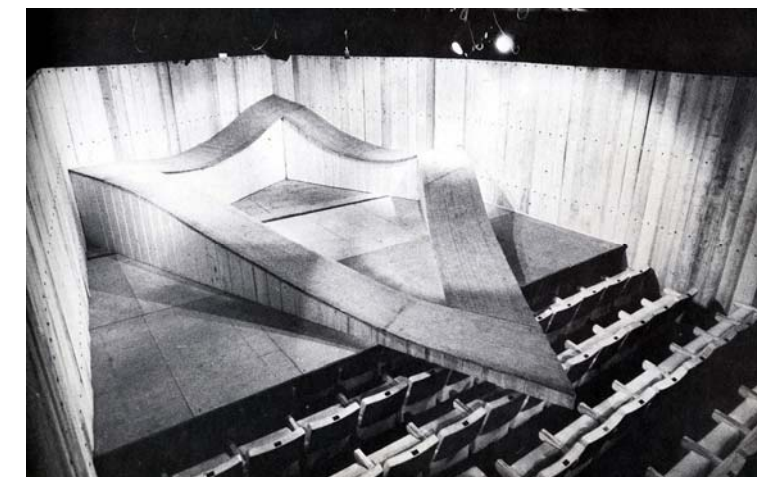
involving and including the audience. It is through this type of theatre that the engagement of the audience can be gauged in order to gain useful feedback for further performances, and this is how research in the dramatic arts is possible.

Current South African theatre uses this audience-performer relationship to create a sense of communication and understanding. Theatre is used as a language that tells stories with meaning, much like the old tales from the old African tribes.

South African theatre is notable on two fronts: community theatre projects aimed at education, development, and the cohesion of the masses and ethnic groups; and also disciplined, innovative performance styles. South African theatre is known for blending art and social interaction.

Current theatre practises show a move away from the theatre of the Apartheid days and towards performances that convey general life stories in aid of reconstructing the country as a new edifice. Theatre is moving forward with a new vision of portraying the past and present using new theatre methods that give South African history new meaning.

Current national theatre tends to be simple entertainment. This type of theatre is created in conjunction with international performance trends and dramatic styles from the United States, Britain and other Western theatre traditions (Graver, 1995:103-109). Training and performance engenders methods of theatre that is concerned with the advancements in theatrical skill from abroad that can be used within South African culture and history. This will evolve into new forms of performance and take acting to new levels, elevating South Africa’s acclamation to unique theatre on a global level.



**Figure 1.1.1: *Sophocles's Philoctetes* by Heiner, Muller showing the sue of a proscenium thrust stage72. Burris Meyer, 1968: 311)**



**Figure1.1.2: *Rutherford & Son* by Daw, Simon 2005, showing the use of a theatre in the round.**



**Figure 1.1.3: *The Secret Love Life of Ophelia* Holdsworth, Simon L 2001**

## 1.2 | THE REAL WORLD PROBLEM

To broaden the scope for global theatrical trends in this country institutions are educating students in ways that will allow them to have the appropriate theatrical knowledge that will adapt to the evolving forms of theatre. To stay ahead of the ever-changing nature of both the national and global theatre, dramatic arts education should incorporate collaborative processes such as workshops for the public as well as workshops from international dramatists and lecturers. The training will enable the student to pursue mastery of various skills, local and international, as well as extend their creative potential to develop work of high artistic and intellectual calibre. This can then be measured against the international dramatic arts trends (Barker & McCaw, 2001:155-169).

There are various tertiary educational institutions around South Africa that offer a Dramatic Arts degree of which the main focus is the fusion between African and European theatre. The general dramatic arts curriculum for most of the South African institutions train students to grasp, and engage with, the dynamics and tensions of theatre in South Africa and develop new approaches to performance by engaging with both new and old theatre trends and explore new methods on a practical level.

The University of Pretoria states that they are keen on internationalizing their Arts Faculty (Haggerman, 2008). This in turn will attract students and lecturers from abroad, which will ultimately strengthen the University's international links. The eventual aims are to make the entire Arts Department nationally relevant, where the Drama Department produces a large number of theatre practitioners who make their mark on the South African scene. They also intend on exploring theatrical studies beyond what is currently available. This will be achieved by creating interest

within its own syllabus and then moving forward in theatrical studies using feedback and further research into the international scene. The Department will adapt their training to the new methods and theatre will take on a more current approach to the dramatic arts training and development (<http://web.up.ac.za>, 12 Aug. 2008).

To achieve a higher level of training the Department requires appropriate facilities. The larger part of the current Drama Department of the University of Pretoria is situated on the north-eastern part of the Hatfield Campus in and around the old Christian Brothers College Residence building. The other facilities, namely the voice and movement halls and the costume department, are located on the South Campus across Lynwood Road. The Faculty is inappropriately disjointed and awkward to use, and therefore cannot be utilised optimally.

Annually there is a ten percent average increase in admissions percent of those who wish to study the dramatic arts. The Department cannot accommodate the intake due to inadequate facilities and venues that are too small for the numbers that are applying for admission and unsuitable for the types of education required (Haggerman, 2008). The Department is small and the focus is on an intimate student to lecturer ratio due to the labour- and attention-intensive methods of teaching required by the performing arts. The facilities available are small and limiting, and the current spaces for teaching and practise does not allow for future growth of the faculty.

Each year The Department of Drama stages around 17 productions. Some of these productions are larger than others and involve all the students from the Department. The smaller productions, such as those performed at the annual Krêkvars Arts Festival, give students the opportunity to stage the performances

they have conceived, written and directed, and are the highlight on the UP calendar. It is also the only interaction that the Department has with the public. The problems arise when the availability of suitable spaces for these productions are limited due to inadequate facilities.

Theatre has a lot to offer a community; it brings people together and creates a culture. It enables freedom of expression and insight into other worlds that are not usually made visible to the public on a daily basis. This opportunity has not been adequately exploited by the university.

## 1.3 | PROBLEM STATEMENT

The aim of the project is to take the disjointed elements that make up the Drama Department and consolidate them into a **unified space**, turning it into a place based on the appeal and intrigue that performance has on society. This in turn would create a node within the university that becomes the **place for cultural interaction and exploration**: an Arts Precinct for theatrical education and public events, where theatrical training and research can be explored further.

## 1.4 | PROJECT BRIEF

Drama is a **flexible subject** and therefore requires flexible spaces. The existing facilities are rigid and limit performance, training, and the exploration of the art form.

The design should be focussed around theatrical performance and practise, as well as the **interactive** event spaces that support theatre and theatrical education. The spaces will allow for theatrical events and training to occur **beyond its usual confined borders** in order to facilitate the maximum use of

every space. These would accommodate **teaching, technique, and exploration**, for the actor, student and the average person. All spaces, interior and exterior, become **adaptable for rehearsal, performance and recreation**. The site then becomes a place that allows the dramatic arts training to go **beyond its current limitations**.

The scheme would involve conceptually developing the whole site to create a **unified space** for the performer and the audience. This would link performance into the landscape facilitating site-specific theatre practice and create for random opportunities in theatrical exploration and expression.

The **Interior intervention of Die Masker** will be based on the **“flexibility”** required for a wide **range of performances to occur in a single space**. This means a design of a theatre that is suitable for multiple performance types as well as theatre training. The design will compare to a new trend in theatre that enables it to **go beyond the proscenium arch** and make the space **multipurpose** and as accessible to the university and the surrounding community as possible.

It should be envisaged as a compliant space that does not imitate traditional theatre, but rather evolves into a space that **explores the relationship between the actor and the audience in unison**. The basic needs for the Department are to create a **dynamic space where students learn: conversational, and interactive**. Contemporary drama has evolved into something that is more **interactive and site-specific**. Drama and theatre now have many other facets. These evolving methods of theatre should be explored and exploited as theatrical research occurs through performing (Haggerman, 2008).

## 1.5 | PROJECT GOALS

The goals of this project are as follows:

- Due to the extent of the intervention required by the project (interior, architectural and landscape) a basic conceptual scheme for the landscape will be shown based on site analysis and optimal spatial configuration.
- The buildings incorporated within the Precinct that requires architectural intervention will be conceptually designed, suggesting facilities and functions required to complete the square and supply the facilities required. This proposal makes reference to Die Lier and Die Bok.
- The Drama Building (the old CBC) will be designed and shown in plan format. The design will show how the building links to the Precinct as well as the surrounding buildings and the interventions made on the existing structure.
- The focus of the project will be Die Masker theatre.
- Detailed design will show Die Masker with regards to lighting, acoustics, HVAC, finishes and sustainability.
- Product design of elements within the building will be resolved. These are: the light deck in the theatre and foyer, the ticket box in the foyer, and the flexible theatre equipment.