



02

Theory

2.1 The Condition of Cultural Infrastructure in Pretoria

2.1.1 The Erosion of Cultural Heritage

The negation of the cultural dimension of cities is a globally ubiquitous process that is associated with the growing tendency of world cities to move towards global standards of habitation (Weafer, 2010:369). In Pretoria, this is amplified by the city's history of decentralisation and fragmentation; determined efforts were made by planning authorities to relocate urban communities into dedicated cultural districts, outside the city. This had the effect of creating a culturally homogenous urban demographic.

In the case of theatre, the forced removal of inhabitants has resulted in a negation of cultural practices. Theatre venues and cultural production houses, such as the Deutsche Verrein and Capitol Theatre, that used to fuel the cultural activity of Pretoria have been replaced by governmental, financial and commercial infrastructures. The existing cultural fabric, which ought to perform a pivotal role in securing future development and the economic growth of the city, has thus been eroded (State Theatre Annual Report, 2010.)

Spaces that are officially earmarked for the staging of cultural events are poorly utilised for this purpose. There is a general tendency for open spaces towards the western periphery of the city to fall into disrepair or be closed to the public; in the city centre, by contrast, open public spaces are over-run by the informal urban activities of traders (legal and illegal), taxi owners and squatters. This "evolving informal urbanism" is a "motivated private initiative characteristic of multi-cultural communities" (Chodikoff, 2008:8); although indicative of a diverse city centre, it competes for space with local creative economies.

2.1.2 Cultural Homogeneity

Homogeneity of cultural space and practices is often an indication of an adoption of global values in society (Weafer, 2010:367). These values often serve to undermine local creativity, and there are various indicators suggesting this to be the case in Pretoria. The variety of goods on offer by traders and small business is limited; when questioned as to the origins of their merchandise, the majority of traders indicated that foreign exporters were the main suppliers. This suggests that the local manufacturing industry is struggling in the face of foreign competition, and that there is little new creative input from locals.

2.1.3 Artist-led Regeneration

There is growing global interest in the potential of culture and creative diversity to fuel economic development in cities. Richard Florida and Jane Jacobs (Hospers and Van Dalm, 2005) predict that the "global competition for creative talent will become one of the defining economic issues of the twenty first century", and that we are moving towards a "creative age" where creativity will be "the engine of national, regional and urban economic growth."

In view of its underdeveloped cultural infrastructure, as demonstrated by the gathered observations, Pretoria could benefit from an investment in cultural infrastructure. One way to do this is by encouraging creative people to move back into the city as part of a process of gentrification: the process through which creativity invites middle-class investment in urban spaces, leading to the economic upliftment of these areas (Evans and Shaw, 2006).



Fig. 2-8 The Capitol Theatre in its current state of disrepair. (Image source: internet.)

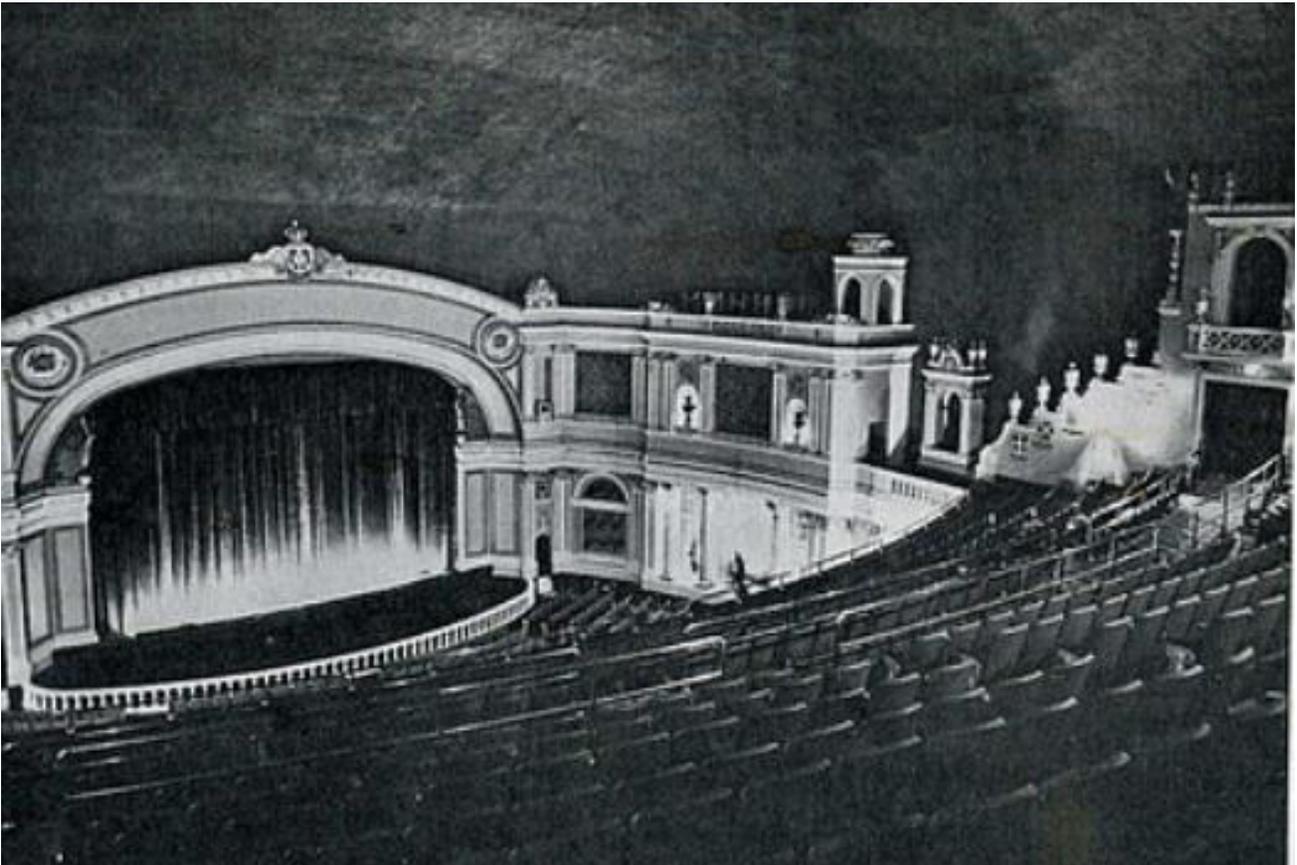


Fig. 2-9 The Capitol theatre in its former glory. (Image source: internet.)

2.2 The National State Theatre

2.2.1 No Longer a Production House

Currently registered with the DAC as a receiving house, the State Theatre makes no direct contribution to the creation of new theatre productions. The restructuring of theatre's fiscal agenda from production-based income to rental-based income has proven to be more lucrative for the theatre as a cultural facility. Most of its revenue is generated through the hiring out of venues and parking spaces for urban users (State Theatre Annual Report, 2010).

South African theatre practitioner Mark Fleischman maintains that although theatres which were previously subjected to segregation have now become available to all practitioners, the bulk of the funding has been withdrawn, and operations have been scaled down (Solberg, 2003:44). Underutilization of established venues is now less a political issue than a financial issue. Fewer and fewer classics are produced, and there are few resident companies with salaried workers. Theatre practice has largely become self-generating, and populated with freelance workers.

2.2.2 Relationship with the Surrounding Context

Fleischman states that "people are not going to the theatre", and that there doesn't seem to be a "plan". He also maintains that as no audience development policy was in place, the demographics of the theatre-going audience have not changed significantly. The location of the established theatre is also seen as a problem: "As long as theatre remains stuck in the paradigm of an event happening in a building called a theatre, and those theatres are placed at a great distance from the majority of the people and there is poor public transport, and serious security problems remain, you're not going to make theatre part of the lives of the majority of the population" (Solberg, 2003:58).

Temple Hauptfleisch confirms that "People don't go out!" He states, however, that people go in their droves to festivals, because they provide a safe, protected environment (Solberg, 2003:48).

The ability of architecture to frame social interactions or events is an important factor in the design of a successful public building (Tschumi, 2000:591). Insofar as it caters for these interactions, a space becomes inscribed in the memory of a community as one with significant personal and collective value. A theatre is not merely a space dedicated to the acting out of plays. As a venue for experience, social interaction, and the expression of social concerns, a theatre becomes a space for healing, learning, socialising and communication. Despite being such a prominent landmark in Pretoria, the State Theatre fails to provide this social and therapeutic aspect of theatre.

Firstly, it makes no real impact on the development of cultural life in its immediate vicinity, where there is a total absence of cultural programmes. Secondly, because of the manner in which the State Theatre has been designed, the structure of its exterior envelope serves to shut out the world. The regulation of light and sound is an important consideration in the design of theatre venues. A typical result of focusing production activities inward is that all services are pushed to the outside, leaving little area as social frontage. Peripheries with services present a bleak façade to the public on the outside.

The thick-skinned approach to the theatre's design stands in stark contrast to the contemporary preference, which is to provide active edges that serve to invite in public life (Jacobs, 1961:157) and frame social interactions. A thesis project undertaken in 2009 by Lizelle Cloete attempted to reactivate one of the State Theatre's non-communicative peripheries through the installation of a cultural programme into the adjacent Lillian Ngoyi Square (Cloete, 2009:21).

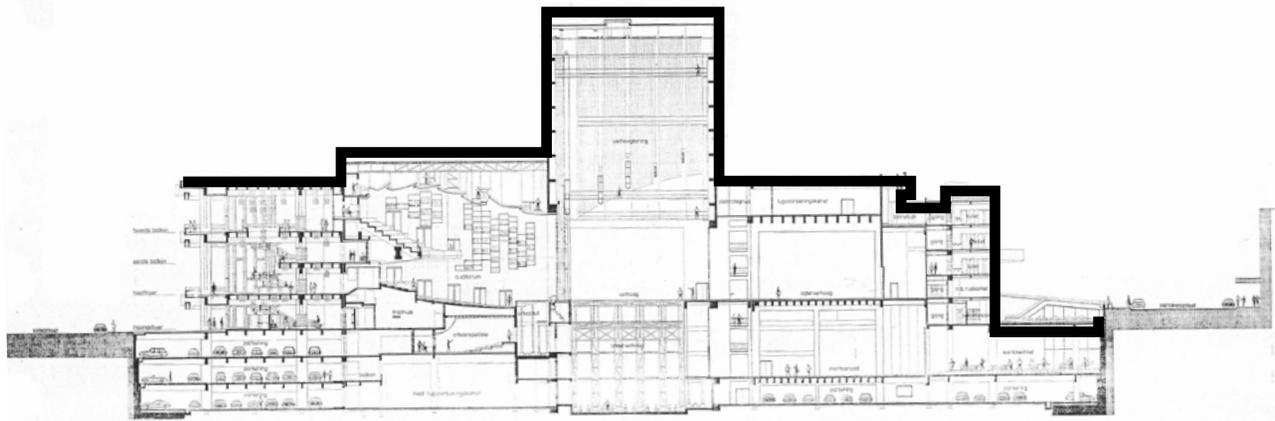


Fig. 2-8 State Theatre: a thick-skinned building with anti-social skin.

2.2.3 Social Programme

Apart from functioning as a receiving house for commercial productions, the theatre also engages itself with programmes aimed at developing the arts sector and theatre profession in local communities (State Theatre, 2010:iv). However, most of these initiatives are concentrated in outlying communities, rather than in the city. Exploiting some of these existing developmental objectives might provide some possibilities for a new extension programme of the State Theatre, enabling it to fulfil its role as an urban culture house. Possible exploitable programmes include:

- The Residency Programme: the theatre aims to install a new training programme for young theatre professionals under the guidance of established theatre professionals.
- Showcasing of Local Writers: the theatre aims to deliver a programme for showcasing new and upcoming playwrights by providing them with a platform for showcasing their plays.

2.2.4 Application in Project

- The State Theatre's existing developmental framework can be exploited as part of a new social agenda to develop theatre and cultural practices in Pretoria, thereby contributing to cultural diversity. The economic incentive generated by this renewal would allow urban-based theatres to compete with their suburban-based counterparts, which tend to offer a spectacle-based, non-didactic brand of theatre.
- The prevalence of lost urban spaces presents an opportunity for a new theatre to work within the public domain, and with the inherent condition of informality.
- Conventional theatre design tends to shut out exterior elements and activity. The consequent migration of all servicing parts to the exterior leads to a thick-skinned exterior envelope that communicates poorly with its surrounding context, as is the case with the State Theatre. This presents the challenge of exploring ways in which the envelope can start to perform a social function and deliver experience to public users: an activated edge.
- The State Theatre as a public institution can start to incorporate programmes that utilise theatre as a therapeutic tool for empowering community members.

The objective of this study is to frame theatre as a therapeutic and didactic (educative) tool that can function within the public domain and start to meet some of the challenges facing Pretoria, and the State Theatre, in particular. The study will attempt to define theatre in terms of these functions, by looking at appropriate applications in the South African context, and at examples from abroad. In order to do this, a clear definition of what theatre is must first be given.

2.3 What is Theatre?

2.3.1 Definition

Theatre studies the complex interrelations between human beings in society, and aims to elucidate societal truths and universal concerns (Boal, 1995:16). It does this by creating a platform where social concerns can be brought out into the open. In this way, it acts as an introspective mirror into the mind of society, through which society can analyse itself.

At its most fundamental level, theatre can be seen as comprising “two human beings, a passion and a platform” (De Vega in Boal 1995:16). Lope de Vega’s “platform” (ibid.) denotes a fundamental idea underlying all theatres: the platform serves as a rudimentary means of separating the actor from the spectator.

2.3.2 Architectural Application

De Vega’s definition offers opportunities for interpretation into the current design agenda in the following ways:

Two human beings can be reinterpreted as two (or more) users, a term more common within the architectural profession. Architecture is ultimately about catering to the needs of users, and requires a sensitivity to how people will use and experience spatial designs. There are countless uses and associated forms of theatre, each with certain philosophical and/or theoretical underpinnings, and a range of associated techniques. The intention is that theatre be flexible enough to suit the needs of a diversity of users, such as that in the Pretoria CBD.

The passion of theatre is what defines it as an art form embodying emotional values. The passion is what drives the artist in his creative efforts to convey a certain message or idea. In essence, this is what theatre aims to do: to deliver a message or lesson.

The role of the platform is self-explanatory. It serves as a rudimentary division that separates the spectator from the actor on stage. This has multiple applications in a building, and is open to various interpretations that go beyond the theatrical.

2.3.3 The Aesthetic Space

An extension of the idea of the platform is the concept of the “aesthetic space”, which provides the stage for the self-analysis of “internalized oppressions” and personal inhibitions, in order to put them in perspective and see them within the “larger context” (Jackson in Boal, 1995:xviii).

Mark Fleischman questions whether the theatre in a post-colonial context should focus on entertainment, or on current issues in an emerging society that is still in transformation. He recognizes that there was a definable theatre aesthetic that emerged from the 70s and 80s in the form of protest plays and workshop theatre, but is concerned about the lack of development of a post-apartheid theatre aesthetic (Solberg, 2003:58).

Fig. 2-9 (Opposite) Boal's forum theatre is able to take place in informal environments. (Image source: internet.)

2.4 Forum-based Theatre

2.4.1 Background

In the context of this study, the term “Forum Theatre” embraces a range of forum-based theatre practices that allow for interaction and creative collaboration between the actors, the audience and the space in which the action takes place.

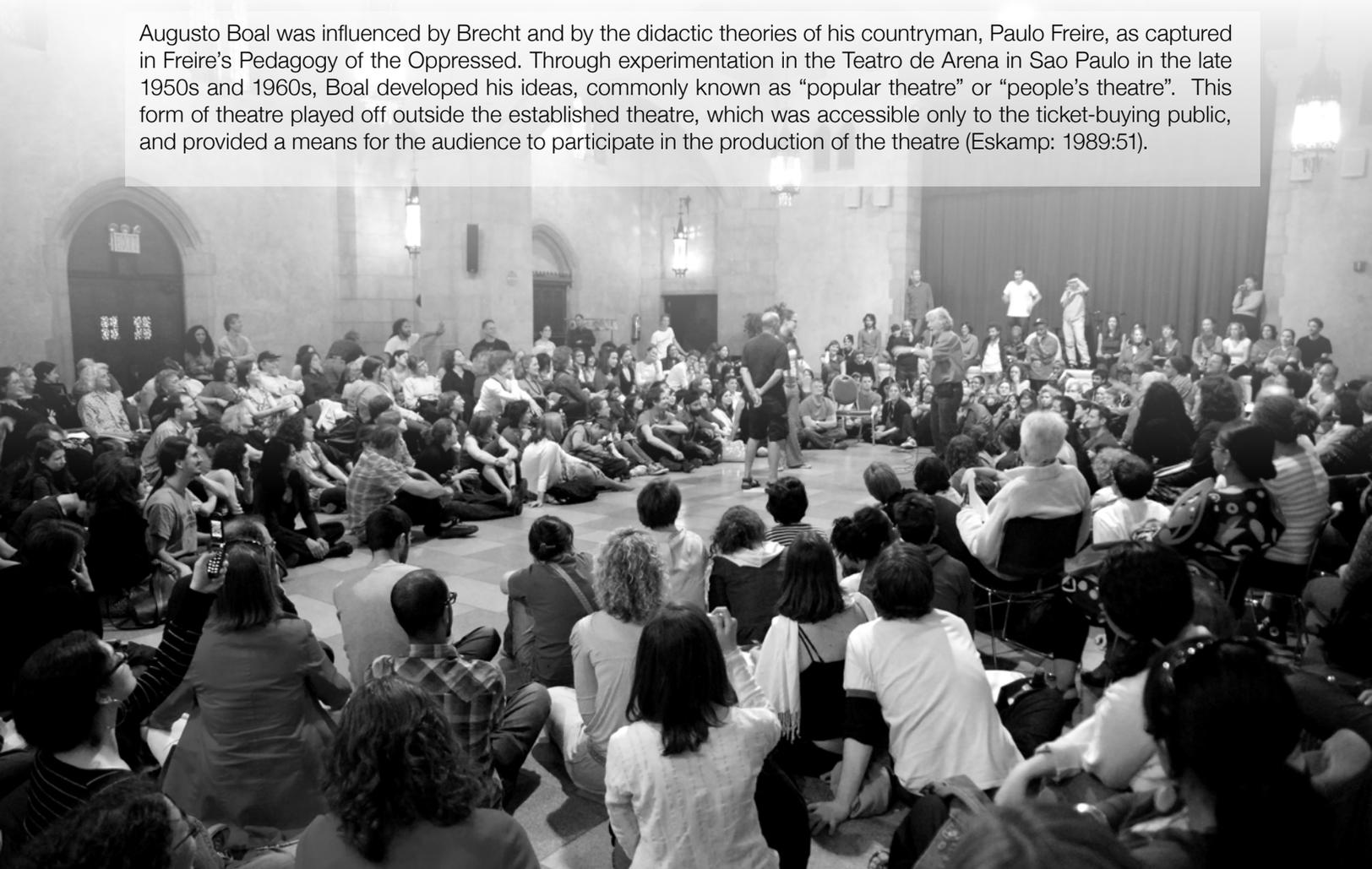
International proponents of this style of theatre were Bertholdt Brecht (in the 1920s in Germany) and Augusto Boal, creator of Forum Theatre, in the 1960s and 1970s in Brazil.

Bertholdt Brecht’s ideas and works were strongly influenced by his reaction to the theatre of his day, which he viewed as an institution which was run as a business, placing profits above what he believed to be the essential function. In his view, drama should be a realistic portrayal of current reality, which should communicate insights into that reality (Eskamp, 1989:48).

He didn’t regard the audience as passive consumers. Rather, he wanted them to be active and excited, not only by what was on the stage, but also by what was happening on the street. This view influenced ideas on theatre as a medium, and as a didactic instrument.

Educative theatre distinguished itself from other types of theatre through aiming primarily at the process of awareness raising among the audience. It aimed to change the view which the target group had of reality; to have them start considering reality in novel ways.

Augusto Boal was influenced by Brecht and by the didactic theories of his countryman, Paulo Freire, as captured in Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Through experimentation in the Teatro de Arena in Sao Paulo in the late 1950s and 1960s, Boal developed his ideas, commonly known as “popular theatre” or “people’s theatre”. This form of theatre played off outside the established theatre, which was accessible only to the ticket-buying public, and provided a means for the audience to participate in the production of the theatre (Eskamp: 1989:51).



2.4.2 Forum-based Theatre in South Africa

In the South African context, there are many manifestations of forum-based theatre that are variously referred to as alternative, applied, community, collective, developmental, educational, environmental, people's, physical, political, popular, protest, or struggle theatre; most of these are not reliant on the technical and built infrastructure provided by established formal theatre.

In Rolf Solberg's book *South African Theatre in the Melting Pot* (2003:3), he describes theatre as one of the "mainstays in the struggle against apartheid". He refers to alternative theatre as a significant tool in the political conscientization of the rural and township youths, versus the established theatre venues in the major cities, which had catered mainly for the affluent white sector. With theatre serving as a "response" and as an instrument to deal with socio-political issues, Solberg suggests the use of the term "applied theatre" as the collective title for all issue-based and didactical theatre.

Dan Mvundle believes that communal or community theatre has evolved from forum theatre, and that it is characterized by spontaneous involvement of the audience in the story and the acting, and interaction between actors, the audience and all other stakeholders afterwards in the form of a discussion of the issues raised (Solberg, 2003:13).

Zakes Mda's developmental theatre, which he uses to "stimulate the audience's desire for change and development through participation in the action on the stage through interaction with the actors", is also forum-based.

Environmental theatre includes elements from educational and developmental theatre, and serves as a conduit between society at large and the rural majority. It makes use of "physical theatre" as a way to bridge the language barriers, and relies strongly on interaction with its audience (Solberg, 2003:15).

Political theatre constitutes the "struggle theatre" of the post-apartheid era. It makes use of "rituals of remembering and healing" which transforms the theatre space into a "cathartic cathedral". Zakes Mda regards Athol Fugard as the pioneer of "theatre of reconciliation", but holds that these are only some of the theatrical impulses used within the context of a nation-building process.

Public participation has been identified as a necessary condition for sustainable urban development (Enyedi, 2004). There is a tendency for authorities to by-pass public opinion in the process making decisions, often to the detriment of the resident urban community.

The participation of groups which are marginalised (for example through AIDS, racial discrimination, poverty, old age, or domestic abuse (of women and children, by men) in forum-based theatre can provide the necessary means to empower these groups.

Apart from playing an active role in the activation of indeterminate spaces, theatre can form the basis for providing minority groups with a say in public decision-making processes.

Fig. 2-10 (Opposite) Shadow theatre used to as a participatory tool at the 2007 Johannesburg Cascoland arts festival. (Photo by SharpCity.)

2.4.3 Application

The literature describes how forum-based theatre, or applied theatre, can be used as a developmental tool, and how it will be used in the specific social context of the project. The main people who will benefit from the theatre will be local members of the public who inhabit the immediate site context, such as traders, office workers and shoppers.

According to Solberg, “today’s practitioners seem to regard theatre in a socio- political context and consider their own roles as part of the country’s reconstruction and development programme”. He states that there is a “backlog of old issues to be addressed and new problems to be resolved.” John Kani predicted that theatre in SA would remain “issue-based” for the next 20 years (Solberg, 2003:195).



2.5 Precedent: Cascoland Urban Arts Festival

2.5.1 Background

In an article entitled *Festivals and Community Involvement*, Richard Bladel describes the sensitive process of designing festivals that reflect the needs and ideals of the communities that they actually celebrate (Bladel, 2004:92). From a cultural perspective, this is relevant because a city is made up of a specific intersection of cultural backgrounds and interrelated histories. A festival such as that envisioned for this framework needs to respond to these idiosyncrasies and the ideals of the local community stakeholders. An inappropriately designed festival would consequently not function in a city that does not exhibit the kinds of values that the festival seeks to express or engender.

Festivals have the capacity to be powerful activators of dysfunctional or “lost” urban spaces; they can fill urban voids with creative activity, thereby encouraging the public to make use of space. This appropriation serves to establish vital links and connections between creative individuals in the community; it engenders the formation of social networks that can strengthen both community development and urban regeneration, which in themselves are mutually reinforcing.

The 2007 Cascoland Festival was held in the downtown precinct of Johannesburg, on the site of the old Rand Infantry Drill Hall. This Netherlands-supported festival was intended as an inexpensive and accessible approach to enabling meaningful community interactions. Spontaneity was emphasized, and programming was kept to a minimum, thus enhancing artistic freedom. Through the use of arts to create opportunities for public interaction, locals were invited into small, yet potent on-site projects. The author and a colleague participated as consultants and active participants within this process, collaborating with other participants from the Netherlands and South Africa.

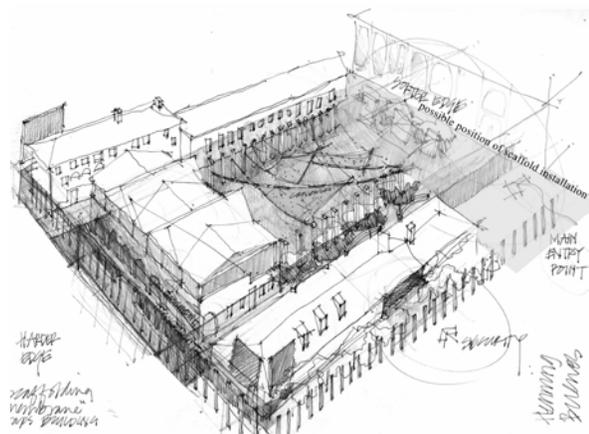


Fig. 2-11 Historical Rand Infantry Drill Hall, the host site of the Cascoland Arts Festival, is an example of a lost, derelict site activated as cultural space. (Photograph by Michael Hart; sketch by Dino Kiratzidis.)

2.5.2 Application

The State Theatre, in collaboration with other arts bodies, is responsible for the management of a number of important seasonal arts festivals. However, without a focus on hosting festivals in the central part of Tshwane, the transformative potential of these festivals is lost. It is therefore envisaged that new spaces dedicated to the hosting of urban-based festivals be provided.



Fig. 2-12 Children on swings newly inserted into a dysfunctional arcade on the Drill Hall site: small-scale regeneration. (Photo courtesy of Jan Korbes).