



2

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Considering the current status of craft in South Africa and abroad, and the implementation of cultural products in everyday life, the study aims to bring forth material that indicates how craft manifests not solely in products but also in spatial experiences. The reuse of an existing vacant building provides the platform for a refurbishment that will allow the user to reap the benefits of craft on an experiential-, aesthetic- and programmatic level.

2.1 CRAFT AND INTERPRETING DESIGN

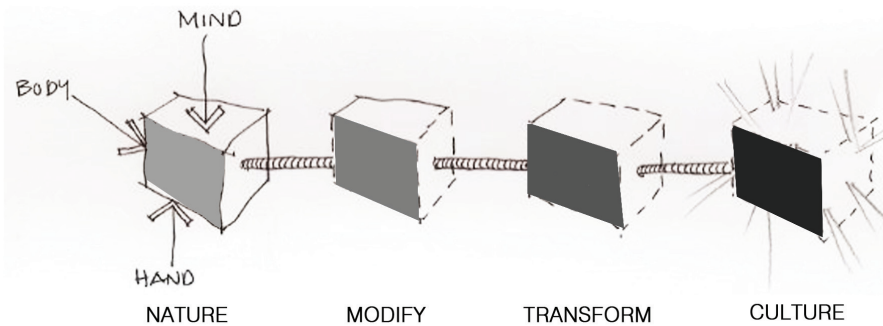
My concern for interior design as a means of cultural production relates back to that of craft- and design's role in contemporary South Africa: the role of catalyst and vehicle for exposing the nation's diversity.

Howard Risatti (2003: 14), postmodern- and art theorist, explains craft as a process, "being fundamentally different from the design process... and in this difference lies its great value". This leaves the author the opportunity to investigate the two elements as processes, and to what extent they contribute value to society.

Risatti (2003) continues to emphasise the role culture plays in craft process and –production. The idea of a mutual relationship between mind, body and hand is a direct relative of Nature: a craftsman modifies and transforms the natural world into a cultural world, while using raw material as a catalyst to stay connected to Nature.



Figure 2.1: Diagram illustrating interdisciplinary approach (Author, 2011).



2.2 REAL-WORLD PROBLEM

Another distinct aspect that differentiates the two processes is that of the materiality of the product being produced. The designer lends himself to implicit knowledge of the object's 'machine-ability,' whereas the craftsman lends himself to implicit knowledge of what the object should be and can be because of his direct relationship with the materials at the time of making (Risatti, 2006: 14). He implies that the craftsman seeks to answer the utopian question of 'what ought to be'. Peter Rowe (1987) suggests that a normative stance be taken when seeking to answer this utopian question, investigating the comparison of different ideas competing in the architectural fields. I believe that interior design similarly seeks to answer that question of 'potential'. Furthermore, the author intends to relate craft's role in society as a parallel to that of interior design's role, in terms of value, relevance, responsibility and identity (I.F.I., 2011). Craftsmanship requires manual skill and hand-to-object coordination. The maker is constantly involved in the inherent properties of the object from conception to product, and in that sense he transfers his human qualities to the object, making the object part of the human psyche and scale. This enables the human component to be portrayed in the object, and the user will relate to its scale and use it accordingly with ease.

It is almost to say that the 'no limits' paradigm the machine age presents, is an ideal paradigm that is situated in the thought that something can become perfect. Here, craft poses a contradiction in that the inherent nature of the craft object is not against decay or the idea thereof, and the forming (a process) is visible. The design entity does however base this utopian ideal on past examples, but the ideal implies a future entity that exists outside history (Risatti, 2006: 16).

Lipstadt (2003: 394) defines a craftsman (as put forth by Bourdieu) as someone who reaches a "mode of knowing" when afforded the opportunity to further his skills.

The Arts and Culture Trust (A.C.T.) in Braamfontein is the oldest funding agency in democratic South Africa, aiming to secure resources for cultural production while creating awareness in the public domain of the needs and the role of the cultural sector in the country (D.A.C., 2010). The Gauteng Creative Industries Co-operative (GCI) has said in a recent publication with regards to the implementation of a crafts hub:

We're planning to have a centrally-placed hub where everything we need will be based centrally – be it a meeting place, a workshop place, training, a place to have coffee, a gallery where people can display their products, a conference centre. It would be in Johannesburg at this stage, in the city (Creative Industries Sector Report, 2007: 90).

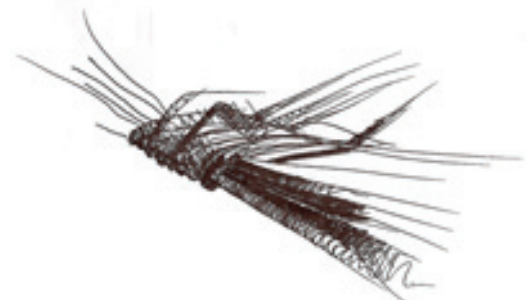


Figure 2.3: Author's abstraction of potential (Author, 2011).

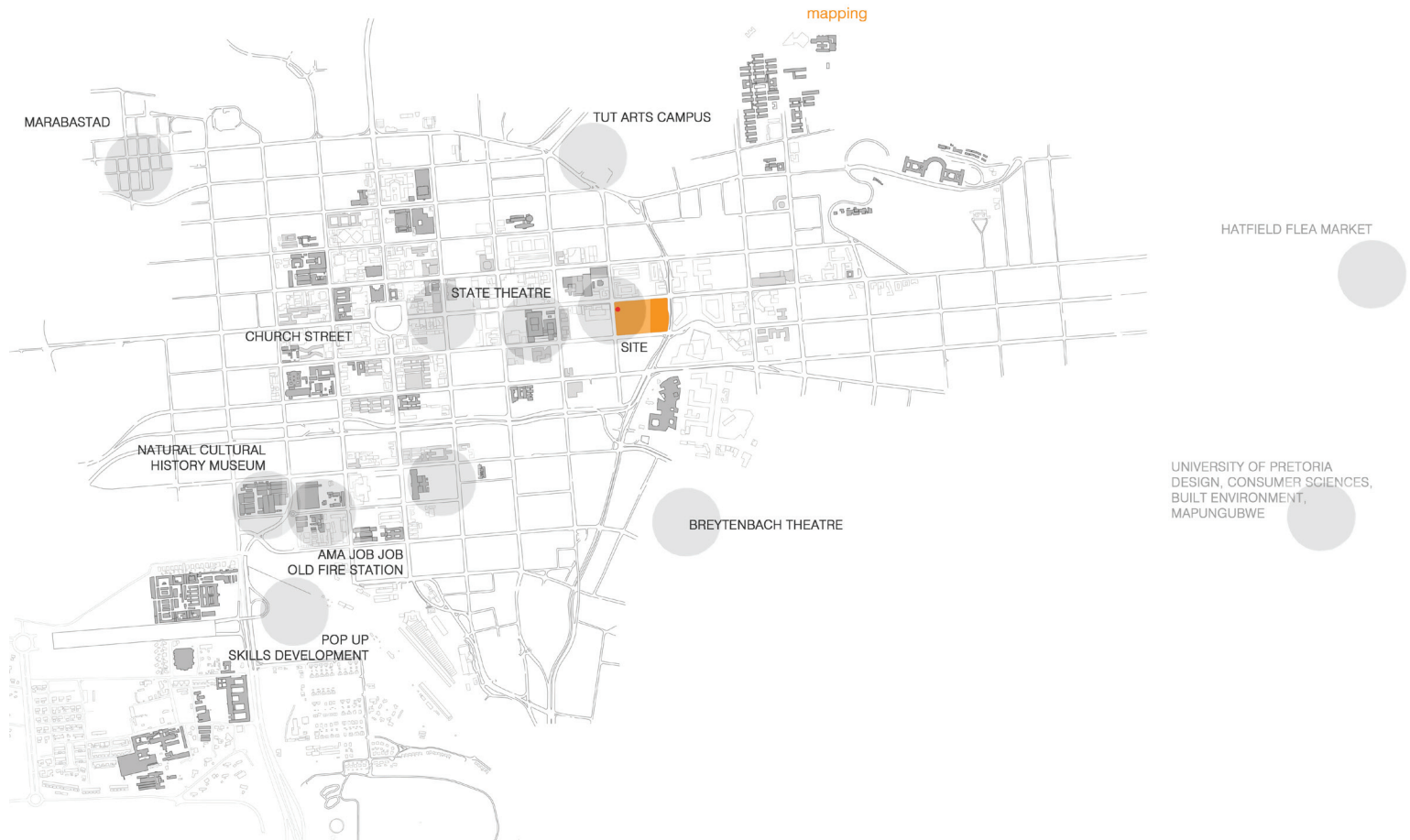


Figure 2.4: Context outlining creative production processes in Pretoria (Author, 2011).

The author remains adamant that Pretoria has earned its rightful place within this arts and culture realm as being the administrative capital of the country, home to a rich political history and a seat for innovation, with the Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research situated there. Pretoria, celebrated previously as one of the cultural capitals of South Africa, has not yet been placed on the map in terms of culture, a deceptive assumption marked in the way tourists perceive the country's other large cities: Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Often, informal settlements are perceived to be the birthplace of the majority of crafts in South Africa by some, produced for the tourism industry, creating a cultural field of perception rather than objectivity amongst the public. Craft can be the forerunner for addressing this issue of global reception if it is given more credibility than at present, in not only the informal sectors, but the formal sectors as well.

In South Africa there exists a diverse array of entities that contribute to cultural production: music, dance, theatre, literature, visual art and craft (A.C.T., 2010). Professions like medicine and law also contribute culturally to society, as does religion, but in other ways. With recent global events taking place in the country such as the FIFA World Cup soccer event in 2010, South Africa's economy flourished in a short period of time, with the crafts bringing in some ZAR 2 billion nationwide and about R 600 million in Gauteng alone (Gauteng Mapping Report- The Craft Sector, 2007). The FIFA World Cup allowed for the influx of vast amounts of tourists who interacted with the culture of the event. Many spectators came into contact with craft as one of the products of South Africa's culture.



Figure 2.5: Craft-based design products (Global Africa Expo, 2010).

Theoretical investigations focusing on product and spatial experience, as well as the culture of the production, will be done in order to arrive at a sensitive answer as to what it is that inhibits certain artistic fields and their products from reaching a status that others have, based purely on a perception of materiality. Specific precedential comparisons will be done in order to see what qualities are favourable, and why and how materiality influences a production decision.

Interior design will be analysed as a form of cultural production in terms of space and ergonomics as well as detail design, in order to ameliorate South African craft production for it to be recognized on a local- and global level as an element that can add value to the sector, and in turn, to the nation.



2.3 SITE

2.3.1 CRITERIA FOR PROPOSED SITE

The Sammy Marks Precinct in the inner city of Pretoria was identified as the larger context in which the design intervention would take place. The city of Pretoria as a hub for cultural production has been considered in terms of site choice, and existing production centres are identified in the inner city of Pretoria as possible 'fields' in which the contextualisation of a production centre can take place. These centres provide the basis for questioning the relevance of such an implementation and an overview of the context as a cultural one (see Figure 1.4).

Furthermore, various frameworks have been proposed for the regeneration of the inner city and the author is of the opinion that it is fitting to respond to this aspect of regeneration. A small educational precinct in particular, substantiated the idea of innovation, where a vacant, under-utilized building will house the proposed intervention (see Figure 2.1).

The proposed site for the investigation is situated on the corner of Du Toit- and Church Street, in the Sammy Marks Precinct within the inner City of Pretoria. This site is significant in terms of its placement on a major axial route: Church Street, which allows for numerous pedestrian- and vehicular activities to flourish. Furthermore, the site poses opportunities in terms of what was proposed for the block development framework: an educational precinct, as developed by a previous student, Du Plessis (2010) (see Figure 2.8). The author is proposing a reactive strategy in response to this proposal that took place on the same site.

This location is identified as a node at which pedestrian- and vehicular activity is prominent and where possible cultural activity is envisioned, using the existing energy as departure point. Under-utilised and poor quality buildings are in abundance and the author identified a vacant warehouse as proposed site.

...dis-used buildings contribute to the deterioration of the integrity of the urban fabric (Du Toit and Karuseit, 2010)



Fig. 2.6: Sammy Marks Precinct, Inner City of Pretoria (Author, 2011).



Fig. 2.7: Exterior of proposed site, corner of Du Toit- and Church Street (Author, 2011).

As part of the existing educational precinct and proposed framework, it is established that student activities will manifest in the vicinity of the site. Students and city-dwellers as well as visitors to the city, are proposed target groups, as Church Street is a main vehicular route in- and out of the city from the suburbs to the east. Existing creative industries and institutions are identified within- and around the city as possible satellite institutions to the proposal, which will allow for students, trainees and experts in the fields of craft and design to be exposed to this new development.

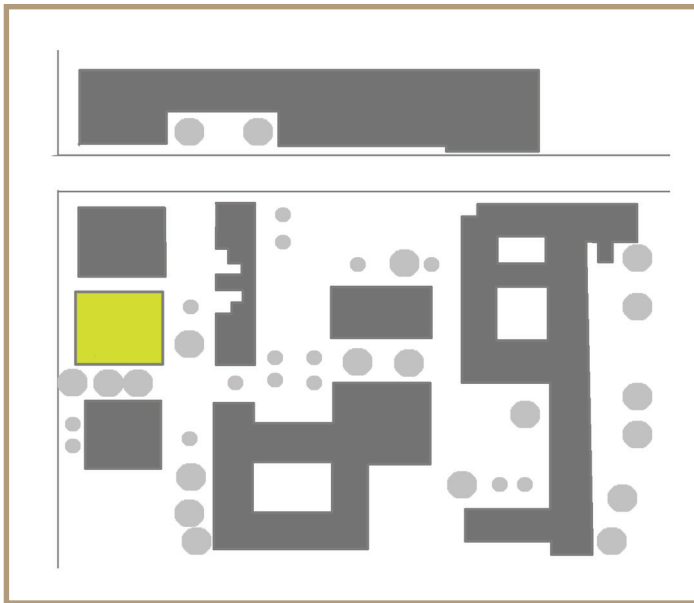


Figure 2.8: Diagrammatic site context showing adjacent buildings and streets (Author, 2011).



Figure 2.9: Interior of vacant building (Author, 2011).



2.4

CLIENT

It is assumed that the Department of Arts and Culture will act as client.

Creative products and services are centred in but not restricted to arts and culture, and are often found in purely commercial sectors such as clothing, textiles and furniture (Creative Industries Sector Report, 15 December 2007).

The Department of Arts and Culture proposes that the creative industries be manipulated in order for the transformation of the training-provider base for the 'production of culture' to take place in a contemporary way (D.A.C., 2010). This notion should be one that runs parallel with the prevailing context of production, which needs to be addressed.

The term "craft" has been identified by the client as an entity relating specifically to the immediate human scale and -use: "to create or produce a range of utilitarian or decorative items, on a small scale, mainly by hand" (D.A.C., 2010). This definition implicates the producer of the product, the end-user and subsequently, their role in the production process: handmade processes contribute to the value-added content of craft and should be retained as part of the production processes, even if machinery allows for a quicker outcome.

The client's relevance within the topic of discussion is substantiated by the fact that the Department of Arts and Culture's key objectives are the improvement, re-orientation and expansion of the arts and culture sector (D.A.C., 2006).

Furthermore, the client has enabled almost 11 000 beneficiaries to be provided with job opportunities primarily in the crafts sector, since 2005, catering to people from all cultural backgrounds throughout the country (D.A.C., 2006). The current aim of transforming the training-provider base lends itself to the idea of an educational facility that allows for conducive working environments in the creative industries.

Current programmes taking place in the department consist largely of training programmes, for example The Artists in Schools Project that enables established artists to go to schools and offer help in terms of new arts curricula (D.A.C., 2006). Other programmes include relationships with foreign sectors of the same nature, like the exchange programme in music that the department has with institutions in Norway.

The department recognizes architecture, craft, visual art and design (among others) as part of the Cultural Industries Growth Strategy (CIGS) and the author believes that the crafts sector, like the art and music sector, can establish similar initiatives and correspondence with international entities and other disciplines.

Various definitions imply that the human body is affected by- or affects the outcome of the craft, while being involved in the production of that craft on a physical-, social- and cultural level. Complementary definitions and perceptions give rise to more questions relating to the term: craft as a possible equal to art and craft as an opposing entity to machine production (in the case of an object: a predetermined outcome versus a crafted outcome) (Gore, 2004: 39).

These claims, varying in their deeper meanings, allow one to argue craft as an entity with a certain power. Art and literature are both seen as autonomous entities, acting independently and asserting their roles as symbol carriers conveying meaning to society with a power that has not yet been equalled by other 'professions' in the field of 'the arts' (Lipstadt, 2003: 391).

Craft has been given due recognition on a global scale, with a recent exhibition in New York, redefining the term as a part of design, with artefacts on show ranging from ceramics and jewellery to architecture and sculpture. The position of the exhibition is situated in the thought that professionals and artisans are equal, challenging conventional notions of distinctions made between the different strains of cultural production (Museum of Art and Design, 2010).



Figure 2.10: Craftswoman weaving the "Zulumama" chair design by Haldane Martin (www.haldanemartin.co.za).