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introduction

general background information



A building creates images that are linked with emotions. If the basic conditions of phenomenological theory is not fulfilled by a building, in that it should be a symbol of human existence or presence in the world, it would be unable to influence these feelings. It is only when a building fulfils these conditions that it can become more than just a sculpture (Pallasmaa 1986:452).

Brand (1994:3) said “First we shape our buildings, then they shape us and then we shape them_ *ad infinitum*.” Man transforms the environment in which he moves, but also adapts to and is influenced by physical environments. There exists a constant relationship and interaction between man and the physical context. Although the first contact we make with architecture is physical, the actual importance of architecture lies in the experience it creates and the influence it has on the behaviour of the user who occupies the space.

Sights, sounds, shapes, textures and smells all contribute to the experience of place. Pallasmaa (2005:11) stated that all the senses should be addressed simultaneously in ‘life-enhancing’ architecture.

Experience happens anywhere and everywhere, but the quality of experience can be manipulated, explored and applied to contribute to a specific feel and purpose of place.

The thesis will focus on how experience can become the basis for the design decision making process. The site and program, whilst important to any design, becomes the vehicle to be able to investigate and apply experience and therefore stands secondary to experience.

The study will investigate the regeneration of the existing steel vaults at the Ditsong: National Museum of Natural History, previously the Transvaal Museum of Natural History, in Paul Kruger Street, Pretoria. This will be done in conjunction with the exhibiting of natural history in order to revive interest in the museum as well as to assist the museum in the education of natural history. A secondary aim of the study is to give meaning to the field of interest beyond mere facts and change the perception of users in general about the subject of the programme.

1.1 Problem statement

Interior design plays an important role in how we experience space and what the lasting effect of the experience is on the user. Museum design, in general, is more concerned with portraying facts than what the experience of the user is within the exhibition space. Experience within built form easily becomes secondary to the objects and the aesthetics of a space.

Pallasmaa (1986:450) claims that planning has become a game of form.

To determine how specific programme related experience can be created through utilisation of the user's senses, the relationship between the human body, human behaviour and the physical environment will be investigated. The study will explore the creation of and experimentation with experience within a specific context and programme. The study will also look at the essential meaning of experience and the role interior design can play in this exploration.

The user of a building or space should not be seen as an observer in space, but as an active participant. A building can only be successful if the user can interact and feel comfortable and use the building as it was intended by the architect or designer. Tadao Ando said:

"Architecture is deemed complete only upon the intervention of the human that experiences it. In other words, architectural space becomes alive only in correspondence with the human presence that perceives it in our contemporary culture" (Ando in Jodidio 2007:13).

Pallasmaa (1986:454) states "An impressive architectural experience sensitizes our whole physical and mental receptivity."

Where human experience and consciousness take on material and spatial form, embodied space is located (Altman 1975:sp). The built environment is too easily limited to concrete physical space and objects. Human social behaviour in relation to the physical environment and the influence the environment has on the user are aspects of the profession that should be given the same weight as the physical and aesthetic. Interior architecture has so much more to offer

in terms of sensory engagement and quality of experience. The constant interaction between the user and architecture, between skin and material, allows for exploration and development. Because the user is a multi-sensory being, experience in architectural space should be a collaboration of all the senses fused into each other to create a heightened experience. Phenomenology and environmental psychology will be investigated in chapter 3 as theory of experience.

Space, light or the absence thereof, objects in space, materials used, sound, smell, context, scale and time are all different elements that influence experience. All these elements contribute to or demote the experience of place and have to be taken into account in the design of space. These elements influence each other and can be used together with a specific end goal in mind, to create a precise experience, quality or sense of place. Attention will be given to these elements individually as well as in conjunction with each other.

The aim of the study is to create an intervention that could enhance experience of place through specific investigation and implementation. In doing so, it will enrich the interior design field and inform it as to how experience can be created, enhanced and exploited. Even though the study will be specific to the programme and site, it will act as a case study and aid in creating awareness of the importance of quality of experience and the exploitation thereof.



1.2 Project aims

- Create spaces where quality of experience is the primary focus
- Enhance experience through stimulating the user's senses and encouraging interaction
- Create an experience that adds to the exhibition of natural history and give meaning beyond mere facts
- Instigate a change in perception of the museum as a whole and strengthen its identity

1.3 Research methods

Other than literature and precedent studies, the heuristic research method will be used as informant for design decisions. Experience will be investigated in terms of specific elements and how these elements were applied in existing buildings.

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The relationship and communication between the user and the physical environment, as well as the interaction of body and material, will be investigated and analysed and used to influence the design of experience. This will be applied to guide, educate and affect people within and through interior design. Experience will be created in interior space for the specific programme of exhibition beyond mere facts. Behaviour will be manipulated and influenced through interior design and the use and application of elements of experience such as light, material, object, time, space, sound and smell. User experience as driving force in the creation of interior space becomes the primary focus of the study.