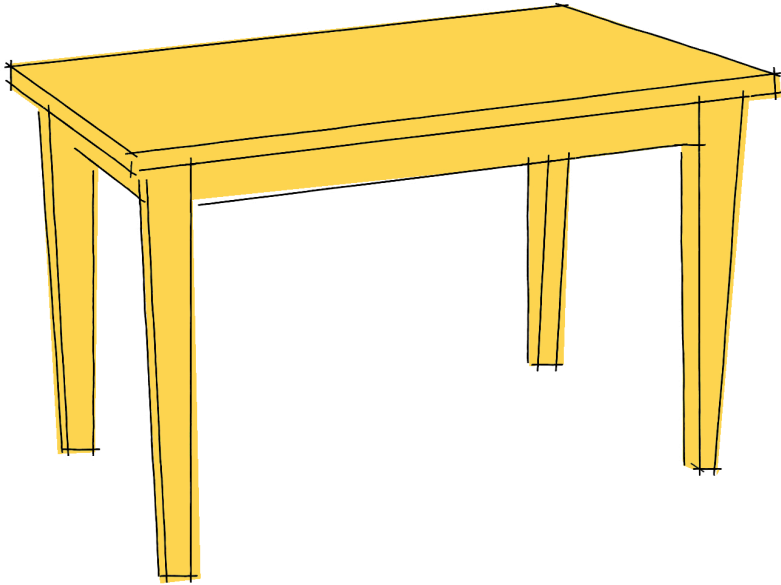


# 02. theoretical argument



# engaging architecture

Architecture is a profession that should be preoccupied to transfer anthropology to the built environment. The study of humans in their environment and how they interact with another within routine and ritual is of essence to design suitable architecture. Appropriate architecture should sustain life in the present and the future. The building that is designed today is the inheritance this generation leaves to the next, architects should be the ambassadors for that future.

To separate life from architecture so that it is abstracted into contradictions, manifesto and simplifications is to dust aside the purpose of architecture; to sustain life and give shelter to people and their belongings. This is confirmed by Robert A. M. Stern: “Architects need to get out of the narrow confines of ideology and into the fresh air of the real world a great deal more than most of them do.” (Cheng 2003; 21) Architecture is primal a physical element for the habitat for humans, not a theory.

Architecture is maybe taking itself much too seriously.

## INTRODUCTION

Architecture should house life in the true meaning of the word. The problem with the contemporary design of buildings is that it is preoccupied with form and program and not with the humane relationship to it. We design life out of it.

The study field of Anthropology was always perceived as the study of secluded tribes, this has changed in the 20th century when anthropologists also included other disciplines. Anthropology, according to Cris Shore is “an understanding of other cultures and value systems and how they work; critical awareness of the importance of social context in shaping thought and action...” Human’s behaviour of the everyday must be studied; these have certain systems of social movements and programmatic requirements. (Architectural Design 1996: vol66 p7)

Buildings or spaces enclose the users’ actions by establishing a stage that acts as a reminder for the repeated actions that are known as rituals. Peter Blundell Jones reasons that if one looks at art as a cultural system, the difference of a bicycle shed and that of Lincoln Cathedral that Nikolaus Pevsner asserted can’t be followed. The difference between these two examples is that they lie at opposite ends of the same scale within a cultural setting. For anthropologists the recurring human behaviour are omnipresent and will have a constant meaning, whether in a cathedral or a bicycle shed. (Architectural Design 1996: vol66 p22)

There is a real need for architecture to engage imaginatively with the patterns of life as it is lived in different situations, both the everyday and the celebratory level, the latter punctuating and giving rhythm and meaning to the former. To fully understand human life and to determine the basic anthropological paradigm of man, this dissertation will look at consumption of food as the metaphorical medium for integrating architecture and everyday life.

## WHY FOOD?

*“It is absurd to think of eating as a sort of fuelling-up process necessary to enable us to go off and do other quite unrelated things. There are no unrelated things. Man is man in an environment, and eating is one of the principle forms of commerce between ourselves and the world. It is also a principle factor in constituting our relations with other people. I must insist again that there is a great deal of truth in the saying that man is what he eats. He craves his surroundings into the shape with his teeth.”* (Versfeld 1991:84)

Food guides our daily lives in repetitive sequences of social interaction, i.e. meals provide an order to the everyday. Although it is an omnipresent ritual that sustains human life, it is treated as a matter of fact. The same applies to buildings, it is the shell of our daily actions and yet the man on the street does not think about it every day. Spaces guide our movement and relationship to the earth in a very subtle manner. Food guides our routine and connection with the natural world. This daily sequence and perception of food may shed some light on the matter of creating architecture for the everyday and of the everyday.

## THE TABLE

The table establishes the centre of community life, the site of common daily prayer... (Horwitz; Friedman: p122) Around the dining table a number of transactions take place. These transactions form a ritual and rhythm in a certain context. In view of this table and architecture one can explore the transaction in both the relationship humans have to one another and the situation which the table and architecture creates.

## The relationship on different levels:

### The relation with fellow beings:

The act to buy, cook and eat food is a pivoting point for social interaction. Food functions as catalyst for the social transaction between participants of a meal. Even in contemporary society the meal is still the most social event of everyday. However, the meal functions as a dual event that can be the daily routine of eating but also be the celebration of a special occasion. The scale of cultural setting already mentioned by Jones is applicable. Special meals celebrate friendship and anniversaries as the everyday meal is just a few scores down the social context. (Architectural Design 1996: vol66 p22) Regardless of the score of social context, the meal creates a structure that can accommodate chaos. This structure at the table consists of the table top and the plate where an array of different meals can be accommodated. Just like a floor and walls create a bowl/space for different functions to occur. The food that is served on the table is subject to seasonal availability and a meal must be planned accordingly. For human comfort the seasons must be taken in consideration to create spaces of comfort.

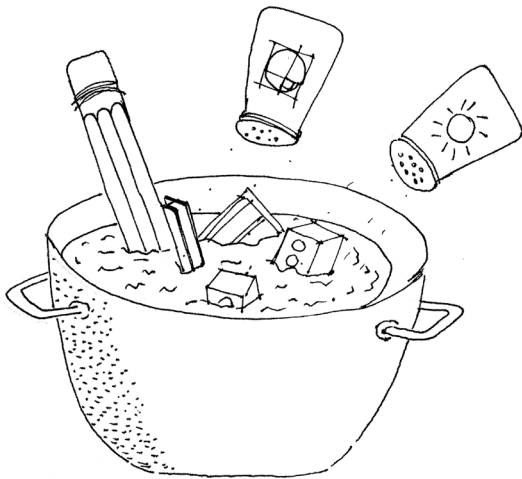


fig 2.1

### The relation of the dead and the living:

When food is served at the table one can not avoid the fact that food was once alive, whether livestock or vegetation. In this transaction of the dead to the living you become aware of the importance of sacrifice and how you need it to sustain life and growth. Food and drink is internalised, consumed by the living. It seems as a brutal act of killing, but is of essence for survival. As Steele states: “The rituals of food transcend doctrine, myth or belief: they carry deeper messages, about life itself. Nothing could speak more eloquently of our basic commonality: of what it means, in the end, to be human.” (Steele2008:211) In the built environment the role of the dead and the living is reversed. The buildings are constructed of dead material, but consume its inhabitants and in that way, the building or space is maintained. Architecture needs the living otherwise it is spoilt. However, the users also consume the space. To create a place that gives enough opportunity which will enable a place to grow, not in a physical matter but in meaning and reputation. In a conclusion to a study of squatter settlements by John Turner and others they found that regardless of the

poverty of the inhabitants, the flexibility, adaptability, and self-determination of these settlements – the ability they provided for their inhabitants to express themselves in building – made them better in some ways than American standardised housing, where the high level of technological development prevented individual involvement in the creation of dwellings. (Berke1997:98) This involvement is a building consumed.

### The relation to the producer/cook/creator:

This relationship is not evident or even intensely experienced by the eater. In this instance the cook is a chef in a restaurant, separated from the party at the table.

The creator of the dishes, the thought and recipe is a mystery to the users. There are a few associations between the chef and the architect. Both work is done in secret and takes intuition to complete. The different ingredients or elements have little meaning unless it is organised in the correct quantity and proportion. The planning of a dish or a space is for the enjoyment of others, the chef may use spices, heat and measuring cups while the architect uses texture, orientation and dimension. The design and cooking is a service for fellow men and that of the environment. Friedman notes: “Each test exercises the question of good form: the first test, which requires knowledge of anatomy, enables the master chef to measure technical understanding and imagination; the second, which requires knowledge of custom, enables him to evaluate ethical disposition. ...The chef needs someone who can do more than transform food from a fact into a poem. This latter test therefore demonstrates not so much artistic skill as suitability to context. He knows that however imaginative or unwieldy the ratio of carrot to festivity, culinary art always elaborates the immutable criterion, ‘fit to be eaten’.” (Horwitz; Friedman: p116) In architecture it would be ‘fit to be lived’

### The relationship of the produce to consumer:

This transaction takes place before it comes to the dinner table, yet the produce was first on the market table. It is here that not only produce but also ideas, advice and camaraderie are traded. At the market one is confronted with an array of choices and to survive the shopkeeper must perform to sell his or her goods. According to Kirchenblatt-Gimblett, performance encompasses social practices – whether customs or laws, ritual or etiquette – and thus composes what Pierre Bourdieu calls the habitus of

everyday life. When rituals are displayed, when participants are invited to exercise discernment and appreciation, 'food events move towards the theatrical,' a convergence of taste as a sensory experience and taste as an aesthetic faculty. Like the table itself, food stages events, congregating and segregating people, and food becomes an architecture that inhabits the body. (Horwitz: Horwitz p11) Every person around a table has a role to play to make the meal successful. A building or space in a city whether new or old has a specific role to play in the performance of the city. If a place is so designed that the dweller buys into it and performs his/her role, the architecture of the everyday makes it a profitable space.

### **The relation to the immediate habitat; the situation:**

#### **The situation of chance:**

Situations could be planned, or could happen by chance. The problem is however, how one goes about to design or plan situations, which must still be functional, as chance. Guy Debord "proposed concepts such as derive (literally, "drift"), a semi programmed wandering intended to bring new urban connections and insights through displacement and dislocation; psychogeography, the study of manipulation to environments to create new ambiances and new psychic possibilities; and situation, a spatial/temporal event staged to catalyse libratory transformation." (Berke1997:20)

#### **The transaction to the cultural situation:**

'A certain Cuisine is a function of the genius loci, the spirit of the place. And one who says "place" also says "season" one who says "earth" also says "heaven". I find it impossible to abstract the dish from its environment. (Horwitz; Weiss: p26) Any culture has signature dishes and customs regarding food. One could study this phenomenon by looking at the indigenous livestock and vegetables available as well as the influence of other cultures on the culinary tradition of a society through travel and trade. The exchange of the food of different cultures, whether, African, Indian or even Asian, gives the cultural make-up a diversity that add meaning to the landscape. This can form an analogy to Critical Regionalism. This dissertation will not study this in depth.

#### **The transaction to the immediate context:**

The table does not enclose space but by the presence of the table a certain program can be utilised in a space. In the same sense how a build intervention in a landscape (whether rural or urban) can give meaning and program to a place. When a building is introduced into a urban context such as this market, transaction between the market and the city is vital. The presence of the market in the space of the city provides, just as the table in a space, opportunity to enrich the urban landscape and to give new meaning and program in the city. The architecture must be executed so that the situation of that area is enhanced so that users can consume the space with delight.

#### **The transaction to the remote landscape:**

Considering food, the meal's dependence on the remote landscape is recalled by flowers at the table's centre, testifying to the interdependence of sun and soil, grasses, grain and grazing. The table – much like a building site or even a city – incorporates the farmland and field in a relationship that bear on the person having the meal. (Horwitz; Leatherbarrow: p219) The body is centred round the table but the different elements on the table makes the body relate to the natural world; the salt of the sea, steak from the land surrounded by the potatoes, carrots and apples from the earth; the tablecloth and napkin from the cotton fields, the plates and dishes that represents the earth. On the topography the elements are used for the construction of space; the steel from the furnace, the wood from the land, the dwellers from the dust. In amalgamation of the above are related and forms part of the larger landscape. To fit in, to be part of, to consume and to be consumed by the landscape.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The table is a place of related things. Every person has a unique transaction to others and that the architecture and so also to the environment. If the table is architecture, it must be the right dimension and be placed right so that maximum enjoyment and opportunity may be created for transactions on a number of levels. This makes the table functional everyday.