Chapter 2 - The Greater Context

Figure 2.1 Digital collage illustrating positioning of Pretoria extending the skin
2.1 Introduction

Pretoria is a bustling CBD with unlimited potential. From nine to five, music blares from stores, vendors line the streets, pedestrians dodge one another and many people hand out flyers or take ID photographs. Within Church Square people gather around the plinth of Paul Kruger to listen to a discussion or even take part in a debate, some may pop into Café Riche to listen to the music of the quartet. The opportunities are endless – one can even buy flowers on the way home from Church Square. Anything could be around the next corner, and ‘chances are always that something surprising might be seen, or that a beautiful or interesting place might be discovered’ (Plenaaar, 2004: 1). Any paying visitor would be disappointed if it were any other way.

One such exciting place waiting to be re-discovered is the Capitol Theatre on the south western corner of Church Square; a building which poses an opportunity to rework what was into something even better. This thesis therefore attempts to re-capture the grandeur of the theatre without restoration, but rather through adaptive re-use. The resultant design attempts to draw passing pedestrians into its intrigue if only for a couple of seconds on their way past. It is for this reason that it has been designed as a platform for performance, thereby setting the stage for an experience never to be forgotten.

Figure 2.2 Digital collage illustrating street activity around the watchful eyes of the statue of Paul Kruger in Church Square
Figure 2.3 Digital collage of Map of Pretoria(na), 2009.

extending the skin

//8//
2.2 Non-Physical Context – a brief history of Pretoria

Around 1840 J. G. S. Bronkhorst settled alongside a stream in an area called the Fountains Valley. In 1854 Marthinus Wessel Pretorius bought the farm from Bronkhorst. The growing community of Elandspoort and the valley petitioned successfully for a ‘kerkplaas’. The kerkplaas was the place where the travelling dominee called at intervals to celebrate nagmaal and officiate weddings and baptisms (Allen, 1971: 8). In 1855 the kerkplaas became the town of Pretoria named after Pretorius’ father. Incidentally Andries Pretorius is also represented as a hero at the battle of Blood River. Several versions of the name were discussed and the name Pretoria Philadelphia was agreed upon. However, the second part of the name was soon dropped (Allen, 1971: 8).
2.3 Development of the city

1. In the article *Urbs Quadrata* (1989), Gerrit Jordaan identifies principles that played a key role in the layout of Pretoria’s inner city as well as universal aspects that further define the structure of a city.

Pretoria is located in a ‘classical’ landscape between two mountain ranges. The ridges naturally delineate the northern and southern boundaries of the city whereas the Apies and Steenhoven rivers define the eastern and western boundaries.

2. The decision to establish the city in this area was based mainly on the availability of water as well as protection against natural forces. The centre of the city coincides with the junctions of two primary movement routes from neighbouring farms. Accessibility to the church was of major importance. As a result, Church Street and Paul Kruger Street (previously Market Street) were created and Church Square was established at their crossing point.

3. The mandala, a primary cosmic ordering principle, was used as a generator for defining the city centre as well as subsequent layouts. The spatial layout of the city is a result of the *Urbs Quadrata*, based on the Roman grid system. Within this system, urban settlements are quartered by two intersecting axes.

4. From the main structuring axes, each quarter of the city was further divided into a hierarchical grid system of roads and streets defining the city blocks. The natural layout of the landscape obviously influenced the extent and direction to which the city developed. The spatial relationship of Church Square set a precedent for the further placement of public and institutional buildings. Religious, commercial, banking and governmental institutions were amongst the civic structures that gave rise to the architectural development pattern of the inner city that we see today.

/10/
Church Square became the heart of Pretoria, the "focal point from which it all grew" (Allen, 1971: 22). The first church was built in the centre of the clearing of Lewis Devereux and William Skinner. The square became the commercial centre of the town where markets and auctions were often held. In addition, it also became the social core where people worshipped and met. The Hole-in-the-Wall, the first bar in Pretoria, was situated on the north eastern block of Church Square (Allen, 1971: 23).
The urban fabric of the CBD, in terms of the city grid is very rigid, whilst the social fabric of the city is fragmented. As a city, Pretoria has a mixed identity. The fact that it serves as the administrative capital of the country imbues it with an authoritative role, which surpasses its social role/identity. Within this social fragmentation, most businesses and places of interest have repositioned themselves to the east of the city centre (do Vale, 2007: 33). This has had a major impact on the city. By day it still takes on its authoritative role, the bigger half of its ego, whilst at night it recedes to its more introverted self. This city, with all its potential and historic importance has reduced itself to a mono-city; a fact that has impacted on both its social and urban fabric.

Church Square plays a significant role in the social identity of the city, but has to an extent lost most of its previous cultural importance. This thesis will therefore attempt to employ the re-use and restoration of the Capitol Theatre as a catalyst for the revival of Church Square as a cultural hub within the city. This space should become a place for both travellers and residents to pause, be entertained and become entertainers. It becomes a space that, through the exploration of the proposed framework, SchizoCity, will link to other public spaces, thereby creating an open spatial network that will extend to include cultural and artistic institutions throughout the CBD.

/13/
2.4 The Atmospheric Theatre

The atmospheric theatre was developed by John Eberson in the 1920’s. During his architectural career, five hundred atmospheric theatres were designed around the world. The atmospheric theatre gave the impression that the audience was seated in a great open air amphitheatre in which architectural scenography converged with natural topography in a liminal exchange between interior and exterior’ (Bruno, 2007: 49).

The majority of these theatres were built between World War I and the Great Depression. This was a decadent era of flappers and Fitzgerald’s Gatsby. At this time the cinema became well established, and atmospheric theatres showcased both live performances as well as screened shows (Naylor, 1981: 14). These theatres not only provided entertainment but became the heart of the nightlife in cities, providing relief during a difficult time. An atmospheric theatre is a haptic phenomenon in which a constant play on surface exists. Whilst in the theatre, each spectator must lose their individuality in order to fuse themselves into complete unity with the setting as well as the performers (Bruno, 2007: 47).
The atmospheric theatre becomes an extension of the urban fabric. It is however a mysterious realm as opposed to the reality of the street. Street users are temporarily removed from the sidewalk, becoming spectators within a theatre, architecturally shaped by extravagant decoration. It is ‘a place of excess and excessive space to be enjoyed whilst strolling’ (Bruno, 2007: 48).
2.5 Physical Context
Figure 7.23 View of Church Square from the Transvaal Provincial Administration. The roof of the Capitol Theatre auditorium is visible in bottom centre, 2009.
"The Capitol Theatre is dedicated to the Citizens of Pretoria, to their Wives and their Children in the hope that within its walls they may find relief from the cares and worries of the everyday world by passing through the magic portals into the world of Make-believe." (Opening pamphlet, 1931).

The Capitol Theatre was designed by London architect F. Rogers Cooke in 1931 for African Consolidated Theatres. The theatre is built in an Italian Renaissance style and is described by Cooke as an 'atmospheric theatre'. When being designed three main purposes were borne in mind: the presentation of perfect 'talking' pictures, dramatic performances and instrumental music. The early days of the theatre were marked by public admiration and the palatial auditorium was a realm of wonder to get lost in. An army of ushers, wearing buckled shoes, silk stockings, satin knee-breeches and monkey jackets would lead patrons to their seats (Fourie, 1994).
The foyer and auditorium contained frescos, busts and striking chandeliers enhancing the grandeur of the Capitol. The theatre was intended to be supported by the Capitol Hotel, which was never realised. During the depression the grandeur of the hotel started to decline and in 1955 it was bought by the Transvaal Provincial Administration. The intention was to demolish the theatre and erect high-rise buildings (Fourie, 1994). This however was never realised as in 1971 it was found that the TPA building stood on 23 different unconsolidated blocks and in 1989 the scheme was cancelled (Fourie, 1994).

In November 1981, the Capitol was renovated into a parking lot. Initially, this was intended to be a temporary measure until the Capitol and the Poynton building were demolished. This demolition never occurred however, and the parking lot still persists today. In 1985 it was reported that the theatre was to become a museum for provincial affairs, and in the same year the Wurlitzer organ was returned to the theatre (Fourie, 1994). Most recently the Foyers of the theatre were converted into a nightclub, for which the auditorium provided the parking. It is rumoured that the nightclub was closed and re-located due to damage caused to the interior of the foyers which had been restored five years prior.
CAPITOL

PROGRAM

1. Voorspel op die Wurlitzer-orrel .... "Light Cavalry" .... Sappie
3. Trompetzoekal.
5. Die wereld se jongste gebeurtenisse in beeld en klink Pathe Sound News African Mirror
7. Geletterde vertolking en instrumentale uiteenstelling van die geweldige Wurlitzer deur Max Bruce.

POUSE

10. Seleksie op die Wurlitzer-orrel.
11. 'n Skitterende weergawe van klank, teaterle en harmonie "THE CITY OF SONG,"

met Jan Kiepura, Betty Stockfield en Hugh Wasefield in die hoofrolle.

SLOT


Figure 2.27 Original opening performance program, Capitol Theatre 1931.
PRETORIA

PROGRAMME

1. Overture on The Wurlitzer Organ .. “Light Cavalry” .. 500 p.

2. Miss Aimee Parkinson will sing “Land of Hope and Glory.”

3. Fanfare of Trumpets.


5. The World’s Latest Events in Sight and Sound:
   Pathe Sound News.
   African Mirror.


7. Pictorial and Instrumental Exposition of The Mighty Wurlitzer by Max Bruce.


9. Comedy.

   INTERMISSION

10. Selection on the Wurlitzer Organ.

11. A brilliant presentation of sound, scene and harmony,
   “THE CITY OF SONG,”
   featuring Jan Klepura, Betty Stockfield, Hugh Wakefield.

FINIS

Projectionist: A. E. PEACEL

House Engineer: R. H. SMURR.
2.6 Capitol Theatre as building

The Capitol Theatre consists of:
1. The façade
2. The Entrance Foyer
3. The Grand Foyer
4. The Balcony
5. The Auditorium and Stage

2.6.1 The Facade

The theatre auditorium was not intended to have a façade as it was concealed by the building in front of it. The addition of the façade took place in the later phases of construction (Fourie, 1994).

2.6.2 The Entrance Foyer

This foyer projects from the main building mass in an easterly direction, and was originally supposed to puncture through the Grand Foyer and connect the Capitol Hotel to the street. The foyer is a colonnaded space with two secondary niches. Accessed through glass doors, it is lined with Corinthian columns. These columns, raised on plinths, have no fluting and support a frieze, thereby creating the illusion of an Italian boulevard (Fourie, 1994).

2.6.3 The Grand Foyer

P. Rogers Cooke describes the Grand Foyer as ‘a design to create surprise. The unusual proportions, the beauty of the lofty colonnade, the architectural detail, decoration and lighting have been combined with beauty and dignity, so awakening a sense of pleased anticipation before entering the theatre itself’ (Cooke, 1931)

The foyer consists of a double volume articulated at its boundaries with Corinthian columns. Each column has a pier and pilaster, dividing the space into equal parts. The columns within the Grand Foyer are fluted, contrasting with the entrance foyer. The columns are not load-bearing and support vase-like luminaries. A grand staircase leads up to the mezzanine promenade from which lounges and the theatre balcony could be accessed (Fourie, 1994).
2.6.4 The Balcony

This area of the theatre was accessed from the mezzanine promenade via two corridors and could seat 750 patrons. One of the greatest tasks in the building of the theatre was this balcony which was not permitted to have any supporting columns. The weight is supported by a steel girder. This girder was erected using over 5000 rivets and carries 550 tons (Fourie, 1994).

2.6.5 The Auditorium and Stage.

It is the interior of the Auditorium where the theatre earns its title as an atmospheric theatre. The space creates the illusion of an Italian Renaissance street during the evening. The skyline close to the stage is formed by a parapet which is lined with a trellis creating the illusion of a roofscape, softened by artificial cypress trees and vines (Fourie, 1994). The domed ceiling of the auditorium
provides the illusion of a clear night sky. The dome is taken right across to the back of the stalls, completing the illusion (Fourie, 1994). The Proscenium arch was implemented to provide a frame for the stage, it being the most important component of the theatre.

The structure of the auditorium consists of a reinforced concrete frame which is filled-in with Kirkness bricks. The dome of the auditorium consists of a lattice of steel girders which support a concrete roof slab. This slab is covered with several layers of bitumen and felt. The ceiling is suspended from the girders by a framework of steel ribs (Fourie, 1994).

2.6.6 Sculptures and reliefs

2.6.6.1 Fortune on horseback

The, depicts the mythological character of Fortune atop a rearing horse statue stood at the end of the grand foyer. Fortune and the horse are carved from white marble and stand on a green marble base, the statue slowly rotated on its base to be observed from all angles (Fourie, 1994).
2.6.6.2 Roman man
A mass produced plaster statue, assumed to have stood in a niche on the eastern wall of the auditorium.

2.6.6.3 Woman with raised elbow
Brought along as a pairing to the Fortune on horseback, similarly carved from white marble with a green marble base. The statue depicts a Hellenistic woman in loosely draped clothing which she clutches to her breast.

2.6.6.4 The four nymphs
The main sculptures within the auditorium.
- Nymph with cenchoe and goblet
  Placed within the southern niche of the western wall. She holds a cenchoe in one arm and a goblet in the other.
- Naked nymph holding drapery
  Placed within a niche in the eastern wall in front of the water fountain. She stands, half nude, covering the front of her body with a drapery.
- Nymph with raised with arm
  Placed within a niche of the western wall, the statue depicts a woman covered in a drapery from her lower abdomen to her feet, with one arm raised.
- Nymph with broken arm
  Placed within the second niche on the eastern wall the statue was damaged, but remained in place until the closure of the theatre.

2.6.6.5 Three busts
Situatd in the Grand Foyer within the mezzanine promenade.
- Man looking down
- Woman looking to her right
- Man looking sideways

2.6.6.6 Patera
A relief found above all the doorways leading from the Grand Foyer into the auditorium. Oak leaves and acorns are used to decorate the Patera, just as the classical Acanthus has been used.

2.6.6.7 Proscenium Masks
The masks of the proscenium consist of classical Medallion masks as well as Harlequin masks. Both are coated in gold paint and are framed by a circular wreath.

2.6.6.8 African Theatre Crest
The crest is situated atop the proscenium directly in the centre of the arch. It bears the letters 'A' and 'T', below the crest a festoon of fruit hangs over the proscenium. The crest is topped with a royal crown, containing a Greek cross, and flanked by my French Fleur-de-lis.
extending the skin

Figure 2.45 Digital model and collage depicting the north and south edges of Capitol Theatre city block
Figure 2.46: Digital model and collage depicting the east and west edges of Capitol Theatre city block.
Figure 2.47 Digital model illustrating vehicular activity of Church Square.

Figure 2.48 Shadow analysis Summer solstice.

Figure 2.49 Shadow analysis Summer solstice.

extending the skin
Figure 2.50 Digital model illustrating the pedestrian activity of Church Square
Figure 2.51 Photo montage of the Capitol in its current state, 2009
extending the skin
Figure 2.52 Photo montage of the Capitol in its current state, 2009 extending the skin
Figure 2.53 Original sectional drawing and photo collage through the auditorium with view toward stage illustrating spatial qualities and texture.
Figure 2.54 Original sectional drawing of auditorium and Grand Foyer. The diagram illustrates the volumetric space and hierarchy of the theatre from floor to dome.

Figure 2.55 Original sectional drawing and photo collage through the auditorium and Grand Foyer illustrating spatial qualities and texture
Through neglect the building is no longer what it was. It has been stripped of its sculptures, and the frescos have been concealed under a new layer of paint. Its former glory is left only in the remnants of the theatre’s peeling paint and dust covered chairs. Glimpses of the auditorium are allowed only through the nuances of natural light piercing parts of the building. The exterior of the theatre auditorium is ominous in its appearance, differing from that of the TPA. The vacancy of expression on the façade acts as a mask for the elaborate interior of the theatre; its cladding does not seem to yield to a particular architectural order.

The Capitol appears to have an alter-ego. The exterior serves to protect and conceal the elaborate interior of the building. Upon passing through the exterior skin of the building, one is immediately transported into the mysterious, artificial world that is the interior space. No longer used to enhance theatrical performances and films, the now derelict interior has not lost its sense of mystery. The alter-ego of the more brutal exterior...
protects the fragile interior. It is this combination of two varying orders that defines the buildings potential; two architectural entities within one architectural entity - the interior. When one is enhanced, the other may remain, feeding off the 'other'. The building does not impose a strong exterior because all the intrinsic values are captured inside the building (Viljoen, 1990: 31). The interior space, even through the additional layers of paint, is the authentic entity as it has a specific identity, a sense of place.