06

theoretical approach

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"It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent".
- Walter Benjamin quoted in Pensky (2004:177).

A JOURNEY OF IMAGES & IMAGINARIES

Architecture, as an artifice for physical city making, also serves as a manifestation of social practice, with the ability to translate or construct collective fears, desires, aspirations and wishes. Under the conditions of capitalism, architecture and the progression thereof presents the appearance of eternal repetition (Pensky 2004:179) where the principled manifestos of Modernism have failed by fashioning one encompassing utopia upon the ruins of another. Focused on mobility and connectivity, social life in the city has become an arrangement of images that simulate and mimic signs of a European spectacle (Bremner 2010:81). This culture, defined by instant gratification and displays of wealth, has resulted in illusory consumerist enclaves of escape, removed from the everyday. As such, the resultant architecture becomes a collection of pleasurable moments, composed of layers of falsehood.
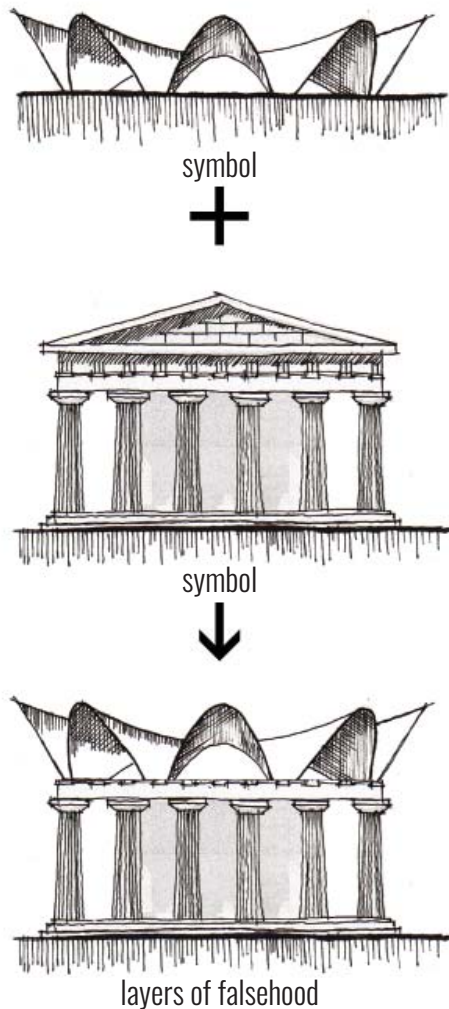
In imagining the city differently, new architectural intervention requires a level of agility in order to explore the breaks, gaps and insurgent domains of contemporary living (Bremner 2010:102). In developing this agility towards architectural production, the discourse was required to establish an approach that accepts deviation and paradoxical information. This positioning would implore capability in addressing the inherent mobility of migrant communities, negotiating the extremes of forms from the past with those of contemporary spatial practices, and creating a susceptibility to modification.

Figure 6.1: Photograph: Montecasino Hotel & Casino, Johannesburg, South Africa exemplifies the qualities of simulation and mimicry. (Source: https://d2qk001qea2413.cloudfront.net/681981528/cms/cache/1680x942/41/3736-41a8a97521d531b61e4 4c74ff4123ddc.jpg)

Seeing Space

the experience of exploration

symbol

+

symbol

↓

layers of falsehood

As generally unseen, officially ignored members of society, migrants occupy and manoeuvre in spheres neglected by official investigation. Their daily routines and schedules in the city are covert in an urban space that has become vectoral rather than dimensional (Bremner 2010:103). Coming and going, in transit to and from, the encounters of urban life have been dominated by the experience of the route and of travel, instead of home and destination. Viewed as explorers of space, encountering and seeing an array of imagery along the journey, migrants imagine space differently. Architecture no longer becomes the morphological, physical organisation of public and private, inside and outside, but instead amounts to a cluster of routes and circuits, of stops and extensive tracts between, of numerous places concurrently (Bremner 2010:105).

This perception or reading of space while meandering along the circuits and routes of the city fosters an appreciation for the spatial practices associated with nineteenth century *flanerie* or the mid-twentieth-century *dérive*. These methods could be argued as naïve, outdated or limited in our contemporary context (Bremner 2010:102). However, if one views migrants as symbols of present-day modernity; mediating settings of vulnerability, uncertainty, unpredictability and insecurity in their daily

Figure 6.2: The combination of symbols of stature results in layers of falsehood.

endeavours, then multiple possibilities for the use of architectural imagination and practice arise. One such possibility, that guides the theoretical approach of this research, is Walter Benjamin's "Dialectical Image".

The Dialectics of Seeing
a montage of opposition

Developed in the 1930s by Walter Benjamin, a philosopher and critical theorist, the "Dialectical Image" was meant as a critique of historical interpretation (Pensky 2004:178). Disillusioned by the collective dream-like slumber induced by the perpetual repetition of the capitalistic production of commodities, Benjamin postulated that historical truth could be presented through creating a tension between past and present that became immediately apparent in the form of images. The desired effect was that these images would awaken consumers from the continuum of accepting repetition, thus critically exposing and seeing the world for what it was: a dream-like world of material well-being assured 333by the consumption of commodities. Hence "Dialectical Images" are perceptible encounters of history or heterogeneous moments of truth. (Pensky 2004:187).
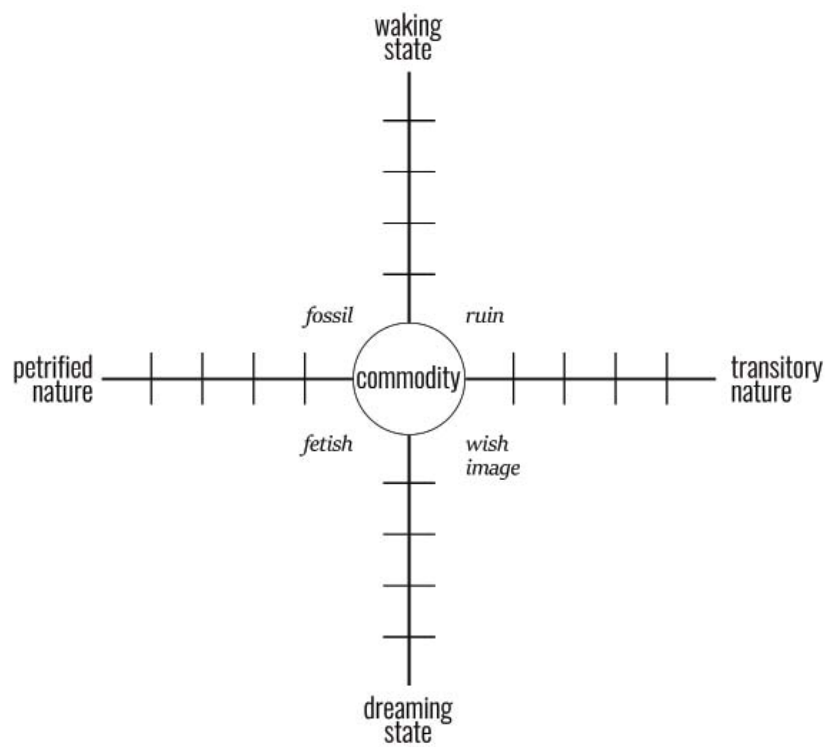
Furthermore, Benjamin recognised that the characteristic cultural styles of an era are jointly cultural and economic, symbolic and material, and as such, proposed a process of montage to negotiate the production of Dialectical Images. This juxtaposition of the contradictory facets of commodities is made more accessible by the model developed from Benjamin by Susan Buck-Morss (Auerbach 2007:3). In clarifying Benjamin's thoughts, the model places commodities at the intersection of four connected yet differing characteristics, namely: fetish and fossil, and utopia (wish image) and ruin. Situated along two axes of nature and culture, these facets impose a complex interplay between past and present, forgotten and remembered.
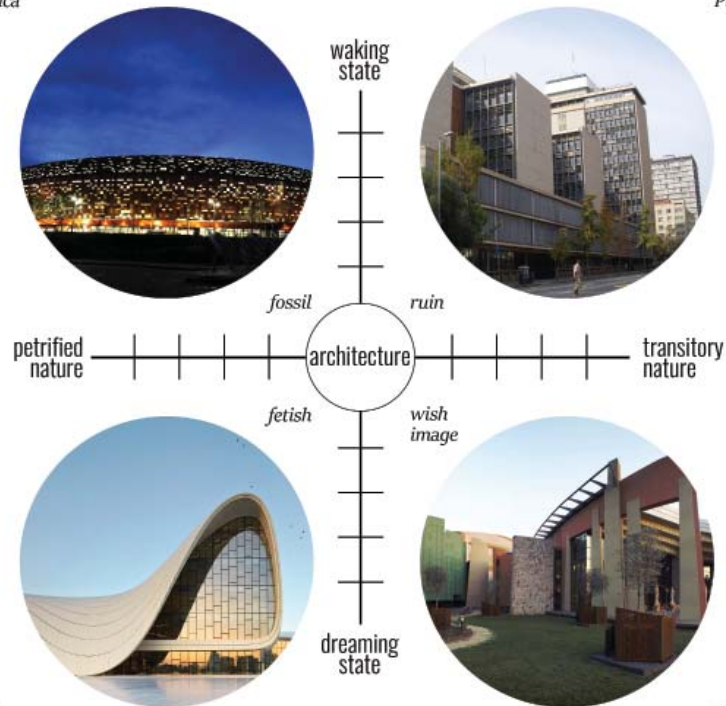

Figure 6.3: Urban migrant as *Flâneur*.
(Source: Gavarni, 1842 viewed 05 May 2016 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fl%C3%A2neur#/media/File:Rosler-LeFlaneur.jpg, adapted by Author).

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Figure 6.4: A diagram of the dialectical relationship between nature and culture.
(Source: Buck-Morss, 1989, adapted by Author).

Figure 6.5: Architectural examples of fossil, fetish, wish image and ruin (Sources: **top left:** http://www.africalist.directory/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/2.jpg, **top right:** Author, 2015, **bottom right:** http://www.archidatum.com/media/7208/fnb-westbank-building-_mma-mds-cnn-fairbairn-architects-02.jpg, **bottom left:** http://images.adsttc.com/media/images/5452/db24/e58e/ce64/0100/0105/large_jpg/52852152e8e44e8e7200015f_heydar-aliyev-center-zaha-hadid-architects_hac_exterior_photo_by_hufton_crow_-1-.jpg?1414716185, adapted by Author).

Architectural Applicability
*finding theoretical relevance*

In applying the above argument to the architectural investigation of the scheme, it is argued that architecture is a commodity of cultural production that is subjected to the same dialectical relationship explored by Benjamin's facets of fetish and fossil, wish image and ruin. Considering the historic value of the Old Native Reception Depot, which has changed with the passage of time, it is reasoned that an intervention on the site has the ability to expose the historical truth while attempting to facilitate the wishes of the collective community. By engaging the same process of montage, the theoretical investigation will be directed by firstly assessing the existing building under each of the aspects of commodities, and, secondly it will utilise the same elements of fetish, fossil, wish image, and ruin to generate a conceptual

approach towards new architectural forms. Additionally, by narrowing these inquiries to focus on the constituent architectural elements of form, programme and context the theoretical discourse is rendered relevant to the continuing argument for heritage architecture.

The aim is that the theoretical informants blend together urban imaginaries, imagined communities and images to depict the city and architecture not only in its current state, but also their possible alternatives. In doing so, the purpose of architecture becomes a platform for numerous unheard stories to be told and visualising the unexplored, imaginary landscapes of the city. As a result this creates a space for the architectural project to salvage its function as a locale of investigation that hosts and reflects different interpretations of social life, thus establishing a more intricate and accommodating spatial logic for the future (Bremner 2010:106).

form   *context*   *programme*   *architectural commodity*
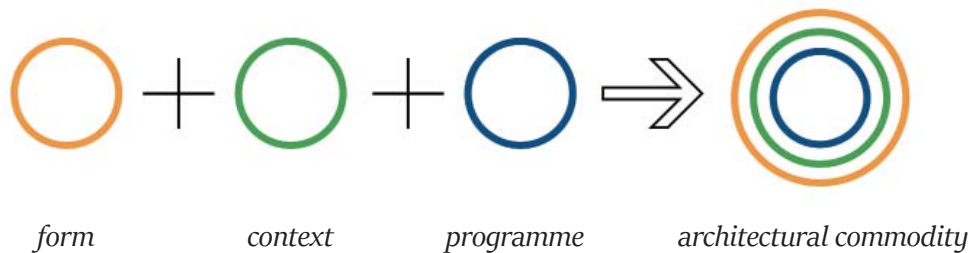
Figure 6.4: The constituent elements of the architectural commodity.
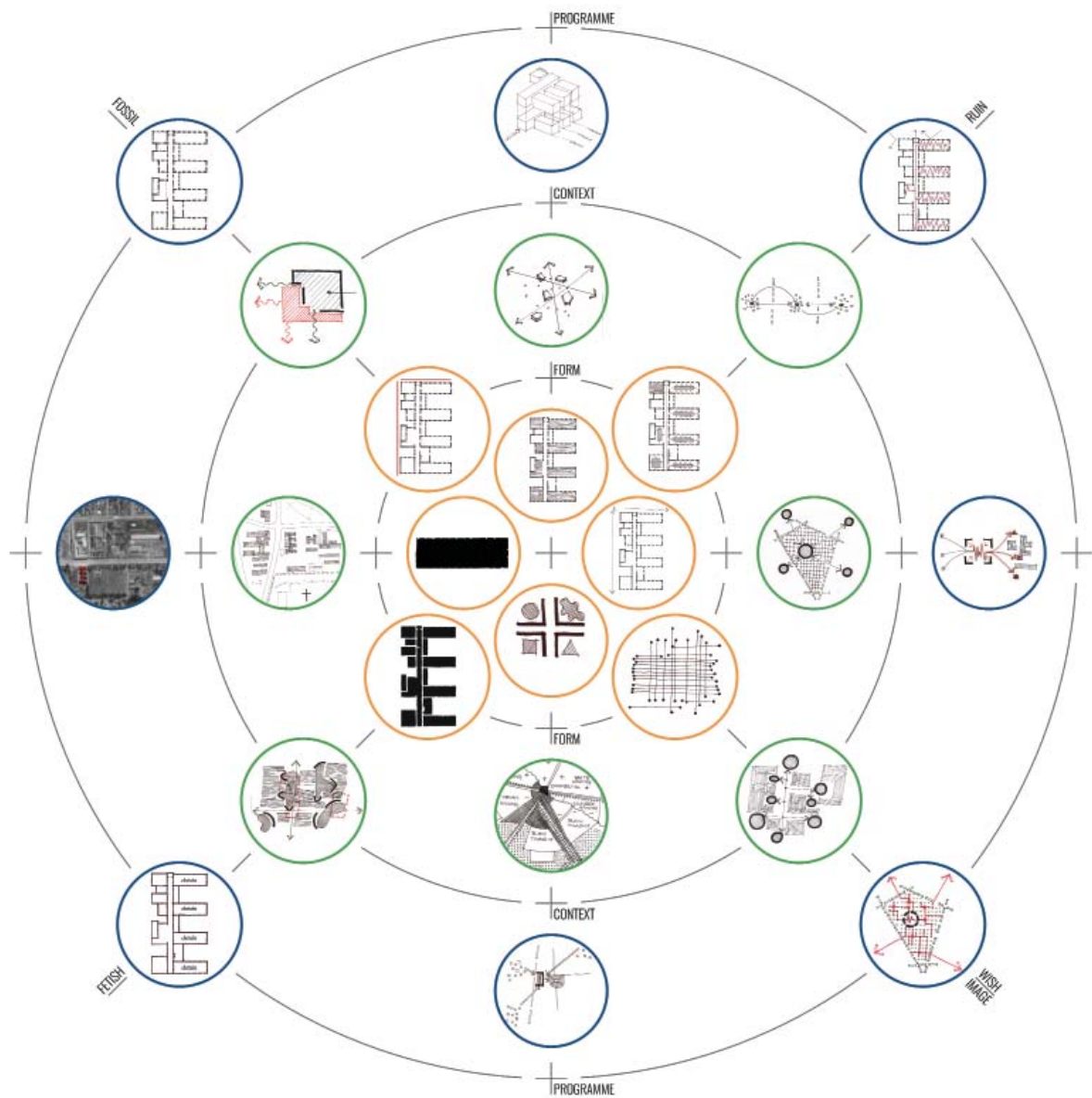
Figure 6.5: Diagram summarising the resultant analysis of fetish, fossil, wish image and ruin according to form, context and programme.

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Fetishism

an obsession with objects

The political and economic directives of a capitalist society depend on an ideology of guaranteed and endless progress (Pensky 2004:182). Driven by these endeavours, advertising, fashion, new building forms, materials, and architectural decoration arise. As a result, the population becomes obligated to incorporate or accept new commercial and productive technologies. In such an economy, the power given to commodities separates individuals from their own disposition as free producers and at the same time the commodity is given human-like qualities. In this reversal of roles, alienating industrial labour transforms subjects into objects and, through the same process, objects become subjective things. Thus, the consumption of these commodities, embodied with the utopian fantasies and longings of the collective, begin to express the delusional consciousness of experiencing history. Simply put, this fetishism allows those in control of the economy to present the passing of time and its events to society, caught up in the endless cycle of consumption, in a manner that endorses their position and profits (Pensky 2004:184).

PETRIFIED NATURE

DREAMING STATE

Tin Town &
Municipal Compound

vacuum border
state

rigid
form

control &
segregate

limited spatial
experience as a result of
functional requirements

FORM

negative city of voids
occupied by a mixture of
smooth & striated space

model apartheid
city planning

CONTEXT

overnight
detention centre for
"illegal"migrant labour

FETISH

controlled movement
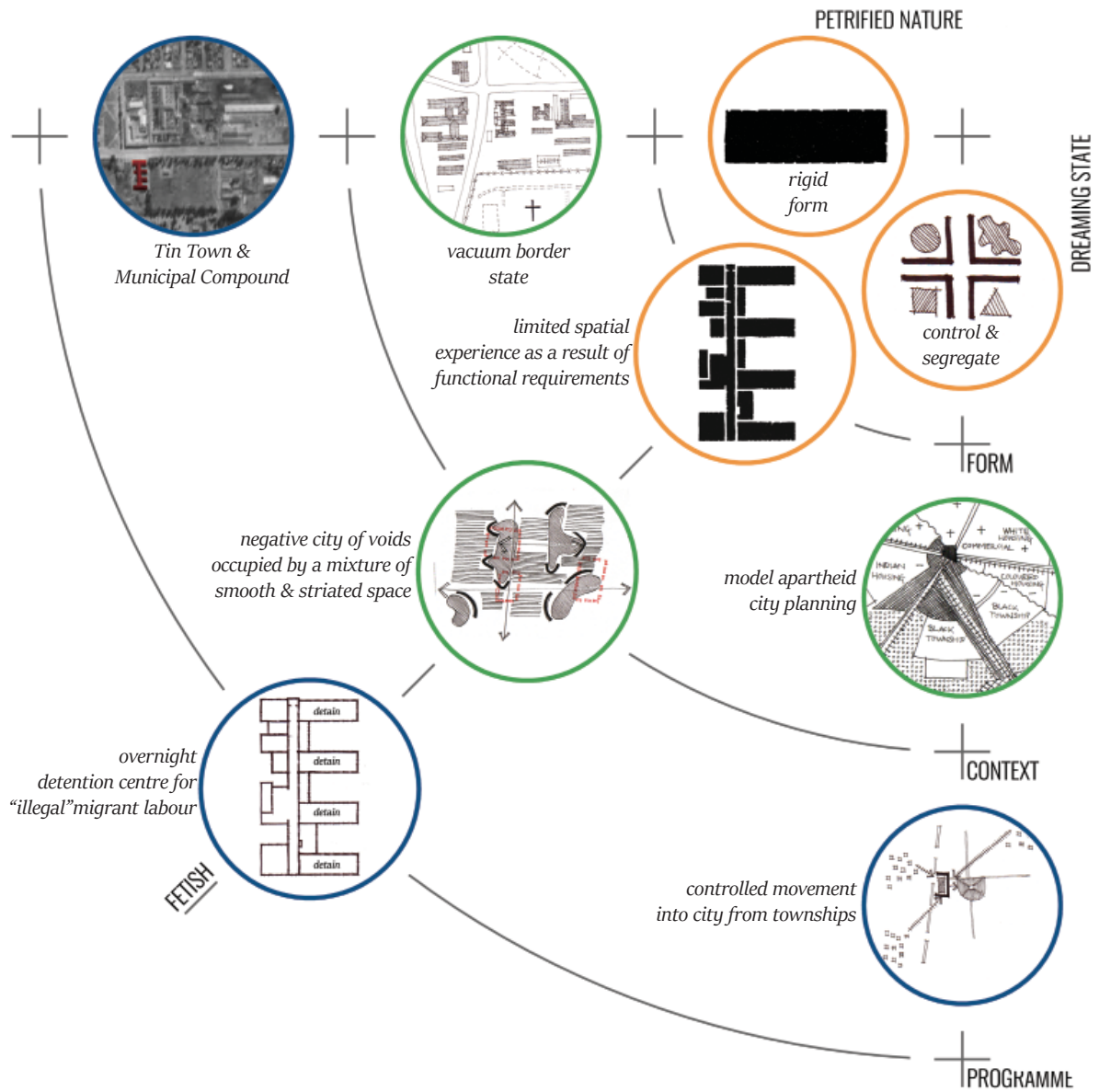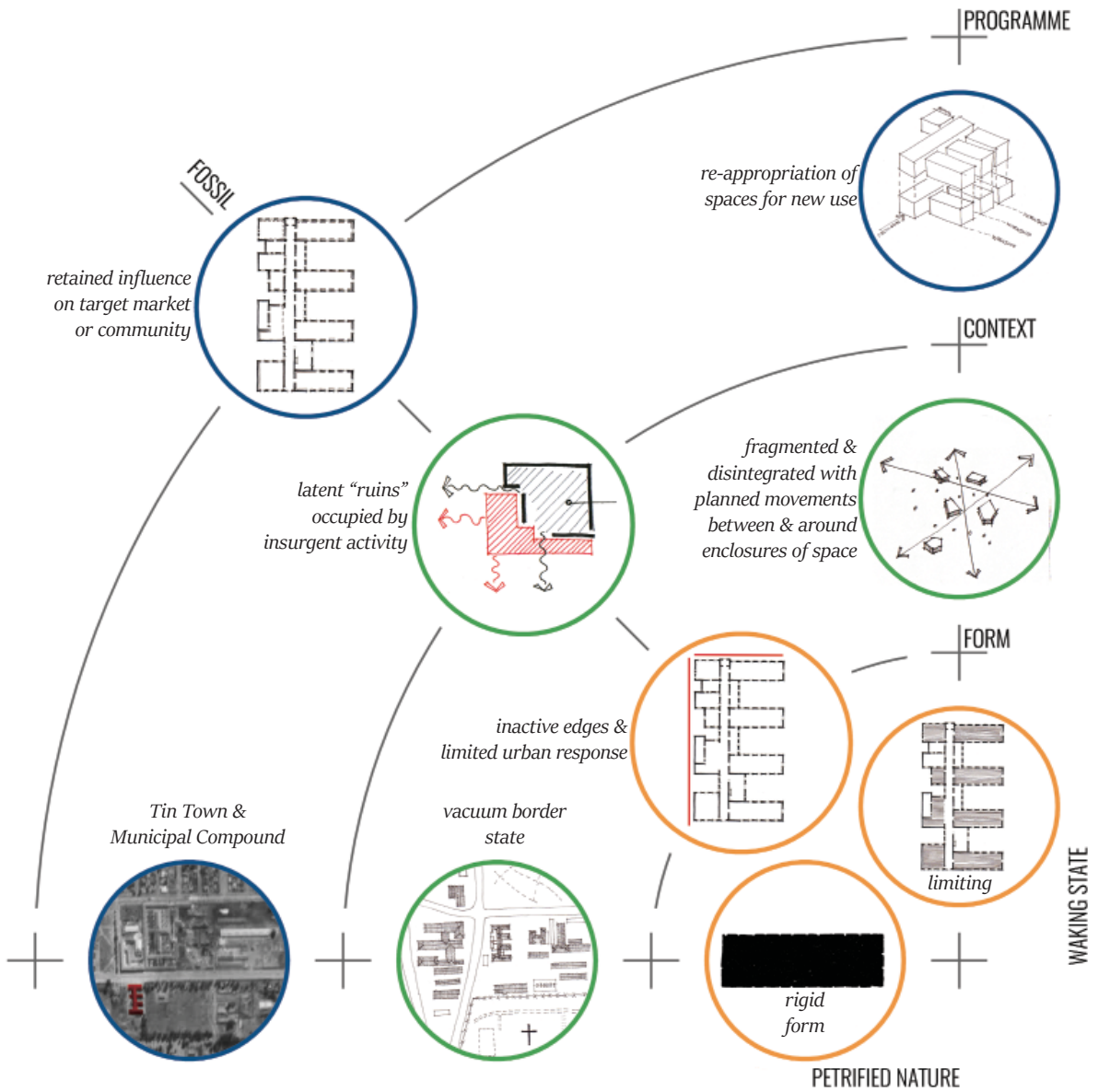*into city from townships*

PROGRAMME

Figure 6.6: Diagram indicating the dialectical relationship between the Dreaming State and Petrified Nature, resulting in the condition of fetishism.

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Fossilisation
fragments of the forgotten

In pursuit of eternal newness and technological progress the victorious parties in power are selective in choosing fragments of history that only support their impression of a harmonious past and those commodities that denounce this vision are forgotten (Pensky 2004:181). In an attempt to disguise the failings of past capitalistic endeavours and the endless compulsion to repeat, the slight aging of "failed" commodities is justified through criticisms of their usefulness to society. Now released from the cycle of consumption these otherwise forgotten cultural goods have the ability to be recovered, reintroduced and reconfigured to reveal the objective nature and true status of an ongoing history of struggle, violence and disappointment (Pensky 2004:186).

Figure 6.7: Diagram indicating the dialectical relationship between the Waking State and Petrified Nature, resulting in the condition of fossilisation.

Wish Images

the rejection and repetition of antiquity

As a community encounters its own history, sites develop where a different history aspires to upset the limitless reiteration of capitalism. In this history the collective strives to transcend and alter the inconsistency of products of society and the deficiencies in the social arrangement of production (Pensky 2004:184). The result is a chronology of unrealised hopes for a sociality freed from inequity, want and violence. These desires are conveyed as "Wish Images" which become entrenched in the material culture of the said society; in its building styles and architectural fashions, its commodities, as well as in its institutions of consumption and distraction. Adamant at distancing these products from that which has already passed, and motivated by the allure of achieving something new, these pursuits tend to divert the imagination back upon the past. Ultimately, the motivation toward ceaseless novelty results in people, cities and buildings that unconsciously quote the primal or prehistoric.

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TRANSITORY NATURE

DREAMING STATE

object

control & segregate

open & connectible

cross-border retail "tourists" of the city

disperse skilled workforce throughout the city

FORM

model apartheid city planning

life as a string of pleasurable moments results in layers of falsehood

CONTEXT

controlled movement into city from townships

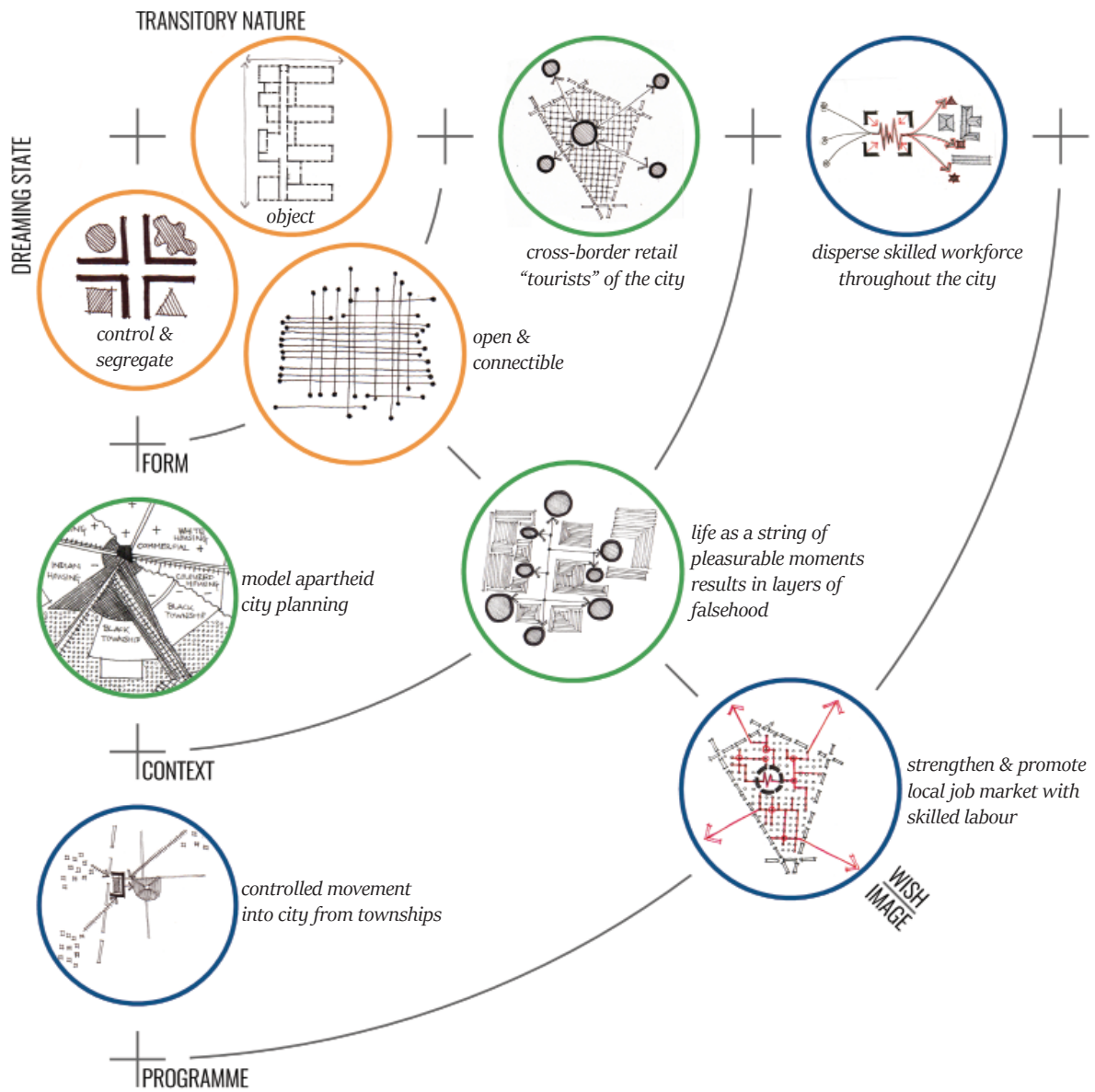*strengthen & promote local job market with skilled labour*

WISH IMAGE

PROGRAMME

Figure 6.8: Diagram indicating the dialectical relationship between the Dreaming State and Transitory Nature, resulting in the condition of wish images.
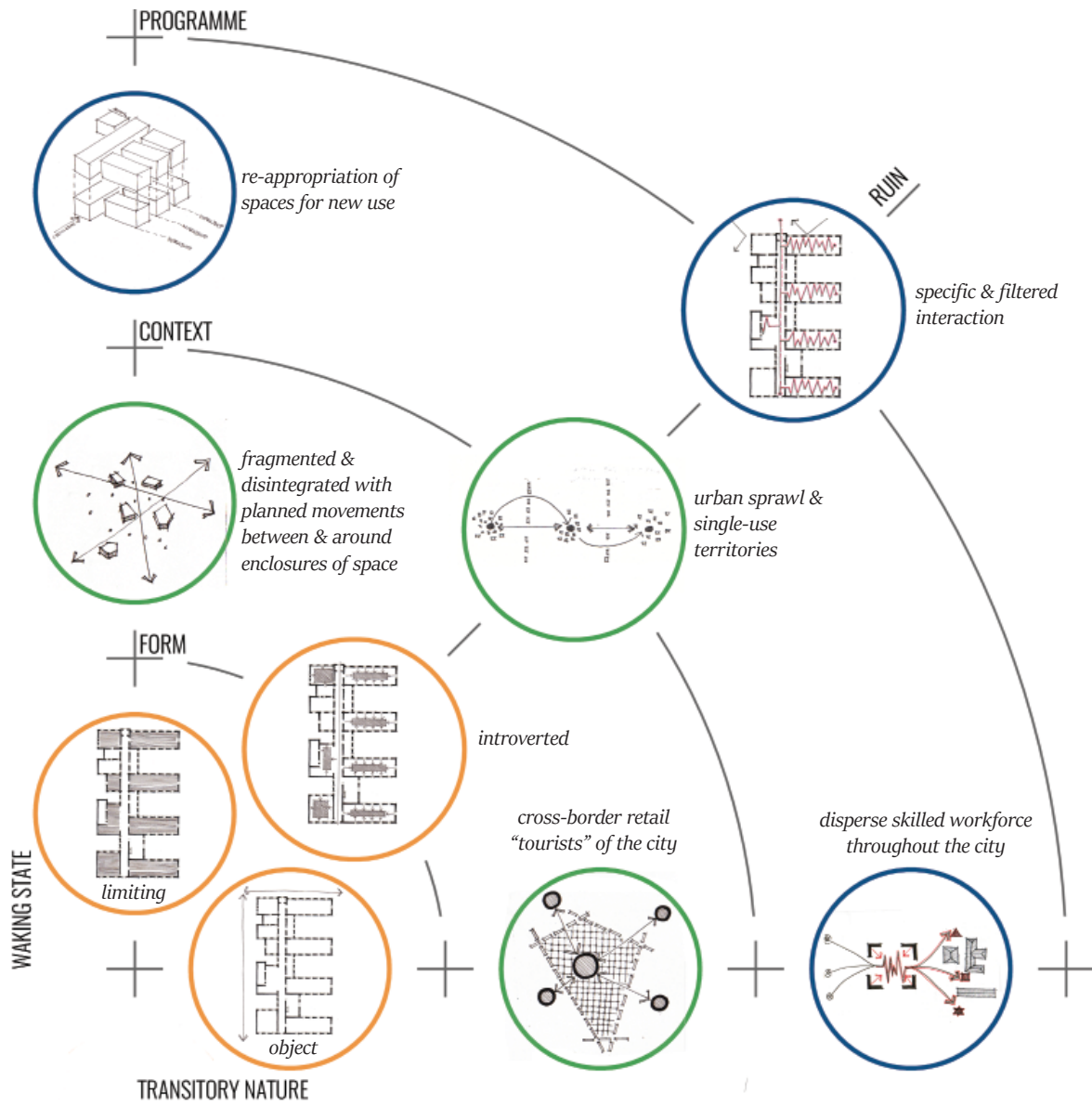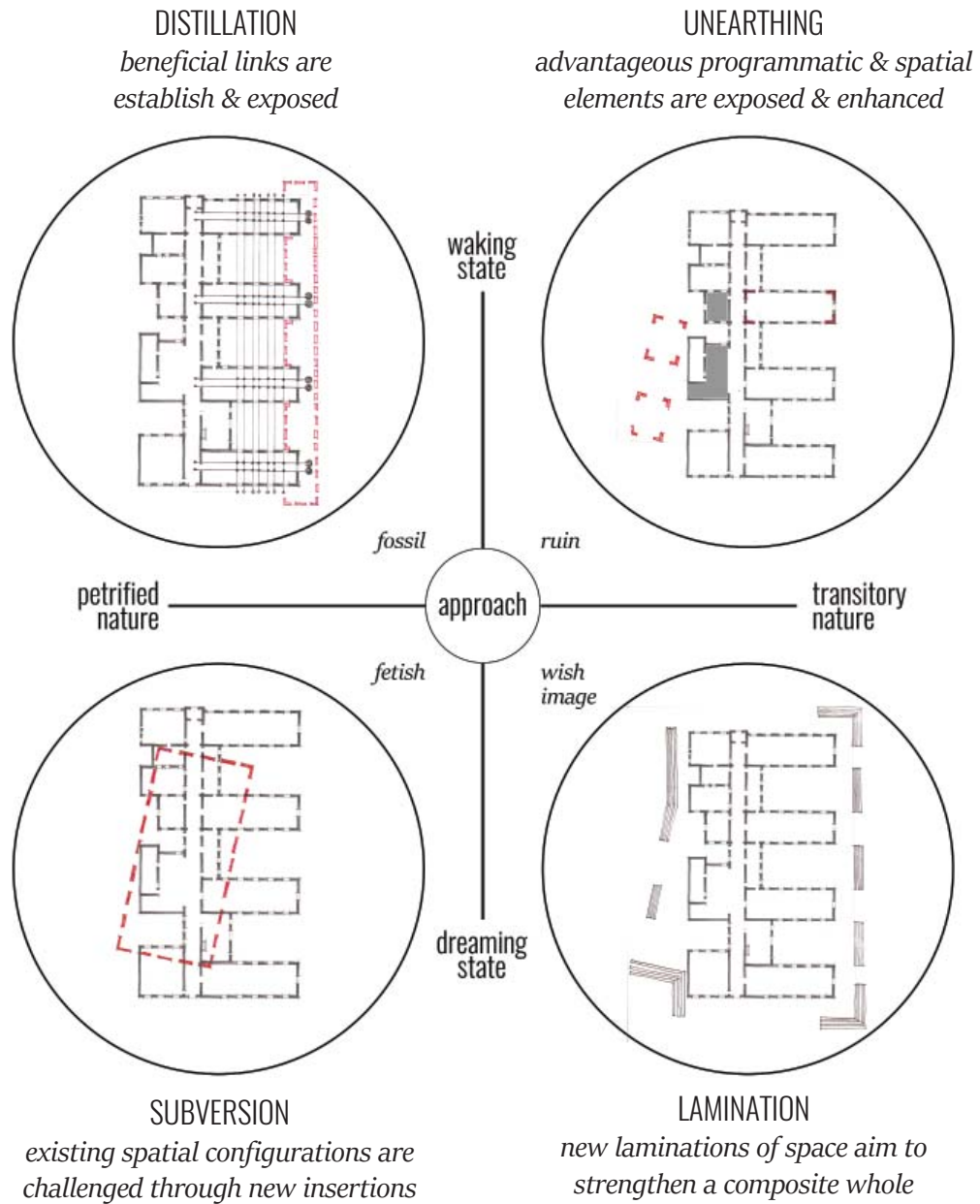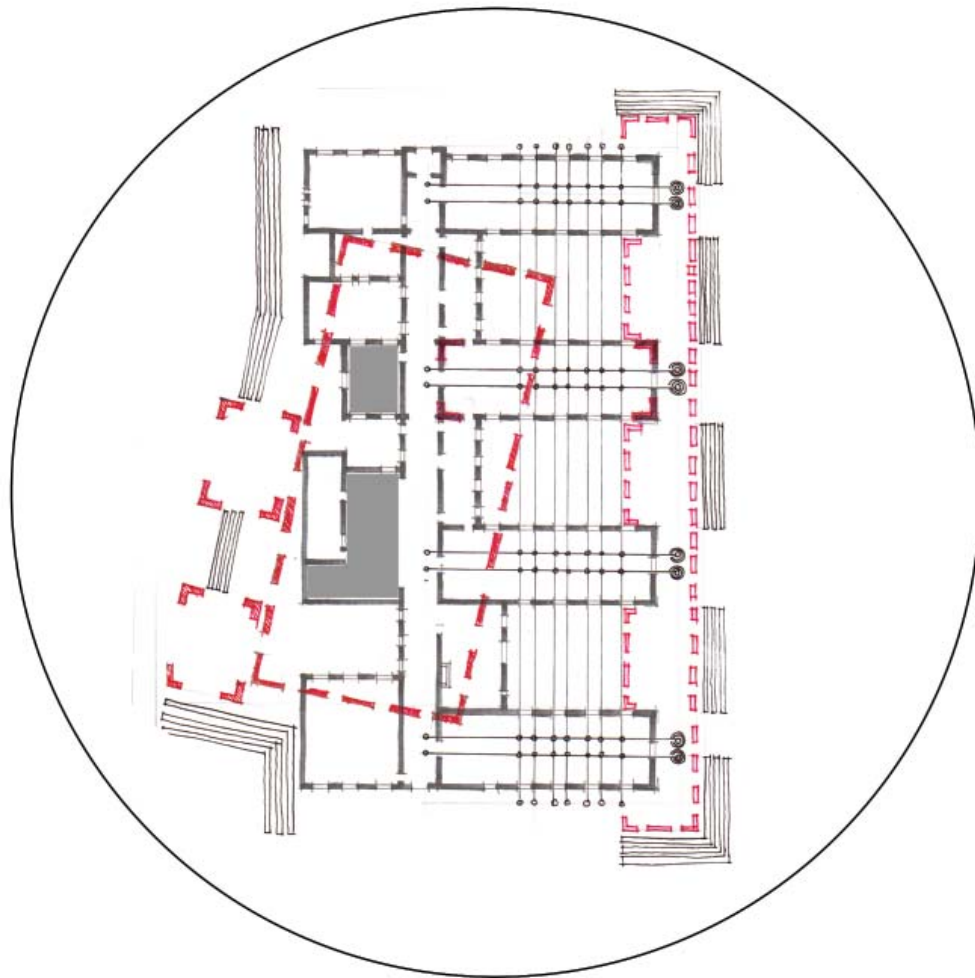
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Ruination

irrelevant objects

In quoting antiquity, cultural objects of production intended to promote freedom from oppression and injustice, now achieve the polar opposite. Encoded with the value of the culture from which they where salvaged and a fascination with technological advancement, their relevance is short-lived as they become coveted by the same capitalistic economy that they were meant to oppose. Now, the commodity no longer encapsulates the collective aspirations and dreams of a collective. Instead, it embodies the aspiration and demonstrative character of the commodity itself, in an inverted setting: the commodity now becomes the vehicle in which collective imagination and fantasies are denied, thus leading to a state of ruination (Pensky 2004:187).

PROGRAMME

re-appropriation of
spaces for new use

RUIN

specific & filtered
interaction

CONTEXT

fragmented &
disintegrated with
planned movements
between & around
enclosures of space

urban sprawl &
single-use
territories

FORM

introverted

cross-border retail
"tourists" of the city

disperse skilled workforce
throughout the city

WAKING STATE

limiting

object

TRANSITORY NATURE

Figure 6.9: Diagram indicating the dialectical relationship between the Waking State and Transitory Nature, resulting in the condition of ruination.

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DISTILLATION
*beneficial links are
establish & exposed*

UNEARTHING
*advantageous programmatic & spatial
elements are exposed & enhanced*

SUBVERSION
*existing spatial configurations are
challenged through new insertions*

LAMINATION
*new laminations of space aim to
strengthen a composite whole*

Figure 6.10: Diagram of the theoretical approach developed towards intervening with heritage architecture.

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Figure 6.11: Diagram depicting the montage of distillation, unearthing, lamination and subversion. 118