THE INVISIBLE OBJECT

Civic place in Atteridgeville

The realm between the
extraordinary and the mundane

Kathleen Louise Nel

2016

"Isolating such potential qualities of delight inherent in the most ordinary forms is the task of the designer since once isolated they may become more important elements in his vocabulary than the accepted formal disciplines of volumetric containment."
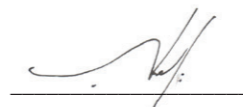
- Cedric Price
(Price and Obrist 2003:11-12)

In accordance with Regulation 4(e) of the General Regulations (G.57) for dissertations and theses, I declare that this thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree Master of Architecture (Professional) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

I further state that no part of my thesis has already been, or is currently being, submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification.

I further declare that this thesis is substantially my own work. Where reference is made to the works of others, the extent to which that work has been used is indicated and fully acknowledged in the text and list of references.

Kathleen Louise Nel

DECLARATION

Kathleen Louise Nel

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree Masters in Architecture (Professional).

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Pretoria, South Africa
2016

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Invisible Object

Volume 2 of 3

Site
Ramohoebo Square
Mareka street
Atteridgeville
City of Tshwane
Gauteng
South Africa
25°46'05.4"S 28°04'41.0"E

Programme
Public Space
Cinema and Performance Arts

Client
Department of Arts and Culture (DAC)

Research Field
Human Settlements and Urbanism
Heritage and Cultural Landscapes

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents, for their unconditional support and love. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to complete my degree in architecture. It is an immense privilege.

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Ali Sadiq. Thank you for sharing this vision with me. We managed to put together an amazing scheme and contribute to the legacy of Atteridgeville.

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To Deborah Bukasa, my incredible friend, I could not have done this without your support. Silindzile Shongwe, thank you for sharing your views on life and architecture with me. Hendrik Loubser, thank you for your support and help throughout the years.

To every person I have spoken to this year, thank you for taking the time to listen, and share my passion, and for believing that I could make something beautiful.

ABSTRACT

The Invisible Object

CIVIC PLACE IN ATTERIDGEVILLE
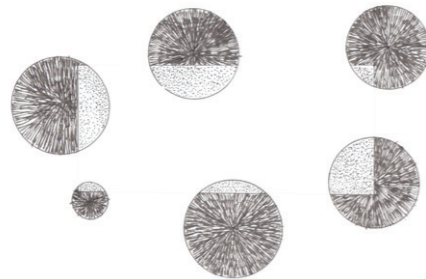
Ramohoebo Square, the heart of Atteridgeville, currently lies dormant. This document explores the possibility of introducing a new pattern of events to expose the extraordinary in the midst of the mundane.

Conventional approaches to township architecture are challenged as a means to return *place* to the citizens of Atteridgeville. This study is dedicated to recreational space guided by an underlying theme of the surreal in an attempt to celebrate and enhance the quotidian by allowing for moments of serendipity and reverie.
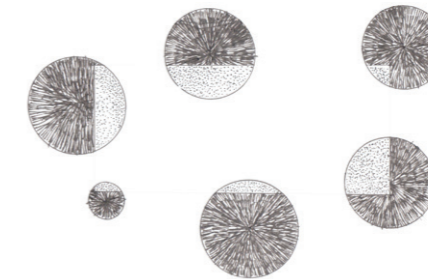
An argument is developed towards changing attitudes and preconceived ideas towards townships and the bodies who occupy them by proposing a new perspective on old systems.

Fig. 01. Borderlands: psychological borders and barriers. An integral part of investigation. (Nel & Sadiq 2016).

KHUTSHWAFATSO

Selo se se sa bonagaleng

BONNO LE KAGO YA ATTREDIGEVILLE

Ramohoebo Square, e gona kwa boteng ba Atteridgeville, mme e itlomollogilwe e bile ga e diriswe. Lekwalo le, le rata go seka seka ka kelotlhoko, mekgwa e lefelo le le ka dirisiwang ka gone go re le manontlhothlo a lone a itsewe, mme gore le tsoswe boswa.

Mekgwa e etlwaelegileng ya thulaganyo kago mo Attridgeville, ga e thotloetse gore baagi ba kgale ba Attridgeville gore b aka boela moroga go nna foo gape. Tlhatlhobo ya lekwalo le, e lepane le ditulo tsa go goinntsha bodutu le go roba monakedi. Tlhatlhobo e, e tshegeditse ke molaetsa wa go iteka go ipela le go ka tokafatsa temogo, ditiro le metshameko ee tlwaelegileng, mo lefelong le le didimetseng, le le roroetsang monagano.

Lekwalo le, le susumetsa gore go tswhanetse go fetolwa maikutlo, mekgwa le menagano ka ditorotswano tsa batho batsho, ka go eletsa kgotsa gore methale ya kgale e tlogelwe.

MANIFESTO

Habitus

... systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goal without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.

Bourdieu (1977:53)

There is an innate potential for architects to transform the mundane into something extraordinary. This simple quality allows designers to contribute to society in an exceptional way. The spaces we create determine the everyday interaction between the body and space, and essentially manipulates the way *habitus* occurs.

By being cognisant of this quality and assuming a dialectic stance, the designer ensures that the intricacies of the milieu are embedded in the intervention, resulting in beautiful spaces which contribute to society at an emotive level. In this way, the experiential takes precedence such that spectacular places for people to dwell are the outcome.

PREFACE

An overview

The underlying notion driving this study is the normative position of the author, and the questioning of the role of young South African architects in the continuum of this discourse. This questioning developed into a response to the conditions discovered in Atteridgeville, which is reinforced by a personal desire to create beautiful architecture:

Those of us who have been trained as architects have this desire perhaps at the very centre of our lives: that one day, somewhere, somehow, we shall build one building which is wonderful, beautiful, breathtaking, a place where people can walk and dream for centuries.

Alexander (1979:9)

Perhaps, if we adopt this approach, we will create beautiful spaces which give back to the community, and maybe, provide relief from the tyranny of the mundane. The simple and incredibly valuable aspects of what it is to be human are often neglected in the name of progress. Sven Ouzman (2002:7) suggests we "produce a critically aware and socially responsible practice that allows us to properly imbibe the spirit of a place and its people and so be agents for innovation, compassion and radiance." This document demonstrates how this may be done for Atteridgeville.

PREAMBLE

Structure of document

VOLUME I - BORDERLAND

Kathleen Nel + Ali Sadiq

VOLUME II - THE INVISIBLE OBJECT

Kathleen Nel

VOLUME III - RESIDUAL TERRITORY

Ali Sadiq

Volume I presents the study of Atteridgeville, followed by a development proposal, to situate the succeeding volumes. Each volume serves as a recording of the investigation taken by the author. The arguments made are expressed through the incorporation of appropriate literature, a graphical expression of thoughts, and the translation of this synthesis into a spatial proposal.

The choice of literature, artwork and the author's own sketches reinforce the arguments made, and are vital to the understanding of the document. The discussion of architecture oscillates between an expression of space and the question of representation. The intention is to look at this relationship closely, interrogate the architectural object as well as the impact of space on the body and subsequently the relationship between bodies. An argument is developed towards changing attitudes and preconceived ideas towards townships and the bodies who occupy them by proposing a new perspective on old systems.

This document is divided into six themes, with precedent studies as breaks in between:

Part One, *Prelude*, presents the academic outline of the document summarising the context and dissertation intentions.

Part Two, *Body*, investigates the role of the body in a South African context, in the past and how this is changing.

Part Three, *Space,* presents the study of place, uncovering the layers of the site guided by theoretical arguments.

Part Four, *Experience*, presents the programmatic considerations as a response to the conclusions drawn from the preceding study.

Part Five, *Making Place*, presents the spatial investigation of the conceptual intent.

Part Six, *Technè,* presents the process of bringing the building into being (on paper).

CONTENTS

1. PRELUDE

Introduction

This chapter introduces the problem statement specific to this volume, in response to the research conducted in Volume I. The context is briefly discussed, followed by the listing of issues identified and the statement of dissertation intentions.
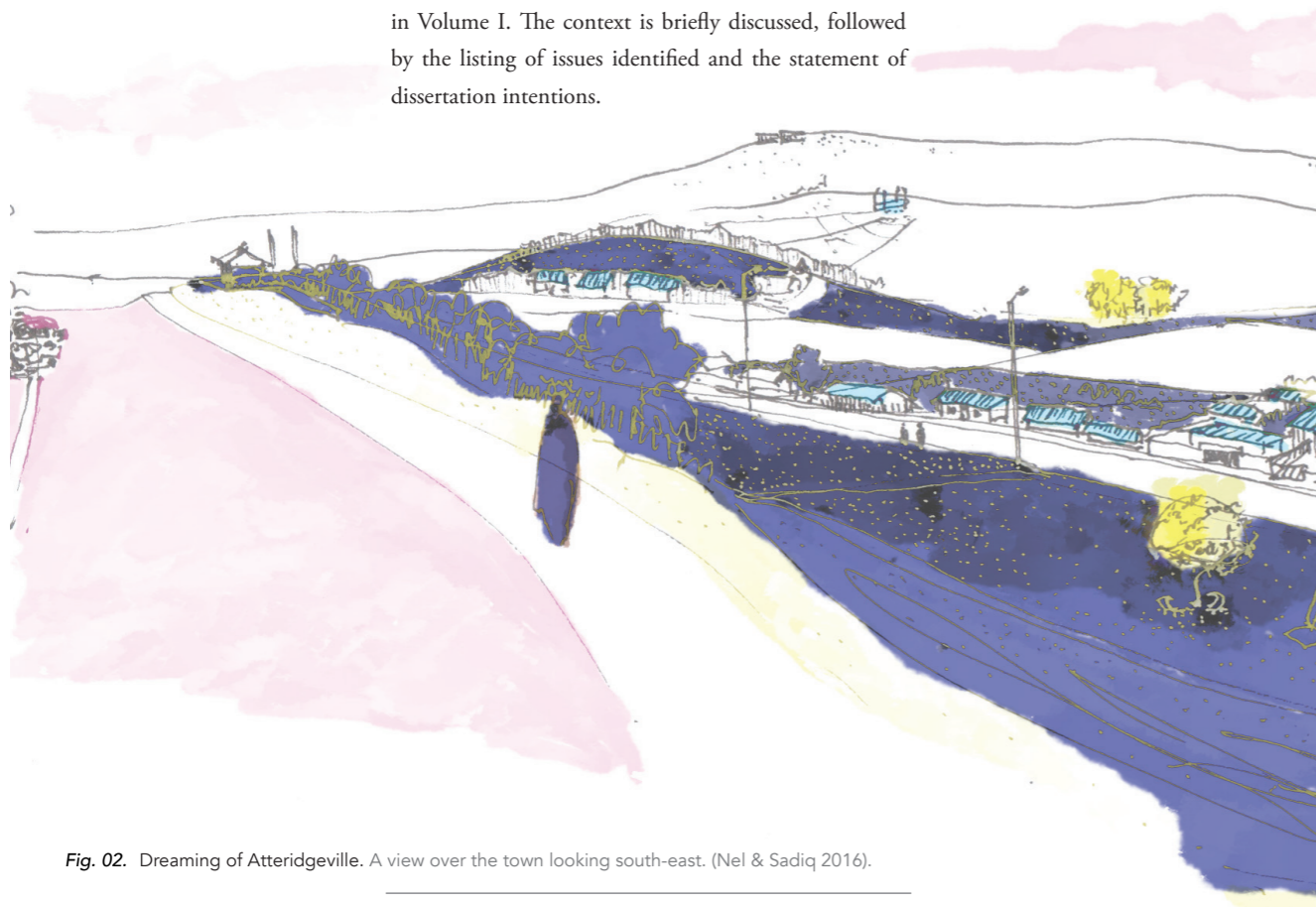

Fig. 02. Dreaming of Atteridgeville. A view over the town looking south-east. (Nel & Sadiq 2016).

STATE OF PLACE

Contextualising the problem

After more than two decades as a democracy, South Africa is still tainted by the apartheid legacy. This is evident socially, economically and spatially and it is embedded in the grain of our cities.

The urban fabric continues to deteriorate, which is apparent in the continued urbanisation and city sprawl, as well as the remnants of the apartheid urban structure. Sadly, development schemes adopted since 1994 such as *The Reconstruction and Development Programme* (South Africa: 1994), have many characteristics which resemble the inappropriate planning schemes of the past.

The RDP was a socio-economic framework developed by the ANC in 1994 to counter the effects of apartheid (South Africa: 1994). Although the intentions stated were noble, the implementation of certain aspects has proved unsuccessful. The low-income house (RDP house), for example, has been criticised for being of lesser quality than the apartheid-era NE51/9 design (see Volume I), in terms of design and construction quality. RDP houses continue to be badly located, away from socio-economic opportunities and they perpetuate issues that are meant to be resolved by the plan (Coetzer 2013:173,221-2).

These factors need to be investigated and examined under a new lens. This dissertation aims to interrogate current trends, and formulate an holistic approach that proposes new ways of thinking about old ideas. Conventional development schemes often aggravate tensions inherent to these spaces, rather than mediate between the built form of the past and the needs of the citizens, both present and future.

Atteridgeville has a unique character - socially and spatially. The township is studied as a means of investigating contemporary issues of space and dwelling in a township setting. As a township, it displays many characteristics inherent to this setting, but contradict many. The macro-analysis and approach is presented in Volume I of this series, while this document proposes a single intervention as a response to this research.

Through an exploration of this dynamic, multiple architectural issues are addressed as part of the dissertation, which will be elaborated through the course of this document.
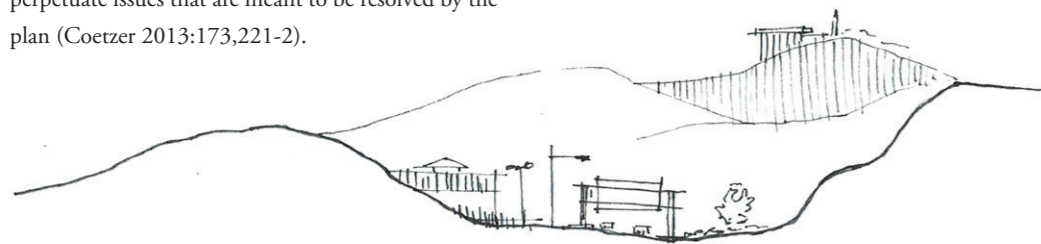

Fig. 03. Valley Section: Maunde Street. The undulating terrain of Atteridgeville and sense of place due to its location.

GENERAL ISSUE

Death of the civic realm

Rapid urbanisation and a demand for housing has resulted in the neglect of shared space. Cities and towns become fragmented, lacking the essential elements to promote healthy environments for living. This has led to a focus on private ownership and the needs of the individual, resulting in a gradual decay of the supporting shared spaces. Contemporary public space has morphed into the shopping mall. Energy is drawn from any remaining shared communal space and the built fabric deteriorates as a result.

Ouzman (2002:28) explains that the urban structure of townships does "little to foster that sense of community" present in traditional settlements. This is exacerbated as socio-economic issues such as housing, transport and medical facilities are the first to be addressed in redevelopment schemes. These facilities often do not provide the required supporting public spaces. If they are considered, they are seldom embedded in the urban fabric, and remain disconnected. Consequently, the daily life of the working class community is undermined.
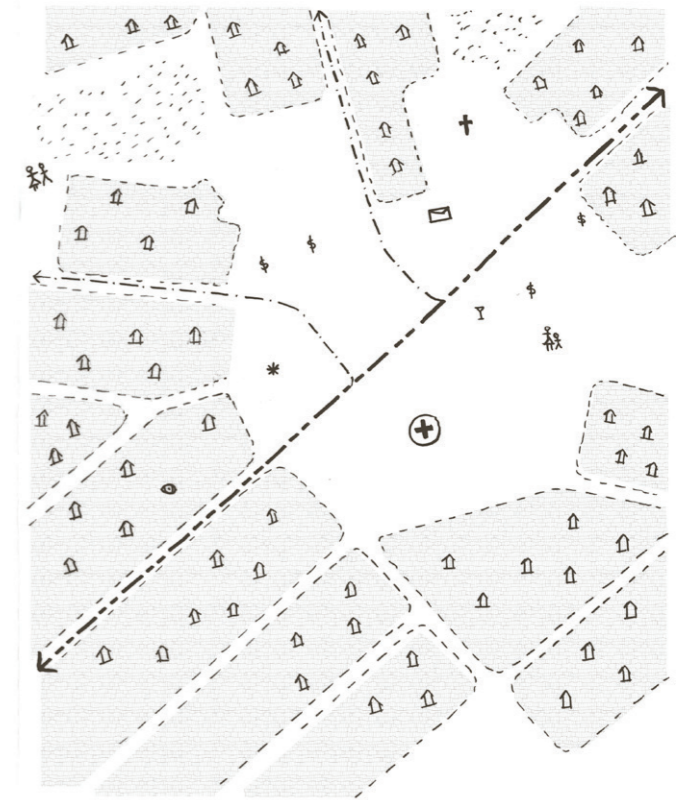

Fig. 04. Ramohoebo Square. Dense housing frames an unfinished, empty public square.

URBAN ISSUE

Exodus + Energy Efflux
Fading Public Realm

In the past, dormitory towns were designed according to Modernist planning principles, which promoted mono-functional zones. This principle was taken further by apartheid segregationist schemes which informed the city planning principles of the time. Those strategies removed supporting structures such as commerce and recreation, thereby limiting choice and opportunity.

As a segregated township, Atteridgeville presents conditions synonymous with its identity: decaying public space and privatisation. This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that it's location allows for an exodus of township-dwellers to the Pretoria Central Business District (CBD). Most recreational and commercial needs are provided for outside of Atteridgeville. However, due to the success of

public transport schemes (especially minibus-taxis) an energy efflux occurs as Atteridgeville struggles to harbour the energy required to create and sustain a vibrant community. The lack of public 'anchors' within Atteridgeville itself can only amplify this problem.

Traditionally, civic spaces and buildings have provided anchors in cities, but these are quickly being lost to privatised space. There are very few collective spaces left which appeal to the active citizen. Ouzman (2002:28) highlights that segregated townships have lost valuable community spaces, and areas of "discussion and decision, such as the men's court, have been replaced by more restrictive community halls and bus stops."
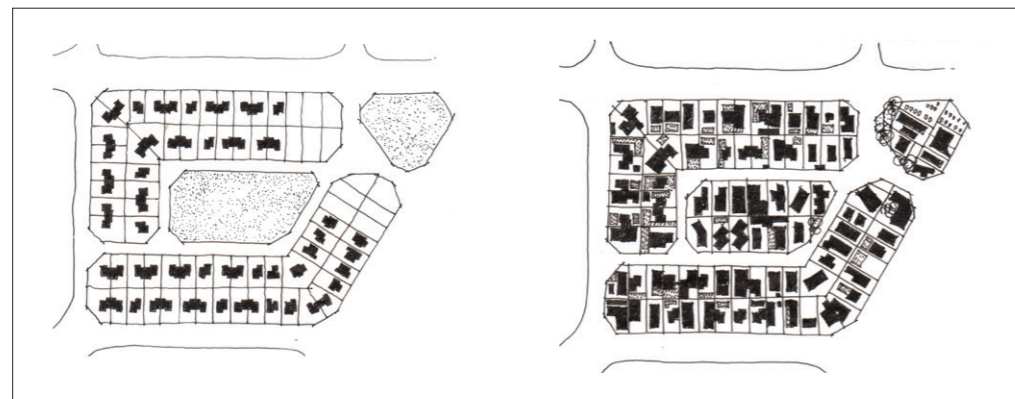
Fig. 05. Block study in Atteridgeville: initial block layout(left) vs. today(right). The comparison of housing density and public space are clearly visible. Parks were claimed for additional housing and ad-hoc growth on individual plots is the norm. (Nel & Sadiq 2016 adapted from Stals 1998:80).

DISSERTATION INTENTIONS

Contest the conventional
Celebrate the quotidian
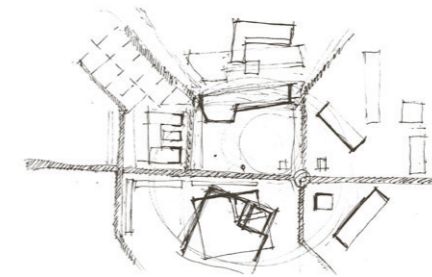
This document concentrates on the death of the public realm within contemporary South African cities, with a specific interest in townships, such as Atteridgeville. The intention is to interrogate conventional typologies. Traditional public spaces are expected to deteriorate further due to growing populations and urbanisation. With limited public investment and high population densities in townships, public finances are mostly allocated to public infrastructure and housing, thereby aggravating these conditions.

The growth and success of townships is important in developing countries, yet they continue to be treated as something undesirable, which cannot be fixed. Townships in South Africa form the most negative aspect of urbanism implemented in apartheid city planning. They remain part of our urban fabric however, and as such, should be recognised as separate entities, independent of the CBD.

The culmination of this investigation will create a means to celebrate shared space and the everyday through architecture - designed to ground citizens in their collective space. This will be explored within the context of townships, so as to shed light on the notion of suburbs as disjointed settlements. The investigation is guided by the theory of the body and space, and also the surreal and the extraordinary.
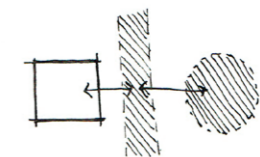
The author intends to pay homage to the history of public gathering and expression in Atteridgeville, while challenging existing public space typologies, and conventional interventions in the township context.

Fig. 06. First impressions of Ramohoebo square. Hard and soft edges in the public 'heart' of Atteridgeville.
Fig. 07. Third Space. Diagram indicating a mediation between privatisation and an intermediate third space.

RESEARCH DISCUSSION

Activity-driven third space

In his book *The Great Good Place,* Ray Oldenburg (1989) identifies the *third space* as the anchor within cities - the lived and social space, which holds a community together.

The proposition is that the spaces neglected due to inappropriate development resort under Oldenburg's *third space.* Pressures from the requirements of contemporary society has transformed this diverse collection of places into shopping malls, which draws energy away from open spaces and creates congested nodes. Not only do these malls push out local businesses, they are often aesthetically unappealing, expressing the little investment put into townships. Unsustainable modes of living and fragmented cities is the result. This phenomenon is evident in Atteridgeville.
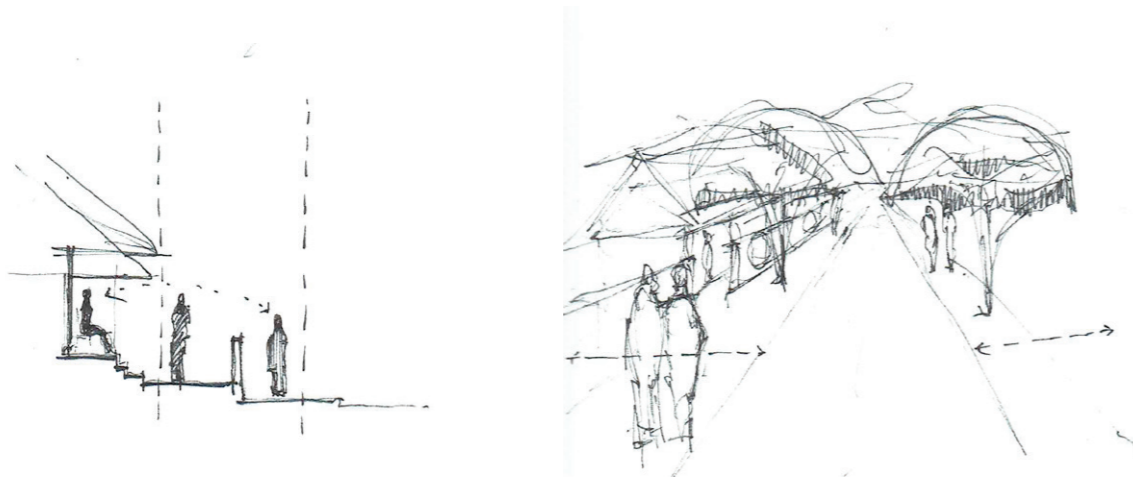
Fig. 08. The in-between (left). The realm between the public and private is where social interaction occurs.
Fig. 09. The street (right). High pedestrian traffic characterises the street of Atteridgeville.

RESEARCH DISCUSSION

Township Architecture

Contemporary interventions in townships often take on one of two forms: firstly, imported models are imposed onto the fabric of a township. This typology is often out of scale and inappropriate, exaggerating existing adverse conditions within the public realm as they negate social constructs and context. They aim to make a statement and dominate their environment rather than mediate between the existing fabric and social practices. These schemes are usually implemented in the name of progress, coming in the form of a 'one-size-fits-all' solution.

Secondly, these interventions often manifest as patronising architecture, which aims to respond to the contextual conditions. This often results in 'romanticised' poverty as the architect attempts to respond to context through an aesthetic imitation of circumstance rather than of *place*.

Fig. 10. Typical store typology in townships. A diverse set of programmes exist in conjunction with formal trade including car-washes and informal stalls, rather than functioning as mono-functional spaces.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Understanding Atteridgeville
Bridging the gap
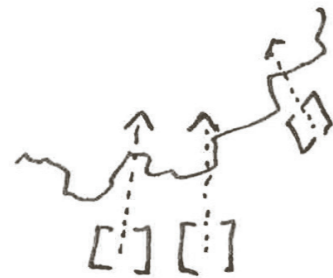
The research aims to develop an understanding of the public realm of Atteridgeville. Part I of the series presents a historical study of the model township as a basis to ground present day observations. This is followed by a larger vision into which the individual intervention is placed.

The study of current conditions manifest as a qualitative and quantitative mapping of the development and transformation of the urban fabric and social structures.

The interpretation of the findings will lead to an understanding of the deteriorating public space.

This will be supported by theoretical studies and precedents to clarify and interrogate current trends. The programme brings into focus the celebration of the mundane. The purpose is to investigate everyday recreational activities and develop an appropriate reading of the spatial and social complexities to produce an architectural interpretation derived from these conditions.

The dissertation uses a graphical investigation as the principal method of understanding context and theory. This is done through photography, collage and sketching.

Fig. 11. In search of mediation. Reading spatial and social complexities.

DELIMITATION

Suburbia
Death of the public realm

The scope of this study is limited to the realm of the everyday experience of body and space. The objective is to understand the deterioration and use of public space in complex environments, specifically developing townships and suburbs in the South African context.

Existing conditions identified will inform the development of new responses. This dissertation does not aim to address larger socio-economic problems, but rather contest current models of intervention.

The exploration of an architecture that addresses context through the celebration of the *third place* will guide the exploration, while the in-between and the surreal are used as major informants and design generators.

Fig. 12. Approaching Suburbia. Tree lined avenue entering Atteridgeville.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Summary

Can public infrastructure be a catalyst for the development of townships into self-sufficient environments?

This dissertation investigates the value of *third place*, and how this notion could be used to challenge conventional interventions in township-suburb environments. The intention is to develop a sensible and appropriate response which incorporates the needs of the everyday user while balancing their emotive experience with the intellectual intentions of the designer.

The objective is to develop an architectural response that could dignify the lives of everyday users when considering the overwhelming mundane conditions of suburbia.

Fig. 13. The unseen. Painting of F.E Mc William's sculpture *Eye, Nose, and Cheek* (1939).