

# 02

## THEORY

WHAT IS THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT?  
IDENTITY OF TODAY?  
WHAT IS THE EVERYDAY?  
EVERYDAY AND THE EVERYDAYNESS.  
CONTEMPORARY HERITAGE OF THE NOW.  
CONCLUSION.

## What is the *South African* context?

What does identity of place mean? Jonathan Noble answers this question in his book, *African Identity in Post-Apartheid public architecture. White skin, Black masks.*

To answer the question of identity of place, one would think of doing research in terms of a contextual study, or finding the regional identity of the place, and genus of place. To find by genus, one would look for a group of things which have common characteristics and which can be divided into sub-categories. But the South African urban context was produced by the dominance of a Colonial and Apartheid rule, and the issue of questioning identity is that when trying to define or explain it, one would maybe be quick to homogenise, and simplify, and almost stereotype it. The idea of “African style, African Culture or African space” becomes generic and becomes a vague blanket term that becomes in turn a pastiche of symbolic African motifs (Noble, 2011: 3).

Noble (2011), makes reference to Franz Fanon's writings in his analysis of post Apartheid architecture. He writes that, *Fanon's wish is not so much to find the truth of his African existence something about which he has little doubt, but rather his goal is to be recognised in the modern sense of the word, to be recognised as an African who can stake claim in the contemporary world order.*

Noble acknowledges that Fanon's metaphors of skin and mask could be used to understand the way we make architecture, as this play of identity, in the eye of power, contains a powerful strategy for self-actualisation. It should be apparent that such a strategy might inform architectural design (Noble, 2011: 8).

Figures 5 to 15 represent parts of the South African built context, from monuments of old and new, to commercial developments. The importance of this collage is not to question whether or not these buildings carry a form of identity, but rather to ask, ‘How do these structures add value to the ongoing narrative of South African space?’

The aim is not to produce or create an identity of the individual or the collective, or of place but rather to recognise its value in a modern/Post-modern South African city and build on it to facilitate a contemporary heritage of the now. In order to understand what constitutes as identity one would need to look at how it manifests on a daily basis. The everyday actions, how one uses space and how one creates space, forms part of our identity. An understanding of the everyday will help form a stronger image of the identity of a specific place.



Fig.5. Union Buildings.



Fig.6. Freedom Park.



Fig.7. Apartheid Museum.



Fig.8. FNB Soccer Stadium.

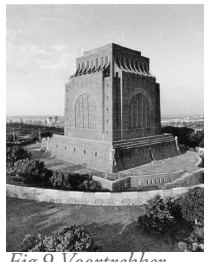


Fig.9. Voortrekker Monument.



Fig.10. Maboneng Precinct.



Fig.11. Apartheid Museum.

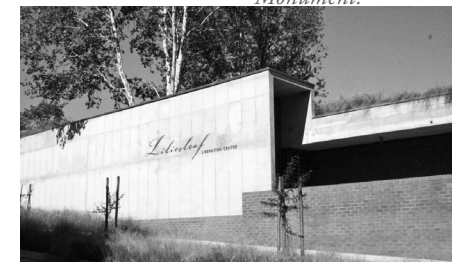


Fig.12. Liliesleaf Museum.



Fig.13. Mall of Africa.



Fig.14. Alice Lane Office Towers.



Fig.15. University of Pretoria Administration building.

Fig. 5 to 15 show the built fabric that form part of the South African context.

## Identity of *today* ?

Juhani Pallasmaa comments that the current time that society is living in, is where novelty and aesthetic invention have become the norm. Pallasmaa puts forward these ideas in his essay titled *Newness, tradition and Identity*. He writes that the concepts of newness, traditional values and identity are interrelated, and are vital components needed to create work that is part of a “historical” continuum (Pallasmaa, 2012: 19).

He explains how *nuance, expressive subtlety and an ambition for an experiential and existential quality in a work require a sense of historical continuum: ‘An embodiment of the essence of tradition’ as a precursor for ‘meaningful creativity’* (Pallasmaa, 2012: 19).

In order to understand the identity of the individual, the collective, of place and how these three become part of this continuum of the “now”, one needs to understand how all three relate to one another. One would need to strip these notions of identity down to its core, down to the subtle, nuanced expressions of identity, and how they manifest in day-to-day living. This manifestation of identity on its most basic level is of the idea of the “everyday”, the mundane, the ordinary, the banal.

*“The making of architecture is a highly conscious, indeed a self-conscious, act. The everyday is not naive.”*  
(Berke, 1997: 226)

## What is the *everyday* ?

*A critique of everyday life* by Henri Lefebvre

Lefebvre describes the idea of everyday life as an elusive concept. According to Mary McLeod(1997), Lefebvre uses a dialectical approach to understanding the everyday (McLeod, 1997: 13).

At its essence, the everyday is “real life, the here and now”. This means it includes how we view, use or find sustenance, clothing, furniture, private space, public space, neighbourhoods, and the surrounding environment (McLeod, 1997: 13). The everyday is generic and anonymous, banal and common, ordinary, crude, sensual, vulgar, domestic, and functional. The everyday can take on collective and symbolic meaning, but it is not necessarily monumental (Berke, 1997: 222-224).

Lefebvre stresses that the everyday is a contradiction to itself unto itself. The everyday is a philosophical matter but it is inherently non-philosophical. The everyday conveys images of stability and immutability, but at the same time it is uncertain and transitory. The everyday is monotonous but also festive and playful. Finally, the everyday is governed by the linear, repetitive march of time but it is also redeemed by its natural cyclical pattern (McLeod, 1997: 13-14).

To understand how the everyday can help build a narrative for the contemporary future, Lefebvre spent much of his time envisioning a future which he describes as a time where we live in a society of abundance. He envisioned that, as a society, we would have increased leisure and personal liberty which was grounded in everyday desires and needs (McLeod, 1997: 14).

Lefebvre explains that there are limitless possibilities for the future, present in everyday life, but that we can only find them in certain “moments”. It is necessary to see the city as a collective oeuvre, an ongoing act of human creation, diverse but unified (McLeod, 1997: 16).

This is the everyday and its *everydayness* that will help build a contemporary heritage for the now.

## The *Everyday* and *Everydayness*.

Henri Lefebvre's essay, *The Everyday and The Everydayness* (originally written in French, titled *Quotidien et Quotienete*) which addresses the relevance of everyday life and natures of space in architecture and urbanism (McLeod, 1997:9), will form the base of this dissertation's investigation into the everyday identities. Lefebvre starts the essay with this remark on society:

*Today we see a worldwide tendency to uniformity. Rationality dominates, accompanied but not diversified by irrationality; signs, rational in their way, are attached to things in order to convey the prestige of their possessors and their place in the hierarchy* (Lefebvre, 1997: 32).

Uniformity has become the norm. In today's ever changing society, uniformity has become a constant. Human beings are attached to "things". Their aspirations are to obtain the things of the "now". Trends dictate what is owned, how it's owned and where it's owned. These are the influences that affect how one would go on to conduct the day-to-day activities. Can then this same idea of uniformity translate from "things", to the built environment? What is the current state of South Africa's built environment? Malls, office blocks, various other commercial projects and gated communities seem to be mushrooming across the South African landscape. These buildings sit in isolation celebrating the international trends, styles

or corporate branding. With no memory of the past, nor inclination for the future, there is just a constant state of the "now".

In the essay, Lefebvre explains the idea of the everyday in five different categories:

1. Forms, Functions, Structure
2. A Common Denominator
3. Repetition and Change
4. General and Diversified Passivity
5. Modernity

Each topic will be discussed briefly to understand the concept of the everyday according to Lefebvre, as well as how these aspects start to inform identity.



Fig.16. Daily rituals allowed to manifest in the various pockets of space.

## Forms, Functions & Structures

Lefebvre (1997:34) sets out to understand the world through interpreting the various forms, functions and structures of our daily lives.

Forms, whether it being a building, or objects, or persons, allows itself to being interpreted into recognisable and accessible forms. As individuals or collectives, they perform specific functions. These functions, housed in structures, range from the physiological, to the social, to the psychological. The structures could be natural or constructed and allowed for the individual or collective to practice these functions in a private or public manner. These three ideas were not practiced separately but viewed rather as an undifferentiated whole. This whole ranged from the smallest object, to the largest built object with everything imaginable in-between. Under this unified nature each object possessed a symbolic value which ranged from divinity to humanity, power, wisdom, good and bad, happiness and misery, to the perennial and ephemeral. These everyday forms, functions, and structures defined identities (Lefebvre, 1997: 32-33).

*All such systems have in common a general law of functionalism. The everyday can therefore be defined as a set of functions which connect and join together systems that might appear to be distinct. Thus defined, the everyday is a product, the most general of products in an era where production engenders consumption, and where consumption is manipulated by producers: not by "workers," but by the managers and owners of the means of production (intellectual, instrumental, scientific). The everyday is therefore the most universal and the most unique condition, the most social and the most individuated, the most obvious and the best hidden* (Lefebvre, 1997: 34).



Fig.17. The mosque as a form, structure and function.

## A Common Denominator

Lefebvre (1997: 35) writes that up until the twentieth century, the world had a common denominator which was the “Father”. Whether it being a divine or mortal being, or a religious or temporal entity. The idea of the “Father” was the defining order of history, space and nature. With the collapse of this figure and the rise of industrialisation, colonisation and abundance, the focus of the common denominator had changed.

There was a shift in thought after the fall. The layman used the everyday as an established point of reference or common sense referent, whilst intellectuals would seek for systems of reference in places such as language, discourse or politics. Both the layman and intellectual, however, tried to solve the same riddle, to decode the modern world according to the everyday (Lefebvre, 1997:35).

*The concept of everydayness does not therefore designate a system, but rather a denominator common to existing systems including judicial, contractual, pedagogical, fiscal, and police systems. Banality? Why should the study of the banal itself be banal? Are not the surreal, the extraordinary, the surprising, even the magical, also part of the real? Why wouldn't the concept of everydayness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary (Lefebvre, 1997: 35)?*



Fig.18. Retail as a common thread.

## Repetition and Change

Lefebvre (1997), explains that the cycle of day-to-day life occurs in two different time experiences. The ‘natural’ that is a cyclical time experience, and the ‘linear’ which is a man made experience.

The natural time cycle is made up of the seconds that turn into minutes, minutes that turn into hours, into days, weeks, months, seasons and eventually into years. Each time period is a different experience according to the time of the day, or the day of the week, and the different seasons. All these factors change the way we go about our day to day living.

Linear time is a rational method of understanding time, and it is the way people construct their lives and our patterns. Work, sleep, and leisure are all categorised and put into this linear time frame, and other factors do not influence the activities. Linear time does not take the natural time cycles into account for it is fixed and permanent.

*The days follow one after another and resemble one another, and yet-here lies the contradiction at the heart of everydayness-everything changes. But the change is programmed: obsolescence is planned. Production anticipates reproduction; production produces change in such a way as to superimpose the impression of speed onto that of monotony. Some people cry out against the acceleration of time, others cry out against stagnation. They're both right (Lefebvre, 1997: 36).*



Fig.19. Street furniture to facilitate repetition.

*Thus formulated, the concept of the everyday illuminates the past. Everyday life has always existed, even if in ways vastly different from our own (Lefebvre, 1997: 36).*

## General and Diversified Passivity

*Common denominator of activities, locus and milieu of human functions, the everyday can also be analysed as the uniform aspect of the major sectors of social life: work, family, private life, leisure. These sectors, though distinct as forms, are imposed upon in their practice by a structure allowing us to discover what they share: organized passivity* (Lefebvre, 1997: 36).

Under organised passivity, Lefebvre (1997) writes that there are three different scenarios, leisure time, the workplace, and private life, where the user will react. This reaction or non-reaction is an indication of the functions that determine everyday life.

Under leisure one determines the passivity of the spectator according to how one would react to the images or landscapes of their surroundings. The workplace means that there is passivity when faced with decision making where the worker has no part in, and private life is where the spectator is confronted with consumerism, the idea of consumption of material things that are created by the capitalistic world that one lives in.

This diversified passivity of private, work and leisure life is an indication of the underlying *common denominator* that allows us to react in certain ways. The idea of the general passivity according to Lefebvre (1997) is that it is distributed unequally. It weighs more heavily on

those sentenced to everyday life, which means it is more focussed on the working class citizen; male or female, employees who are not technocrats or politicians, and on the youth. This means that it is not minorities but rather the majority of people who are burdened by the constraints of the everydayness. This does not mean, however, that each of these citizens is burdened in the same manner, or at the same time.

The notion of the general and diversified passivity is the reaction or non-reaction by the user at a different state in time, under various conditions. This informs the idea of one's everyday, the informants, and how one informs the everyday.



Fig.20. Security as a reaction to the surroundings.

## Modernity

*The everyday is covered by a surface: that of modernity. News stories and the turbulent affectations of art, fashion and event veil without ever eradicating the everyday blahs. Images, the cinema and television divert the everyday by at times offering up to it its own spectacle, or sometimes the spectacle of the distinctly non-everyday; violence, death, catastrophe, the lives of kings and stars-those who we are led to believe defy everydayness. Modernity and everydayness constitute a deep structure that a critical analysis can work to uncover* (Lefebvre, 1997: 37).

On the topic of modernity, Lefebvre (1997) and Pallasmaa (2012) have similar view points on the idea of both modernity and identity.

*Our identities are not attached to isolated things, but the continuum of culture and life; our true identities are not momentary as they have their historicity and continuity* (Pallasmaa, 2012: 23).

Therefore, the idea that modernity is separate from the past and is always present in the "now" would create a disjoint between space and the identity. The *everydayness* would not hold any value, for there is no lived experience to relate to. Modernity wants to change life as quickly as possible, it wants it all and it wants it now. Modernity does not see the value in the mundane, the ordinary, or in the banal.



Fig.21. Layers peeling away



Fig.22. Adapting to the "NOW".

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to help understand the role of identity and the everyday.

People shape their environment through the everyday interactions, thus creating an environment which in turn, shapes us. Lefebvre's essay shows how identity and the everyday are intrinsically connected, and that how one would interpret various forms, functions or structures is what determines one's point of view.

With this understanding, that it is not a common system that defines the reactions, but rather a common denominator with various inputs, time defines our activities. One's subconscious, and its passive forms of decision making, plays an important role in one's day-to-day living. The daily rituals that seem mundane, banal and ordinary, actually become the essence of who one is, how one lives, as well as how one would occupy space.

The South African urban fabric was formed through colonisation and the imposed identity of the Colonials. However, the way that space has been appropriated since democracy, begins to tell a story of the "**now**". This "**now**" is not a new identity, but an identity that was **silenced**.

The aim of this dissertation is to highlight this everyday occupation of space in an urban context, in order to build onto a contemporary heritage for the "now" and future of space making.

*Man must be everyday, or he will not be at all.*

*What is the goal? it is the transformation of life in its smallest, most everyday detail.*

-Henri Lefebvre,  
*Critique de la vie quotidienne*, 1947

# 03

## CONTEXT

BACKGROUND.  
MAPPING : EXISTING IDENTITY.  
MARABASTAD ; A LEGACY OF UTOPIAS.  
MAPPING : OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITY OF SPACE.  
CONCLUSION.