CHAPTER TWO
RESEARCH PROPOSAL
2.1 INTRODUCTION

Opéra is a theatrical concept which has been in existence since the late 17th century. Over the past few centuries it has been growing and changing, but rarely in the past 50 to 60 years. Opéra has seen a decline in attendance. However, this presents an opportunity for it to be re-contextualized in its public presentation. Opéra enthusiast Ja-Naé (2014) states in response to the decline and need for re-interpretation of opera, that: “to reimagine opera and start bringing in a new wave of opera audience, we are going to need to embrace a wide-range of solutions.”

Popular international events which reintroduced the cultural experience of opera to opera festivals such as the ‘Arena di Verona, 2017). This concept draws a number of people of different nationalities to the city to experience the beauty of opera. This annual summer event brings audience members from across the world together to engage in the beauty of opera. The combination of this open-air site and the undying need for opera preservation allows for a unique opportunity which respectfully explores a historical and cultural awareness of the site, opera and heritage.

2.2 BACKGROUND

With the upsurge of the technological era, there is an underlying threat to the cultural development of theatres, especially opera. “The Metropolitan Opera, which had a 97% attendance rate in 1959 currently (2014) has a 79% attendance rate” (Scorer 2014). Further developed by the growth of technology society is frequently searching for new methods of entertainment, from the likes of social media applications to virtual reality, placing the spectator mentally into a created digital realm. This allows an opportunity for the creation of physical escapism - removing the spectator from their immediate reality and placing them into a new stimulating environment. When talking about opera progression Ja-Naé (2014) stated that “what we need to do is to tap into the spirit of elevated humanity that the classic wielded in a way the modern audience can appreciate.”

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2.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is a necessity for cultural and historical and technological development. The need for preservation and cultural celebration arises. Located near the western entrance to Pretoria built into an undated hill sits an exquisite French-designed structure, originally built in 1896 for military purposes. Over the years, the site has fallen into a state of disrepair. However, along with elemental damage comes a delicate and intriguing structural character which tells a beautiful story of the past and present.

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24 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Main research question

How can the introduction of a temporary site-specific opera serve as a catalyst to bring awareness to the cultural and historical value of the Fort Daspoortrand ruin?

Secondary research questions

• What value do scenography and site-specific theatre contribute to the domain of interior architecture?

25 AIMS

The purpose of this study is to identify a method that will bring the public to Fort Daspoortrand for a cultural experience but also draw them to the beauty of the ruin. The intervention aims to take the audience on a journey of the operatic story while at the same time captivating them in the journey of the site’s heritage.

A temporary opera performance, running for three to five weeks, will act as an invitation to draw the public to the site. The William Kentridge reimagined performance of the well-known opera Magic Flute will awaken the beauty of the site’s former encircling the audience and public to revisit the site once the performance is over.

A temporary intervention will facilitate the scenes and create an awareness of the need for preservation of the site. A designated walkway will facilitate the human circulation of the site, firstly to take the audience on a constructed journey of site and ensuite, and secondly to reinforce the physical contact with the heritage fabric. This permanent design strategy, which includes new stairs and a new ramp, will ensure the preservation of the site and possibly add a valuable layer to the value of the site once the opera performance has ended.

The non-invasive temporary intervention will act as the initial catalyst for the awareness and preservation of the site. The three-dimensional exploration of the thematic developments of the opera will be used to highlight the existing beauty of the site, encouraging the public to revisit the site once the performance has passed.

Through the integration of the audience, site, actor, music and performance, a temporary site-specific theatre will draw attention to the need for preservation of all historical landmarks. The performance will focus on unveiling the existing character and historical relevance of the site, placing emphasis on what the current site has to offer. The audience will be encouraged to explore and experience the space whilst learning about its heritage value and cultural significance throughout the performance. The site will become a stage, a temporary platform of information, whilst the performance will tell a story of the past, present and future.

Preservation and site awareness are the main focuses of the project, which will consider both the presentation of site heritage and the cultural value of spaces in order to bring awareness to the unique existing beauty of the site.

26 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study will contribute:

• To the field of interior architecture with a focus on establishing a relationship between set design, interior design, scenography and site to bring about the awareness of heritage and cultural value.

• To an understanding of the value of scenography in the domain of interior architecture.

Since the University of Pretoria does not offer set design as a specific degree, this master’s dissertation - and the existing set design, scenography and theatre design projects of the University of Pretoria that deal with a common theme. The purpose of the table, in Figure 2.1, is to illustrate how the student’s work has contributed to the Interior Architecture field, and through that, align this dissertation within the same field of research.

The table, figure 2.1, elaborates on four existing dissertations for the further exploration of theatre design in the department. The table, Figure 2.1, on the following page, shows a list of honours and masters students who have chosen to contribute to the collective theatre design research of the field of Interior Architecture. The projects range widely in focus, but it is apparent to the collective theatre design research of the field of Interior Architecture that the projects range widely in focus, but it is apparent to the collective theatre design research of the field of Interior Architecture.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Title of Project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Jason Wagg</td>
<td>Extending the site(s) of the Capital Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Jeni Malherbe</td>
<td>Wood for the Trees: A temporary site-specific performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Leandra Levenderis</td>
<td>Fort Daspoortrand heritage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Liza Gerneke</td>
<td>Flute as a catalyst to the narration of site-specific opera: A reimagined Magic in a Forest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Janri Myburgh</td>
<td>Real fictions: a heterotopic production in a Forest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Meera Chita</td>
<td>Theatre for the performance of 'Circles'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Jason Wiggin</td>
<td>Wood for the Trees: a temporary site-specific performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### 2.7 Research Methodologies and Methods

**Methodologies**

This dissertation aims to use the methodology of historical research as well as qualitative research. Both types of research methodologies will add value to the data collection.

**Methods**

Historical research addresses issues which pertain to the environment and context created in the past. The focus of such research is on the historical relevance and cultural significance. Scenography as a strategy to bring awareness to a heritage site. The focus is adding to the site-specific research field within theatre dissertations.

Methods

The qualitative research will be conducted via a literature review and site analysis. The data collected through such research will be interpreted to ensure that the studies are aligned with the dissertation focus. The relevant theories will aid in the further development of the proposed project and design. The literature review will be conducted with a focus on the relationship between interior architecture, scenography and heritage. The chief precedent study of ‘We Play Macbeth at Fort Point’ by We Players will be used for its theoretical and design similarities to this project. The precedent study will be critically evaluated while the visual and interpretative data collected will aid in the further development of the proposed project and design.

**Qualitative research** is multi-method in focus, involving the studied use and collection of qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of qualitative empirical data. Such research focuses on the social relationship in architecture and an interpretation of the collected empirical data. Methods such as location mapping, photo documentation and personal observation form part of the collected data.

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An in-depth analysis and comprehensive historical research of the site, derived from various heritage charters, will assist to develop a design strategy which considers the heritage significance and value of the site, Fort Daspoortrand. The heritage study will form the starting point in the development of the design as the Burra Charter sets out limitations and processes to follow when dealing with heritage sites and cultural significance.

Methodologies

This dissertation aims to use the methodology of historical research as well as qualitative research. Both types of research methodologies will add value to the data collection.

To ensure a shared understanding, the following definitions will clarify which methods of research will be utilised in practice.

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2.8 Delineation and Limitations

The site will be kept in its present state, with the exception of the two permanent interventions. The set design will form part of the temporary intervention, and will ensure that no permanent damage or harm is done to any of the existing structures. The project is limited to the ruin of the fort, however consideration of the Fort Heritage Village, at the base of the hill, will be taken into account. This consideration will ensure that the aspects of the Burra Charter and place significance are efficiently and respectively dealt with throughout the project.

With a clear evaluation of various heritage charters, the historical value of the site will be addressed. The Burra Charter states three methods on how to deal with heritage, namely reconstruction, restoration and preservation. For this project, the method of preservation will act as the main driver of the retention of the heritage value and cultural significance of the site (the concept of preservation and the Burra Charter will be further explored in the Theoretical Chapter 4.2 to follow).

Preservation is the maintaining of the site in its current condition, as well as the minimisation of further decay. Due to this theoretical restriction, the aim of this project is not to restore the site to its original state but to rather use the decay and existing character as an informant for performance and create awareness of the site’s possibilities.

2.9 Overview of Study

Within the study, a focus will be placed on site-specific performance, by explicitly using temporary design interventions to facilitate the opera. The theories and research will support the production as a catalyst to the re-introduction of the fort ruin to the public, as well as the combination of scenography and interior architecture as an homogenous field of study.

Throughout this dissertation, a strong focus on the heritage value and cultural significance of the site and opera are prominent. As the project aims to use the theatre as a catalyst for preservation, the performance will act as a temporary design intervention, bringing about awareness of the historical value of the site. The temporary pop-up nature of the theatre will ensure that no permanent damage is done to the site. The design approach of ‘touch lightly and leave nothing’ will form the main design concept for the project.

Throughout the following chapters, the relevant theories and considerations will be taken into account, as mentioned in the breakdown of the structure of the dissertation page xxi.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter aims to set out a clear understanding of the study’s proposal. It includes the background to the real-world issues; the identified problems and how research questions will be used to address the problem. The aims and objectives define the direction and the intended development of the dissertation - to set out the rationale and outcomes for the design. These directives are further evaluated in terms of research methodologies and methods that will aid in the data collection ensuring that the dissertation is well informed.

The significance of the study is addressed; ensuring that the theoretical and design intents of the project are aligned with that of the Master’s qualification. The overview of the study provides a breakdown of what to expect throughout further chapters of the dissertation.