

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Opera is a theatrical concept which has been in existence since the late 17th century. Over the past four centuries it has been growing and changing, but sadly in the past 50 to 60 years Opera has seen a decline in attendance. However, this presents an opportunity for it to be reconceptualised in its public presentation. Opera 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 are opera festivals such as the ‘Arena di Verona Festival’, where many operas are put on for a specific amount of time at a particular location. In the year 2017, the opera festival will take place in the Colosseum in Rome, Italy. This annual summer event brings audience members from across the world together to engage in the beauty of opera (Arena di Verona, 2017). This concept draws a number of people of different nationalities to the city to experience

the event. Opera festivals are an innovative means to give opera the new life that it is longing for. Such festivals create an awareness of the cultural value that opera has, and brings a large variety of opera to a diverse audience in an attempt to ignite the enthusiasm that opera deserves.

Site-specific performance is a theatre form which was developed in the 1980’s. Distinct locations were identified around a city and used as a stage for a specific performance. The concept of Site-specific Theatre is to encourage the audience to explore new landscapes and use performance to enhance and narrate a site. Removing the audience from the theatre, and allowing them to explore and view the city from an unfamiliar perspective, deepens the metaphorical meaning of escapism intended by theatre. The site-specific performance opens potentials to bring architecture and theatrical design together in a realm where both performance and site are evolved and given new life.

Attachment of place is rooted in a profound emotional connection to cultural heritage. The value of these places enriches the cultural traditions and memories of the

communities. In order to retain such cultural value and attachment, it is necessary for a place to be preserved. Through the suspension of such decay, the importance and value associated with a place can be prolonged (The Burra Charter, 2013).

The combination of opera, site-specific performance and heritage has the ability to create a spectacle which is culturally stimulating and innovative, bringing light to the historical value of physical context, thus making it socially relevant and relatable. Site-specific opera can be used as a catalyst to the re-imagining of opera and its relevance in the 21st century. The performance has the possibility to act as the narrator of cultural significance found in the heritage-rich sites of South Africa, ultimately bringing together the past, present and future.

2.2 BACKGROUND

With the upsurge of the technological era, there is an underlying threat to the cultural development of theatre, especially opera. “The Metropolitan Opera, which had a 97% attendance rate in 1959 currently (2014) has a 79% attendance rate” (Cooper 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 headsets. The downfall of this digital age is that it can only transport 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 tap into the spirit of elevated humanity that the classic wielded in a way the modern audience can appreciate.”

Site-specific Theatre has the potential to fulfil this demand by placing the spectator in a physical environment, removing them from their everyday reality and providing a unique experience. The site, Fort Daspoortrand, is in a state of

physical degradation and the decay of heritage and cultural fabric is evident. Therefore, the potential for preservation and cultural celebration arises. Located near the western entrance to Pretoria built into an understated hill sits an exquisite French-designed structure, originally built in 1898 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.

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.

2.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is a necessity for cultural and historical awareness identified within the local context of Pretoria and found in both the current cultural relevance of the opera and the physical state of Fort Daspoortrand. These two mentioned entities both stand to add cultural significance and value to the greater community. The need for preservation of both opera and Fort Daspoortrand has the potential to bring the awareness of cultural and physical decay into the public eye.

2.4 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

- How can site-specific opera serve as a catalyst to the awareness of any heritage site?
- How can the thematic values of the opera and site be translated into a three-dimensional experience, reflective of both narratives?
- What additional value and cultural significance can William Kentridge's reimagined interpretation of the Magic Flute opera add to the existing site?
- What is the value in the preservation of the heritage fabric at Fort Daspoortrand?
- How can the combination of the site, Fort Daspoortrand, and the opera, Magic Flute, add to the development of the cultural richness of both entities?

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

2.5 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 initial event to draw the public to the site. The William Kentridge re-imagined performance of the well-known opera Magic Flute will awaken the beauty of the site's drama encouraging 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 opera, and secondly to minimise 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 an extra 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, while 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 preservation of site heritage and the cultural value of opera in order to bring awareness to the unique existing beauty of the site.

2.6 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 projects of the University of Pretoria which focus on theatre design - can add valuable research to the field of set design and scenography in the domain of Interior Architecture. The collection of work by the University's students can be used as a catalyst 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 in each of the set design, scenography and theatre design is included under the Interior Architecture domain. The technical development of set design follows closely with temporary interior design, by utilising similar design tools.

According to the University of Oregon (2016), interior architecture opens "opportunities for students preparing to enter professional practice includes interior design within an architectural firm or as an independent interior designer, lighting designer, exhibit designer, set designer, facilities manager and furniture designer". Therefore, this study will contribute to the development of set design through a hybrid-style design which utilises interior design principles, as well as those of set design to create a unified space.

The table, figure 2.1, elaborates on four existing dissertations 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.

| YEAR | STUDENT NAME | TITLE OF PROJECT | DESIGN FOCUS | THEORETICAL FOCUS |
|------|--------------------|--|---|--|
| - | Meera Chita | Reinventing Theatrical Education | Experimental theatre, a means to the education around the theatre. The project was proposed for the UP Campus | Elements that play a vital role in the creation of a theatre, arts and culture relationship for society. It deals with the Relationship between Lynch principles to the theatre realm. |
| 2010 | Jason Wiggin | Extending the skin(s) of the Capitol Theatre | The adaptive reuse of the Capitol Theatre | A blurring of the boundaries of interior and exterior |
| 2011 | JanriMyburgh | Wood for the trees: a temporary Theatre for the performance of 'Circles in a Forest.' | Temporary Theatre, regenerative and adaptive reuse within the inner city. | The catalyst of theatre performance/space to ignite community use and bring awareness to the existing spaces within the city. |
| 2012 | Liza Gerneke | Real fictions: a heterotopic production design for The Lorax | Film production design | Universal message on the design of a production including scenography and set designing. |
| 2017 | Leandra Levenderis | Site-specific opera: Areimagined Magic Flute as a catalyst to the narration of Fort Daspoortrand heritage. | Temporary Site-specific theatre, an opera production | Scenography as a strategy to bring awareness to a heritage site. The focus is adding to the site-specific research field within theatre dissertations. |

Figure 2.1 Table showing masters dissertations of the University of Pretoria

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

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 suitability of the site. Methods such as identifying the social impacts, building styles and city forms are also included under this methodology. Comparative photographic documentation of the history, as well as the current state of the site, adds significant value to the research. The collected data found on the history and heritage of the site is then evaluated and interpreted to ensure that all advantages of the site are exposed. (Groat and Wang 2013, 173-175)

Denzin and Lincoln cited in 'Groat and Wang' (2013:218)

that, "Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials". 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.

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 help establish the theoretical discourse and direction of the further development of the project and design. The literature review will be conducted with a focus on the relationship between interior architecture, scenography and heritage.

An in-depth site 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.

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 design. The precedent study is not specific enough to cover all general notion identified in the research questions. Therefore, the selected precedent study focuses on a site-specific performance which involves audience participation and scenography and set design. The precedent study does not address issues such as the heritage and cultural significance of the chosen site.

2.8 DELINEATION AND LIMITATIONS

The site will be kept in its present state, with the exception of the two permanent intervention. 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 structure. The project is limited to the ruin of the fort, however consideration of the historical 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 respectfully 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 means 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 a 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 xxiii.

2.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter aims to set out a clear understanding of the study proposal. It includes the background to the real-world issues; the identified problem and which 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 restraints and outcomes for the design. These directives are further evaluated in terms of research methodologies and methods which 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.