CHAPTER FOUR
THEORETICAL PREMISE
41 A PRELUDE OF THOUGHTS

There is an evident decline in opera audiences, as identified in Chapter 1.3. The concept of full immersion is prominent. It is identified that site-specific theatre has the ability to bring energy back into these environments and encourage the audience to interact with the selected site. As discussed in Chapter 2.2 – Background – a design intervention which merges site, audience, actor, and performance holds a conceptual solution to this problem. The following Chapter seeks to investigate the benefits of Site-specific Theatre, scenography, and historical relevance of site within the domain of interior architecture. Ultimately, the creation of site awareness and emphasis on cultural value could benefit not only the site, Fort Dauphin, but also encourage a new audience for opera. The project does not have a typical interior architecture focus; however, the case for the open-natured site, and therefore, its place in the theatre architecture domain, is argued. Further, the site-specific performance integrates a unique experience where the audience is placed directly in the physical set and surrounding natural environment.

42 DEFINING SITE-SPECIFIC THEATRE

Site-specific theatre originated in the early 80’s as a means of entertainment to provide the audience with a different and innovative perspective on performance. Originally, the performers were involved in street art and street performances, but soon the excitement and spontaneity spread to the theatre house. Mason (1992:3) stated during a time of site-specific performance, that conceptually, “the border between entertainer and art, between audience and performer and between this performance itself and the larger social event are becoming less defined”. Naturally, with any change to the norm, there was much controversy in the acceptance of theatre changing its form. Mason explains how the conventional theatre lovers for an outdoor theatre to be inferior to the indoor theatre, implying that outdoor theatre is not a ‘real’ theatre and that the shows are put on by amateurs. The conventional theatre lovers find an outdoor theatre to be of lesser entertainment to provide the audience with a different and innovative perspective on performance. Originally, the performers were involved in street art and street performances, but soon the excitement and spontaneity spread to the theatre house. Mason (1992:3) stated during a time of site-specific performance, that conceptually, “the border between entertainer and art, between audience and performer and between this performance itself and the larger social event are becoming less defined”. Naturally, with any change to the norm, there was much controversy in the acceptance of theatre changing its form. Mason explains how the conventional theatre lovers for an outdoor theatre to be inferior to the indoor theatre, implying that outdoor theatre is not a ‘real’ theatre and that the shows are put on by amateurs. The conventional theatre lovers find an outdoor theatre to be of lesser quality than is the case for an indoor theatre. Mason (1992:3) also explains that outdoors “the changing conditions and interruptions mean that each performance is an unique event where as indoor performance tends to be more of an easily repeatable production”. Outdoor performance typically has a free and exciting atmosphere since an “outdoor performer cannot get away without energy and spirit” (Mason 1992:87). When referring to the uniqueness and spontaneity found at site-specific locations, as opposed to the indoor theatre, Mason (1992:87) explains that outdoors “the changing conditions and interruptions mean that each performance is an unique event where as indoor performance tends to be more of an easily repeatable production”. Outdoor performance typically has a free and exciting atmosphere since an “outdoor performer cannot get away without energy and spirit” (Mason 1992:87). Open-air theatre needs to offer something different from the indoor theatre; giving the audience a unique experience, something to talk about and most importantly something to remember. Not only does the outdoor theatre offer a new environmental experience but, “the performer can have a greater effect on the audience because they can get amongst them, surprise them, lead them on journeys, play with them, surprise them by appearing in unexpected places, or surrounding them with fireworks” (Mason 1992:12).
Site-specific locations form an important aspect of the Immersive Theatre, where certain sites are chosen to evolve the performance. The attraction to particular sites often occurs because “they provide ready-made exploratory landscapes, sediments of the historic, into which performances can be situated and in which engagement with the environment can be an important part of the audience experience” (White, 2012). The site is then addressed as the stage and a backdrop to the performance, forming part of the site by giving the play an advanced context. The context and history of the site form a vital part of the site selection, however the emphasis is placed rather on the play's relevance to the site. Nevertheless, the emphasis is placed on the site being the first element of the site, and the site as the director of the performance, moving audience and actor strategically through the performance experience.” (White, 2012). The site is then addressed as the stage and a backdrop to the performance, forming part of the performance through revealing the range and variety of these performative relationships. Sites are then seen as three-dimensional, multi-sensory spaces where the play reveals the character of the environment. The spectators' experience is integral to the performance space and the environment, and the performance is formed around the site rather than on the play's relevance to the site. This approach is often used to develop the relationships between spectator, environment and performers, and the intended interactions, planned or unplanned, with the actors. The audience, environment and performers, along with the physical interactions of the performing bodies, along with the physical interactions of the spectators within the environment, means that the experience of the space for the spectator is integral to the performance. As mentioned by Mason (1992:11) the audience's participation and how to facilitate this interaction. The intention of the unknown is often “greater than the idea or the concept of the space.” “The intention is to replace that typical audience reaction where “video, objects, sound, lights and visuals, we aim for a ‘total performance experience’,” for ‘transportation performances’ that result in ‘transportation performances’ that result in ‘transportation performances’ that result in powerful emotions and eye-opening adventures” (Immersive Theatre, 2016). The site forms the first layer where the play reveals the character of the environment. The second layer is filled with the details of the environment. This invites the audience to interact and explore the site on a new level. The third layer of the performance is where the performances are situated around the site focusing on audience’s movements around the site. The fourth layer is the environment which becomes “multi-sensory, making use of exploratory and site-specific personalities. Sometimes introducing touch and smell – things that are not normally part of the traditional theatre.” (White, 2012). Although Immersive Theatre focuses on the audience participation and how to facilitate this interaction. The emphasis is placed on the audience and on making the site the focus of the performance. However, valid design informants are set out within Immersive Theatre which will aid the audience in the development of the site-specific performance of this project. As mentioned by Mason (1992:11) the audience's understanding is vital to the success of the performance.
4.3.1 Elements of Interior Architecture

**Environment**

The environment is defined as the physical space, made up of existing natural or man-created structures. The environment also pertains to how we interact with space. It is important to ensure that harmony and interaction are incorporated into the environment.

With regards to this project, the environment refers to the existing site and what it has to offer to the audience experience. The environment can also be challenged and changed with purpose to create a particular effect on the public.

**Space**

Space refers to the physical attributes of the environment. It is classified by the solids and void forms that make up the area. Space is affected by distance, closeness, views, and existing structures.

In this project, space relates to the proportion of the architecture and the openness, scale, confinements, and different physical properties the site has to offer.

**Light**

Light typically refers to the natural and artificial use of light and its particular function or purpose. Light in design has many opportunities to enhance the experience of the user.

The design intentions of this project are to use light as a drawing tool, using its flexibility to manipulate and change the spaces, creating information in multiple layers.

**Enclosure**

The term enclosure typically refers to a physical structure which acts as a protector. An enclosure does not have to be closed on all sides it can have one, two or three sides open.

For this project, the enclosure pertains to the highly structured and densely built areas, such as the entrance tunnel. However, the enclosed space could also refer to the way that the night’s sky acts as a ceiling, or the trees bring the scale of the room down. The site possesses many elements of natural enclosure which can be enhanced through the design.

**Ground Plane**

The ground plane refers to the existing natural level of the ground. This can include levels, inclines, physical changes and slopes. The ground plane is typically the areas of the site where the public or people will come into contact with the environment.

The site facilitates two levels of ground where the audience will have the opportunity to stand. Through the design, the ground plane can be manipulated to create various experiences.

Support refers to the physical elements added to the space to ensure the audience interact with the site and participate in the experience.

For this project, the support will take the form of the audience’s interaction with the performance as well as the way in which the set-design and actors relate to the site and the audience.

**Display**

Typically display would be used in retail to exhibit certain elements and items.

However, for this project display will take the form of a visual exhibition of the actors and their performance. This could potentially include predicates and other focal structures to enrich the themes and emotions of the performance.

**Decoration**

Decoration in interior design refers to the added elements and furnishings which create the atmosphere or set the mood for the space.

Regarding this project, decoration relates to the details used to give cues to the audience of the mood or the intended thematic development of the performance.

**Information**

Information is a key design element as it communicates the intentions to the public, whether it be direction, content or instruction.

Throughout the performance, information will play a valuable role as it will ensure that the audience members follow the performance and remain safe throughout the production.

**Proportion**

Although scale and proportion do not officially form part of these elements, they are important in the development of this project. Scale and proportion can be utilised to place emphasis on certain areas and themes that the performance wishes to enhance. The scale can help develop the relationship between actor, audience and site.

Acoustics is not a formally identified element. However, it is an important consideration when designing interior spaces.

For this project, the sound quality of the actors’ voices and ambient noises need to be addressed. Strategies for acoustic considerations have been addressed in each scene, ensuring the maximum output of sound quality is achieved at the site. Two methods are employed, firstly the sound is captured at the audience end, and secondly the sound is reflected at the actor end.
A PLACE FOR SCENOGRAPHY IN INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

According to the Collee English Dictionary (2017), scenography is defined as ‘the art of portraying objects or scenes in perspective’. This non-specific definition gives a sense of flexibility in what can be identified as scenography. Since scenography is seen from the perspective of space, it allows the opportunity to explore tools and methods to create these spaces. For the context of this dissertation, the term ‘scenography’ refers more to the physical means of designing these environments (or scenes) to elicit a perceived performance.

Scenography closely links design tools, such as lighting design, projection, acoustics and illusion, which will form part of the experiential aspect of each scene. These elements are then further developed to enhance the thematic meaning and creation of each scene.

Just as in interior architecture, there are methods and principles—such as proportion, scale, light and space—to create the context of a spatial experience. Scenography employs a variety of tools to create these physical spaces in the theatre. The elements of design are then similarly utilised in the same principles—such as proportion, scale, light and space—to design buildings and interior spaces, while also maintaining respect for the context and integrity of the original building.

Interior Architecture as a design profession has developed over the past thirty years with the intention of bridging the gap between architecture and interior design. More specifically, it has evolved to incorporate architectural influences of existing buildings and interior spaces, while also maintaining respect for the context and integrity of the original building. According to the University of Pretoria (2015), interior architecture opens “opportunities for students preparing to enter professional practice; these include interior design within an architectural firm or as an independent interior designer, lighting designer, exhibit designer, set designer, facilities manager and furniture designer”.

The technical development of set design follows closely with temporary interior design by utilizing similar design tools and principles. Therefore, this study will contribute to the understanding of set design and scenography as an extension of interior architecture. However, more importantly, a focus is placed on the possibilities of scenography to become an interior architecture tool which can be used to ignite creative conceptualisation at a specific site. This, in turn, will bring awareness to its existing character of the site while also considering the audience interacting with the physical space.

As in interior architecture, there are many methods and principles which can be utilized in the creation of physical spaces intended for public enjoyment. The projects range widely in focus, but it is apparent in each dissertation that a scenic and thematic context is placed on the possibilities of scenography to become an interior architecture tool which can be used to ignite creative conceptualisation at a specific site. This, in turn, will bring awareness to its existing character of the site while also considering the audience interacting with the physical space.

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Figure 2.1 Table showing masters dissertations of the University of Pretoria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>STUDENT NAME</th>
<th>TITLE OF PROJECT</th>
<th>DESIGN FOCUS</th>
<th>THEORETICAL FOCUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Jason Wippie</td>
<td>Extending the skylight of the Capital Theatre</td>
<td>Experimental theatre, a means to the education around the theatre</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Jann Machlin</td>
<td>Wood for the trees: a temporary Theatre for the performance of Sichers in a Forest</td>
<td>Temporary Theatre, representative and adaptive reuse within the interior city</td>
<td>The catalyst of theatre performance/space to ignite community use and bring awareness to the existing spaces within the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Lisa Gemaere</td>
<td>A blurring of the boundaries of interior and exterior</td>
<td>Reinventing Theatrical Education</td>
<td>Universal message on the design of a production including scenography and set designing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Leonor Lavender</td>
<td>Site-specific opera: A means to the education around the theatre</td>
<td>Temporarily Site-specific theatre, an opera production</td>
<td>Scenography as a strategy to bring awareness to a heritage site. The focus is adding to the site-specific research field within theatre dissertations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
45. A THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

The theoretical context is based on an understanding of the close relationship between interior architecture and scenography. These theories have been further developed through the project which explores a local context of military ruin. The selection of a site-specific theatre production evaluates the balance of design intentions to create awareness of the cultural significance of the site, opera and theatre. A focus has been placed on how a site-specific performance, which takes the form of an opera, can act as a catalyst to the narration of a chosen site to create awareness of its existence and unique character. The aim of the design is not to permanently affect the site, but rather to behave as an ignition for the future development of such sites. The theatre performance, which takes the form of an opera, can act as a catalyst to the narration of a chosen site to create awareness of its existence and unique character. The aim of the design is to draw awareness to the site, without taking away from its existing properties. Similarly, the opera is a culturally rich entity. However, over the recent years it has seen a decline. The project aims to reinforce the cultural value and significance that opera and the site have to offer.

The Magic Flute opera was selected for its unique imagery that the artist has used to depict the characters, themes and atmosphere of the production. Kentridge has adapted the production for the South African context, making the visual components accessible to the local audience. Figure 4.1, shows a collage of Kentridge’s use of lighting, illusions, projection and basic scenery. His scenographic tools ensure that the production can be easily reconceptualised in a site-specific performance. Without re-designing each scene, Kentridge’s performance provides a useful amount of visual information which can be layered onto the site, while still maintaining its innovation and intricacies. Kentridge has adapted the production for the South African context, making the visual components accessible to the local audience. Figure 4.1, shows a collage of Kentridge’s use of lighting, illusions, projection and basic scenery. His scenographic tools ensure that the production can be easily reconceptualised in a site-specific performance. Without re-designing each scene, Kentridge’s performance provides a useful amount of visual information which can be layered onto the site, while still maintaining its innovation and intricacies.

46. CONSIDERATION OF HERITAGE

The value that the preservation of the site can add to the surrounding community is significant. Not only is the site historically rich, it also has unique characteristics which have developed as a result of elemental damage. The intention of the design is to draw awareness to the site, without taking away from its existing properties. Similarly, the opera is a culturally rich entity. However, over the recent years it has seen a decline. This project aims to reinforce the cultural value and significance that opera and the site have to offer.

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The third option is preservation, which is the maintaining of a place in its existing state by retaining deterioration. The design approach focuses on retaining the site in its current state, as well as the minimization of further decay. A theoretical restriction for this project is not to restore the site to its original state but rather to use the existing structure as an informer to the opera performance. The objective is to create awareness of the site’s possibilities and bring to life the value identified at a heritage level.
4.7 Audience placement and site-specific performance

Site-specific theatre is a relatively new concept, along with site-specific performances which take place in historical or old buildings. The following precedent study shows an immersive theatre adaptation of a Shakespearean production in an old structure: Macbeth at Fort Point 2014, is directed by John Hadden & Ava Roy. This site-specific theatre performance utilises the old Fort Point building. The production aimed to express the power and beauty of the performance space through the manifestation of a Shakespearean play. We Players (2017) described the production of Macbeth at Fort Point as “multiple performance trajectories which wind through the dark stone corridors, narrow passageways, expansive brick casemates, and inner chambers of the fort. The Golden Gate Bridge soars overhead, the city skyline looms—a full sensory immersion into Macbeth’s Scotland as it collides with Civil War era and modern-day San Francisco.”

This performance combines two completely different themes and eras. The past and historical value of the performance by Shakespeare, juxtaposed against an old Military fort and the modern cityscape. Macbeth at Fort Point is an interesting precedent study which explores the relationship between the site and performance to create a narrative and audience experience. Figure 4.2a to Figure 4.2l illustrates strategic lighting as a focus in the performance. Lighting is used to highlight the character of the fort and reveal the drama of the play. The natural acoustic nature of the site is also used to enhance the drama. This variation changes and enhances multiple audience perceptions of the production. Corridors, courtyards and casemates are used to enhance the audience’s auditory experience, while following the actors through the site, exploring the drama of the fort and experiencing a thrilling performance.

Studied as an example of site-specific performance, scenography and architecture, this precedent gives visual clues on how to achieve a performance which has been scattered throughout a specific site. Technical advancements in the use of lighting and the existing levels of the fort help to evolve the design considerations of the site-specific performance.

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Figure 4.2 We Players performance of Macbeth at Fort Point, 2014
4.8 Audience-Actor View

Although Site-specific Theatre focuses on audience interaction and how to facilitate it, emphasis is placed strongly on how the audience perceive the characters and interacts with the site. Valid design informants are set out which will inform the development of the site-specific performance of this project. As mentioned by Mason (1992) under the Site-specific Theatre section, audience understanding is vital to the success of the performance. Therefore, White’s (2012) thorough exploration of the audience, performer and site relationship will give a better understanding of the limitations and boundaries accessible in the development of the outcome of this project.

As mentioned in the Immersive Theatre, further explored in Chapter 1.4, the audience is able to give the performances and interact with the actor as requested. However, for the purpose of this project and the focus on the physical space of the site, the audience members will not be required to physically interact with the actors and the historic fabric. Due to the historical value of the site and the intended heritage direction of the project, site preservation, it is not advised that the audience have physical access to the site’s fabric, but rather that they move around and through the space without contact. The concept of a designated walkway will take the audience on a journey following the performance, but not allowing them to participate in acting in the scenes. The following diagrams, Figure 4.3 to Figure 4.9, show the audience-actor relationships typically used in film and theatre.

4.9 Audience-Actor View

![Diagram of Audience-Actor View](image)

**Figure 4.3** Audience surrounding actor

**Figure 4.4** Audience facing actor

**Figure 4.5** Actor above audience

**Figure 4.6** Actor below audience

**Figure 4.7** Actor on same level as audience

**Figure 4.8** Actor below and surrounded by audience

**Figure 4.9** Actor view restricted for audience

- **SAME LEVEL**
  - Equality, relatability

- **ACTOR LOOKING UP**
  - Authoritative audience, feelings of vulnerability for actor

- **ACTOR LOOKING DOWN**
  - Power for actor, feelings of intimidation on audience

- **FAR DISTANCE VIEW**
  - Equality, and detachment for actor and audience

- **SURROUNDED ACTOR LOOKING UP**
  - Introduction for actor, sense of pressure

- **SURROUNDED ACTOR LOOKING DOWN**
  - Mystery and hidden information, a sense of insecurity

- **CLOSED IN**
  - Distance and intimacy

- **Figure 4.10** Actor on same level as audience

- **Figure 4.11** Actor view restricted for audience

- **Figure 4.12** Audience surrounding actor

- **Figure 4.13** Audience facing actor

- **Figure 4.14** Actor above audience

- **Figure 4.15** Actor below audience

- **Figure 4.16** Actor on same level as audience

- **Figure 4.17** Actor below and surrounded by audience

- **Figure 4.18** Actor view restricted for audience

- **Figure 4.19** Audience surrounding actor

- **Figure 4.20** Audience facing actor

- **Figure 4.21** Actor above audience

- **Figure 4.22** Actor below audience

- **Figure 4.23** Actor on same level as audience

- **Figure 4.24** Actor below and surrounded by audience

- **Figure 4.25** Actor view restricted for audience

- **Figure 4.26** Audience surrounding actor

- **Figure 4.27** Audience facing actor

- **Figure 4.28** Actor above audience

- **Figure 4.29** Actor below audience

- **Figure 4.30** Actor on same level as audience

- **Figure 4.31** Actor below and surrounded by audience

- **Figure 4.32** Actor view restricted for audience
49 A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DOMAIN

Not only add the research and design contribute to the examination of Site-specific Theatre and scenography in interior architecture, but it will also bring awareness to the site and opera in prominent, and the temporary pop-up nature of the theatre will ensure that no permanent damage is done to the site, this will be achieved with the conceptual design approach of "touch lightly and leave nothing". As the purpose of the project is to use the site-specific theatre as a catalyst for the preservation, the performance will act as a temporary design intervention looking about awareness of the historical value of the site.

4.10 THE FINALE OF THOUGHTS

Site-specific theatre is an unique form of performance which has the potential to combine theatre architecture and scenography in harmony. The research in this dissertation has attempted to support the case for the consideration of scenography within the interior architecture domain.

Site-specific theatre can give life back to the unused building. This sustainable design approach has an advantage as it can be used to enhance the richness of a site while at the same time giving it a second chance and creating an awareness of its existing beauty. Since site-specific theatre identifies ready-made landscapes, it can be applied to a variety of environments. The focus of this dissertation is on the use of a historic site, with a unique physical quality, which can be further exposed and appreciated through the use of the site-specific performance.

Supported by the precedent study and the design interventions, the use of lighting, illusion, set design, and scenography come together to produce an experience which transcends the audience's spatial expectations. The site-specific performance opens a vast opportunity to create awareness of the site. Projection and light are used to enhance and expose the richness of the heritage fabric. Illusion gives the audience a fractured visual experience combining site, performance and actors into one whole. In addition, the strategic use of set design enhances the performance while addressing the sensitivities or drama of the site.

The combination of scenography and interior architecture broadens the performance in the theatre domain. Elements of scenography can be used to enhance the interior spatial experience and similarly, interior architecture principles can be utilised in theatre to enhance thematic conceptualisations. The theatre performance at a site-specific location shares the public out of their comfort zones and allows them to escape their everyday lives. The physical exploration of the theatre production allows the audience a unique outlook on the performance and the site, with the anticipation that this will create a future interest in the beauty of historic sites and specifically the Fort Daspoortrand ruin. The focal intention for this research and design is to create an awareness of the historical significance and value of both opera and the Fort Daspoortrand ruin. This can be achieved through the introduction of a theatrical performance which acts as a catalyst for the renewal of any site. The site is not necessarily required to be of heritage value, however the combination of the site-specific theatre and a historical relevant site creates a more in-depth and intriguing relationship between the site and theatre. Site-specific theatre is a multifaceted design approach which not only adds value to a given location, but also broadens the imaginative development of the audience members who experience the performance.