

Theoretical Discourse



3

THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

3.1 WRITING ARCHITECTURE

According to Thomas A. Markus and Deborah Cameron, language and writing is a neglected subject within the discussions relating to architecture and space. The richest symbolic systems that human beings have access to is that of natural languages. The way these languages are utilised, both in speaking and in writing, about the urban and built environment, plays a great role in shaping our perceptions about ourselves, our surroundings and our responses to it (Cameron & Markus, 2002).

Fundamentally architecture is a social art concerned primarily with creating liveable, sociable and memorable places. Any practice that has such a strong social orientation must have a verbal and written component to it, given that language provides humans with their primary means of social interaction.

It can be argued that the written word does not have the same impact on an individual as the spoken word does. Writing does however involve just as much interaction as speech does, even if it is under different spatio-temporal conditions, since written language is given meaning when an individual engages with the text.

It should however be noted that the author is not advocating architecture as language, but rather argues for the important role that language plays in the production of architecture. If architecture is treated as language, it has the regrettable effect of obscuring the effect that actual language, writing and speech, has on shaping our understanding of the built landscape.

Buildings should thus not necessarily be seen as linguistic objects, but the meanings we attach to space and architecture, the perceptions and the judgements, are heavily dependent and highly influenced by the texts, both written and spoken about them.

The 'social production of reality' is also greatly facilitated by the use of language. As product and residue of communities' previous constructs of reality and as starting point for the production of new realities, language is once again a key protagonist. A certain amount of insight is gained into the past construction and future functionings of reality if one studies language within its social context (Cameron & Markus, 2002: 12).

Text can also be employed to support the visual qualities of architecture and can thus be read as either a preamble to the image to be seen (i.e. the architectural product) or serve as a clarification of what has just been seen. If text is used as preamble, it will have a previously set up framework of expectations and viewpoints into which an individual must fit his or her own experience and judgement of both building and space (Cameron & Markus, 2002). This greatly affects the nature of the encounter as the validity of the architecture has been determined before the physical encounter.

Text and architectural product can however work collectively to enrich spatial experience – a 'multimodal text' of sorts (Cameron & Markus, 2002: 133). In this context, neither text nor product retain the properties they might have had in isolation, but rather in their juxtaposition, transforms into something new.

It is the intent of the author that this document fulfil the roles of both *preamble* to what is to be seen in terms of architectural product and as *clarification* of what has just been seen.

3.2 MUSEUM SPACE

What is museum space? Upon entering the physical building, the visitor encounters a sequence of rooms and in-betweens that constitute the immediate and tangible space of the museum. The museum does however also extend its boundaries through its physical surroundings – public spaces, streets, parks and squares. The tangible and intangible also constitute museum space with museums being seen as gathering places that require no belief, just enquiry according to Fleming (2005).

Gurian (2005: 207) suggests that in order for us as society to maintain a peaceful and productive existence, we need access to three different kinds of spaces. Firstly we need spaces for family and friends (our most intimate of spaces), secondly we need places and spaces for work (our intermediate spaces), and thirdly we need spaces where it is safe to have the 'chance-encounter' (our most public of spaces). Museum space, and its extents, fall within this last category.

Museums need to be greatly varied in their spatial composition – they should have spaces that delight and inspire, spaces that provoke deep reflection and spaces that stimulate learning and discourse.

Museum space is however not only limited to the physical building and its surroundings, it extends further, past its physical reach. The potential visitor enters the psychological space of the museum long before actually entering the building (Fleming, 2005: 54). They enter this space through reading – the reading of advertisements, of reviews and of texts. They also inhabit this space through speaking – having conversations about the specific building, its collections and its exhibitions. This societal discourse prepares the potential visitor to make contact with the physical museum.

3.2.1 THE PERCEPTION AND THE CHANGE

For most individuals there seems to be a separation between the belief in the value of museums and their actual use of them (Gurian, 2005). For museums to become applicable and inclusionary within society they must provide services that are regarded as essential by the user, that are personally orientated, timely and available on demand. Gurian (2005: 205) defines 'essential' as the transformation of an internal inquiry into an action – a personal impulse of sorts. The process of changing the museum from 'nice to have' to 'indispensable' is however not an easy one.

The user experience is imperative in the design of any new museum space and is the first step to ensuring that users take ownership of the space and the building. The space within the museum is first and foremost that of the audience. It is a space that resonates with their lives, their being and their humanity (Greenberg, 2005: 226). Architects need to design spaces that are welcoming, with easily locatable human amenities and that employ a way-finding strategy that is easy to navigate and understand.

Museums are also regarded as agents of urban change and urban comprehension. They carry with them great significance in terms of symbolism, urban regeneration and cultural tourism. Fleming (2005: 59) argues that in order for museums to become successful in being agents of urban change and regeneration they have to be 'of their place' and 'of their setting'. He says that museums need to be of the 'somewhere' and not of the 'anywhere' – each has a very specific and relevant context.

A mixing of uses and facilities can be employed in order to tie the museum programmatically to its context. This cross-programming is also very

important when considering the socio-spatial organisation of museum space. Jane Jacobs (in Gurian, 2005: 207) speaks about mixed-use spaces. She says that these spaces range in scales and complexity – from shopping malls, single city streets, singular buildings and even urban precincts. These mixed-use locations attract the widest variety of users because of their multitude of offerings and services.

For buildings, streets or precincts to function as mixed-use, they need to have a combination of everyday services as well as the occasional exotic speciality. They need to have good critical mass in terms of residential population, good access to public amenities, almost around the clock activity and a significant reliance on pedestrian orientated foot-traffic.

Museum space needs to become more mixed-use in approach. Some of the most successful museums in America and in Europe have already started to adopt this strategy with museums offering not only exhibitions but also various educational programmes, shopping opportunities, restaurants, performance and public space as well as other everyday amenities. Considering everyday amenities within the study area, the opportunity arises to incorporate infrastructural elements into the design of the museum. With the site location being central to that of the precinct as well as the southern part of the CBD, and with parking being extremely limited within the area (see Fig. 23, Chapter 2), the possibility to incorporate a parking facility will be investigated.

Gurian (2005: 212) argues for the design and conceptualisation of the museum to be approached similar to that of a mall. She says that museum space needs to offer the possibility of entering anonymously, being able to sit and stroll without having to commit to any organised activity. Museums also need to

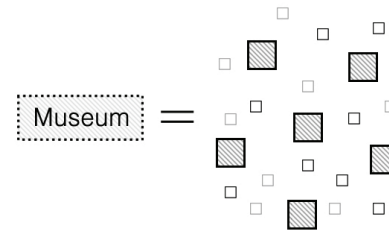


Fig. 40: Variety of spaces that work together to shape the overall museum experience (Author, 2011).

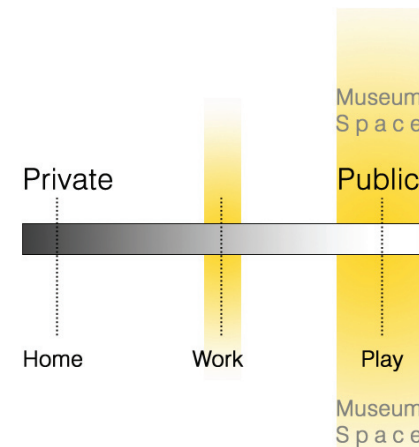


Fig. 41: Museum space associations. Museum space needs to be a true public space (Author, 2011).

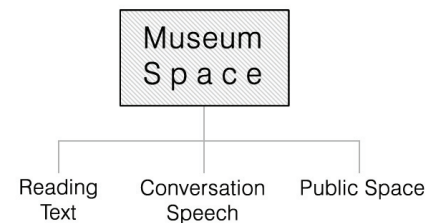


Fig. 42: The extent of museum space beyond the confines of the physical building (Author, 2011).

realise the value of ‘impulse visiting’ – being able to delight in and appreciate a small segment of the museum in a short period of time.

Museum architecture should be recognised as a social and cultural product, a product that is constantly reproduced through use.

It is the opinion of the author that there is a need for a ‘museum re-think’, for the museum space to gain validity within society and for the museum to once again become essential.

Suzanne MacLeod (2005: 13) consequently defines architecture in support of the argument as “that which is conceived as the outcome of a perceived social need, located in the specifics of time, space and site. As society changes and new social needs arise, new building forms will be produced in order to fulfil that social need”.

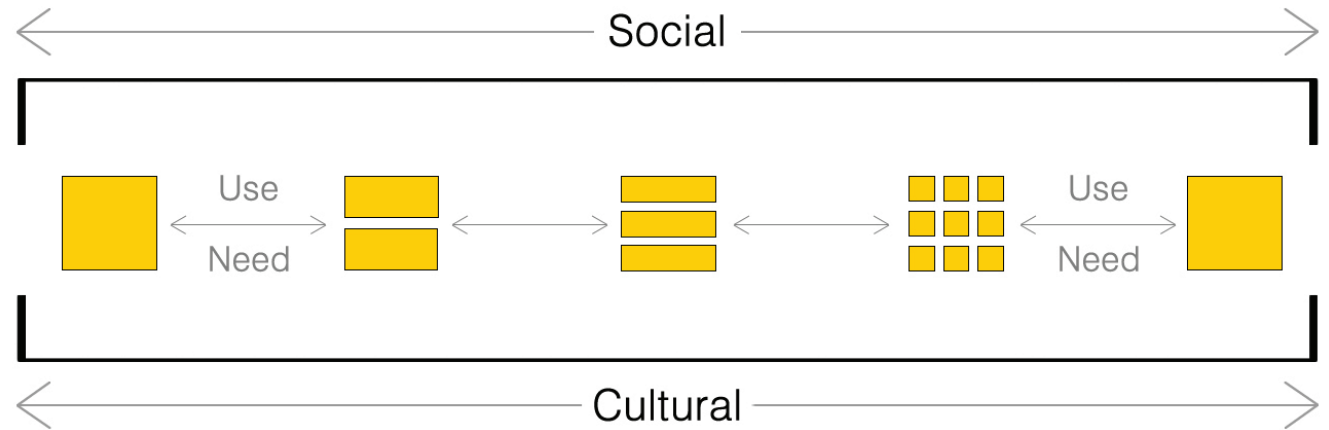


Fig. 43: The continuous reconstruction of museum space according to social and cultural factors (Author, 2011).

3.3 THE EVERYDAY + THE ORDINARY

Henri Lefebvre addressed many themes intrinsically relevant to architecture and urbanism. One of these themes is that of 'the everyday'.

Lefebvre (McLeod 1997: 9) regarded the everyday as the 'authentic life', the 'real', the 'here and now'. It was, in his opinion, material life with a 'lyrical tone', life with a 'dramatic attitude'.

The everyday life is also a life of contradictions – it is a life filled with monotony and routine but also with event and festival, it has stability and elements of uncertainty, the rhythmic march of linear time is juxtaposed with the cyclical renewal of nature and it is a life that is steered by rationalism and capitalism, but it manages to stand and function external to these (McLeod, 1997: 13).

Lefebvre called for a reactivated street-life, of an urban centrality and residential participation – all of which creating opportunities for spontaneity. He believed that the everyday life also harbours the strongest possibility to realise transformation. When people can no longer lead their everyday lives, it fosters the need for a revolution (McLeod, 1997: 15-17). Everyday life embodies the desires that generate adjustment and is seen as the motivating force for social change.

The proposed project envisions tapping into this 'social revolution', ensuring an amelioration of the everyday structures surrounding museum and public space. Museum space needs to become part of people's everyday lives; it needs to become embedded in the societal realm so that it starts to become indistinguishable from everyday proceedings – it needs to become a space of, and for the people.

3.4 THE IN-BETWEEN

In Architecture the boundary takes many forms – it is signified by the facade, the wall, the window, the entrance, the door, the threshold, the perimeter of a site and a building’s footprint or volume. On a larger scale the boundary takes the form of roads, signs, gates, hedges, canals, built structures or simply a mountain, forest or plain (Blaisse, 2009: 85).

3.4.1 UNDERSTANDING THE IN-BETWEEN

In exploring the philosophy and arguments behind the concept of the liquid boundary; many proponents came to the fore. Aldo Van Eyck (1918-1999) was one of the main protagonists in the formulation of an understanding and a theory of the in-between.

Van Eyck borrowed his philosophical terms of the ‘in-between’ from Martin Buber who states that “the fundamental condition of being human is man with his fellow man. It is rooted in the fact that a being considers another as ‘an other’, so as to be able to communicate with him in a sphere which is common to both and which transcends the individual spheres of both... I call this the sphere of the in-between. It is a primary category of human reality. It will be the starting point for the real third” (in Farhady & Nam, 2009: 17).



Fig. 44: The in-between space we experience on a daily basis between one another (Author, 2011).

Herman Hertzberger (in Farhady & Nam, 2009: 17) argues in terms of the transition(s) of space, making use of the term “threshold”. He states that “the threshold provides the key to the transition and connection between areas with divergent territorial claims and, as a place in its own right, it constitutes, essentially, the special condition for the meeting and dialogue between areas of different orders.”

The philosophies of Van Eyck aimed at challenging and reconsidering the relationship between design and threshold by looking at four interrelated aspects (Farhady & Nam 2009: 18-25):

SPACE

Space signifies the most significant dimension of the in-between in architectural design and there are many ways in which this concept can be expressed (see Fig. 48 - 52).

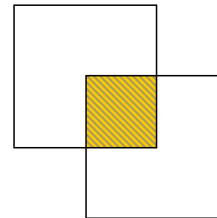


Fig. 45: Threshold through overlapping of two elements (Author, 2011).

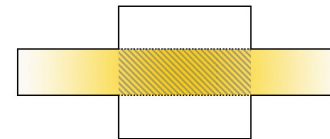


Fig. 46: Threshold through the continuation of one element into another (Author, 2011).



Fig. 47: Threshold through articulation of different elements (Author, 2011).



Fig. 48: Threshold through the fragmentation of elements (Author, 2011).

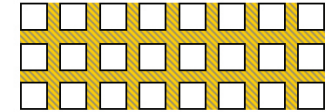


Fig. 49: Threshold through the repetition of separate elements (Author, 2011).

TIME

Time is the invisible, but sometimes tangible dimension of the in-between. It makes itself known through the mobility and temporality of elements and spaces, allowing for the building to become flexible for functional and spatial changes over time.

ENVIRONMENT

Bringing delicacy to design in order to create a sense of ambiguity by making use of transparency and materials such as light, shadow, greenery and wind is what signifies the environmental in-between.

HUMAN

The intimate threshold is constituted by the relationship between the individual and the physicality of a building, its materiality and its spaces. The overlapping of human-activities and uses can also contribute to the human experience of the in-between.

The author will aim to implement and comprehend the concept of the threshold and fully utilise its resources in the design process, by closely considering the four above mentioned concepts propagated by Van Eyck.

3.4.2 UNDERSTANDING THE URBAN IN-BETWEEN

When there is an urban transition, there is a formation of a threshold with the ability to span various urban scales. When residential, civic and commercial uses coincide and collide, several transitions and resultant thresholds are formed, both naturally and artificially (Ramaswamy 2005: 14). In exploiting the idea of a deliberate and intentional heterogeneity in architecture, where contrasting objects are placed together, designers will be able to create complex and compelling spaces and buildings with complex and compelling in-between places. An architecture of cross-programming and of hybrid space can come into being. If there is an establishment of a successful mixing of uses, the making of lively thresholds can be facilitated. (Ramaswamy 2005: 4).

Within urban landscapes there are conditions and instances where buildings create planned or unplanned in-between slow spaces which eventually become part of the everyday civic landscape.

Our built landscapes can therefore have distorted and ambiguous contours with vague and random morphologies allowing for inside and outside forms to merge. These threshold spaces between the built fabric will evolve over time, often into an integral part of the city's urban tissue. (Ramaswamy 2005: 15)

3.4.3 UNDERSTANDING THE INTIMATE IN-BETWEEN

The physical experience of a space needs to be highlighted in order to fully employ the intimate in-between. This experience needs to be visceral and imaginative, tactile and sensuous (Bennett 2006: 7).

Allison Bennett (Bennett 2006:7) illustrates the interdependence of our experience of space and our bodies. She

says “the physical sensation encompasses the skin like a breath and transforms at the collision of surfaces - the collapse of the space between - the touch of a hand on a doorway, the strike of a shin on a step. Touch is the perpetrator of the trace, the patina of occupation. To live is to leave traces.”

The space between a building's physical tectonic and that of the “lives and experiences enacted within it” (Bennett 2006: 1) constitutes another aspect of the intimate in-between.

Van Eyck (in Farhady & Nam 2009: 19) believed that an architecture aiming to be humane in its approach, must dedicate special attention to the in-between; specifically to the architectural places and spaces of transition through which people meet. People need to be invited to stay, to linger. He believed that this is possible by re-introducing soft boundaries into the architectural realm.

The author will aim to reinstate the tactile experience of space, allowing for the disintegration of the perceived boundary between the body and the built – the reintroduction of the ‘lived experience’ rather than the ‘perceived happening’. The proposed design will also investigate the construction of possible urban as well as architectonic spatial in-betweens in order to form a hierarchy of liquid transitions.

3.5 DESIGN GUIDELINES

3.5.1 WRITING ARCHITECTURE

- Have text and architectural product work collectively in order to enhance the spatial experience of the user.
- Illustrate that text and typography can have a spatial presence within architecture and the urban environment.

3.5.2 MUSEUM SPACE

- Design the museum in order for its spatial composition to extend beyond the confines of the physical building.
- Design an architectural product that is strongly rooted in context.
- Employ a mixed-use design strategy that will ensure an architectural end-product of multi-functionality.
- Design a truly public building. A building that is appropriated by people and is given meaning through use.

3.5.3 THE EVERYDAY + THE ORDINARY

Deborah Berke (1997: 223) believes that an architecture of the everyday and the ordinary is not easily quantifiable and resists true characterization, but she does mention some points that can be related to an architecture of this nature:

- AN ARCHITECTURE OF THE EVERYDAY MAY BE PEDESTRIAN AND FAMILIAR
It is an architecture that doesn't tell you what to think, but allows you your own interpretations and connotations.

- AN ARCHITECTURE OF THE EVERYDAY RESPONDS TO PROGRAMME AND IS FUNCTIONAL

- AN ARCHITECTURE OF THE EVERYDAY MAY BE ORDINARY

- AN ARCHITECTURE OF THE EVERYDAY MAY BE SENSUAL

The everyday world provokes ones senses, it is filled with touch, smell, sight and sound. The architecture of the everyday encapsulates spaces that allow for the essential experience of space and architecture through the body.

3.5.4 THE IN-BETWEEN

- Articulate the transitions from one space to another. Explore the possibilities of the following:
 - The overlapping of spaces.
 - The creation of an intentional threshold through the articulation of different elements.
 - The repetition of separate units.
- Explore the invisible notion of the in-between through the notion of time:
 - Designing flexible spaces that allow for functional changes over time.
- Experiment with light and shadow both as materials and as spatial catalysts in order to explore the environmental in-between.
- Making use of tactile materials and textures in an attempt to explore the sensuous possibilities of space through touch and sight.
- Introduce a hierarchy of thresholds – exploring the building mass, the facade, the building envelope, the individual spaces and the architectural detailing in terms of the in-between.



Fig. 50: Power to the Imagination (Brodskaia, 2010). Here typography becomes at once image and spatial construct, whilst also incorporating the ideas of threshold, surface and recess.