3 CHARACTERS

CLIENTS

The Department of Arts and Culture has undertaken a variety of national language services projects. Their vision is "to promote multilingualism by ensuring that all eleven official languages enjoy equitable treatment, development and protection".

Part of their mission is to develop and implement Human Language Technologies (HLT). (www.dac.gov.za/projects/language_service). The African advanced institute for information and communication technology known as the Meraka Institute is a collaborator in the development of HLT. According to them HLT "can play a crucial role in addressing the need for information empowerment" as well as supporting language diversity and contributing to solving "historical discrimination against specific languages" (www.meraka.org.za/humanlanguage). As part of the research required to develop this technology, the many languages and dialects used in South Africa need to be recorded. A facility is required to perform these functions.

The necessity to record language in an audible format opens up many other areas of opportunity. Oral traditions and vernacular knowledge can be documented and archived simultaneously. These can be used for researching, recording and demonstrating many cultural aspects of Southern African people. This will attract tourists as well as teach locals about their heritage and social values that traditionally are passed down through the generations and should not be lost.

Internationally, Language conferences are held biannually around the world where language development is discussed. Some of the questions asked at the conference recently held in South Africa were:
— "What role does language play in development?"
— "What role can language play in addressing urgent global demands?"
— "How do we reconcile language development, the hegemony of English, the formation of national identities, demands for democratization and liberalization, and the recognition of individual and cultural rights in a global context?"
— "How can language practitioners, educationalists, development specialists and the like, from across the world, collaborate to make a tangible difference to increasing access to knowledge through the development of language?"
(http://www.langdevconferences.org)

The proposed facility will provide a space where these questions can be addressed on an on going basis.

USER PROFILE

The following anonymous poem is reproduced in the introduction to the published papers given at the fourth International Conference on Oral Tradition at the university of Natal in Durban.

"We do meet in this Durban often.
Oh! What will be the result?
Men have flayed the beast and cut it open;
However the cutlet, Nongena, has not come our way yet,
The prize portion, ntsonyama, has not been delivered to us.
Who is it will consume it, and when?
For you flay the ox and cut it up into pieces;
Eventually you leave it behind in the Durban.
Frustrated indeed is Black Africa.
You discuss custom and hold forth on language.
Who does benefit from your deliberations?
For this race is at a loss.
Having dissected and unpacked folktales, who does benefit?
You analysed and interpreted the traditions;
Who will then enjoy the fruits thereof?
Be it so, I'm not complaining!
Keep up the good work, fellows,
And you too, spirited ladies.
Go on exercising your critical faculties —
For your minds, full of knowledge, are primed already:
They distinguish between the stars and the moon;
Reflecting the dazzling light and heat of the sun;
But then the light shed turns to shine on you
While Africa lies straddles in the shade.
She needs to be retrieved, fellows.
Hold hands together gingerly
And stand together firmly,
Bringing black and white together,
Set to apportion the rights equitably.

I disappear !!

The author addresses the academics who study language and custom, showing appreciation for their work but reminding them that Africa "lies straddle[d] in the shade" and "needs to be retrieved". In other words, all their academic knowledge about African oral traditions is of no use if it does not benefit the African. [Sienart, 1994:pgx]

The proposed building needs to facilitate the mixing of these two worlds and accommodate both the researchers and the public as well as be a threshold between the two. Therefore a wide range of users need to be accommodated. The public areas of the building would attract informal traders; or a citizen walking past, needing a place to eat during their lunch break; or a tourist coming to see an exhibition or planned event. The upper levels of the building would be used by students and scholars, as well as researchers and academics.
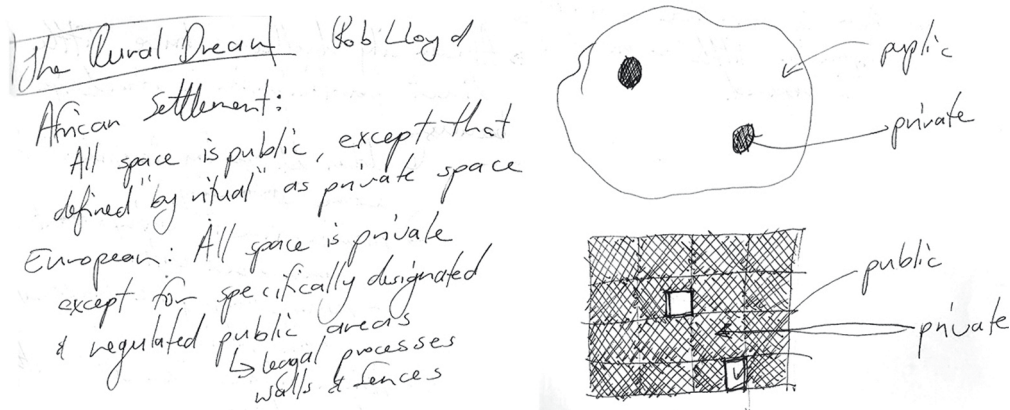
4 DIALOGUE/PROBLEM

AFRICAN VS EUROPEAN SPACE

Two cultural perceptions of space influence cities in post—colonial Africa. To the European colonists, space was a commodity to claim ownership over whereas the indigenous Africans perceived space as infinite, belonging to no—one [Makin:2006]. The colonists imposed their spatial ideals in the cities they built wherever they dominated, resulting (in post—colonial times) with cities defined by one way of spatial perception but used by citizens with a different spatial sensibility.

The European approach to space was that it needed to be demarcated and privately owned. Even public space would be defined in the same way as privately owned space except that the owner is "the public". These spaces have clear boundaries and rules (e.g "no walking on the grass"). They are the only places where loitering would be allowed. In South Africa, the town planning and zoning laws that were established by the European settlers are still in use today.

The African conception of space is that all space is public except that which through ritual becomes private [Lloyd:2003]. To the indigenous African the earth doesn't belong to anybody. Materiality, space and time are all inseparable constructs and therefore not own—able. There is no notion of compartmentalising space even though it occurs between things it is all part of one indivisible continuum. Time is also indivisible. All those that have lived, do live and will live and are always present. Birth and death are mere events or the changing of phases like water turning into ice or vapour. Both space and time are infinite. The practical implications of this is that parts can't be separated out or owned or disposed of [Makin:2006].

The dichotomy in urban sensitivities was exaggerated when early colonial settlers excluded African people from colonial developed towns and imposed written laws and land titles on them. These two concepts were completely foreign to African oral history. The colonials tried to re—create what they knew by transforming the "indigenous land to replicate a quasi—metropolitan culture in every physical respect" [Lloyd:2003:pg107]. They did this by imposing formal structure on the land, bringing in foreign trees and dividing the land up into own—able portions sold off cheaply to the new settlers.

Fig. 35 Diagrammatic interpretation of African and European space

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These conflicting world views are evident today on most street corners where a hawker (usually an African) occupies a space with his goods for sale. Regularly he is forcefully removed from the spot because it is designated as pavement and not as a trading area. The hawker has a sense of belonging to all space but the city laws are still reflective of the European concept of space even though the needs of the city user have changed. Pretoria displays many examples of these conflicting views. As a result, spontaneity and dynamism are lost and the city is full of homogeneous spaces where functionality and commerce are given priority over social relations. [Da Costa:2007]

African city dwellers tend to have very little participation in the urban design process. From Lloyd's observations he suggests a number of reasons for this. Firstly urban delivery by "outsiders" has become customary and the African culture tends to accept rather than to question. Their human based culture renders architecture as unimportant on any other level other than a functional one. The final principle he suggests for the lack of active involvement comes from looking at african art which is reductive and functional in nature and little or no development is required.[Lloyd:2003]

Although there is little formal involvement in the overall design decisions, the African citizens contribute greatly to the urban experience through informal interventions. They are responsible for the spontaneous, dynamic moments that do occur within the fragmented city. The informal traders give citizens choice and opportunity for social experience and connections in-between highly secured, controlled buildings. In his essay Inconsistent Vernaculars, Alberto Ferlanga describes the "infrastructural, residual and occasional constructions" that exist temporarily as part of the building process. They disappear as the self contained buildings are finished, only to reappear at the next construction site, becoming, in an ever changing built environment, the only consistent elements. "Often their duration is limited in time and their appearance is mutable, but it is precisely the obvious way in which they vary with the variation of the conditions that surround them that allows them to preserve a temporal dimension which seems to have totally disappeared from the majority of contemporary buildings, interested instead in endlessly prolonging an impression of newness and corruptibility."[Ferlanga, 2006: pg137]. This description can appropriately be used to describe the informal elements present in the South African city. Hawkers and informal structures are a 'permanent' and consistent feature of the urban landscape. Their connections with their location are closer than what the buildings (that 'belong there') can achieve.

Walking through Pretoria a sense of division is felt; of inside and outside, the included and the excluded. People moving from destination to destination fill the streets and pavements with activity, but lingering or dwindling or pausing is not encouraged. The buildings are highly secured excluded, untouchable spaces. By observing the movement patterns over a twenty-four hour period, it is obvious that people only come to the city during office hours, in other words for purely functional or commercial activities. Very little social activity, for its own sake, takes place. [Da Costa:2007]

Fig. 36 Informal trade

The post-colonial African city is an interesting situation full of opportunities. It is made up of many layers of meaning to many different groups of people who have either participated or been involved over a long period of time. The past cannot be ignored. New democratic processes of design need to be established, layering and improving on what exists without ignoring it or trying to superimpose idealistic styles in the hope that something new and different will heal the current discord. "Misunderstandings of the development of today's metropolis lead to a contemporary reinterpretation of the historical city that almost always brings out nothing but its frozen scenery and not the structures of its transformation."[Aymonino:2006:pg19]

UNVOLUMETRIC SPACE

The humanist philosophy of Ubuntu, a fundamental aspect of African society places people at its centre. It is a non-individualistic, communal and inclusive approach to life, best explained with the Xhosa aphorism Umunthu ngumunthu ngaBanthu: "I am a person by reason of other people" [Lloyd, 2003:113]. Spatial strategies emphasising efficiency and and individual ownership are therefore not the best solution in the South African context. "Diverse identities should rather be celebrated and acknowledged through open ended, activity driven solutions supporting the concepts of inclusivity and community." [Van Rensburg, 2008]. Non-prescriptive spaces need to be developed, where differences can be negotiated and the unpredictable can be accommodated. The human dimension is the critical factor [N'Da N'Guessan & Bachir, 2000]. Spaces can then be truly democratic where all actions are community orientated instead of individualistic.

The creation of such spaces happens through many processes from social interactions and cultural ideals. Prior to the 1950's, architecture was taught in terms of mass and volume. After that a paradigm shift occurred and architecture became about space. Many recent projects have gone one step further, suggesting "architecture can exist without volume" [Scott Brown, 2006:p9]. The idea of an un-volumetric architecture is worth exploring in the African context where a space can be defined by a central fire or a circle of white painted stones. Un-volumetric architecture is generated from contextual processes "almost always trying to be systematic, rather than to produce objects of mere design" [Aymonino, 2006:pg21]. The focus is not on volumes although they may occur as a by product. Continuity is prioritized over permanence so the volume reflects the many flows of the context. "The responses that Un-vol gives to its modes of use of its objects are never univocal or prescriptive." [Aymonino, 2006:pg23] This allows architecture to fulfil its role as a social service.

Un-volumetric architecture suggests a "creative alternative to the the overly volumetric, shape making obsessions that dominate international building design today." [Wines, 2006:p387] Architecture is too often designed aesthetically, "ignoring social

relations and rendering people passive" [Borden, 2001:p4].
 Buildings are not pieces of sculpture, they are the functional
background to society. They influence how people live and
experience life which is always a subjective process continually
evolving and being re-interpreted. Static formalist objects cannot
accommodate the ever changing needs of society. Architecture
should not control the activities that happen within it, it should
support the activities that would naturally take place. It should be
flexible in order to accommodate changing events and activities.
 Spaces should be designed with cross-programming in mind.
 Instead of designing the event itself, the spaces must be designed
for the event to take place and encourage users to interpret space
and impart their own meaning. [Borden, 2001]

We are in an age of information and ecology yet our design
concepts are still from the age of industry and technology. "The
language of architecture should now be more psychological than
formal, more cosmic than rational, more informational than
obscure, more provisional than stable, more indeterminate than
resolved, more narrative than abstract" [Wines, 2006:p388].
 Architecture needs to shift from "physical to cerebral" and be
experienced as conceptual art is experienced: as a cerebral
condition (mentally) more than a physical thing. Wines suggests an
architecture based on "the absorption of information from context"
 and "on inversions of meaning and the inclusion of information
from a variety of outside sources." Buildings should not be about
form but rather about idea, attitude and context, "architecture as a
dialogue in the mind." [Wines, 2006:pg390]

"The attention of the discipline has moved away from the urban
form" [Aymonino, 2006:pg18] and the in-between space has taken
priority over the solid elements. This space then becomes a
dynamic narrative rather than a static processional void. An
architecture of "complex relations and no longer just the relations
between volumes" is possible [Aymonino, 2006: pg18]. Currently a
lack of elements with the ability to connect the solid forms (the
story meandering between the buildings) is felt [Morteo, 2006]. A
building should not stand on its own within the urban context, it
should rather be a condition that is not only a physical
construction, but a social one as well. [Chamber, 2001]

TEMPORAL SPACE

The spaces in and between buildings are not "discrete
multiplicit[ies] of inert things" but rather a "heterogeneity of
practices and processes". This means that space is an "ongoing
product of interconnections ... always unfinished and open". It is
not just a physical surface. "It is always being made and always
therefore, in a sense unfinished (except that finishing it is not on
the agenda)", it is always undetermined and waiting to be
determined by the arrival of new interconnections and relations.
 "There are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet
to flower into interaction, or not, potential links which may never
be established. Loose ends and ongoing stories." [Massey,

2005:107]. By accepting and acknowledging this, temporal spaces can be created that allow meaning to continually evolve layer upon layer.

Designing un-volumetrically means joining together fragments over periods of time rather than proposing an overall design that may not be relevant in the future [Aymonino, 2006] . Spaces need to be flexible to allow change. They need to be able to adjust to the systems of economics and society. Landscapes and in turn spaces change as they collect residues of history [Lynch, 1990]. They change over time and are continuously becoming. They are "in waiting" therefore "architecture should ... be continually reproduced through use and everyday life" [Borden, 2001:p5].

ACTIVITY DRIVEN/EVENT SPACE

The temporal condition of space needs to be accommodated when designing buildings by designing event spaces that allow unexpected encounters, diverse activities and interruptions . Architecture should not control the activities that happen within it but it must encourage the urban experience through rhythm, surface conditions and sensory experience. Architecture then becomes a vehicle to aid perception and not something (an object) to be perceived. [Borden, 2001]

"Contemporary public space, that of mass society, is increasingly in need of forms to define and exalt ephemeral events" [Aymonino, 2006]. Temporary events which are usually entertainment, bring diverse people together with a sense of unity. Architecture gives form to these occasions. These events often happen spontaneously, and spaces are colonized and adapted on such occasions.

Expansive unstructured spaces must be avoided [Borden, 2001]. In language words and grammatical rules are used to structure the words together to make sense. An 'open sentence' consisting of a random selection of words strung together makes no sense. The structuring grammar is necessary to express meaning. The same is applicable for designing spaces. There needs to be structure to give the space meaning. There is no freedom without it like a poet cannot truly express his meaning freely without the structures of language. "Limits locate the object within the universe of possibility. Not only as possible, but as particular. This and not that." [Jones, 2006].

Expansive spaces in a city do not make sense. They do not take advantage of the many potential opportunities the urban setting offers. Using the existing situations as restrictions allows for far more meaningful spaces to be generated. Wines [2006, pg389] quotes a comment made by Picasso: "Forcing yourself to use restricted means is the sort of restraint that liberates invention. It obliges you to make a kind of progress you can't even imagine in advance." Diverse complex spaces give something for people to react to. They can engage with the space.

THE BUILDING AS A BACKDROP TO LIFE

Pretoria is a complex construct of two different spatial perceptions; built by a society from european heritage but now used mostly by people with an african heritage who were excluded from the urban development processes until recently. The laws and systems used today are still based on european urban ideals and thereby spaces keep being created from a spatial perspective different to that of the actual city user who perceives space from a communal point of view. The focus on individual ownership needs to change to take advantage of the urban opportunities and complex relations that exist in the city. Democratic, non-prescriptive spaces that celebrate the community over the individual are created by focusing on spatial experience and appropriate contextual and social responses; rather than on creating aesthetically appealling objects in space.
 Such spaces will be adopted into the flows and connections of the city encouraging the users to engage with them and turning them into temporal and used, event spaces. The city therefore emerges as a backdrop to the stage of life.

Fig. 37 Informal interventions