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Surreal city escape: discovering escapism within the unaccommodating Johannesburg city fabric

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ABSTRACT:

Surreal City Escape: Discovering escapism within the unaccommodating Johannesburg city fabric

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This thesis explores theories of escapism and applies them to the Johannesburg precinct in the form of a socially interactive public space. Our day to day banal realities do not satisfy our innermost desires, as a result; we choose to disconnect from our realties. We often become passive consumers in a world dominated by production, fuelled by retail advertising and marketing media, and in turn we frequently overlook the shaping of our own social existence and choosing healthy forms of flight. I feel that our city does not provide opportunities for escape in the form of urban rituals and therefore a sense of belonging is inadequately specified.

I aim to provide a positive form of escape which supports urban rituals, and thereby define a place within Johannesburg. A public space enables social interaction and individual exploration and is therefore a temporary from of escape. Our city is often perceived as dangerous and unaccommodating, but there is vast opportunity within the precinct due to the many existing connections and vibrant pedestrian life. My chosen site is an existing heritage building and the active node, Gandhi Square, currently existing divided by a sprawl of busses through which pedestrians are forced to navigate through. Through the redesign of this space, I intend to encourage a pedestrian dominant city, and a civic space that enhances public life and further facilitates urban renewal.

My intervention involves 3 elements; an outdoor theatre, the redesign of the Metro Bus facility and a public space to promote a harmonious transition zone between the two. The contemporary theatre I am proposing forms space without physical walls, as light and sound evolve to stage events. The theatre functions within the reshaping of an existing heritage building located on site. It is a flexible space where intense sensory events can occur and carve the avenues into a socially interactive city.

This engaging atmosphere caters for the collective as well as the everyday encounter, transforming to the needs of Johannesburg. My intervention will define a place where the celebration of community is lacking and in turn seek to change the perceptions of our city. Through the experience of the whole, my design facilitates chance interactions in which mystical moments can be manifested within a public space devoted to civic escape.