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Inhabiting the in-between: the transitional locations of urban settings

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abstract

Movement between spaces ordinarily creates an in-between place in space, a place which is neither the precise place of departure nor the precise place of arrival, but is related to both. This generates another reality, a short-lived, momentary transitional place. Every day people travel great distances from one edge of the city to another by means of public transportation. We move through spaces such as airports, train and bus stations which exist as purely transitional spaces, and ironically many of these environments have certain emptiness about them even though there is a large convergence of people that come through these spaces on a daily basis.

This thesis presents an architectural proposal that addresses the issues of transitional locations, by identifying the architectural possibilities within a liminal context. I investigate how architecture and infrastructure can be integrated by allowing for programmatic hybridization in a South African urban context of the Johannesburg inner city. I propose a multimodal transit station where different modes of public transport intersect. The site is the existing Westgate station in the south western corner of the inner city of Johannesburg. The objectives of the building are to facilitate the functional aims of a multimodal transit station, to establish the station as a destination and to enable connection and exchange between different people. These are achieved by upgrading the existing public transport facilities and introducing educational, commercial, and recreational functions.

This architectural exploration aims to enrich public life in transitional spaces of urban settings. Many of the challenges associated with the typology of transit, including the sense of void and isolation that comes with mobility nodes that act as merely a transit zone, are addressed through the integration of mixed programmes that will enhance public space and create opportunity to linger. The aim is to provide an attractive and lively pedestrian environment starting at the transit station to make the experience of arrival and being in the area a satisfying one.