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Dualistic tendencies: encounters between art and politics

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Duality is a part of life. Every thing, every philosophy, every emotion can be counteracted by what the scientist Sir Isaac Newton (1642 – 1727) referred to as “an equal but opposite force” (Worrall, 1995: 179). Dualism surpasses categorisation, geographic positioning, race, creed, culture, the various disciplines etc. Each pair of opposite forces exists to maintain some sort of a balance for example life and death (a natural cycle), good and evil, peace and war, night and day, reason and emotion, conscious and subconscious.

Can a duality be considered a duel? I would think so, as it's stipulated in the Oxford Dictionary: a duel requires the participation of two equally matched opponents. (Hornby, 2000: 361) Duality is the confrontation of two opposing forces resulting in friction or agitation. Naturally a battle ensues. These are not always physical encounters; they can take the form of a debate, a piece of writing, music, an artwork or simply as an internalised series of thoughts. The architecture surrounding us conditions part of our daily experiences, therefore there are very powerful dualities inherent in it. With regards to this document, I will be discussing the various dualities that are most prominent and most interesting in Johannesburg's built environment.

The three pairs of dualities to be explored are the conscious and subconscious, urban spectacle and monotony, and commodification and authenticity. Each pair of dualities is closely related to the next. The conscious and subconscious stream concludes that there is a human need to break free from the constraints of a stifling reality. The urban

spectacle and monotony topic concludes with how we feel about the city and public space. The commodification and authenticity topic concludes with a need for stimulation in Johannesburg that differs from commercial marketing.

Each dualistic pair proves that commercialism has come to define urban spectacle and that this is boring. To counteract the overtly dominant consumer culture I'm proposing an art centre with forums for political debate. The building offers art and politics as something real and authentic. The architecture serves as a mediator between art and politics which promote human expression as the real spectacle. Art and politics are also a means of resisting that which reduces the human-ness of our situation (i.e. the automation and predictability of urban life).

Following the theoretical argument are a series of architectural, artistic and political case studies which help to shape ideas around how one should approach the designing of this typology. I've extracted the essence of each example to set up architectural rules that govern my design for the art centre. The precedent studies feature local and international examples.

A macro and micro context site analysis follows the case studies. The site for the development is situated in Johannesburg's Central Business District. This is an unusual location for an art centre but it is an advantageous starting point for the resistance philosophy. The site also has a history strongly linked with passive political resistance.

The last two sections of the dissertation are focused around the design and technological detailing of the architecture for this art and political forum. The architecture represents the inner fighting spirit of humanity. It achieves this through physically breaking out of the regimented, grid layout of the city from the interior of the building and reaching out to the public.

DUALISTIC TENDENCIES

ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN ART AND POLITICS

Abstract

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