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DDR STATEMENT

This practice-orientated PhD research project involves practice-led research, where the research leads to new understandings about practice through new teaching methodologies that are proposed in architectural pedagogy. It also deals with practice-based research in that the new methodologies result in student work which become the artefacts that form new contributions to knowledge. (Candy, 2002. p.3) Student reflections on using narrative, film techniques and learning from each other offer further contributions to knowledge. This is a qualitative research that engages with the knowledge embodied in the architectural design process as well as the knowledge embodied in the products of designing. (Cross, 2006, p.224). Approaching the design process through filmic narrative offers new ways of encountering architecture through emotive embodied experiences involving movement and time. Filmic methods of representing architecture through a character's participation reveal new ways of experiencing architecture; through emotive character-led experiences. Teaching these skills could enable new ways of looking at architecture. Young architects in South Africa could develop skills to engage with the existing architecture of the apartheid city in a new way.

Filmic narrative in the design process is a method that has the potential to be unpacked, analysed and compared in a critical and interpretive reflection. (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2013, p.24) This could involve the exploration of fictional or documentary story-lines, the selection of characters embodying the story and the architecture, the point of view of the author and architect, and what the effects of the narrative are on social realities and a lens on how various communities and identities are seen, projected, read and understood. There is also opportunity to experiment and question existing filmic narratives in relationship with local South African narratives. Filmic narrative in the role of transformation has the potential to give voice to those whose voices were previously not recorded in western history.

IT DEPENDS ON THE LENS: FILM AS EXPERIENTIAL TEACHING IN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AND DESIGN REPRESENTATION

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

*PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH, INTERDISCIPLINARY,
ARCHITECTURE AND FILM, ARCHITECTURAL PEDAGOGY,
NARRATIVE IN THE DESIGN PROCESS,
FILM AND DESIGN REPRESENTATION, STORY TELLING,
HISTORICAL NARRATIVE, POSTCOLONIAL, DECOLONIAL*

ABSTRACT

With a background as an Architect, Filmmaker and Lecturer in the Wits School of Architecture and Planning in the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, this research proposes to explore the introduction of filmmaking techniques into the subjects of Design and Design Representation with the aim to transform the existing curriculum. Through the research, I intend to contribute new theory with the introduction of filmic narrative into the architectural design process and explore how the interdisciplinary relationship between architecture and film creates new methods of experiencing and representing architecture. The research explores student projects as case studies and unpacks how students were taught, the processes that they encountered and what the emergent outcomes were.

The background of this PhD research project proposal stems from the Master of Arts Film and TV that I undertook whilst lecturing in the Wits School of Architecture and Planning. In my Masters' Research Report, I explored the relationship between architecture and film through the notion that the human-place connection exists in both the disciplines of filmmaking and architecture. My study aimed to explore the narrative-spatial relationship between narrative (screenwriting) and the construction of mise-en-scene (that which appears inside the film frame), and the architectural considerations of place-making, to offer conceptual insights into how the idea of the human-place connection could be explored in the reading of selected film texts about Johannesburg, South Africa.



(fig.1)



(fig.2)

I was inspired to contribute the knowledge that I gained from my Masters' towards architectural pedagogy. I introduced techniques from filmmaking into the subjects of Design and Design Representation with the full support and encouragement from my colleagues. This openness for change and collaboration occurred as a result of the #feesmustfall protests in South Africa when students asked for free tertiary education and for a decolonised curriculum. As lecturers, we felt the need to explore inventive methods of teaching in response to these protests. An inventive method is described as "...an inventory of methods or devices that may be used to conduct research that is explicitly oriented towards an investigation of the open-endedness of the social world." (1) The filmmaking processes that I introduced aimed to make necessary changes to the architectural curriculum, as well as giving me the opportunity to explore the relationship between architecture and film further. The idea was to transform the pedagogy by enabling an inclusive collaborative environment where people learnt from each other to produce new outputs as well as an awareness of the other. Students were encouraged to teach and learn through the processes of their productions, and not exclusively from a top-down teaching method.

In the first year design studio, I worked closely with my colleague who is an indigenous South African. I grappled with questions that I also put forward to him. I asked, how do I, as a non-indigenous person, engage with indigenous methodology and decolonising methodology? What is my position as a lecturer as I engage with indigenous students? Neither one of us had answers to these questions, but we agreed that in asking them already demonstrated a willingness and an openness to recognize necessary change. Decolonial methodology is a mentality which constitutes an active learning strategy which requires careful design and curation by educators. (2) There is a vulnerability that the educator needs to address in the sharing of personal lived experience and the equal exchange of knowledge. (2) My experience with engaging these methodologies allowed me to become vulnerable, to be taught and become open to learning and listening. "Instead, vulnerability can foster a self-reflexive, safe, and inclusive learning environment, where class members' interactions are based on mutual respect." (2)

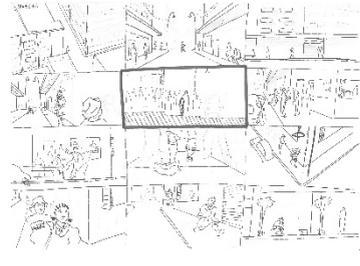
I proposed to approach the design process through narrative which I connected to the decolonising methodologies of story telling. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (3) makes reference to story telling as one of the indigenous research projects. "Story telling, oral histories, the perspectives of elders and of women have become an integral part of all indigenous research. Each individual story is powerful. But the point about the stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place." (3)

I linked screenwriting, from the field of film, as a story telling method to engage narrative in the design process. A character-driven story is one which the audience invests in and believes in. Syd Field states "Character is the essential foundation of your screenplay. It is the heart and soul and nervous system of your story. Before you put a word on paper, you must know your character." (4) I imagined that a character-led story could achieve 'a character led architecture'. A screenplay as the starting point in the design process, could enable a design driven from the point of view of characters. It could also enable the reading of a place from multiple subjective character's points of view, which could include the indigenous voice, previously unrecorded. This approach was explored in projects in the first-year Design studio, as well as in second-year Design Representation. Results yielded emotional and experiential narratives in the form of films, architectural representations, and

performances, which intentionally blurred fiction and history, creating counter and diverse narratives to oppose the hegemonic view.



(fig.3)



(fig.4)

These projects were initially introduced in 2018, so, this study will explicate methodologies and artefacts that have already been produced and may explore ongoing iterations for the duration of the research. The projects have a sociological, ethnographic and anthropological focus, specifically exploring the relationship between architecture and identity through the relationship between architecture and film. In the first-year design studio, students did not partake in deep urban studies, therefore their narratives mostly evolved within imaginary worlds. However, I designed the second-year Design Representation course around the relationship between architecture, film and identity to explore a specific neighbourhood in Johannesburg. The course introduced the neighbourhood and characters to the students through a film which I produced in my Masters as well as a historical library project.



(fig.5)



(fig.6)

Having watched the film and doing some archival research, the students then visited the neighbourhood, experienced it in its present day, and met and interacted with the characters from the film. Students then created their own narratives and animations

based on what they had read, seen and experienced. This process enabled multiple ways of reading the neighbourhood as well as extracting methodologies from local culture to inform future design processes. Below are the summaries of these two projects.

The Utopias Project is the first-year Design project where my teaching methodologies were initially introduced. It contains a large group work component and an individual design component. Each group writes a script about the genesis of a cosmos and a community which is visualised into a storyboard. A cosmos model is conceived and built, including the scaled model figure of a protagonist, who experiences the spatial journey. The cosmos model includes three regions that represent three stages of the cosmogenesis and relate to each other visually, conceptually, and spatially. The students are required to think about the key elements in each region. The story unfolds from the point of view of the characters, whose images are captured to make stop-frame animations. In the next step of the project, each student designs their own stage set for the three acts of performance and rewrites the script so that they become the characters who re-enact their cosmogenesis on stage.



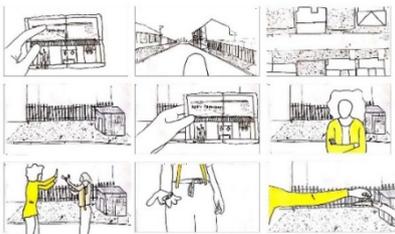
(fig.7)



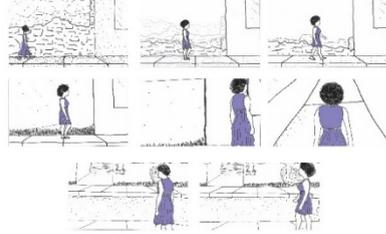
(fig.8)

Script-Sketch-Animate is a second year Design Representation project which employs filmic techniques to open new ways of architectural access to a specific neighbourhood in Johannesburg. Fietas, a once vibrant multi-cultural, multi-racial neighbourhood, was forced apart under the apartheid regime by the Group Areas Act. Urban design strategies evicted people and houses were demolished. The students develop imaginary and visually presented personal stories that allow for an empathic analysis of past and present social, political, and cultural environments which could inform future place-making. Each story is initially sketched by hand, then digitally edited and animated. In the process of the animated film, the architectural

design and design presentation is understood through the dimension of lived experience. Film as a creative method offers a new approach to filter and read the South African Urban fabric and its traces of trauma as a result of apartheid. This project wields a “socio-spatial” approach using new interdisciplinary and multivalent methods in which “to explore the full depth of how society and culture intersect with the material world of buildings” (5)



(fig.9)



(fig.10)

The contributions that this PhD research project could make to the enhancements of creativity, knowledge and understanding are the new teaching methodologies that I have introduced which combine filmmaking processes into architectural Design and Design Representation to transform the existing curriculum. The necessity to change the existing curriculum enabled me to introduce these new methods that were applied in practice. The introduction, application, and the emergent outcomes of these methodologies will become my contribution to new theory. I will explore existing theories, how I used them directly and what theory I developed by having applied my methodologies in practice. Existing theories that I intend to explore include narrative in the design process, existing case studies that are also exploring film structures in architecture and architectural pedagogy, various decolonising and postcolonial methodologies that exist and which one that I connect with, new inventive methodologies of doing research, the notion of narrative in history and new emergent theories such as the post-soviet condition and theories regarding the relationship between the body and the city. These will develop as my research deepens. This new knowledge contribution could answer my research question which could possibly be: *How could the personal stories of architectural students inform future place-making and architecture in Johannesburg?*

End Notes:

- (1) Lury, Celia/Wakeford, Nina (eds.) (2014): *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*. Chapter 1: Introduction (p. 1–24). (p.147-162). UK: Routledge
- (2) Sendra, Estrella (2020): »Video Essays: Curating and Transforming Film Education Through Artistic Research«, in: *International Journal of Film and Media Arts*. Vol., No2, (pp.65-81). pp.69
- (3) Tuhiwai Smith, Linda (2012): *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books Ltd. New York: Room 400. pp.146
- (4) Field, Syd (1982): *The Foundations of Screenwriting*. New York: Publishing Co. p.22
- (5) Mack, Jennifer (2019): »Working the Field«, in: *Architecture in Effect: Rethinking the Social Vol 1*. Barcelona: Actar. pp.347

References for Title Page:

- Candy, Linda (2002): *Practice Based Research: A Guide*. Sydney. Creativity and Cognition Studios.
- Cross, Nigel (2006): *Designerly Ways of Knowing*. UK. Springer Press.

Figure References:

- (fig.1) *Axis Johannesburg* (2018): Anita Szentesi. [Film] Authentic Studio
- (fig.2) *Axis Johannesburg* (2018): Anita Szentesi. [Film] Authentic Studio
- (fig.3) *Territorial Characters Storyboard* (2018): Merlin Love. Wits School of Architecture
- (fig.4) *Territorial Characters Storyboard* (2018): Merlin Love. Wits School of Architecture
- (fig.5) *Fietas Soul of the Suburb* (2017): Anita Szentesi. [Film] Authentic Studio
- (fig.6) *Fietas Soul of the Suburb* (2017): Anita Szentesi. [Film] Authentic Studio
- (fig.7) *Utopias Performances* (2018): Anita Szentesi. [Film] Wits School of Architecture
- (fig.8) *Utopias Performances* (2018): Anita Szentesi. [Film] Wits School of Architecture
- (fig.9) *Threadcount Storyboard* (2020): Salma Jawoodeen. Wits School of Architecture
- (fig.10) *Khawuleza Storyboard* (2020): Rotondwa Manavhela. Wits School of Architecture