English

Sociology

Modern European Languages

Philosophy

Ancient Languages

Psychology

Biokinetics, Sport and Leisure Sciences

Communication Pathology

Drama

African Languages

Visual Arts

Political Sciences

Music

DEPARTMENTS

Social Work and Criminology

Historical and Heritage Studies

Anthropology and Archaeology

HUMANITIES BUILDING
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

02

problem statement

2.01

Introduction

As the idea of convergence of cultures is laid down, the client is introduced. This sets the scene for the brief of the project to express the client's needs, and translate a theoretical premise, all in order to state a goal for the development of the dissertation.

2.02

Client Profile

The client to be considered for this dissertation is the University of Pretoria. The Faculty of Humanities' various Language departments are the main interested parties that are considered for the development of the architectural conclusion.

A hundred years ago the Pretoria branch of the Transvaal University College commenced with 32 students attending classes in a house in 270 Skinner Street in the centre of Pretoria called Kya Rosa. Courses were presented in Dutch and other Modern Languages, English Language and Literature, Classics (which included Philosophy, Latin and Hebrew), as well as Natural Sciences.

"Today more than 50 000 students study in the nine faculties and two business schools for the 371 undergraduate and 1522 post-graduate study programmes on offer."
(*Univ. of Pretoria Centenary, 2008:* www.up.ac.za)

2.03

2.04

2.01 Aerial photo of the University of Pretoria (1967)
2.02 University of Pretoria Centenary logo
2.03 Photo of Kya Rosa in its original location
2.04 Photo of Kya Rosa in its current location

GEESTESWETENSKAPPE
HUMANITIES

2.05
Photo of the Humanities Building.

Despite being one of the oldest faculties on campus, the Faculty of Humanities only found a permanent residence in 1977, where it is located to this day. Located on the main campus the building forms a point of reference, a historical landmark within the continuously developing precinct. The faculty consists of a variety of departments which include: Sociology; Philosophy; Psychology; Communication Pathology; Political Sciences; Social Work and Criminology; Biokinetics, Sport and Leisure Sciences; Drama; Visual Arts; Music; Historical and Heritage Studies; Anthropology and Archaeology; and Language Departments.

The Language Departments include: English; Afrikaans; Modern European Languages; Ancient Languages; and African Languages.

The image with sketch overlay indicates that each floor of the building is dedicated to a specific department, and consists mainly of offices with a meeting room at the end of each hallway. These horizontal spaces are vertically connected with the elevator core.

The University of Pretoria is celebrating its Centenary in 2008 and is appropriately themed: *A Century in the Service of Knowledge.* It is within this milieu of knowledge and achievement that the proposed project will function.
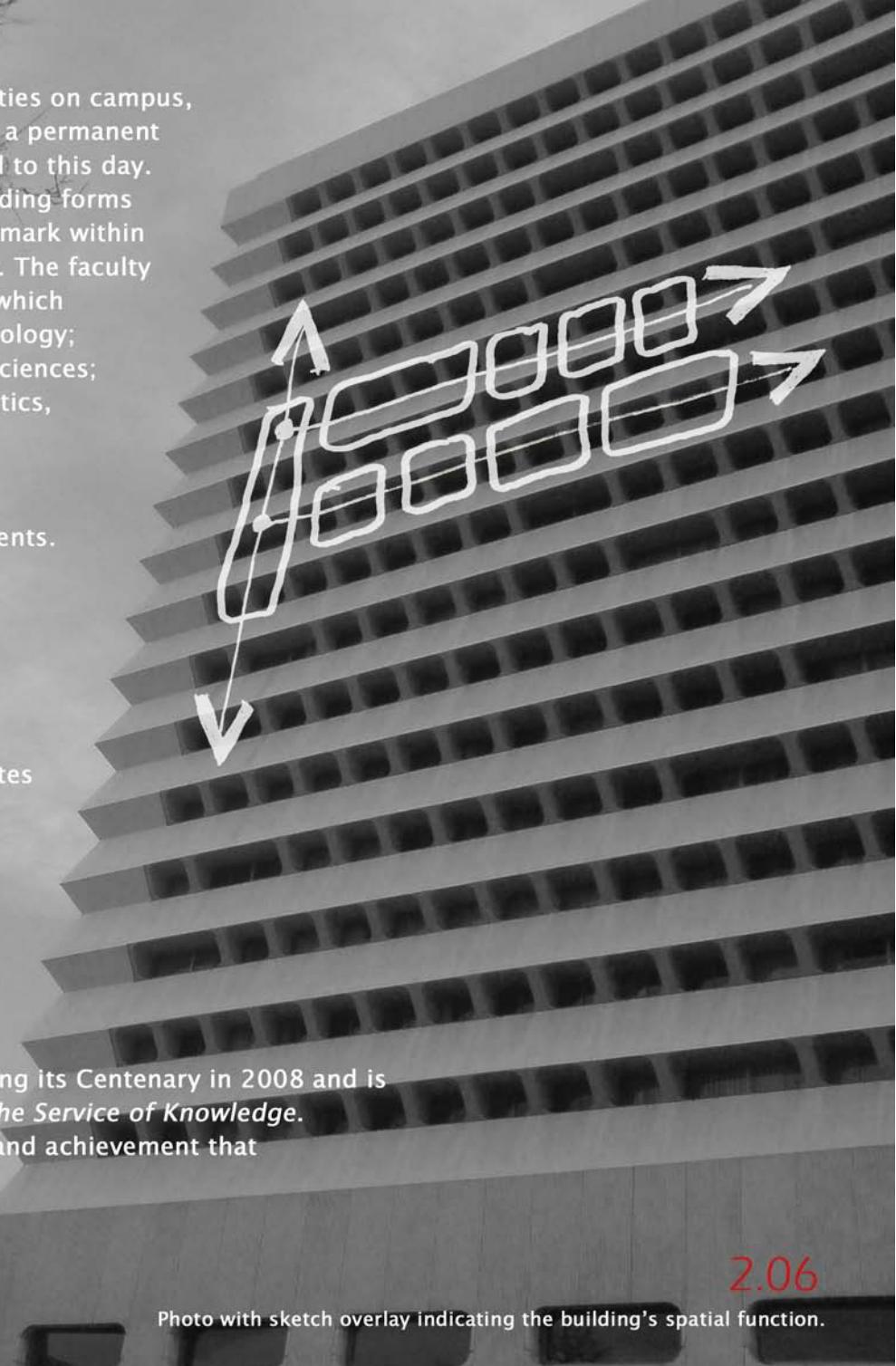
2.06

Photo with sketch overlay indicating the building's spatial function.

Photo collage of facial expressions suggesting cultural difference.

Brief

The image above serves as a visual reminder of the different cultural layers that exist in society. The social problem identified earlier in the dissertation states that the existence of a void between ignorant and informed needs to be filled by the learning of different cultural languages. It is this concept of infill and void that resonates with the requirements of the Faculty of Humanities. The Language Departments require space on main campus where students can freely express themselves in their various languages. This should not only function as a space of expression, but mainly the new location for the Departments' practical language learning centre: a space that will provide the students with an opportunity to engage in critical thinking and talking sessions, brainstorming, and where they can network with one another, and ultimately cause intercultural cross pollination in various languages. The new building should fit in well within its urban precinct, and at the same time be accentuated as a remembrance of the university's centenary celebrations.

Photo collage of facial expressions suggesting cultural difference.

Goal Statement

The challenge now is to translate exiting spaces into sensory stimulating social spaces that would provide the freedom of choice and expression, evoke intercultural chance encounters, and ultimately enhance the quality of life. *The goal is therefore to design an urban responsive language learning centre that would be a linking tool which enables the user to learn through interactive intercultural contact sessions.*

1. How does the learning centre facilitate interaction between cultures, encourage individuality, the freedom of thought and expression, and exposure to creative ideas?
2. How does the facility fit into the urban environment?
   a) Who will benefit from the facility within the urban context?
   b) What will the facility 'fix' in the urban context?
3. How does the learning centre influence the education of languages?
   a) How will the learning process be channelled to enable maximum information gain?

Theoretical Premise

The theoretical stance which this dissertation investigates is:
   Language as an architectural translator.

The purpose of this investigation is to establish whether the pedagogy of *natural languages* can influence the translation of unutilized, left-over spaces in an urban environment into an *architectural language* of form and image with sensory stimulating social spaces and real cross-cultural dialogue.

Natural languages are the richest symbolic system to which human beings has access to, enabling people to communicate with others. "Language-using is itself a form of social practice as such it is implicated in the reproduction of the beliefs, relationships, attitudes and values that exist in a given society." (Markus, 2002: p.3.)

When language is personified as a translator or mediator, it acts as a catalyst within a complex development of an architectural conclusion. "The purpose of language is then to convey ideas and information from one head to another. Not so easy when English/American one drives on a parkway and parks in a driveway, plays at a recital and recites in a play." (Fletcher, 2001: p.391) It seems that language can also somehow be lost within the translation.

To what extent then, does the interaction of language and image
   affect the perception and evaluation of design?

As stated earlier, the existence of language and communication is considered a highly valuable tool for the continued existence of the human race. This fact is further emphasized with the statement that "linguistic and cultural competence will be the mark of the well-educated citizen of the 21st century." (Genesee & Cloud, 1998: p65)

It has been recorded in history that Cuneiform script tablets were the first recorded written form of language expression. This indicates that image and language work together as multimodal texts, informing the user of the substance while stimulating the senses. "Oddly enough, for a function so basic to being human, research into exactly how language works, and how it is acquired, is full of theories, some more plausible than others, and very few facts indeed." (Barter, 1994: p.35)

Having said that, linguistic academics state that language develops in three areas, namely grammatical development (language form), expansion of concepts (language content), and appropriateness of communication in particular context (language use). (Nelson, 1998: p.288)

2.09

Background image indicates Cuneiform symbols.

In order to fully comprehend the process of language acquisition, the range of chrestomathy[1], and the instruments required to learn a new language, the author sets out to learn a new language himself. From the 112 recognized world languages available to learn, the process started off as being rather a daunting task. After a couple of elimination rounds and prerequisite criteria, a language was chosen to get the process started.

The utilization of computer software as an instrument to commence the process of understanding a language makes it rather an accessible development. These software programs utilizes a combination of images, text, and sound, with difficulty levels increasing as the learner progresses, in order to teach various vocabulary terms and grammatical functions intuitively, without drills or translation. The process consists of the teaching of pronunciation, basic expressions, and the three main components which include: grammatical development, expansion of concepts, and appropriateness of communication in particular context.

The author is in total agreement with Collier's statement of mastering a language: "in order to become linguistically proficient and competent in any language requires time and input. Language acquisition occurs over a number of years and requires stimulation and feedback in the target language from communication partners." (Collier, 1989: p.510) It is therefore appropriate to conclude that social interaction is central to language learning, and that spaces that are designed for this action, be design with social interaction as part of the conceptualization of the architectural conclusion. The analysis of language is therefore a useful tool for understanding buildings as social objects.

Where spoken language is a system of visual, auditory, and situational constraints 'providing users with multiple ways of representing the same object, state, event or process' (Markus, 2002: p.3.), then architecture is public art speaking in images that are 'constructed by combining a set of formal elements according to a set of formal rules.' (Markus, 2002: p.4.)

Verbal language plays a vital part in the process of designing a building. It is a collaborative process which involves continual dialogue with clients, colleagues, and other professionals. The language used to speak and write about the built environment plays a significant role in shaping that environment. One such aspect is the technical vocabulary of architecture. The vocabulary is not merely "a convenient shorthand, it is a system for thinking with, and provides the classificatory scheme which enable architects to 'see' as they do." (Markus, 2002: p.3.)

The section to follow will place the stated problem into its context, by investigating the social and urban environment in which the site is located.

1. *Chrestomathy (from the Greek words khrestos, useful, and mathein, to know) is an anthology (collection) of choice literary passages compiled especially as an aid for those engaged in learning a foreign language.*