**Satyagraha House**

**The Kraal**, designed and built by **Hermann Kallenbach** in 1907, occupied briefly by Gandhi and Kallenbach for less than two years from 1908 to 1909. The Kallenbach design linked together two African-inspired circular constructions or ‘rondavels’. Known in those days as **The Kraal** (colonial Dutch/Afrikaans term describing a livestock enclosure constructed by African farmers), the house was built by Kallenbach as an alternative to his affluent residence on **Linksfield Ridge**. Located in the exclusively ‘white’ suburb later known as Orchards, it was among his first built interventions in Johannesburg, a city to which he would make a considerable contribution, as both architect and property developer, in the course of his life. In his architectural practice, in particular in his partnership from 1923 until his death in 1948, he built commercial buildings, residential blocks, residences, hotels and churches in the then named Transvaal, Natal, Cape Colony and Orange Free State. Kallenbach was responsible for drawing up an award-winning plan (never implemented) for housing at **Orlando East, Soweto**, and also for the construction of Johannesburg’s scenic passes Munro Drive and Sylvia’s Pass (the latter he reportedly built himself with the help of some labourers).

Today, **Satyagraha House** is a heritage site, where the buildings and location are imbued with a spirit of ascetism now made monumental, re-invented as a boutique hotel paying homage to Gandhi, with minimal décor, yet sumptuous. The house was bought in 2009 by the French travel company *Voyageurs du Monde* as part of a plan to invest in ‘liberation tourism’ in South Africa. After a lengthy process of renovation and heritage, design and decor consultation, the bed-and-breakfast opened in November 2011 combining luxury accommodation with ‘an on-site museum complete with **Gandhi memorabilia** and period pieces from India that reflect the development of Gandhi’s anti-colonial and anti-racism philosophy and his commitment to non-violence. Along with commemorating Gandhi’s contribution to *satyagraha* in South Africa, the museum also references Gandhi’s following of Tolstoy, an interest shared with Kallenbach, and their association with a circle of transcendental thinkers including Sonja Schlesin, Henry and Millie Pollack, and others.

See <https://secretaffinitiesblog.wordpress.com/places/> <http://www.satyagrahahouse.com/>

**Walter Benjamin** would reference the African kraal as epitomising the idea of ‘porosity’, a term he, together the actress and theatre director **Asja Lācis**, defined as ‘the melting away of structural and hierarchical divisions’. This was a notion that would become central to the Frankfurt School’s thinking during the 1920s (Jeffries 2016:99). The city of Naples, wrote Benjamin in a newspaper article penned in collaboration with Lācis, was like an ‘African kraal,’ a space allowing for private acts or attitudes to be ‘permeated by streams of communal life’ (Benjamin & Lascis 1978 [1937]:171; McGill 2008; Jeffries 2016:97-121, see also Benjamin 2005.).

In his travels in **Marseilles, Naples and Russia** during the 1920s, Walter Benjamin would compare these cities to **Berlin**, the compartmentalised city of his childhood, a place where he felt he was living in ‘an iron cage of capitalism’.

In his memoir *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, he would write about the barricaded suburb, where he lived in with his family – their affluence separated them securely from the sight of poverty; he writes that he did not see a single beggar during his youth. Benjamin used the term **porosity** as a way of talking about what he observed in the southern European city of Naples during his travels in the 1920s, describing what he saw as fluid, spontaneous, unpredictable, where spaces allowed for public and private life to be ‘thrillingly intermingled’; these were places where, for Benjamin, the possibility of transcending barriers of class arose.

The notion of interpenetrability or porosity was something Benjamin returned to again and again in his work – **the arcades of Paris**, already in ruins by the time he wrote about them in the 1920s and 1930s, had, when they were constructed nearly 100 years before, ushered in a new social life of commodification, and capitalism, and the beginnings of a separation between private and public life. In this project, my intention is to revisit these spatial ideas inaugurated by Benjamin, and to think about the idea of porosity in relation to **social and political spaces of the present**, with particular reference to the Kallenbach sites curated for JOZIQUEST.

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**Archival image:** Satyagraha House