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Alternating Currents of Power: From Colonial to Post-*apartheid* Spatial Patterns in Newtown, Johannesburg

Sally Gaule

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Summary. Turbine Square in Newtown, Johannesburg, stands as a metaphor for the changing fortunes of the inner city during the 20th century. Four buildings occupy this site, flanking a small open space. One is the Johannesburg branch of the new South African Reserve Bank (1996); the others are the Boiler Houses (1928) and (1936) and Turbine Hall (1929) that generated electricity for Johannesburg until 1960. The former, completed in 1996, represents one of the first public works of the new democratic South Africa. The latter, icons of Johannesburg in its colonial phase, stand derelict and, until recently, were occupied by squatters. In this examination of Newtown, some social, political and cultural histories of Johannesburg are traced in relation to the city's transition from colonialism to a post-*apartheid* city. How the spatial layout and symbolism of the built environment form a component of that transition is a theme of this paper.

Colonial Contexts and the Spatial Structure of the City

Although the present is deemed post-colonial, we are reminded of Jane Jacobs' assertion that this condition is "deeply entwined with colonial formations". As she states,

> The politics of identity and place is not simply built around structures of power internal to the city itself or even to globally linked processes of urbanisation. It is undeniably a politics that occurs in and is concerned with the city, but for many groups it is also a politics constituted by a broader history and geography of colonial inheritances, imperialist presents and post-colonial possibilities (Jacobs, 1996, p. 2).

Many of the post-colonial spatial narratives that have characterised Johannesburg are not unique to this city. Conditions of decentralisation, inner-city decay, demolition and rebuilding have been a feature of North American, European and Australian cities, as well as others such as Hong Kong and Nairobi. Against this shared background, nevertheless, Johannesburg displays its own distinctive traits, as many theorists of the-*apartheid* city have confirmed. Among the most significant imprint was the Group Areas Act, that enforced strict racial residential segregation and, as McCarthy observes, created "an urban form that was more structured and quartered than anything that had preceded it in either colonial or early industrial capitalist times" (McCarthy, 1991, p. 260). The post-*apartheid* era in some senses compounded and in others subverted this pattern.

Sally Gaule is in the School of Architecture and Planning, Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, University of the Witwatersrand, PO Box 698, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa. Fax: 011 717 7649. E-mail: Gaules@archplan.wits.ac.za.
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That transition which remains etched on the face of Johannesburg was more rapid and wrenching than was the case with many other post-colonial cities. Late *apartheid* (1960s and 1970s) tried to freeze things in time, holding up transformations which would have otherwise occurred in a more gradual and organic fashion. One of the sites in Johannesburg where this and earlier compressed and contested changes are most visible is the industrial suburb of Newtown which stands on the western boundary of the inner city. This will provide our lens through which to show how changes in the built environment bear mute but vivid evidence of Johannesburg's contested past.

Johannesburg's Built Environment

Johannesburg metamorphosed from a low-rise mining town to a modern city with high-rise steel and concrete structures in a matter of decades. Visitors to the city registered amazement at the image of modernity that it conveyed. This physical development was driven, as it is today, by economic forces. As Clive Chipkin puts it in *Johannesburg Style*

> it is the sequence of booms and slumps, synchronised to the cyclic movement of the world's finance markets, that helps explain both the scale and forms of Johannesburg's architectural development (Chipkin, 1993, p. 10).

During these bursts of expansion, Johannesburg's built environment was brashly and shamelessly imitative. Bare *veld* gave way quickly to corrugated iron structures, often imported complete in broken-down form from Britain, then to one- and two-storey brick buildings in which French and Victorian influences were evident (Chipkin, 1993). By 1903, the imprint of New York and Chicago's high-rise architecture was registered on the high*veld*, even before it had crossed the Atlantic to London (Chipkin, 1993, p. 44). Ties between New York and Johannesburg have endured, but a noteworthy difference was perceptible in the effect of this new architecture. Where the US used steel and glass in the service of producing light, airy buildings, Johannesburg versions, by contrast, were massive and heavy (Chipkin, 1993, p. 49). With each wave of economic upsurge, existing buildings would be demolished to give way to new development. This was to become a recurring motif of Johannesburg's growth and, since its beginnings, approximately four cycles of redevelopment have occurred in the inner city.[1]

In many colonial cities in the early 20th century, Johannesburg included, Europe was looked to as a prime arbiter of taste and the importation of its particular styles and materials was preferred to indigenous traditions. As Daniel Herwitz maintains

> The Eurocentric modernist claims ownership over the colony by retaining the sense—or illusion—of ownership of the means of cultural production. By remaining a producer of what he thinks of as European modernism, he remains European rather than indigenous in his own eyes (Herwitz, 1999, p. 411).

This pattern accords with that outlined by Anthony King who observes that the transfer of European architectural styles and planning practices formed part of the process of colonial domination (King, 1990, p. 9). Spatial and cultural forms for cities such as Bourneville, New Delhi and Pretoria, were taken from the centre and mapped onto the periphery without much acknowledgement of the changed circumstances or cultural conditions (King, 1990, p. 9). As Jacobs notes

> Colonial cities were important sites in the transfer of modern capitalist culture to new worlds. This can be seen in the architectural form and planning of such cities that regularly mimicked the cities of the imperial home. Colonial cities also operated as important sites in the deployment of technologies of power through which indigenous populations were categorised and controlled. Here town planning became the mechanism by which colonial adjudicators of cleanliness, civility and modernity were realised quite literally on

> the ground. Not least, it was in the name of the ideal city, that many of the most comprehensive colonial territorialisations and displacements occurred and the most rigid policies of segregation were implemented (Jacobs, 1996, p. 20).

Two qualifications to these views are required, at least for Johannesburg. It is often not adequately recognised how much the development and planning of deep-level mining in Johannesburg was above all the achievement of American mining engineers. These were probably one conduit through which American modernity left so much deeper an impression on Johannesburg's architecture than on that of many other colonial cities. As a result, Johannesburg, at the turn of the century exhibited a compendium of architectural styles, revealing a desire to adhere to the image of international trends rather than demonstrating any real engagement with particular local conditions and climate. Colonial cities have a particularly ambiguous character which planning itself is an effort to resolve. Despite the structural separations that characterise colonial and post-colonial cities, the city itself undermines this. As Roland Barthes observed, the city is the place of encounter with the other, it is the place where strangers are most likely to meet (Barthes, 1986, p. 96). It is here, in the contemporary city, paradoxically, where intermingling that colonial powers sought to prevent is most likely to occur. Such a meeting, as Jacobs points out, is

> not simply augmented by imperialism but still regulated by its constructs of difference and privilege. This is most clearly shown in the racial politics of cities and especially in the often startlingly spatial outcomes of segregation or inner city racialisation (Jacobs, 1996, p. 4).

It is precisely this ambiguous quality of the city that was a characteristic feature of Johannesburg in the early decades of the 20th century. An intimate co-existence of multiracial slums was juxtaposed with bold new architectural, industrial and commercial monuments, which enshrined its most elevated cultural, social and economic aspirations.

Lionel Phillips described these disjunctures in a letter written in 1905

> Entering the 'Golden City' for the first time, one is struck by the curious spectacle of huge structures upon the American pattern, standing side by side with modest double-storied buildings, and in the immediate vicinity of wood and iron shanties (L. Phillips; quoted in van der Waal, 1987, p. 104).

These spatial and social patternings which characterised Johannesburg in the first decades of the 20th century, produced repeated struggles over space, which were reproduced and retraced in the final decades of the century. This paper, which was initially prompted by photographing the latter phenomenon, traces the process full circle, in an attempt to portray recurrent and distinctive features of Johannesburg and to show how much these earlier photographic images could enrich the written word.

The photographic research that accompanies this paper, sought not merely to re-present the written word, in which case the photographs would simply be at best illustrative and at worst tautological, but to portray some of the hidden tensions and contradictions of the site. Very few visual records of the buildings are preserved in the historical document. Museum Africa holds only a handful of images taken over the past 80 years. Hence, this photographic record was an attempt to lend an added authenticity to the dilemma of Newtown. Reinforcing the point, Barthes maintains that

> The photograph's essence is to ratify what it represents . . . No writing can give me this certainty . . . it is the misfortune of language not to be able to authenticate itself (Barthes, 1984, p. 85).

With each successive removal, histories and memories were erased and forgotten. By photographing the site, some of this could be preserved. The two methods of analysis, the one written and the other visual, could

therefore complement each other: text could anchor meaning, while the image could authenticate it.

Transition from the Colonial City to the *Apartheid* City to the Global City

Many different forces shaped the spatial organisation of the *apartheid* city in South Africa, but racial residential segregation has been regarded as the most significant factor (McCarthy, 1991, p. 258). Literature on the *apartheid* city reflects that this residential segregation originated as a condition of colonialism, which had its beginnings in the master servant relationships that colonialism engendered (Davies, Parnell, Chipkin, Van der Waal, Lemon etc). As McCarthy explains, it required 'spatial distancing' of the residential patterns of the coloniser and the colonised (McCarthy, p. 259). A related contextual factor, as Parnell points out, was that ethnic and racial segregation were a dominant motif of the colonial world and north America during the early 20th century (Parnell, 1993, p. 1). But where South Africa differed from the colonial world, as Anderson maintains, was in the "degree of force it wielded", to preserve racial classifications (Anderson, 1988, p. 127).

It was not only policies of racial segregation that informed city planning in the early 20th century. Eurocentric attitudes to modernism and adherence to the styles and values of European modernism tended to dominate South African cities. Daniel Herwitz argues that

> Public life was regulated even before the rule of *apartheid*, by a severe Eurocentrism in design and mission. Only rarely did the builder or planner of public space recast European models and blend them with existing architectural spatial forms; instead it was designed to divide and rule, to incorporate the privileged into 'European' culture and exclude all others. And this often meant northern Europe and Britain rather than the Mediterranean. Thus public space was park rather than piazza, domesticated landscape in the city rather than open meeting or dwelling space in streets or squares along the lines of say, Italy or Spain (Herwitz, 1999, p. 411).

Clive Chipkin has remarked that "no single feature can be said to define Johannesburg's metamorphosis from a colonial centre of capital into an apartheid city" (Chipkin, 1999, p. 265). The *apartheid* city, Chipkin maintains, is most visible in the township of Soweto, 12 kilometres from Johannesburg's city centre, physically separate, its position in all senses peripheral to the city. As he states

> Here mass housing provided by the state was used as a means to coerce and subjugate an impoverished population, quarantined behind buffer zones from the main areas of urban wealth creation (Chipkin, 1999, p. 265).

What is more, as Parnell and Pirie observe, *apartheid* policies were imposed inside African townships as well. Sotho and Nguni speakers were allocated separate pockets of land based on their home language, ostensibly to preserve their 'natural' rural ties and facilitate the education of their children in their mother tongue. Reinforcing the belief that Africans were temporary occupants of the city, title to property was limited to 30 years and, in 1968, retracted altogether (Parnell and Pirie, 1991, p. 135). What was produced was an arrangement that was deeply hierarchical, divided and ordered to include the White group and exclude all others and, as theorists on the *apartheid* city have pointed out, efforts by the state to control the African workforce and segregate the South African city intensified with rapid industrialisation (Davies, 1981). Herein lies the difference between the colonial and the *apartheid* city.

Mapping the City: The Grid Form

The grid form is a commonplace of most South African towns. As a way of surveying land, it gave structure and order to the

landscape. Originally the form was adopted by the Dutch, being preferred for its practicality and ease of use because land could be divided up into equal portions, straight roads were easier to construct and this spatial layout facilitated the expansion of the town (Cardy, 1990, p. 80). Interpretations of the grid, most notably by Carter, Jacobs, Harley, Huggan and Said, provide useful insights of the process of colonial domination. Urban historians have largely regarded the charting of the grid as historically neutral but, as Carter (1987, p. 205) points out, in reality, it attempts to render space uniform and equal. As he states

> The grid would seem to negate such spatial properties as direction, nearness, even here and 'there'. For by definition, the grid plan equalises parts, rendering everywhere the same. In this sense, the grid plan is characterised, like the map grid, by its placelessness, by its elimination of viewpoints, of comings and goings, and indeed of history (Carter, 1987, p. 204).

Beliefs that maps represent factual information arranged in scientifically neutral conventions is a view, J. B. Harley notes, "well embedded in our cultural mythology" (Harley, 1988, p. 287). In their use of 'graphic conventions', representational hierarchies and selections or omissions of information, they represent a "manipulated form of knowledge" (Harley, 1988, p. 298). And, since the production of maps in many countries is undertaken by the state, then much of the information they contain reflects the ideology of the system of government that commissions them (Harley, 1988, p. 292). A noteworthy example of such gaps and silences is the omission of Soweto from early maps of Johannesburg.[2]

Using the example of Australian cities, Paul Carter reveals how the spatial patterns of colonial settlement are reflected in colonial and imperial processes (Carter, 1987, p. 206). Spatial segregation, King maintains, was "inextricably tied up with organisation and the grid form" (King, 1990, p. 31). As Jacobs notes

> If the mapping and charting of a country was part of the material possession of people and places, then it became so because its fantastic scope was anxiously articulated on the ground, through settling and journeying over a page which was far from blank (Jacobs, 1996, p. 22).

Huggan suggests likewise, she asserts that mapping was a technique to represent a stable and knowable reality in what were unknown lands inhabited by unknown people (Jacobs, 1996, p. 19).

Although the grid pattern characterises the streets of Johannesburg, it is unusual in that Diagonal Street, as the name implies, is positioned at an angle to the grid. The site of Johannesburg lay at the centre of a block of proclaimed farms near the Main Reef—i.e. the gold-bearing reef of the Witwaterand (Shorten, 1970, p. 83). Originally, it consisted of a triangular piece of left-over state land called Randjeslaagte, which was surrounded by adjoining farms that had already been surveyed. Diagonal Street forms the western boundary of Randjeslaagte (Smith, 1971, p. 123) and thus designates a racial boundary or border of the city limits. It is on this thin edge that Newtown balances, on the periphery of the central business district (CBD) (see Figure 1).

Newtown at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Multiracial slums dotted south-central Johannesburg in the early 20th century and were especially concentrated in the east and west. The site that later became known as Newtown was a prime example of these. At the end of the 19th century, Newtown comprised a cluster of three locations on the western side of the town, occupied by Whites, Coloureds, Indians and Africans (see Figure 1). One, known as 'Brickfields' due to the clay deposits found there, was inhabited mainly by poor Whites; the others, 'Coolie Location' and 'Kafir Location' were set aside for Indians and Africans respectively (Beavon, 1997, pp. 162–163). Brickfields

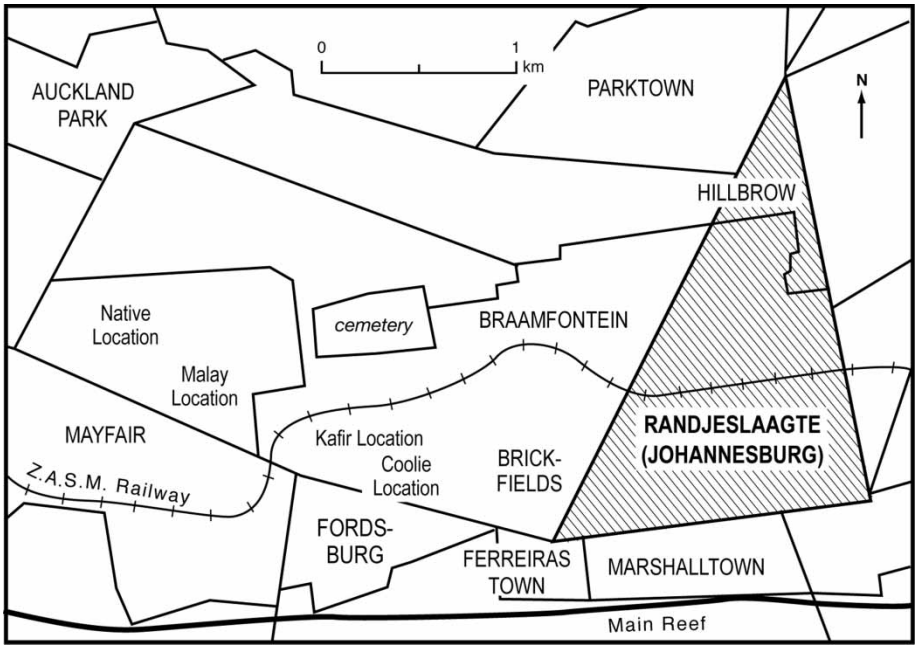

Figure 1. Johannesburg in 1896.

was the site where Johannesburg's first bricks were kilned. During the late 1880s and 1890s, many Afrikaners who had been driven off the land by drought and disease were forced to find new modes of livelihood in the cities. Some petitioned the State President S. P. Kruger for the right to manufacture bricks on the land bordering Braamfontein, south of the railway line (van Onselen, 1982, p. 8).

Kruger, aware of the difficulties this group would have in finding employment in the mining industry, agreed to their request, hoping it would provide a temporary reprieve for young unskilled Afrikaners. Evidently, it did and, very soon, the property was cluttered with houses, kilns, puddle machines and stacks of drying bricks (van Onselen, 1982, p. 116). By the 1890s, as van Onselen notes

> The Brickfields had started to assume an even more permanent aspect and became well known as a place of economic refuge for the Afrikaner poor (van Onselen, 1982, p. 8).

The area was sometimes referred to as 'The Insanitary' (Smith, 1971, p. 366), since slum conditions were so prevalent there, and it soon came to be regarded as one of the most pestilential areas of the city south of the railway line (Lange, 1998, p. 44). Dr C. Porter, medical officer of health, evocatively describes the contrast between Brickfields and the city in these words

> Huge meretricious buildings as remarkable for their costliness as their lack of aesthetic effect, lay Brickfields, home to 7000 people of all races, its streets irregular, crooked, narrow and unmade, its houses dumped down promiscuously, as if their owners carried them on their backs and dropped them down when they felt tired (C. Porter; quoted in Lange, 1998, p. 169).

By 1904, the City Council had made repeated efforts to clear the slums in Brickfields and adjacent locations in Johannesburg. Expropriation and reconstruction were proposed not only because of a lack of proper streets, poor drainage and sewerage systems, but because of racial mixing (Lange, 1998, p. 114). For medical and other authorities, such slums came to stand for a condensation

of fears. Poor sanitation and racial mixing was elided into miscegenation, sexually transmitted diseases and a generalised moral decay. Collectively, these represented a profound threat to social stability and White supremacy. In the early decades of the century, disease, or 'the sanitation syndrome', to use Swanson's evocative phrase, came to serve as an immensely powerful metaphor for this entire cluster of concerns (Swanson, 1977, p. 387). Since Johannesburg was where they were encountered in their most extreme form, the city soon became emblematic of all that White supremacists feared. Here, urban planning and urban racial segregation were most closely intertwined (Parnell, 1993). Thus, when bubonic plague broke out in March 1904, the City Council exploited the resultant moral panic by relocating the Brickfields residents to Klipspruit, 15 kilometres away. The City Council first erected a corrugated iron fence around the site and then the fire brigade set it alight (Leyds, 1964, pp. 170–172). Within months, the city authorities had rezoned it for commercial use and renamed it Newtown, erasing its former life from maps and memory (Chipkin, 1993, p. 198).

The removal of Brickfields, Coolie and Kafir Location was a pivotal moment in the history of city planning and residential segregation in Johannesburg. It was the first racialised relocation of its kind (Parnell and Pirie, 1990, p. 130); it provided a model and precedent for all Johannesburg and it was the first major example of a racialised struggle over space. Africans, Indians and Coloureds resisted it mainly through refusing to move to distant racial locations.

The elimination of the slumyards would take another 30 years to achieve. Many of the residents of Coolie Location, for example, trickled into neighbouring Vrededorp and Malay Location, which quickly developed into another of the city's most notorious slums and which were only finally removed in the era of *apartheid*. Such developments were reproduced in other parts of the inner city. The story of Brickfields/Newtown was thus re-enacted many times more in the subsequent decades. Ironically, several of the same actors returned to the same stage nearly 100 years later to re-engage in a remarkably similar struggle over space.

Newtown's Beginnings

The reconstruction of Newtown was mirrored in architectural developments that reflected the social ethos of Johannesburg more generally. It was bold, modern, ambitious and commercial. After its initial resurveying, plans envisaged for the area included transferring the fresh produce market there, the construction of an abattoir and cattle yard, and, due to the increasing demand for electricity, a new power station, electricity workshop and migrant workers' compound (now the Workers Library), which would provide a ready source of labour (see Figure 2).

By the early 1910s, Newtown had transformed dramatically: Premier Milling had erected its first silos and produce, brokerage and trading of other food-related industries had been established there. Many Litvak retail and wholesale merchants and grain brokers gravitated to the area, creating a rich and unique sub-culture. As Georgina Jaffe observed

> Jews and Afrikaners mixed with Germans and other East European immigrants and activity centred largely around the daily auctions and produce (Jaffe, 2001, p. 110).

Among the idiosyncrasies associated with the milling fraternity of Newtown, was the awarding of a fictitious degree from the 'University of Newtown', to those who had learnt their trade on the job (Jaffe, 2001, p. 110).

The original market, situated in the heart of the town in Market Square (now Library Gardens) had been the site of cattle auctions since the town's beginnings (see Figure 2). However, due to rapid unplanned expansion in the town, more space was required for the fresh produce market and plans to erect a City Hall on the market site had been passed. Consequently, the market had to be relocated. The chosen site was in Newtown, about half a

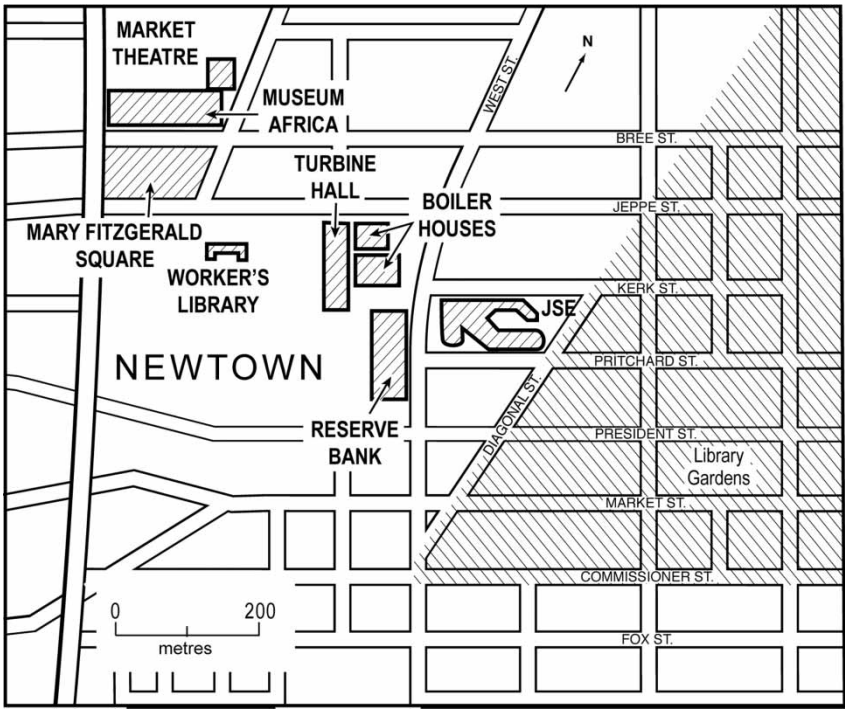

Figure 2. Plan of Newtown, 2000, showing location of buildings referred to in the text.

mile away. In 1913, the first major official construction was unveiled. The new structure was an engineering feat—a steel structure measuring 203 metres long by 30 metres wide, and constructed entirely without interior supports. It has the longest three pin arches of any steel structure in South Africa. As an example of the bold rationalist style of the architecture of the early 20th century, its scale and the detailing in the corner turrets at each end make it one of the landmarks in the area (South African Heritage Resources Agency, File 9/2/228/46, Historical background, the Newtown market, p. 3).

At the turn of the century, South Africa's electricity supply was insignificant by international standards but, within 10 years, it had become one of the largest providers of the commodity in the world (Christie, 1984, p. 5). The growth of electricity and electrical supply in Johannesburg was driven primarily by the needs of the industrial and mining sectors.

At the time, electricity supply was provided by two main sources, one was the privately owned Victoria Falls Power Company (VFPC) and the other was the Electricity Supply Commission, (Escom), partly state-controlled and part private industry (Clark, 1994, p. 57). As demand for electricity increased, competition between these two entities intensified. However, the municipality administered Johannesburg's electricity supply and, although Escom offered to supplement its supply, Johannesburg's city engineers declined. By this stage, South Africa's Prime Minister, J. B. Herzog and his 'Pact' government were beginning to propagate a distinctive White South African identity and patriotism. This national settler orientation was reflected in the promotion of national industries and parastatals. Johannesburg's municipal leaders articulated their own peculiar version of this creed. They desired their own separate power station at least partly as a symbol of Johannesburg's standing as the principal town in South Africa and a 9.5-hectare site in Newtown was set aside for the construction of Jeppe Power Station, later renamed City Generating Station (Clark, 1994, p. 78).

Not only was electricity seen as "the life blood of the city", (*Sunday Express*, 25 September 1938), it also epitomised one of the key aspects of modern city living. Electrical consumption, termed "the fairy godmother of modern life" by one Johannesburg newspaper (*Rand Daily Mail*, 19 October 1932), perhaps sums up how electricity itself symbolised innovation and modernity. Renfrew Christie, the main historian of electricity in South Africa remarks that

> Electricity has been called 'the consummation of the industrial revolution', and at least in one sense it represented a 'spirit of progress' (Christie, 1984, p. 3).

In the 'electrical exhibition' held at the City Hall during 1932, electricity was portrayed as an essential commodity of modern life. Thus, the buildings which housed the power supply came to represent all that electricity embodied. Made of brick and steel and built in the functional tradition of the industrial age, they represented an image of modernity and progress that characterised the period. They demonstrated a new interest in scale, structure and materials, all in the service of practical construction.

The first three buildings with which this paper is especially concerned were two Boiler Houses and a Turbine Hall, that occupy the space now known as Turbine Square. The buildings were commissioned by the City Engineer's department of the municipality of Johannesburg, and were designed by the department's city architect (see Figure 3). The first Boiler House (1928) abuts the Turbine Hall and both are constructed of reinforced concrete and clad in yellow brick. They are fenestrated with large elongated industrial windows on the northern Jeppe Street façade and west façade.

The second Boiler House or southern Boiler House was constructed in 1935. It is a rectangular steel-framed building, clad with red brick. It has a pitched corrugated iron roof; the central part is raised, with tiers on either side giving the building a pleasing symmetry when viewed from the east. Both Boiler Houses overlook a small piece of vacant land, an unnamed park. Their position, set back from the street, allowed them to be viewed from a distance, which was an unusual characteristic in the city of Johannesburg (van der Waal, 1987, p. 106).[3] It is this feature, and the scale of their austere industrial structure, that gives them a strong presence and amplifies the industrial impression of Newtown.

The scale and monumental quality of these Boiler Houses reflect approaches to industrial architectural construction evident in Europe in the early part of the century, most notably those designed by Peter Behrens. Behrens' innovative synthesis of aesthetics and function in the AEG Turbine Factory (1908–09) in Berlin was widely praised and, by 1910, he had become a pioneer of modern architecture (Buddensieg, 1987, p. 36). His use of steel and reinforced concrete combined to produce a newly formed 'industrial classicism'. Large structures, constructed out of modern-age mass-produced materials, were used in the service of a refined aesthetic sensibility, producing finely wrought, simple and elegant industrial buildings. Eschewing tradition, August Josef Lux states that, "the 'modern eye' was able to perceive in the contemporary constructions of the engineer 'the secret of a new beauty revealed'" (Buddensieg, 1987, pp. 35–36).

Bare words convey little of the Turbine Hall's proportions, light, detail and pristine space. Few representations of these buildings are passed down to us in the historical record and, as will be shown in the following section, they were removed from public view when mothballed and bricked-up in the era of high *apartheid* in the 1960s and 1970s. Once invaded by squatters, however, in the 1990s, their full majesty was once again revealed and their full significance apprehended. This is now preserved in photographs, which were the starting-point of this study. From 2000 to 2002, the author documented the site extensively, using photographs and text from interviews with the squatters. This work addressed multiple themes of the history of contested space, memory and forgetting, forced removals and circulatory migration portraying an elliptical narrative

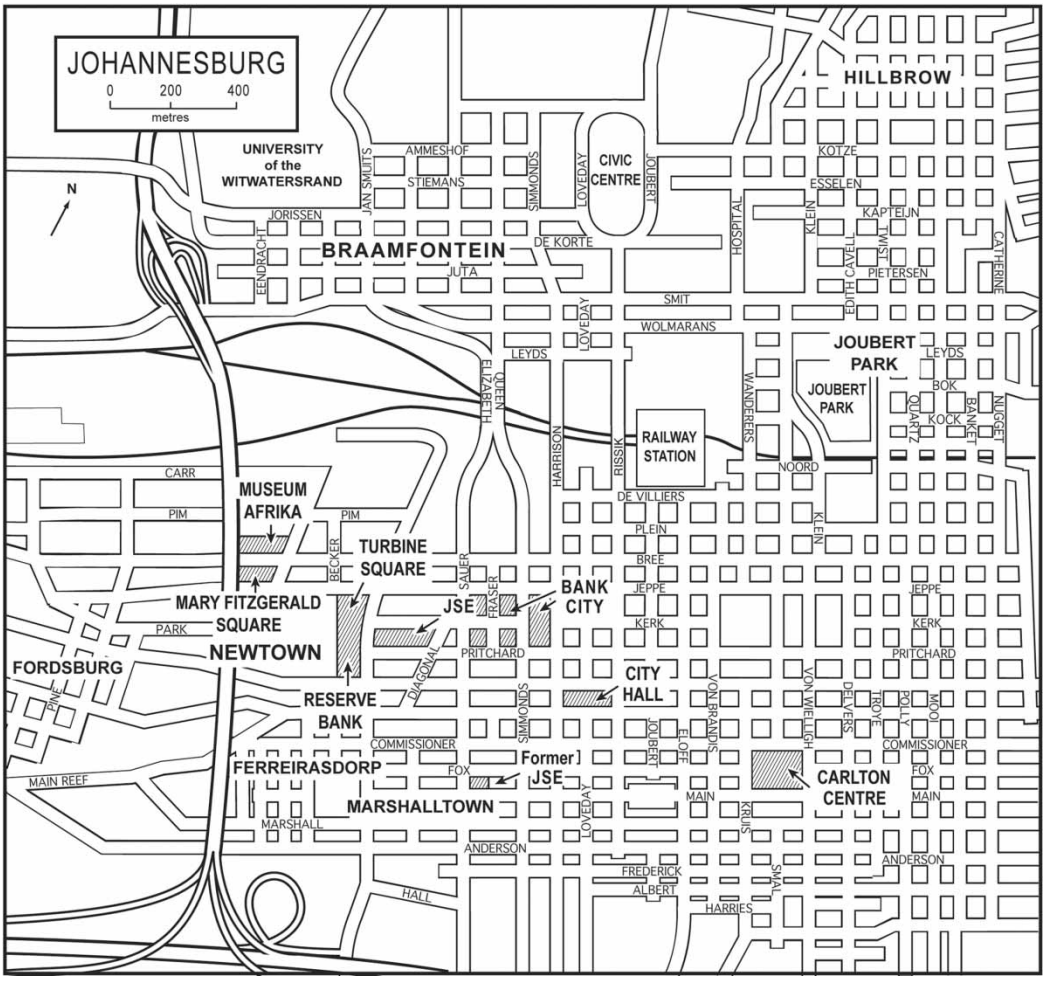

Figure 3. Newtown in relation to the CBD, 2000

of inner-city life in Johannesburg in the 20th century. By photographing the site, some of this could be preserved. The value of the photographic record is twofold: it serves to enrich the written word and to present the dilemma and contradictions of Newtown's past (see Figure 4).

Group Areas and *Apartheid*

Newtown mirrored Johannesburg's development remarkably closely. The first Boiler House was constructed in 1928 at the very moment when the city's first major burst of industrial expansion took place. In 1928 Johannesburg was also awarded city status, again mirroring its civic leaders vaulting aspirations (Shorten, 1970, p. 350). The second Boiler House was built in 1935 as the South African economy pulled out of depression (on the back of gold) and embarked on a sustained burst of industrial expansion which would continue through and long after the Second World War. That economic expansion ironically spelled the doom of the City Generating Station as demand for electricity rapidly exceeded the station's capacity to produce. To meet the escalating demands, a new power-generating complex was erected in Orlando, far to the south-west, and from 1961, the City Generating plant was relegated to the position of

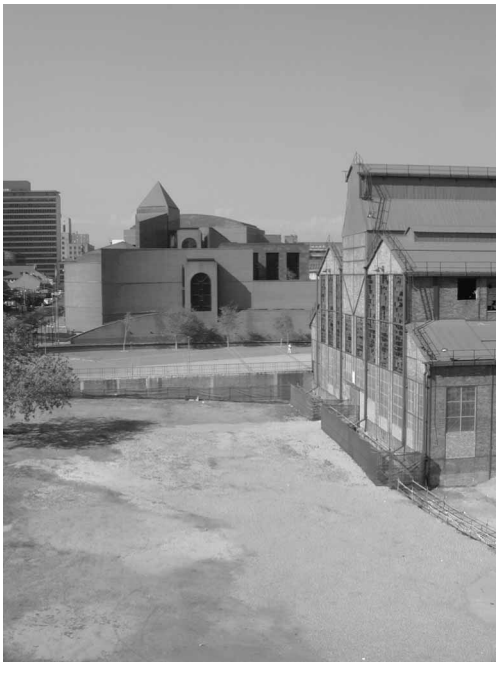

Figure 4. Turbine Square from Jeppe Street Parkade, 2002. *Photograph*: Sally Gaule.

emergency back-up for Johannesburg (Shorten, 1970, p. 607).

The late 1950s also witnessed the consolidation of *apartheid* and especially of its lynchpin piece of legislation, the Group Areas Act. Through much of the 1940s, Newtown and its environs had been caught up in new struggles over social space. Malay Location, which loomed menacingly in the peripheral vision of Newtown's merchants and mining houses, continued to absorb new immigrants; as was the case in every Black urban niche around Johannesburg. The square outside the Market, originally known as Newtown's old wagon square, and later renamed Mary Fitzgerald Square,[4] was also invaded on many Sundays by Black trade unionists and Black oppositional political parties who favoured this as a site to hold meetings. The 1946 anti-pass campaign and the 1946 Black miners' strike, two of the most significant stirrings of Black opposition in the mid to late 1940s which for some constitute the prelude to and mandate for *apartheid*, were launched from here (*The Guardian*, August 1946, p. 1). By 1956, eight years after the introduction of *apartheid* by the new nationalist government, Malay Location, which had loomed for so long close to Newtown was finally designated for White ownership and its inhabitants gradually despatched to new locations such as Lenasia and Eldorado Park. Removals took place from 1956 until the 1970s (Cachalia, 1985, pp. 32–33).

This final consummation of racial separation, however, confronted the racial engineers of *apartheid* with a paradox. Nowhere is this better illustrated than Newtown. The ambition of successive city and central governments to expunge these sites and symbols of racial togetherness was thus finally achieved. The same process was replicated all over South Africa as one tiny isolated 'Black spot' after another was erased. However, the moment that the struggle for racial space had been decisively won by the ideologues and *aparatchiks* of *apartheid* was perversely the same time that the life-blood of the area was draining away. The area became simultaneously racially pure and economically ailing. In the early 1970s, the power station was mothballed and the market was evacuated in favour of more spacious premises on the southern outskirts of the city. Economic activity more generally was vacating the city centre, as will be discussed more fully in the next section.

The Preservation of Newtown between the 1970s and the 1990s

Up until 1970, the central business district (CBD) had been the primary location of Johannesburg's main tertiary services, but in common with world-wide trends of decentralisation and suburbanisation, a shift in this pattern began to become apparent. Newly constructed shops and office space in the northern suburbs began to compete for tenants, heralding the beginning of the decline of the city centre. Gradually, over the next three decades, locations in the north and east of the city came to be preferred to Johannesburg's 2.7 million square metres of prime office space (Beavon, 1997, p. 161).

Cocooned from new racial infusions by the economically and socially artificial shell of *apartheid* and eviscerated by suburban and peri-urban industrial drift, the Newtown area was forced to reinvent itself.

Newtown's problems were compounded when its fresh produce market was relocated to the south of Johannesburg in 1975. Plans were initiated to preserve the building because of its structural and architectural merit. It was proposed that the market be made into a theatre and museum. The Market Theatre (1976), as it is now known, has become renowned for its alternative *avant-garde* productions and multiracialism during the latter days of *apartheid*. Indeed, it was one of the first areas in Johannesburg during the 1970s and 1980s where racial mixing took place, mimicking in a slightly distorted and middle-class way, Newtown's multiracial beginnings. A new, almost twilight, character was beginning to envelop Newtown.

In the early 1970s, Newtown was crumbling, mostly because of the City Council's indecision about the area and its inability to come up with a viable plan for its future. At the time, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), whose premises in Hollard Street had become too small, was secretly searching for an alternative location. With characteristic economic sense, it avoided the area around the Carlton Centre and sought out a site on the western edge of the city, next to Newtown, and close to the headquarters of several major mining houses, where property prices were far more reasonable. It was on this edge that the JSE purchased three city blocks for the site of the new Stock Exchange. One was the land between West, Diagonal, Kerk and Pritchard Streets, and the other two were the blocks to the north and south of it. However, it was only 6 years later, in 1978, that the JSE's new 10-storey building was completed. Delays were due, mainly, to fluctuations in the Stock Market resulting from the world oil crisis of 1973 and the 1976 Soweto students' uprising. The adjacent additional land—i.e. the blocks to the north and south that the JSE originally acquired—was sold at a profit. Had the JSE relocated to the vicinity of the Carlton Centre, it would have defined a new heart for Johannesburg's central business district (CBD) (Beavon, 1998, p. 8) (see Figure 3).

In the event, Newtown was thrown a potential lifeline and, now hanging suspended between prosperity and degeneration, this prevailing climate of uncertainty soon became etched on the built and lived environment of Johannesburg. The national, political and economic stagnation which set in in the early to mid 1970s resulted in the progressive reduction of state funding and housing for Coloureds, Indians and Africans. By the early 1970s, the determination to maintain separate residential areas and housing for Coloureds, Indians and Africans became too great a financial burden for the ruling party. Housing provision declined from that point. The 1976 Soweto uprising was also a major contributing factor to Johannesburg's shifting social and economic landscape. It triggered a drop in property prices and the emigration from South Africa of Johannesburg's inner-city foreign residents. This in turn created a surplus of accommodation in the historically White suburb of the flatland area Hillbrow, a mere 2 km from Newtown. This oversupply coincided with a drastic shortage of accommodation for Indian and Coloured people who, in desperation, began to take up residence illegally in Hillbrow (Morris, 1994). Over the next 10 or more years, lawyers fought legal battles to defend 'illegal residents' rights and, finally, in December 1982, a landmark court case in which Judge Goldstone ruled that no-one could be evicted from their accommodation unless suitable alternative accommodation could be provided, heralded a shift in the racial composition of Hillbrow. By the 1990s, it thus became impossible for the government to attempt to enforce the Group Areas Act in Hillbrow, which was then euphemistically termed a 'Grey Area'. Units in blocks of flats in Hillbrow subsequently became available to any group or person able to afford them (Morris, 1999, p. 58).

A new government led by P. W. Botha now attempted to rescue South Africa's faltering

economy by implementing free market principles and embracing the late-20th-century reality of globalisation, albeit erratically and unevenly. Businessmen hailed this as the dawn of a new and economically more auspicous era. However, at the moment it sought tentatively to open up to the global free market, it simultaneously retreated politically into a siege mentality. P. W. Botha's Rubicon speech of 1985 was—for example, a classic moment of the resulting incoherence: intended to announce political reform and to open up South Africa to the outside world, it turned out to be an exhibition of the inward-looking, enclosed *laager* mentality (O'Meara, 1996, pp. 329–333).

The 1980s and 1990s were decades of transition. *Apartheid* was failing and the period was characterised by profound ambiguity and uncertainty. As Alan Morris observes, the government's fiscal deficit, acquired during the old *apartheid* period, illustrated the contradictions of racial capitalism that began coming to the fore during the mid to late 1970s (Morris, 1994, p. 824). These contradictory tendencies were each embodied and played out in Newtown.

From 1986, reform in South Africa went hand-in-hand with repression. From June 1986, the first of four year-long national States of Emergency were declared, running until June 1990. Between 1986 and 1988, approximately 32 000 *apartheid* activists were detained (Coleman, 1998, pp. 40–49). At the same time, the government introduced a number of key socio-political reforms. Up until 1986, Influx Control legislation kept the majority of South African Africans confined to rural areas, prior to which they required a permit to reside in White areas. The absence of a permit rendered them 'illegal aliens' and offenders could be fined up to R5000 on the first offence (about US$500) (Morris, 1999, p. 53). When South Africa's rulers began to despair of the cost of regulation and to look for salvation in the free market, they repealed this legislation. Racial residential barriers tumbled all over central Johannesburg. Newtown was a compelling example of the process. Immigrants, whom pass laws had previously penned into barren rural areas, flooded into Johannesburg, occupying the increasingly derelict buildings that had lost their economic and functional purpose (Sapire, 1992).

Transition to Democracy

The democratic transition in 1994 created a new and quickly changing balance of power in the struggle over central Johannesburg's urban space, which can once again be apprehended in distilled fashion in the struggle over Newtown. From 1995, closures and departures by major owners and tenants of once-prestigious offices gathered pace. IBM headquarters was vacant, Carlton Centre Office Tower was struggling to let space; Old Mutual and Anglo American Properties had vacated their premises and the Carlton Hotel, once one of the most high-status hotels in the centre, closed its doors and erected a palisade fence around its perimeter, preventing invasion by vagrants. A consequence of this mass exodus to the north led to the 'mothballing' of many of the buildings in the city centre. Unable to let them, and faced with the costs of maintaining and guarding them against crime, property owners simply bricked up the doors and windows at the lower levels to prevent vagrants from entering inside (Beavon, 1998, p. 19).

Johannesburg's Stock Exchange (JSE) which is ranked 12th in the world, continued to operate in Newtown until 1999 (Beavon, 1997, p. 161). In 1998, however, Russell Loubser, president on the JSE, announced that it would be relocating to Sandton, justifying the move by reference to problems of crime, such as car hi-jackings and muggings (*Financial Mail*, 24 April, 1998 p. 74). This was a serious setback for the city since listed companies had remained there simply because of the position of the JSE (Beavon, 1998, p. 18).[5]

During the 1990s, profound uncertainty and ambiguity dominated the built environment of Johannesburg. While many firms were quitting the city for the northern suburbs, some demonstrated a commitment to its central business district. For example, in the mid

1990s, the old City Hall became the seat of the new provincial legislature, causing a rise in the demand for lettable office space in the area. Likewise, in 1995, First National Bank had taken occupation of their headquarters, comprising a massive area of three central city blocks and costing some $300 million at the time (see Figure 3).

A similar indeterminacy afflicted Newtown. In 1986, in a private-sector initiative, Nedbank donated funds to renovate the remaining part of the old market building as a museum for Johannesburg's centenary celebrations and the project was later completed by the City Council. Significantly, Museum Africa's opening in 1994 coincided with the birth of South Africa's new democracy. Reflecting new priorities, it housed permanent and temporary displays of rock art, ethnography and photography (South African Heritage Resources Agency, File 9/2/228/46, p. 5).

Conversely, from the time that the City Generating Station ceased to serve as an emergency power source for Johannesburg, the City Council cordoned off the site. During those decades, the buildings became derelict due to neglect and indecision about the future of the area reflecting developments in the city. A sequence of plans for the redevelopment of Newtown appeared and reappeared so rapidly that, to date, almost 30 schemes exist for its renewal. Among the proposals were shopping malls, a health and racquet club, cinemas, a clothing chain called Edgars and a headquarters for the mining house Anglogold. Despite all this interest, Newtown has confounded city planners over this time and none of the schemes has actually managed to get beyond the proposal stage. Instead, the premises became invaded by squatters.

In 1996, when South Africa's first fully democratic government erected the Johannesburg branch of the South African Reserve Bank as one of its first public works, it was an equally symbolic commitment to Newtown and the inner city. The site of this new building abutted the second Boiler House. However, the presence of an unruly, insanitary and partly criminalised squatter community obviously jarred with the aspirations of the Reserve Bank. It was, in a way, a living representation of South Africa's social and economic contradictions.

The Johannesburg Branch of the New South African Reserve Bank

A brief for the new South African Reserve Bank building (Johannesburg Branch) was initially conceived in 1988, but the subsequent discontinuation of some of the bank's activities required a reappraisal of the plan and, in 1991, the bank appointed the firm Floris Smith and Meyer Pienaar as the architects for the building. It was completed in January 1996, thereby spanning the critical initial phase of the transition from the old South Africa, and represented one of the first public works of the new democratic South Africa. The site is to the south side of the second Boiler House, where the Old Tramway Sheds were formerly located. In 1993, the financial heart of Johannesburg was only a block away.

The brief for the design of the Reserve Bank stipulated that it should respond to the electricity buildings that form a landmark in the area, which the City Council had earmarked for development as a cultural precinct. In reality, it responds almost exclusively to the financial arteries to the east, that contained the headquarters of large mining concerns and, until 1999, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. In its orientation, towards West Street where the entrance is located,[6] it acknowledges the other financial institutions in the area. Interior axes of the building were designed with the angle of West Street in mind. West Street, like Diagonal Street (mentioned earlier), is positioned at an angle to the grid and the architects were mindful of this geometry of the city in the design of the building. However, the architect's concerns appear to be with the formal connotations of this shift only, rather than with its implications as a boundary that marks the edge of the city limits, due to its proximity to Diagonal Street. As Giesen writes

> West St is positioned at an angle to this grid. Whereas the site was defined by a

north–south running street grid, the 21 degree line of West St running through the site provided an interesting design opportunity.

The Architects used these two distinct fusing lines to organise the positions of the various components of the complex. ... by organising a circular grouping around the north–south axis, a dynamic interplay was achieved between the various forms. The use of this angle was ... optimised by concentrating a number of design details, such as the display of open walls, along this angle to introduce light into the building and at the same time to afford views of the city along this axis (Giesen, 1996 pp. 14–15).

Materials and Light

The spatial and structural symbolism of the Reserve Bank building offers a revealing set of contrasts to that of the earlier boiler houses. Each nevertheless represents a different phase of modernity. As a whole, the site is uneasy because there are discrepancies of space and scale between the buildings. Each building's relationship to the ground plane of the site is different. The older industrial buildings were recessed deep into the ground creating an impression of solidity and permanence. Their brick and iron construction demonstrated an interest in materials, structure and scale—all in the service of practical construction. Conversely, from one angle of vision, a thin slab seems to support the Reserve Bank, below which the space reads as a void or hollow (see Figure 9).

Both buildings make extensive use of brick. The Reserve Bank is built of red brick (especially manufactured to adhere to the slender proportions of old Roman bricks) and *verde mare* granite that complement and enhance the colour of Newtown. As a material, the brick pays tribute not only to the Brickfields, located there 100 years previously. It points to the most commonly used building material in Johannesburg since the city's beginnings, but also defers to the Western world. The brick infill of the Boiler Houses has been treated so that every sixth course is assembled with half bricks. Hence, a subtle pattern is evident in the design of the façades, denoting a concern for finely wrought visual representation.

Light falling on the façades of the buildings at certain times of the day articulates the patterns of brickwork of which they are composed. The way in which light is brought into the buildings creates distinct effects and relates to the way in which they represent themselves. In their orientation, the electricity buildings and the Reserve Bank's entrances face towards the east—in the direction of central Johannesburg—and, latterly, the financial heart of the city. Bright shafts of morning light penetrate the spaces of the Boiler Houses, creating an impression of church light, that reinforce notions of the buildings as 'cathedrals of modernity', representing the 'spirit of the industrial age' (see Figure 6). In contrast, shafts of light do not penetrate the Reserve Bank building, rather the architects opted to use 'indirect sunlight' and sunscreens that would filter out direct sunlight (Giesen, 1996, p. 15). Subdued light inside the Reserve Bank creates an atmosphere like a mausoleum that is emphasised by the stillness of its interior spaces.[7] Indeed, the thick walls and glass of the building prevent sounds of the city from penetrating the building. Visually, views to the west of the city are partial, episodic and fragmentary since the sunshades obscure scenes to the outside. Similarly, from the exterior on the western façade, the brickwork, tinted windows and grid-like sunshades create a visually and physically impenetrable impression. Unlike the old Boiler Houses, the correlation between interior and exterior is spatially disparate. But, in their uses, juxtapositions and the way in which they are inhabited in the late 20th century, an enduring motif of the city itself is conveyed: they represent the disparities of modernity.

In the interior of the Reserve Bank, "Roman architectural overtones, associated with rounded forms such as arches, vaults and domes" were combined with "a number of cultural African influences", Marian Giesen

comments (Giesen, 1996, p. 15). However, she does not explain either the form or content of such "cultural African influences", nor how they complement the Roman style of architectural construction, and it is difficult to see how this was achieved.

Another interpretation of the building offered by Christina Muwanga (1998, p. 134) focuses on the mixed metaphors of its symbolism. Its fragmentation and restless geometric forms are interpreted as a metaphor for South Africa's uneasy democratic beginnings. In its search for an appropriate structure, it reflects a certain doubt in Johannesburg's transition to democracy.

Façades form a feature of the design of the Reserve Bank. The architect, Floris Smith refers to the roof as a 'fifth façade', which is articulated to form a collage of shapes clad in copper and visible only from neighbouring offices, and hence occluded from view to those 'on the ground'. As one proceeds higher, a gradual revelation of the building occurs (see Figures 5 and 7).

The design was explained in the following terms

> Windows could not be placed closer than 10 m from the ground. Roof gardens created at different levels within the

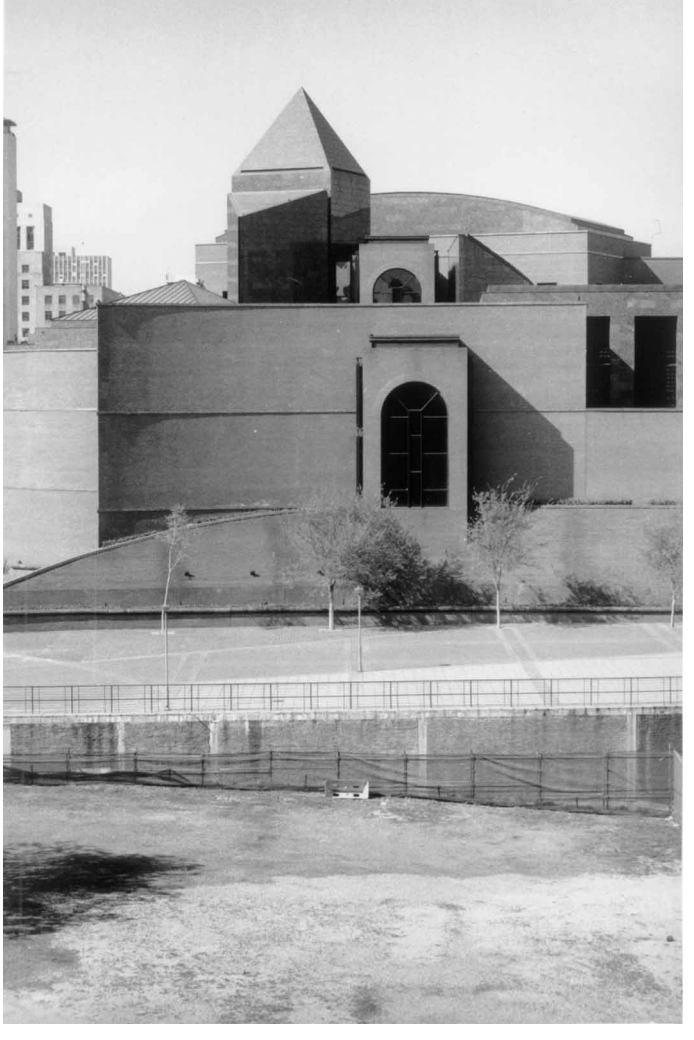

Figure 5. Reserve Bank from Jeppe Street Parkade, 2002. *Photograph*: Sally Gaule.

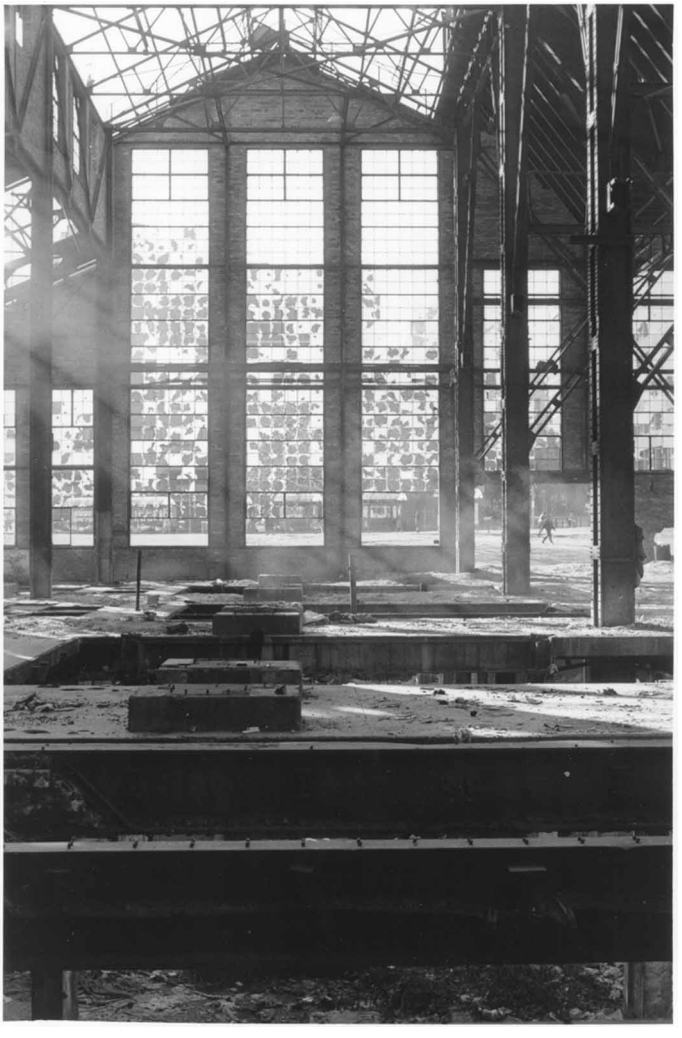

Figure 6. Interior of Boiler House (1936), 2000. *Photograph*: Sally Gaule.

> impenetrable brick skin of the exterior allow workers a view to the outside, without compromising security (Giesen, 1996, p. 15).

Here a new metaphor reveals itself, different from but analogous to that inscribed on Newtown in its early days. Then it represented all that was new, bright and clean, Johannesburg's riposte to the disease-ridden insanitary slums. By the 1980s, a different but comparable moral panic held Johannesburg's citizenry in its grip—a panic about crime. Just as Johannesburg's middle-class suburbs bar themselves up against the outside world and retreat behind towering garden walls, so does the Reserve Bank. Even if the spatial ordering of the Reserve Bank is interpreted as an inward-looking design that refused to acknowledge the site in any meaningful way, the same metaphorical implications remain. Outside lie squatters and crime, dangers which like disease need to be banished afar. This sense of the 'other' at the gates is explicitly evident in the design of the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) campus of 1976 by Smith's partner, Willie Meyer. The spatial arrangement of the buildings comprised a

Figure 7. Reserve Bank and Boiler House from the Diamond building, with Museum Africa and Mary Fitzgerald Square in background, 2002. *Photograph*: Sally Gaule.

series of blocks that surrounded and enclosed a central space of the campus. Spatially, RAU's design was intended to evoke 'the *laager*'(wagons arranged in a circle for the purposes of protection) (Herwitz, 1999, p. 417).[8]

The Built Environment and Photography

In the last decade of the 20th century, the Boiler Houses once more became a focus in Newtown. The corrugated iron fence that had skirted the perimeter of the site had been demolished and the buildings became visible from the street. They attracted many of Johannesburg's residents, but for diverse reasons. From an aesthetic point of view, the site was crying out to be photographed. To architects and photographers, the buildings had become, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, visible; to homeless people, the sturdiness of the buildings offered an ideal shelter against sun and rain. The area, poised between dereliction and development, had become a living evocation of some of the complexities and contradictions of Johannesburg.

By June 2000 local businesses perceived the squatters who lived in the Boiler House as a threat to the area and, in July, the City Council had decided to evict them and relocate them to Roodepoort (15 kilometres away) mirroring the eviction of slum-dwellers there almost 100 years previously. Many of the squatters simply could not afford to be separated from their marginal modes of subsistence; so, they shifted to one or other site nearby, in an ironic reverberation of Brickfields almost 100 years earlier. The City Council then bricked up the entrances of the buildings and rendered them uninhabitable (see Figure 8).

A graduate student, Susan Beningfield, and I spent two years photographing the site. This work formed an installation that incorporated photography, sculpture, text and sound. Aerial photographs showing the changes that had occurred to the site since the 1930s were projected on a screen and a sound recording of the ambient sounds of the site was played on a loop. Two-metre-wide images of the Boiler Houses were printed onto cloth, suspended from the ceiling, and in front of these were suspended smaller photographs, including some by the inhabitants of the site. The aim of the spatial arrangement of the exhibition was to create a series of layers, historical, architectural and social, that would evoke the site. They were intended to be experienced incrementally, much like one might experience moving through the city. The project as a whole graphically represented an episode in Newtown's history.

The photographs that were the starting-point of this research became another 'text' for analysis and interpretation for this paper. Reflecting on architecture, buildings preserve attitudes, sensibilities, fashions and ideologies of a past that the spectator is required to interpret. Charles Wylie asserts that

> They allow themselves to be examined, permit their façades and materials to tell their histories—when and where they

Figure 8. Boiler House (1928), bricked up, 2001. *Photograph*: Sally Gaule.

> came from, what they are doing and have done (Wylie, 2003, p. 148).

Hence, the photographs of the buildings formed a lens through which the history of Newtown could be re-examined. They were an attempt to transcend simple description, to show the complexities of architectural symbolism, modern and traditional methods of building, architectural styles and spatial relationships.

These images graphically represent an episode in the history of Johannesburg and capture the dilemma of space in the inner city. They go beyond mere snapshots and attempt to subvert the momentariness of the casual observer. The photograph, Barthes asserts is a

> certain but fugitive testimony; close to the Haiku. For the notation of a haiku, too, is undevelopable, everything is given, without provoking the desire for or even the possibility of a rhetorical expansion (Barthes, 1984, p. 93).

But, while its content is certain, its meaning is ambiguous and, although photographs may

seem like incontrovertible facts, they are in need of interpretation to be fully understood.

Hence, John Berger explains,

> when we give meaning to an event, that meaning is a response, not only to the known, but also to the unknown: meaning and mystery are inseparable, and neither can exist without the passing of time. Certainty may be instantaneous; doubt requires duration; meaning is born of the two … When we find a photograph meaningful, we are lending it a past and a future (Berger, 1982, p. 89).

There is now an extensive 'toolkit' for analysing images, Emmison and Smith note (Emmison and Smith, 2000, p. 66). Hence, an understanding of the practices of photography: its genres, narratives, framings and selections are essential to reading and interpreting images. In addition, what the photographer takes in during the making of the photograph is often partial or incomplete: reflecting on an image after it has been taken offers the opportunity to 'see it again', allowing for multiple interpretations that may raise new questions about the image.[9] Through analytical processes of selection, framing and composition, we attempted to show not only the physical, visible aspects of architectural style, but also to suggest how photography can convey metaphorical meaning. The photographs formed a record of the site *circa* 2000, but were also an attempt to engage with the complexities and discontinuities that arise when we look beyond the surface of the photograph. As John Rajchman puts it

> There is much more regularity, much more *constraint*, in what we can see than we suppose. To see is always to think, since what is seeable is part of what 'structures thought in advance'. And conversely to think is always to see (J. Rajchman; in Levin, 1993, p. 391).

Façades of buildings formed a theme of the photographic exhibition; changes on the ground were documented against the unchanging façades. The buildings were photographed both before and after the City Council bricked up the entrances, indicating metamorphoses of the site that carried hints of the violence, to both the buildings and the people.

A characteristic of the whole area is multiple processes of recycling. This applies to the most humble and most elevated actors inhabiting the area. A large number of the squatters residing in the boiler house are drawn from the most marginalised, both during the isolation of South Africa's economy during the late *apartheid* period and the sudden rupture into the world economic order after 1994. One of the residents, Bellina Kaopeng[10] subsisted by petty vending which involved a manner of recycling; others collected cardboard and soft drink cans, the detritus of the wealthy's everyday life.

In an ironic way, a stack of cardboard boxes is collected and traded for cash; a stack of cardboard boxes resembles and conjures up an image of bank notes deposited under the northern façade of the bank. Certainly, cardboard represents currency in Newtown for the impoverished human scavengers of the area (see Figure 9).

A shift in scale from massive built façades to the makeshift construction of a cardboard shack articulates the idea of façade further, evincing vulnerable and ephemeral lives. It also forms a visual parallel to the collage of shapes that make up the Reserve Bank's 'fifth façade', mentioned earlier. The Chinese writing, a symbol of globalisation, translates, "high quality warm blankets for winter" (see Figure 10). Inside the boiler house, another interesting inversion occurred. Constantly vulnerable to predation, violence—all too often sexual—and theft, residents enclosed themselves and their paltry stores of goods in lightless wood, cardboard and zinc shacks. As Bellina Kaopeng recalls,

> Some people they used to kill people there. Kill each other. Lot of bad things. That is why they did take the people out of that place. They were killing each other. Lot of bad things were happening there.

Here, in the midst of the airy, glass-paned vaults of the building, the slum was recreated, which, in a manner typical of the slum, placed

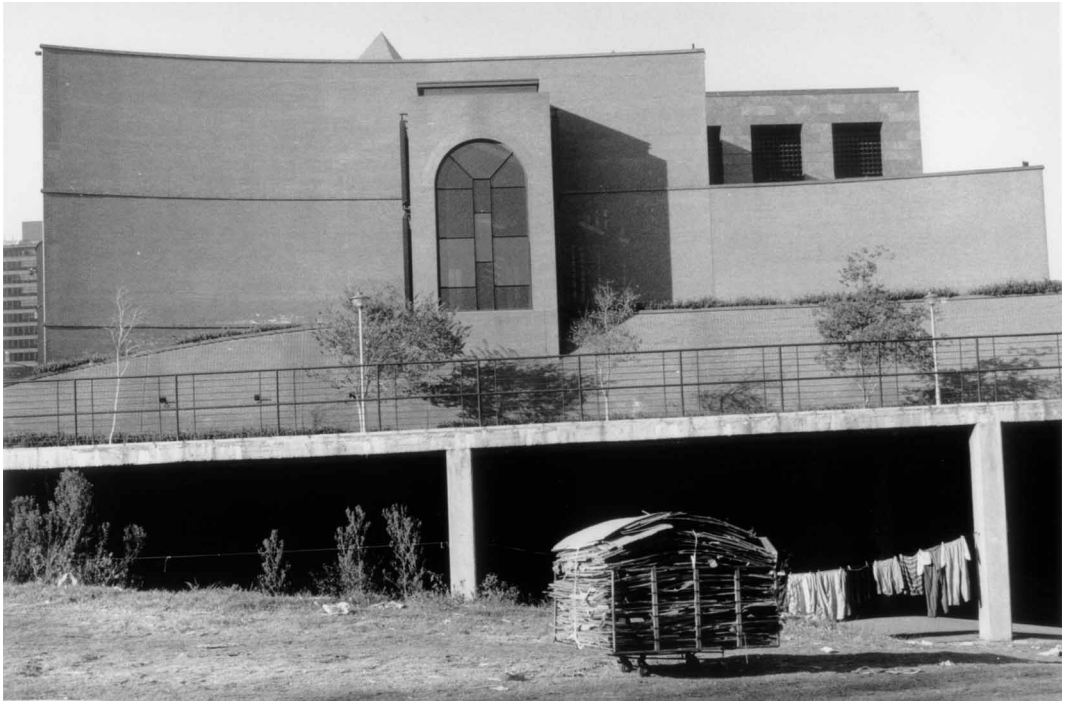

Figure 9. Reserve Bank from Jeppe Street, 2000. *Photograph*: Sally Gaule.

Figure 10. Detail of shack, 2001. *Photograph*: Sally Gaule.

a premium on security and so blocked off all external access, including that of light (Figure 11). Similarly, Figure 12 was taken by one of the squatter residents, John Mashai, with one of the several disposable cameras, ironically and deliberately unrecyclable, which we distributed among residents.

In another image, taken in 2002, the troubled relationship between the dollar and the rand and its depressive effects on the life of South Africa's citizens, especially the poor, is suggested here, in the shadow of the Reserve Bank (Figure 13).

Forced removals continue to take place but, paradoxically, there is a kind of amnesia about these things in South Africa. They generate attention briefly, only to become a cycle that disappears from memory. Part of a rich if problematical past is lost. Such experiences remain largely hidden and undocumented, and are not properly grasped or comprehended. This paper and the photographs taken in the course of this research represent an attempt to controvert that process.

Preservation and Exclusion

Newtown has been imagined by some to have the potential to be Johannesburg's Greenwich Village and several plans proposed for the area sought to achieve this vision. At a meeting of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA; formerly the National Monuments Council) in 1990, the committee resolved, unusually for Johannesburg, that none of the three buildings, the Turbine Hall and Boiler Houses should be demolished. They were of the opinion that the buildings were an example of fine industrial architecture and should form the key to any new development. (File 9/2/228/19/2). SAHRA maintained that cultural centres flourish in old buildings, citing the examples of Glasgow, which used historical buildings as the foundation of its success, and of Cape Town's Victoria and Alfred waterfront where the renovation and recycling of industrial buildings enhanced its architectural heritage and tourism potential (File 9/2/228/19/1). In a letter to the City Council, Miss M. Birch, of

Figure 11. Shack inside Turbine Hall, 2000. *Photograph*: Susan Beningfield.

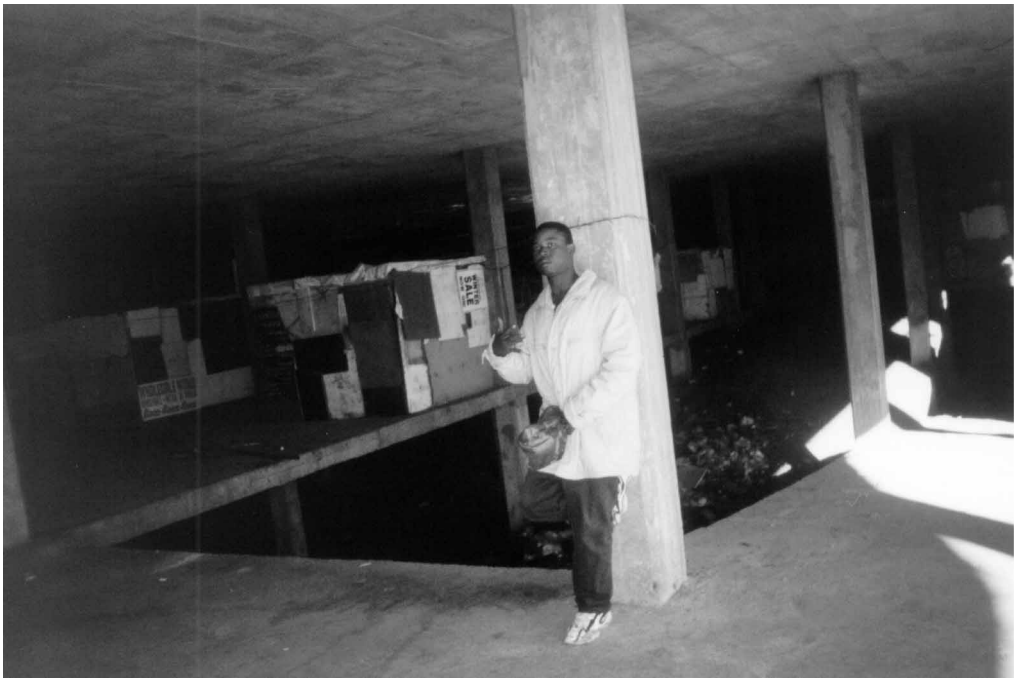

Figure 12. Shacks beneath the Reserve Bank, 2000. *Photograph*: John Mashai.

Figure 13. Interior of Turbine Hall, 2002. *Photograph*: Sally Gaule.

the National Monuments Council asserted that in Johannesburg, little or no concern was evinced for the conservation of its areas and, consequently, most plans ignored the character and fabric of the area involved. Vrededorp, she maintained, was a case in point, where developers simply demolished historical buildings which they deemed 'slum housing', because they had outdoor lavatories (File 9/2/228/19/1).

Preservation is one of the more difficult issues facing not only Newtown but also South Africa; the same concern has gained currency in urban development the world over. In a country that has undergone radical political change, what is preserved and remembered is itself an act of selection and is not politically neutral. Indeed, Jane Jacobs has remarked that the preservation of historical buildings represents the self-conscious elaboration of tradition, that is played out as a kind of nostalgia for the period of imperial might (Jacobs, 1996, p. 40). Likewise, Akbar Abbas reminds us that "preservation is not memory. Preservation is selective and tends to exclude dirt and pain" (Abbas, 1997, p. 66). In a critique of the Cape Town Waterfront, Nigel Worden articulates some of the problems facing the 'heritage industry' in South Africa. Echoing the sentiments of both Jacobs and Abbas, Worden asks, "What heritage is being presented? And whose? And in what ways?" (Worden, 1994, p. 38). Moreover, as Worden points out, it is commercial enterprise that drives the development and, more often than not, this is at variance with the historical tensions that others wish to preserve.

The notion of Newtown as a site of struggle over space, played out by a range of actors over the past century, has been almost entirely erased. Mary Fitzgerald Square evokes memories of Mary 'Pickhandle' Fitzgerald, a formidable trade unionist leader of the 1913 Tramways Strike, while all other traces of Newtown's contested past are airbrushed out. Likewise, the Workers Library remains in the old Electricity Workers Compound, but offers little indication of Newtown's chequered history. Invariably, memory and preservation clash with one another. Since 1994, many institutions have undergone name changes and structural changes that are intended to reflect the spirit of the 'new' South Africa. In some cases, public sculptures have been dismantled and removed. In the case of buildings, their physical rootedness raises more difficult questions regarding heritage. In addition, Johannesburg is not manifestly old and cycles of construction and destruction have erased the visible marks of age.

On occasions, memory and preservation are at odds or in tension with one another. At present in Newtown, preservation presents an enshrined sanitised version of South Africa's past: the painful memory of the recent removal of the Turbine Hall's squatters probably provides an added impetus to erasure. As a result, the site, including the Reserve Bank, is partly emptied of meaning and function. Since the real Reserve Bank is in Pretoria, South Africa's administrative capital, its Johannesburg partner confines itself to recycling old bank notes for new, in its hushed surreal halls. The other buildings around Mary Fitzgerald Square also at present recycle partial and partially phoney pasts. Only the structures of the Turbine Houses remain to remind us of Johannesburg's chequered past. Since South Africa's society remains in transition, however, we can still possess hope in the prospect of them being more appropriately filled.

Conclusion

Turbine Square today is the product of spatial patterns that have characterised the city of Johannesburg for over a century. It is a microcosm of the historical, architectural and political tensions of its colonial, *apartheid* and post-*apartheid* past. How these patterns were formed and shaped, first by international colonial thinking and latterly by strict racial residential segregation, is demonstrated in the writing of theorists such as King, Parnell, Davies and Robinson. The occupation and use of buildings in Newtown reflect changing economic trends, initially driven by the

gold mining industry, subsequently by secondary industrial economic considerations and finally by forces emanating from the rise and dissolution of *apartheid*. The site also bears witness to a succession of architectural and historical amnesias and superimpositions, first of multiracial slums, then of majestic modernisms and lastly of the final wave of squatters who had to give way to the new modernism of the Reserve Bank. That the electricity buildings still stand is testament to current notions of preservation and of their location on the edge of the city limits, which ironically provided the conditions for their survival. As Francine Houben reminds us

> In Western society we only allow a few buildings to turn into ruins. What is no longer functional usually disappears silently to make place for a new building. What is left are drawings, photographs and memories (Houben, 2001, p. 115).

The photographic portrayal that prompted this paper was an attempt to go beyond simple description, to show how architecture becomes the bearer of meaning and how images can complement the written word. Visual and written analyses of Newtown's physical terrain formed the backdrop for understanding Johannesburg's past, reflecting racial divisions and economic imperatives that have left the imprint for future developments. Photographs verify the written word, lend authenticity to it, while text can serve to anchor meaning in the image. Moreover, the photographs are framed, selected, composed and arranged here for contemplation and comparison. Extracted from the simultaneity of visual sensations, photographs represent isolated moments that focus our perception on one particular event. Offering visual data that the written word complements, they combine historical and contemporary perspectives that may indeed offer alternatives to the way in which we see the world, since, as Walter Benjamin believed, "how we see our world is responsible for its production and reproduction" (Levin, 1993, p. 23).

Notes

1. Personal communication, Professor P. Harrison, 2003.
2. Personal communication, Professor P. Bonner, 2004.
3. Instead of attempting to incorporate squares and parks into the public life of the city, the council sought to use these spaces for their own administrative ends. Buildings such as the City Hall (1915) and the Rissik Street Post Office, were criticised by architects of the day for their location next to the street line, prohibiting views of these and other buildings from a distance. In addition, their entrances were not positioned so as to exploit the open spaces adjacent to their sites.
4. Mary Fitzgerald was a prominent Irish-born trade unionist who led a tramways strike in 1911.
5. In 1994, 63 of the companies listed on the JSE had their headquarters in Sandton and, by 1998, the number had increased to 82.
6. Since 2004, most of the street names in Newtown have been changed to those of South African jazz musicians.
7. I am grateful to Mr Steve Brunner for showing me the interior of the Reserve Bank.
8. For a detailed critique of the ideology of the Rand Afrikaans University campus, see Herwitz (1999).
9. A point made by Patricia Hayes at a conference on Pan African photography, Museum Africa, December 2004.
10. Bellina Kaopeng and John Mashai were interviewed about their experiences living in the Boiler House.

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