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Access (the modern paradox): a student clinic law hub re-scripting the border between institutional infrastructure and the public realm, in Braamfontein, Johannesburg

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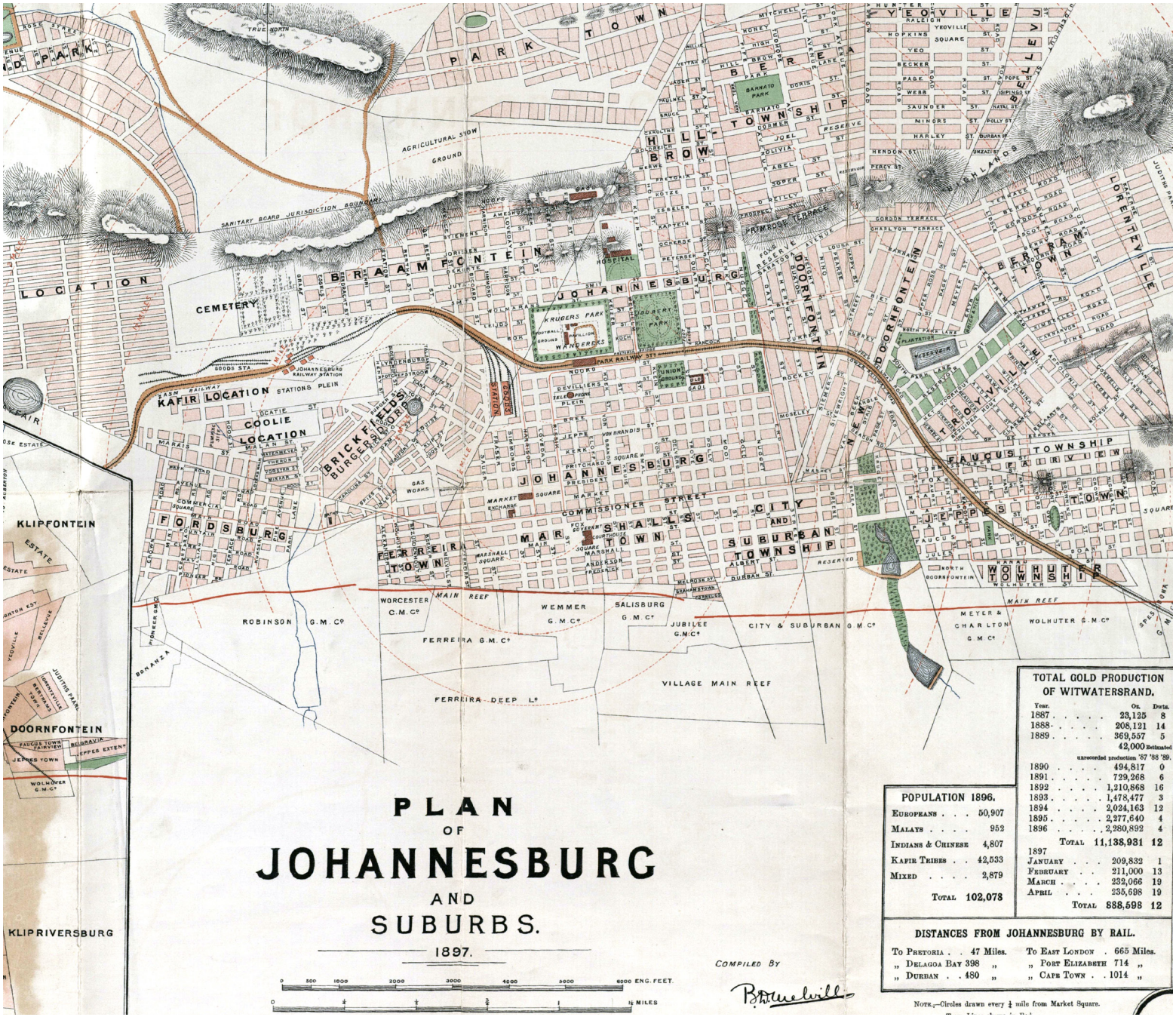

PLAN
OF
JOHANNESBURG
AND
SUBURBS.
1897.
COMPILED BY
TOTAL GOLD PRODUCTION OF WITWATERSRAND.
POPULATION 1896.
DISTANCES FROM JOHANNESBURG BY RAIL.
KLIPFONTEIN ESTATE
DOORNFONTEIN
KLIPRIVERSBURG
LOCATION
CEMETERY
BRAAMFONTEIN
JOHANNESBURG
KRUGERS PARK
WANDERERS
KAFIR LOCATION
COOLIE LOCATION
BRICKFIELDS
BURGERSDORP
FORDSBURG
MARSHALLS TOWN
CITY AND SUBURBAN TOWNSHIP
FERREIRA TOWN
PARK TOWN
BEREA
HILLBROW
TOWNSHIP
YEOVILLE
FAUCUS TOWNSHIP
FAIRVIEW
JEPPES TOWN
WOLHUTER TOWNSHIP
NEWTROYVILLE
DOORNFONTEIN
BERRAM TOWN
FORMENTIFE
AGRICULTURAL SHOW GROUND
SANITARY BOARD JURISDICTION BOUNDARY
PARK RAILWAY STN
JOHANNESBURG RAILWAY STATION
GOODS STA
STATIONS PLEIN
MAIN REEF
ROBINSON G.M.Co
WORCESTER C.M.Co
WEMMER G.M.Co
SALISBURG G.M.Co
JUBILEE G.M.Co
CITY & SUBURBAN G.M.Co
MEYER & CHARLTON G.M.Co
WOLHUTER G.M.Co
FERREIRA G.M.Co
VILLAGE MAIN REEF
FERREIRA DEEP Lo
ENG. FEET
MILES
Europeans . . . 50,907
Malays 952
Indians & Chinese 4,807
Kafir Tribes . . 42,533
Mixed 2,879
Total 102,078
1887 . . . . . 23,125 8
1888 . . . . . 208,121 14
1889 . . . . . 369,557 5
42,000 Estimated unrecorded production '87 '88 '89.
1890 . . . . . 494,817 0
1891 . . . . . 729,268 6
1892 . . . . . 1,210,868 16
1893 . . . . . 1,478,477 3
1894 . . . . . 2,024,163 12
1895 . . . . . 2,277,640 4
1896 . . . . . 2,280,892 4
Total 11,138,931 12
1897
January . . . 209,833 1
February . . . 211,000 13
March 232,066 19
April 235,698 19
Total 888,598 12
To Pretoria . . 47 Miles.
„ Delagoa Bay 398 „
„ Durban . . 480 „
To East London . 665 Miles.
„ Port Elizabeth 714 „
„ Cape Town . . 1014 „
Note.—Circles drawn every ½ mile from Market Square.

Site Context: Braamfontein

"Redefined, urbanism will not only, or mostly, be a profession, but a way of thinking, an ideology: To accept what exists. We are making sandcastles. Now we swim in the sea that swept them away. " - Rem Koolhaas



002. Johannesburg circa 1889

001. Map of Johannesburg 1897.

Introduction:

Johannesburg was a city created by outsiders. With them, imports of social, racial and moral structures were inherited from far flung territories around the globe, and established a township on a veld-land, an area that was "considered fit for nothing but pastoral occupation,"[1] that would rapidly turn in to one of the great cities of the 20th Century - the bustling metropolis now known as Johannesburg. Foreigners were drawn to Johannesburg to create a new future for themselves in the mining industry and stake their claim to boundless riches. Braamfontein became a place where those working in subsidiary industries that supported the mining industry resided. The population of Braamfontein, circa 1896, was a mix of "Afrikaners, Malays, Indians, Chinese and Africans"[2] that lived

in shanty-like dwellings on the Braamfontein Ridge over-looking the mines in the south. 119 years later, Braamfontein houses an urban population adjusting to the hangover constructed by bygone times in Johannesburg's history of greed, gold, modernity, and Apartheid Laws and Planning.

With all the change Braamfontein has seen its one key anchor tenant has remained - The University of the Witwatersrand.

Brief History Braamfontein: the modern Frontier I

Braamfontein, located north of the Johannesburg Central Business District, has enjoyed many different lives since the discovery of gold in Johannesburg's world famous reef. After the 'marvellous' discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand in 1885, Braamfontein became a home for white miners

The University of the Witwatersrand,
Braamfontein, Johannesburg, South Africa.



003. 2015 Johannesburg CBD (Wits in red).



004. Harrison Street Braamfontein

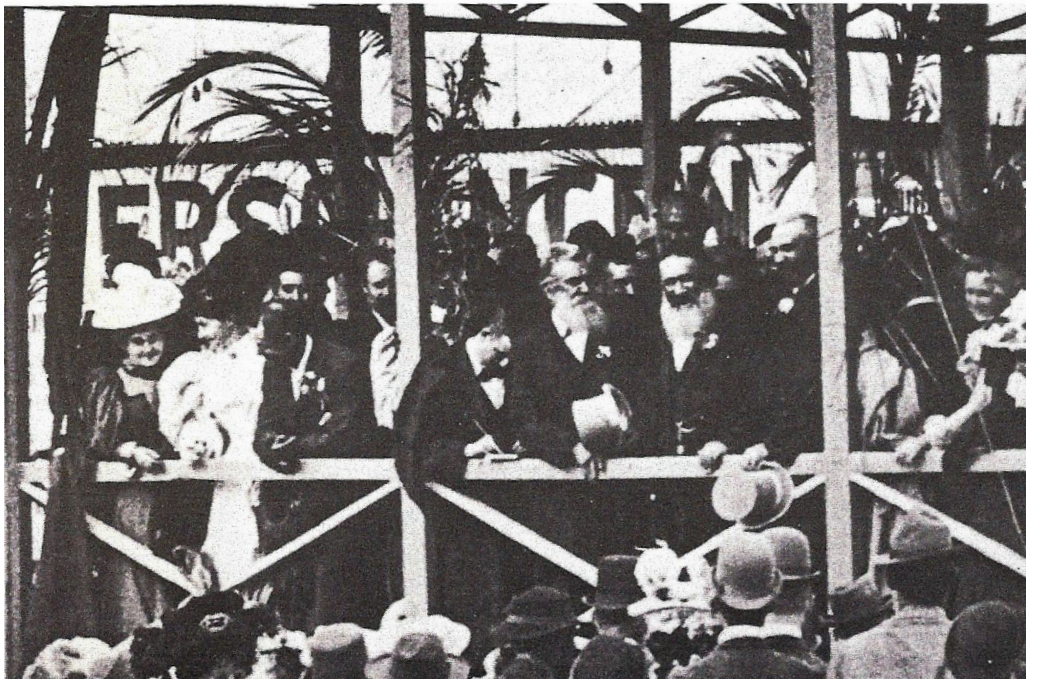
and the Afrikaner, Malay, Indian, Chinese and black labourers attached to the mining industry. In an inquiry for National Geographic, in the November 1896 issue, George F. Becker – of the United States Geological Survey – wrote: "Gold had been discovered in the Traansvaal[1] in the Lydenburg district as early as 1867, and prior to 1881 it had been found at other points as well, but none of these discoveries were of a very sensational character. The marvellous deposits of the Witwatersrand were detected in 1885. . . The Witwatersrand as a gold producing district has no parallel in history."[3]

Braamfontein became the would-be prototype for what would be a 'typical' suburb in Johannesburg, and prided itself in the spectacle surrounding this esteemed role in the greater city of Johannesburg. In 1895, Braamfontein held the very first Witwatersrand Agricultural Society's Agricultural Show

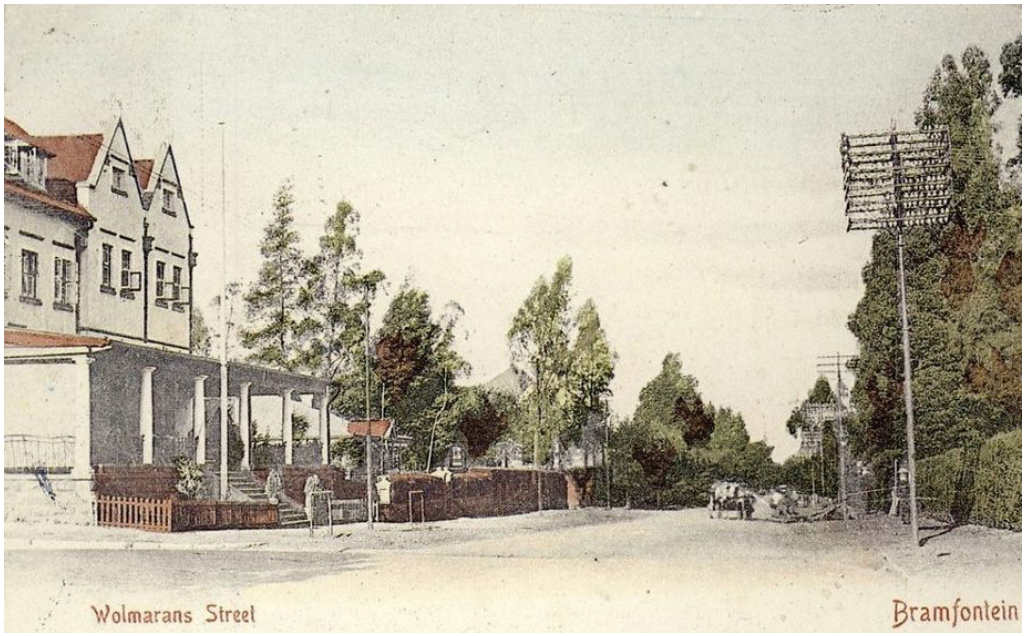
1 A province of South Africa that stretched from the Vaal River to the Limpopo River but was transformed after the end of Apartheid in 1994.

– a jewel in the cultural calendar. At the Agricultural Show the modern accomplishments in agriculture were surrounded with spectacle, as South Africa and in particular Pretoria (the Boer Capital) was world renowned for its pastoral activities. The spectacle in human achievement would soon define the built environment of Braamfontein. South Africa at that stage was widely known for its pastoral activities and Pretoria (the Boer Capital) in particular was a hub that grew around farming. Parts of Johannesburg at that stage were still orientated around farming and supplying Pretoria with goods. Suburbs such as Orange Farm and Yoeville were agricultural plots that grew oranges and apples to be sold in markets in the capital.

1.06



005. Agricultural Show



006. Typical street in Braamfontein in the 1880's.

The built fabric of Braamfontein at the time was very much that of low rise, semi-urban, residential units – described in Clive Chipkin's **Johannesburg Transition** as:

"... small semi-detached verandahed cottages for railway gangers and plate workers, or small hotels with rowdy public bars and boarding houses ..."[4]



007. Early Braamfontein.



008. Typical verandahed mine house - struggling to fit in

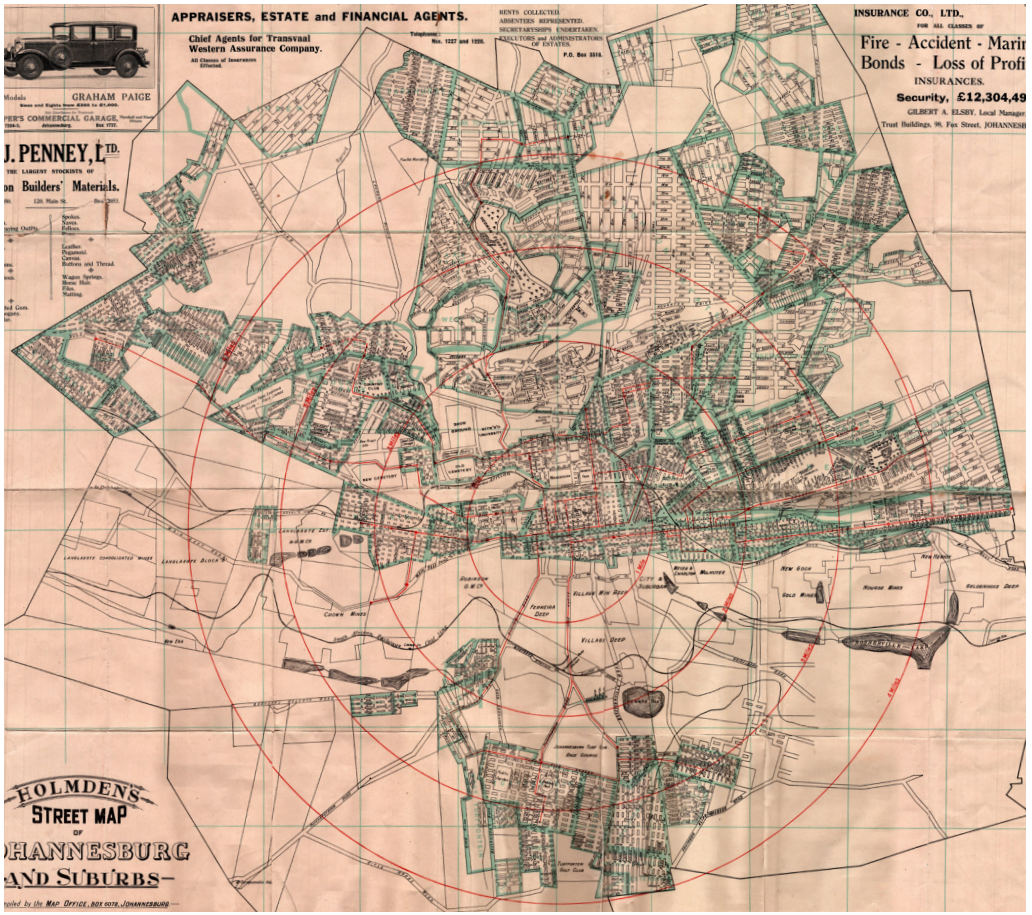


009. The Braamfontein Post Office and Dutch Reformed Church (background).

Building Scale:

The scale of early Braamfontein was more attuned to the pedestrian rather than the car. The street environment seemed to have a small town ambience that is now long gone. The lack of current pedestrian connectivity is predominantly due to Johannesburg's submission to the car as a primary mode of transport. The small town feel was shirked away as it was no longer 'new.' Braamfontein's became obsessed with becoming the modern frontier.

1.010



010. Map of Johannesburg, 1927.

Braamfontein, or Border:

The grand discoveries of gold and deep cast mining in Johannesburg's marvellous reef saw a further induction of foreigners in to Johannesburg, both black and white, - and with them complex class, race and moral constructs - that would have uncompromising affects on the interactions within the city of Johannesburg, as well as the planning of the city. Housing issues, as well as cultural and racial issues, arose over night – city and town planning regulations would further enforce new social structures and hierarchies. Laws and regulations about how people should live, which races could interact with one another and where people of specific race should live were written in to town planning documents as well as legal bills setting up separate rights for white and black people. Space became the great separator.

In the years after the discovery of gold in Johannesburg, Braamfontein

then became an area designated for white labourers which worked in an industry that serviced Johannesburg's growing infrastructural needs. The majority of black mine workers and migrant labourers were housed south of the CBD in mine hostels. These ideals of racial segregation would be carried through Apartheid laws and planning, that would cripple South Africa's black population for decades to come.

During the 1930's and 1940's, Braamfontein acted as a barrier between the ever growing population living and working in Johannesburg's CBD and affluent white population living in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg. The suburb so famous for the Agricultural Show and the Rand Show – events designed to bring people together became a buffer zone, a border separating north from south, and black from white. Braamfontein acted as a physical barrier...



011. Map of Johannesburg, 1973.

A new resident of Braamfontein, the freshly created University, would soon act as a transgressive force in amending racial and developmental borders in Johannesburg.

Braamfontein, a place for Access:

Braamfontein was soon to become a hinge, providing new axis and access to the North, as Johannesburg's ever expanding urban fabric was looking to creep up and over the Witwatersrand ridge. As stated in Martin Murray's **City of Extremes** (2011), up until 1940 there were only four bridges connecting the city centre with the "northern extremities."[5] After World War II new views on modern urban planning, and civic connectivity inspired the creation of three new bridges spanning the gap between the CBD and Braamfontein. Transportation networks played a critical role in Johannesburg's development, and the new bridges became symbolic for change and the creation of new possibilities for connectivity and trade.

The introduction of new bridges fed into new networks that would ultimately lead to the demise of the CBD, as they allowed for the creation of Outlying Business Districts (OBDs) in the northern suburbs (such as Sandton and Fourways).



012. Sandton City, 2010.

Braamfontein: the modern Frontier II

Braamfontein's built fabric was still that of low rise mine houses, Victorian-esque corner stores and hotels with grand old world appeal. The mine housing at the time was starting to show wear, the old mine housing built of stone and corrugated roof sheeting had started to lose its 'quaint' appeal – a

In the 1960's Braamfontein would see another transformation, two decades after the creation of the new transportation networks running northwards, due to the **Great Share Boom**[6] as well as foreign investment invited by then President - BJ Vorster – despite South Africa being fully entrenched in Apartheid ideals and trade embargoes set in place by foreign leaders. An influx of foreign money, and local financing by large conglomerates, would transform Braamfontein's character from "slum like houses"[7] to the cosmopolitan hub of "expensive blocks of offices"[8] that straddled the border between the north and south. The suburbs grid-iron street plan, inherited from the Johannesburg's Central Business District, inspired by the modernist planning of **Plan Voisin**[2] was further re-enforced with a modern architecture to match. Although the new injection of finance triggered vast development that not only affected Braamfontein but the rest of Johannesburg and to a varying extent South Africa, the new wealth and social benefits weren't spread like warm honey over Johannesburg coating the city thinly and evenly but took on very distinct nodal qualities – that followed transport networks –

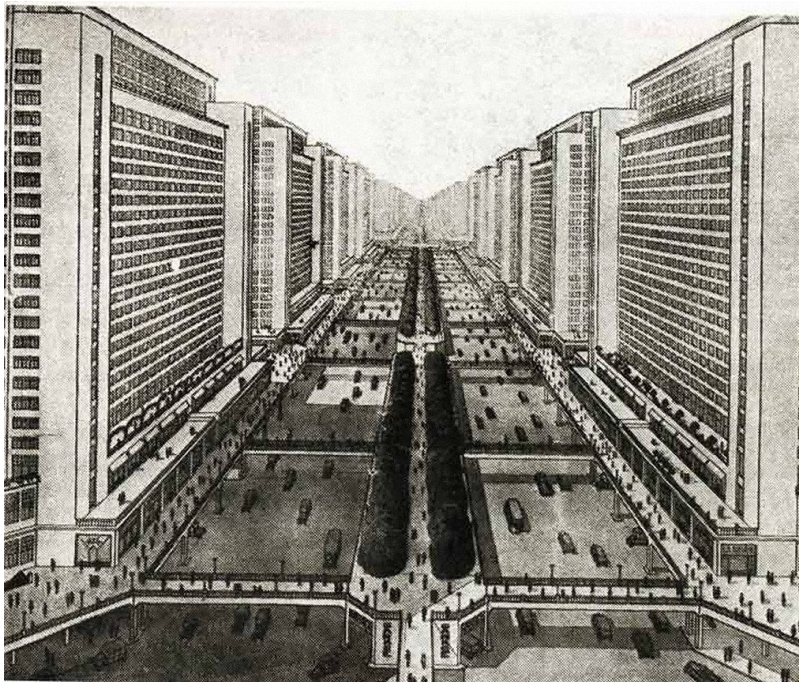


013. BJ Vorster, President of South Africa from 1966 to 1978.

2 Le Corbusier's 1925 *Plan Voisin* – a plan that would see Paris' beaux arts city planning levelled to accommodate a harsh grid iron street plan with monumental modernist housing apartments.



014. Le Corbusier, Architect and master planner.



015. Ville Radieuse

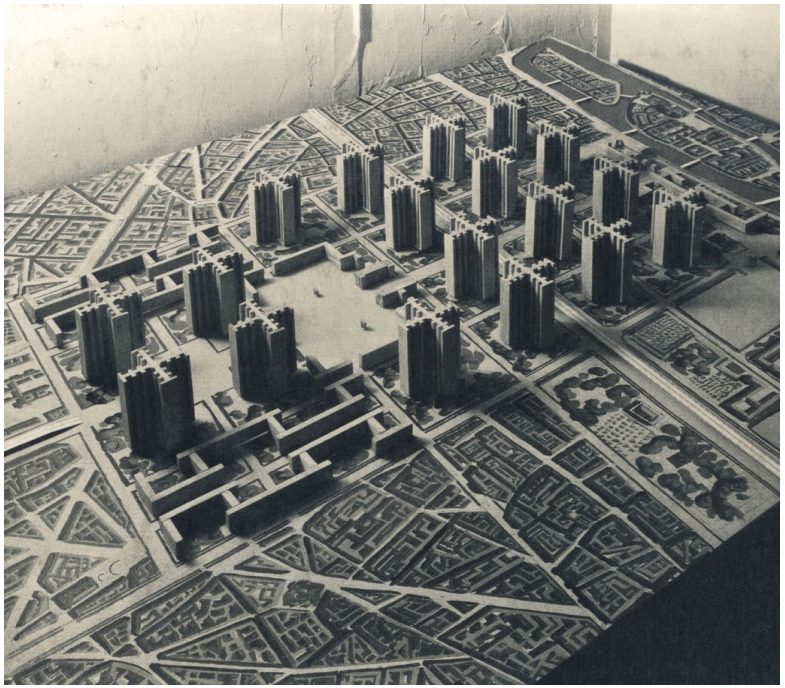
and benefitted a small, predominantly white, population. Braamfontein went from being a physical buffer zone to an economic border.

Modernist mega-blocks replaced the low rise semi-detached units and corner bars of Braamfontein's past. New cosmopolitan building regulations allowed for underground parking and increased building heights[9], erasing the small town ambience that Braamfontein had developed. Ideals from Ville Radieuse (the final iteration of Le Corbusier's Ville Contemporaine (1922) and Plan Voisin (1925)); Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret's urban framework for a 'classless' garden city, were applied to Johannesburg, and specifically Braamfontein, to create long



016. Pierre Jeanneret, Architect.

avenues of monolithic structures. Le Corbusier and Jeanneret's 'classless' city was to be achieved by raising the city off of the ground, submitting the ground plane to a pedestrian park.[10] While the built fabric provided modern architectures greatest commodities: "the provision of the 'essential joys'' of 'sun', 'space' and 'green . . ."



017. Plan Voisin



018. Braamfontein's new development in the 1960's.

Braamfontein: A double Life (Social Justice):

There was a disjunction when adopting the ideals of Ville Radieuse and its application in Johannesburg. The basis for **Ville Radieuse** was social change, as Le Corbusier noted in **Verse une architecture** (1923), that man was in an in between phase – "neither the artisan nor the intellectual"[11] – and needed an city that was no longer simply industrial, that allowed for intellectual exchange. Braamfontein became a place for social change but social change for whom?

"Modernist city builders maintained an undeterred faith in the power of the built form to transform the social world around it. The sleek Machine Age surfaces and structural rationalism of these new office towers reflected the emergent corporate culture of managerial capitalism, with its stress on beuarocratic order."[12]

Braamfontein became a place of paradox as the concept around this newly pledged modern city was set to "transform the social world around it" and allow man to break the fetters of artisanal life and transcend into the intellectual, modern man. Yet, what was esteemed to be a 'classless city' was in actual fact set up to allow for the further development of the white population, rather than for all. A built environment that was set up with honest ideals of developing a socially just society took on the built character of commercial North American architecture – great rectilinear masses with vast repetitive, anonymous facades. The architecture became the built form of the political attitude of the time, harsh and uninviting.

Current Condition, and the street:

After the 1960's Braamfontein enjoyed two decades of prosperity – for the white population of the city - that was quickly cut short due to Apartheid planning laws. As the new road networks allowed for further expansion moving northwards, and a new younger white population able to make profit from easily available bank loans, the city centre and Braamfontein saw a decline in population. Adding to this, the Group Areas Act (an act that was created in 1950 but amended continuously until 1984) didn't allow for a black population to inhabit areas that were reserved for white communities. CBDs such as Fourways and Sandton City, in the Northern suburbs and new vast shopping centres drew people in, and with that investment dwindled in the city. These new markets drew people in and rapidly started to grow creating new central points. Since the late 1990's there has been rapid redevelopment in Braamfontein, focussing on the regeneration on the built form and injecting youth in to the area.

The built environment of Braamfontein is astonishingly harsh with few truly public spaces. Dominant concrete masses stand separated due to streets that act as a no-man's-land. The streets are dominated by motor vehicle traffic and feels cavernous. A dominant feature in Braamfontein is the University of the Witwatersrand (and its satellite campuses).



019. The built environment becomes the watch-dog on the street.

References:

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2. Gutsche, T. 1970. A Very Smart Medal. Howard Timmins. Cape Town. Pg 48.

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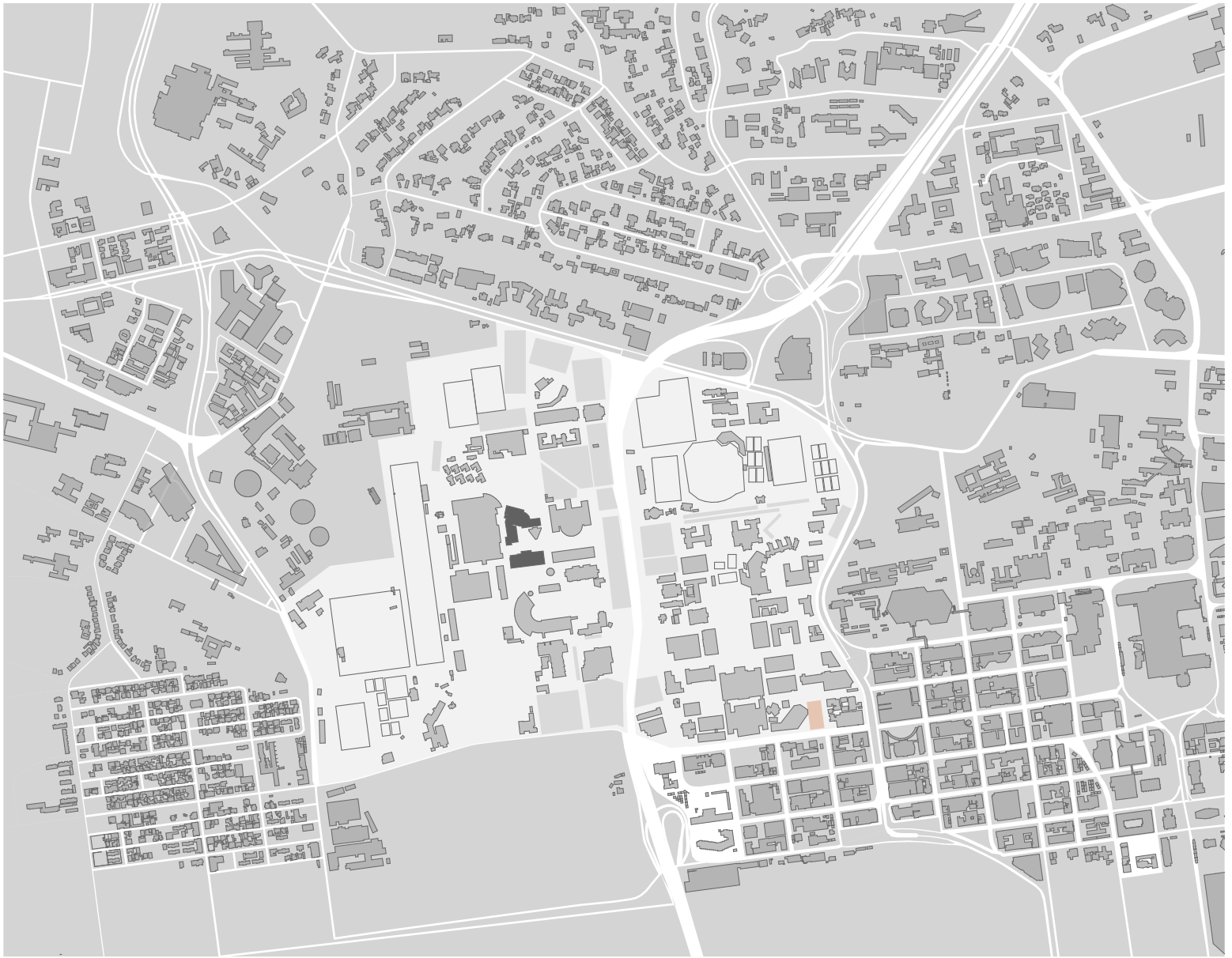
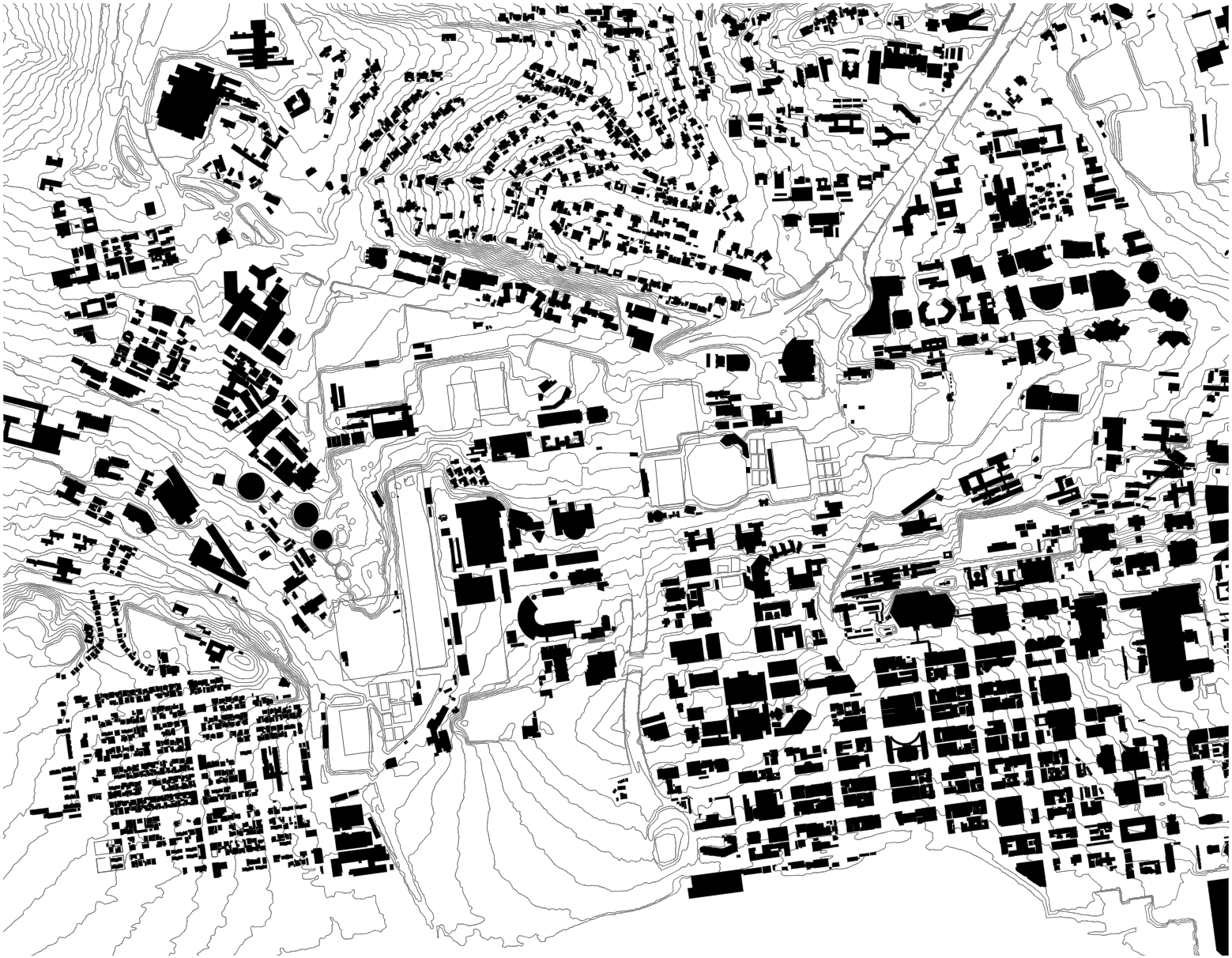


020. WITS' current layout.



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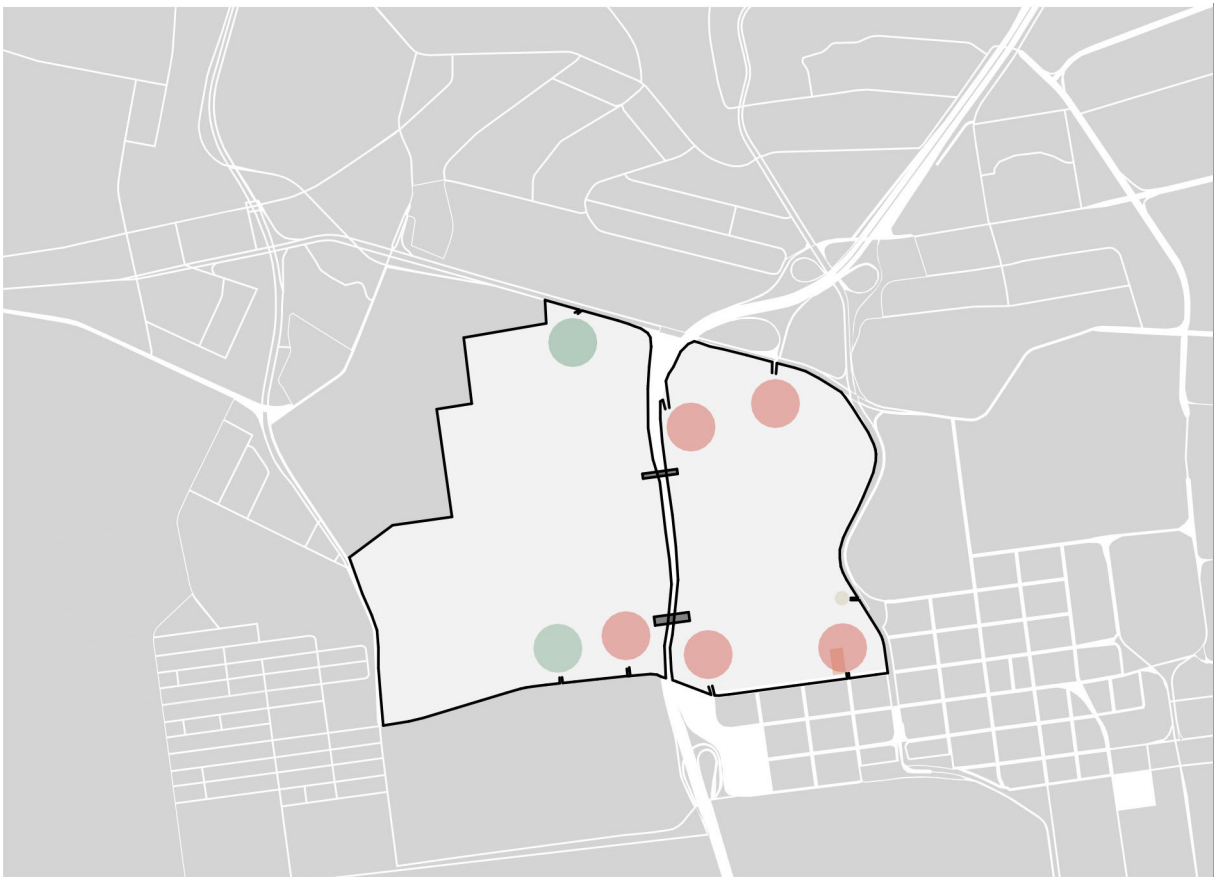
021. Built fabric surrounding WITS



1.022

022. Movement Networks.



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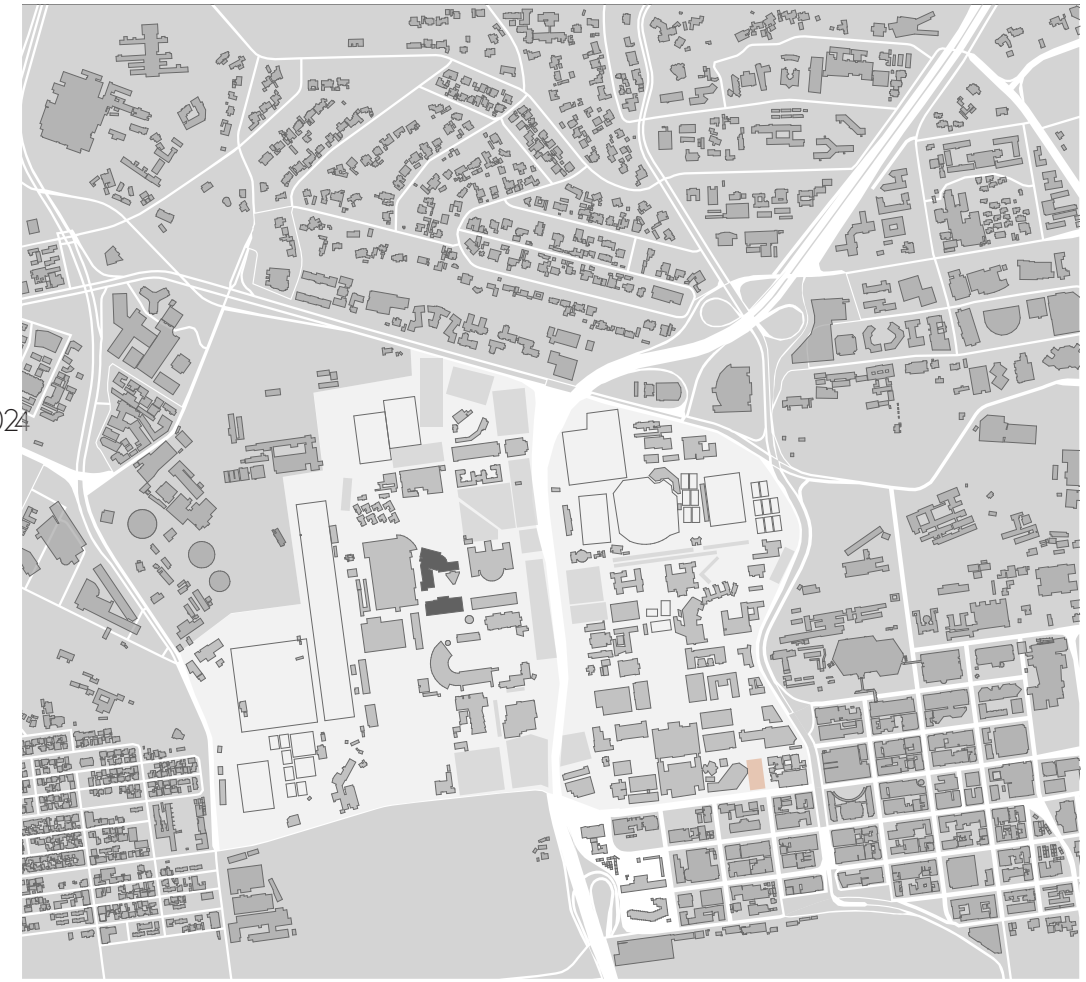
023. Access to the University. (Red - Public, Green - Private).

Site Planning: the University of the Witwatersrand



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024. The University of the Witwatersrand Site Plan (current).

Introduction:

The University of Witwatersrand has been one of Braamfontein's long standing tenants and represents an opportunity to gain access to a better life through education. The University offers public and civic amenities to the greater city of Johannesburg.

Brief History of the University of the Witwatersrand:

The University of the Witwatersrand eponymously received its name from the ridge it sits on. The 56 kilometre long ridge of Orange Grove quartzite[1] runs from East to West and acts as a watershed separating the North from the South. The ridge itself sits on the perimeter of the Witwatersrand Basin – a Sedimentary Basin that was created by a depression in the earth's surface[2]. A distinct feature of this ridge that occurs not far from the current pedestrian entrance on Jan Smuts Avenue, is the famous '**contortion bed**.' The **Contortion Bed** is a

unique deformity of rock whereby the layers of the sedimentary bed are drawn out, twisted and contorted. It is made visible due to one of the Northern suburbs main arteries to the south - Jan Smuts Avenue - cutting into the crest of the Witwatersrand Ridge.

The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) started in 1896 as the **South African School of Mines** but was interestingly located in Kimberley Northern Cape, and only moved to its current site in Johannesburg in 1904[3]. The University was then known as the **Traansvaal University College** (1906) but was once again renamed, as it was absorbed into **Traansvaal Technical Institute**, to **South African School of Mines and Technology**.[4] The school only gained University status in 1922 as a result of an Act[5], passed 1921, allowing South Africa to create four new universities.[6]

"On March 1, 1922, the University of the Witwatersrand officially opened with 6 schools with 37 departments,



025. The University of Witwatersrand Class of 1949 - a noteable back row.

73 academic staff members, and a little more than 1000 students studying the arts, sciences, medicine, engineering, law and business." [7]

The University, and the spectacle of space:

The stance taken towards access of knowledge in the early years of the University is evident in the architecture and urban planning of the Wits campus. The built environment on the East Campus (the original campus) speaks of Imperial order and hints to classically taught knowledge (while the rest Johannesburg was adopting the **beaux arts**[8]). The architecture of the original buildings seems almost transplanted through a Euro-centric paranoia.

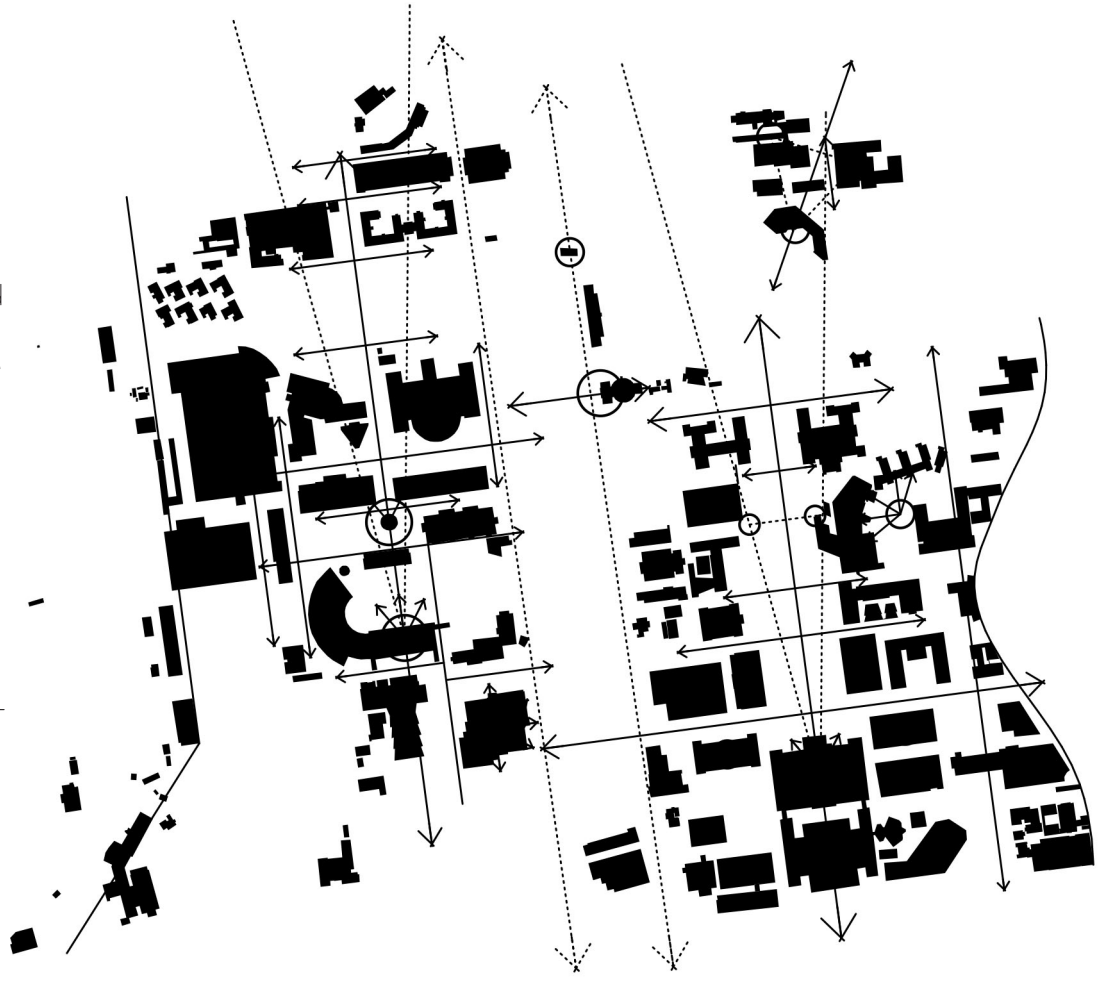
"The great central portico of the new University of the Witwatersrand, flanked by giant colonnades, of the Physics Block on the east and the Engineering Block on the west was a neoclassical restatement of the old



026. Great Hall Portico.

idea that culture was equated with classicism – not an adaption ... but an archaeological reproduction with antiquarian knowledge of Imperial Rome..." [9]

While the East Campus relied on the spectacle of urban planning and architecture, the West campus inherited its built fabric from the Rand Show. The West Campus, the site where the current Law faculty and Law Clinic sit – as well as the sciences and commerce blocks, has endured has endured a history of grandiose spectacle and prosperity due to Johannesburg's changing social and urban climate. The campus was the original Rand Show Showground (and prior to that the second home of the Witwatersrand Agricultural Society's Agricultural Show).



027. West Campus has a confused layout inherited from the Rand Show Showgrounds.

East Campus, dominated by Classical axis and ordered hierarchy.



The University of the Witwatersrand: Social Mixer

On its grand revealing Wits opened under the guise of being an 'Open' University. This meant that it would cater for both white and black students, equally and without segregation. Yet, this was not the case; the ruling committee of the University at that stage did its best to "avoid admitting black students." [10] In fact, in 1926 a board commissioned an inquiry to investigate how the University could legally not initiate its policy of integrated racial admissions. Bruce Murray - an author who has written a great deal on the University of the Witwatersrand and its curious history – wrote of this inquiry, to "ascertain what procedure is necessary to empower the University to exclude students on the grounds of colour."[11] The racial demographics slowly, but minimally, started to change throughout the years precluding and post World War II. The University was becoming a vehicle for racial and social change, although at a meagre pace, transgressing cultural and political borders.

Interestingly, in 1953, during apartheid the University of the Witwatersrand took a forceful attitude against the Nationalist Government's wishes to create separate universities[12] for 'non-white' students. Although, there is much debate whether this was around creating a socially just space of equality or an ambition to retain autonomy. One of the outcomes of this resistance was a convention, in 1954, titled '**The Idea of the University**,' held by the **South African Institute of Race Relations**.[13]

"Let us consider a little more in detail what is involved in learning or the pursuit of knowledge. In the first place it involves a single-minded and unselfish devotion to an ideal . . . the paramount virtue of the scholar is honesty – intellectual honesty, which is the source of every other honesty."[14]

028. The Tower of Light (West Campus): a remnant of past spectacle.

The opening statement (above) of **The Idea of the University** (1954) echoes the values of a foreign education system – a system created on classical values to create the Renaissance man - a system linked closely with the Empire.

The University has been the site for protest and academic discussion around social and political justice. During Apartheid... strike season... and currently...



029. Fees increase protest #FeesMustFall



030. Jacob Zuma,President of South Africa.

The University: Duality of Access I:

University and other tertiary education institutions represent the access of knowledge, the promise of high quality qualifications that meet the needs of the labour market and opportunities for (social) networking.

Access to knowledge, as well as tertiary education, has been an issue globally, but especially in South Africa and has been compounded due to the country's recent past. The University of the Witwatersrand is a great Bastian of knowledge that straddles the border separating Johannesburg's two very distinct urban sprawls, yet is designed to service the population of both. Although the University is created to benefit Johannesburg's ever-growing population, without prejudice, it still is not financially accessible for a large part of South Africa's population. In January 2015, President Jacob Zuma bemoaned the lack of access to tertiary education on the basis of financial and racial status.

"... We are concerned about the escalating costs of tertiary education and the annual raising of fees by universities and other institutions of higher learning. This escalating cost has become another source of exclusion for the poor and vulnerable South African Child. While we appreciate the autonomy of universities, we must caution universities against excluding students on the basis of price and race."[15]

1.031



031. The Portico at the Great Hall.

1.032



032. Public Space on Jorissen Street - so inviting even the trees are trying to escape

University, or Border I:

Although the University's role is of civic and public importance there is a disjunction with purpose and use. The University is not a public space and requires access through membership, and offers little public space for the greater population of Braamfontein and Johannesburg (non-members). The public space the University provides can be broken down in to two categories: public-public and private-public. The private-public spaces are easier to understand and occur within the University's walls, and most of which occur on movement routes within the campuses. Their greatest quality is that they offer safety from the city and a space to have a break and enjoy student life. The public-public (truly public) spaces that the University offers are set out to the peripheries of the University. They are the interfaces and connections the University has with Braamfontein, and offer little more than pavement, shade and an access point to Wits.

The University: Duality of Access II:

Physical access to the University of Wits can be gained in one of two ways, either by vehicle or pedestrian (card holders only). There are two vehicle entrances off of Empire Road (from the north); one that enters under the highway on Yale Road, the other enters by the PDM business school (across the road from the KPMG offices). From the south there are four vehicle entrances (two entering West Campus and two entering East Campus); entering West campus from the south, off of Enoch Sontonga Avenue, is Raikes road (not actually a University entrance – it is leased out to a bus company that has a depot on the campus); also connecting the public to West Campus, from Enoch Sontonga Avenue, is another vehicle entrance (across the road from the Johannesburg cemetery). The two vehicular access points entering East Campus from the south are off of De Korte Street and



033. Access on Jorissen Street.

Station Street (both perpendicular to Jorrisen Street. All of the above mentioned entrances have pedestrian interfaces (except the Raikes road entrance) but one needs a student card to gain access. There is only one 'pedestrian only' entrance to the University of the Witwatersrand and is located just off of Jan Smuts avenue parallel to the Oppenheimer Life Sciences building.

1.034

Street, or Border II:

Currently, The University of the Witwatersrand's main campus is surrounded by four of Johannesburg's main arteries and split down the middle by a national highway. At its northern border Empire Road stretches from east to west, connecting Auckland Park to Hillbrow and more specifically connecting Louis Botha road (another north-south road that connects Johannesburg to Pretoria) to industry in the East Rand.

East campus is closed in by Jan



034. Enoch Sontonga, composer of Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika.



035. Jan Smuts, Boer War General and Statesman.



036. Ominous and Anonymous

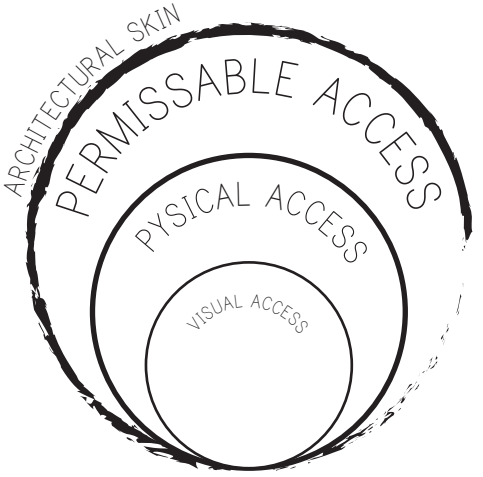
Smuts Avenue, which by means of the Nelson Mandela Bridge, connects the CBD to the Northern suburbs of Hyde Park, Sandton and Bryanston. The Southern part of the University is cut off by Jorrisen Street, named after famed Judge Jorrisen, (which becomes Enoch Sontonga Avenue) in the east and Enoch Sontonga Avenue in the west. Jorrisen Street spans in to Braamfontein, and Hillbrow, while Enoch Sontonga Avenue branches in to Vrededorp – a suburb that has endured decades of ill repute. On the University's western border Annet road separates campus from Vrededorp. As Annet road extends north it becomes Barry Herzog avenue – a road named after famed Boer War General – a road that connects the leafy suburbs of Emmerentia and Greenside – a student hot-spot – to Fordsburg and Mayfair.

The roads surrounding the University become borders rather than streets filled with activity. The fast paced vehicular movement, combined with few

pedestrian entrances create streets that aren't conducive to comfortable pedestrian movement and lengthy pedestrian travel routes. The street is no longer an urban platform and is simply a vehicle dominated artery.

Design Planning and Mapping:

Jorissen Street



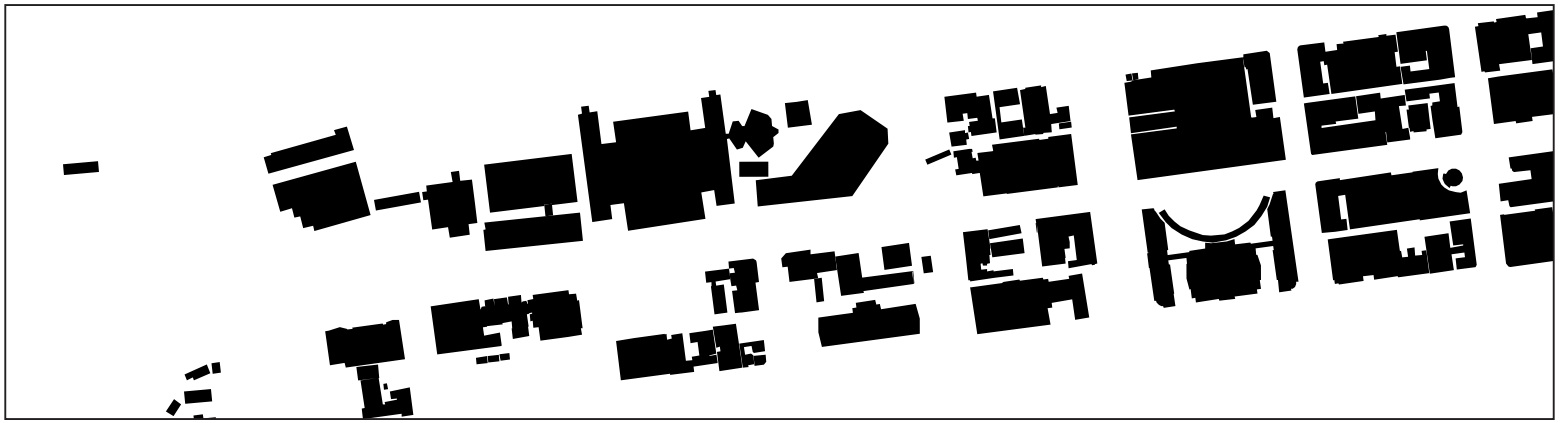
Balance/Utopian Access



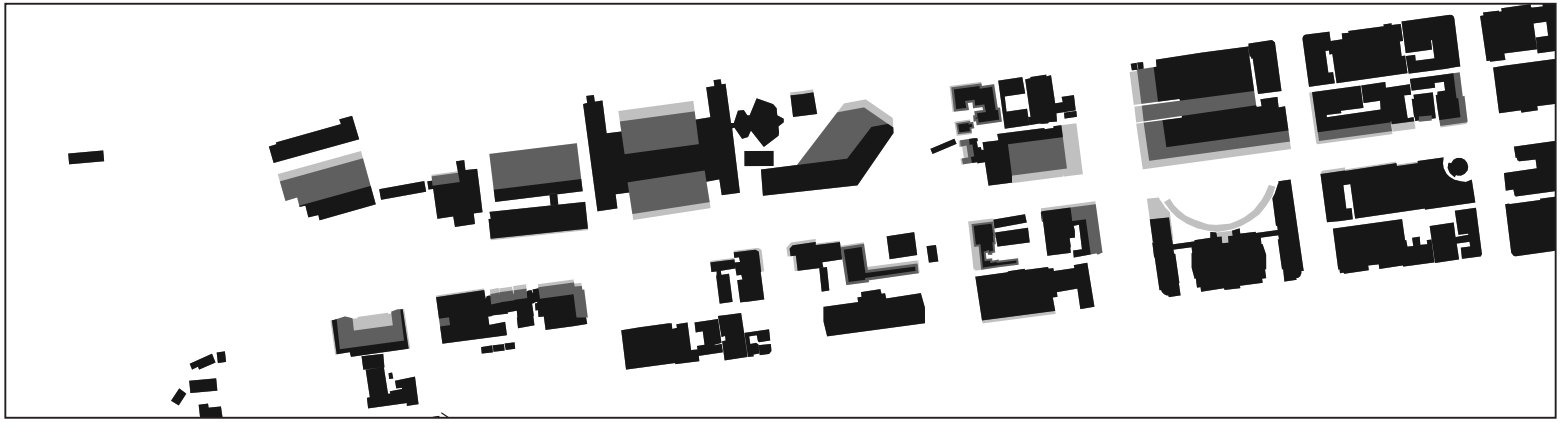
Street Access on Jorissen



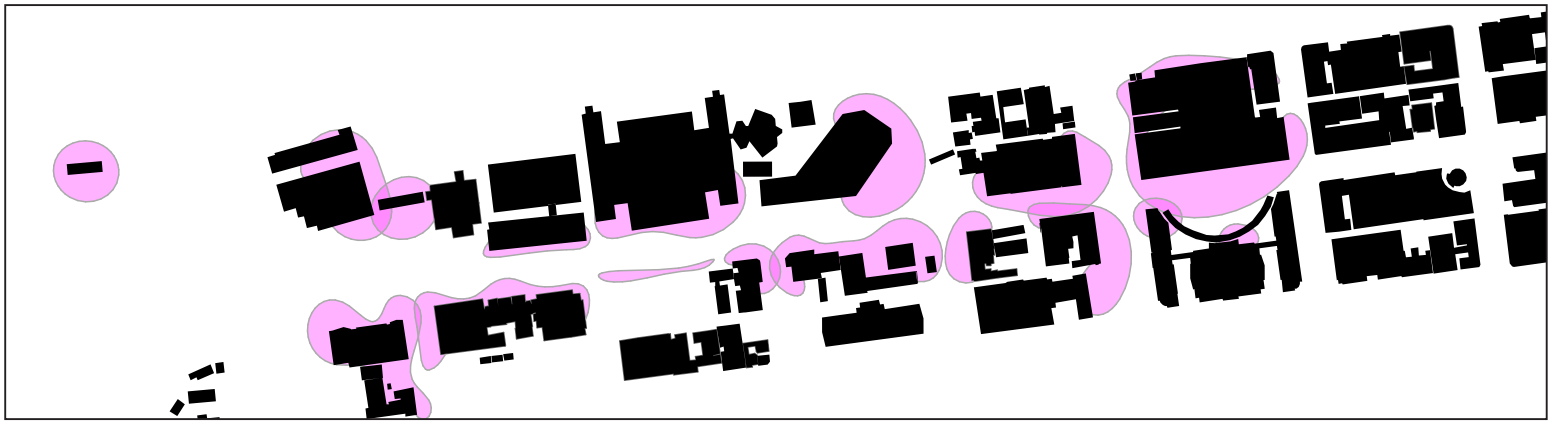
001. Jorrisen Street 1:1000



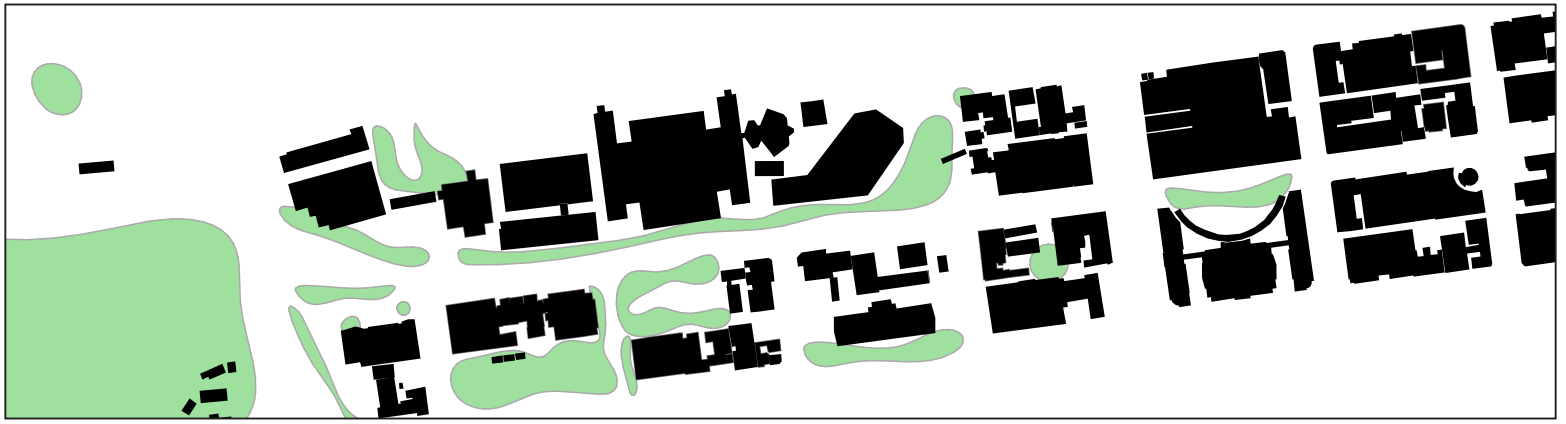
002. Building Coverage 1:1000



003. Levels of Access 1:1000



004. Signage 1:1000



005. Vegetation along the Street 1:1000

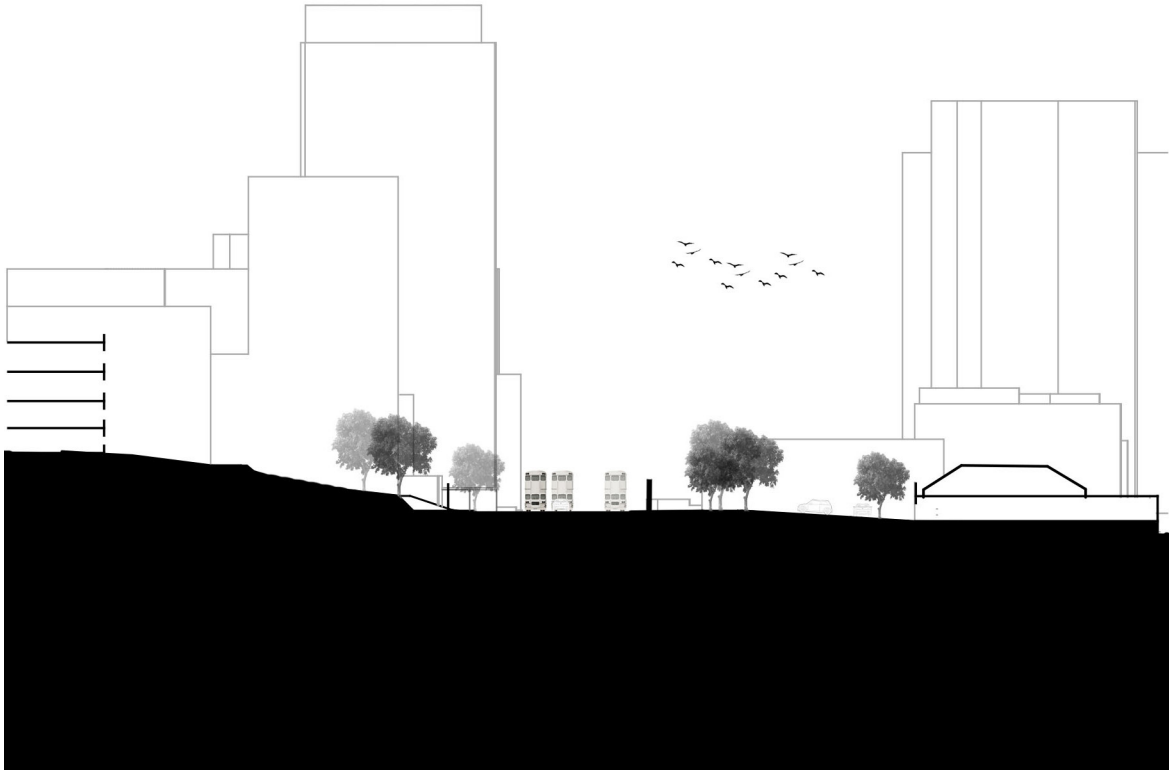


006. Pedestrian groups (Red - Security) 1:1000



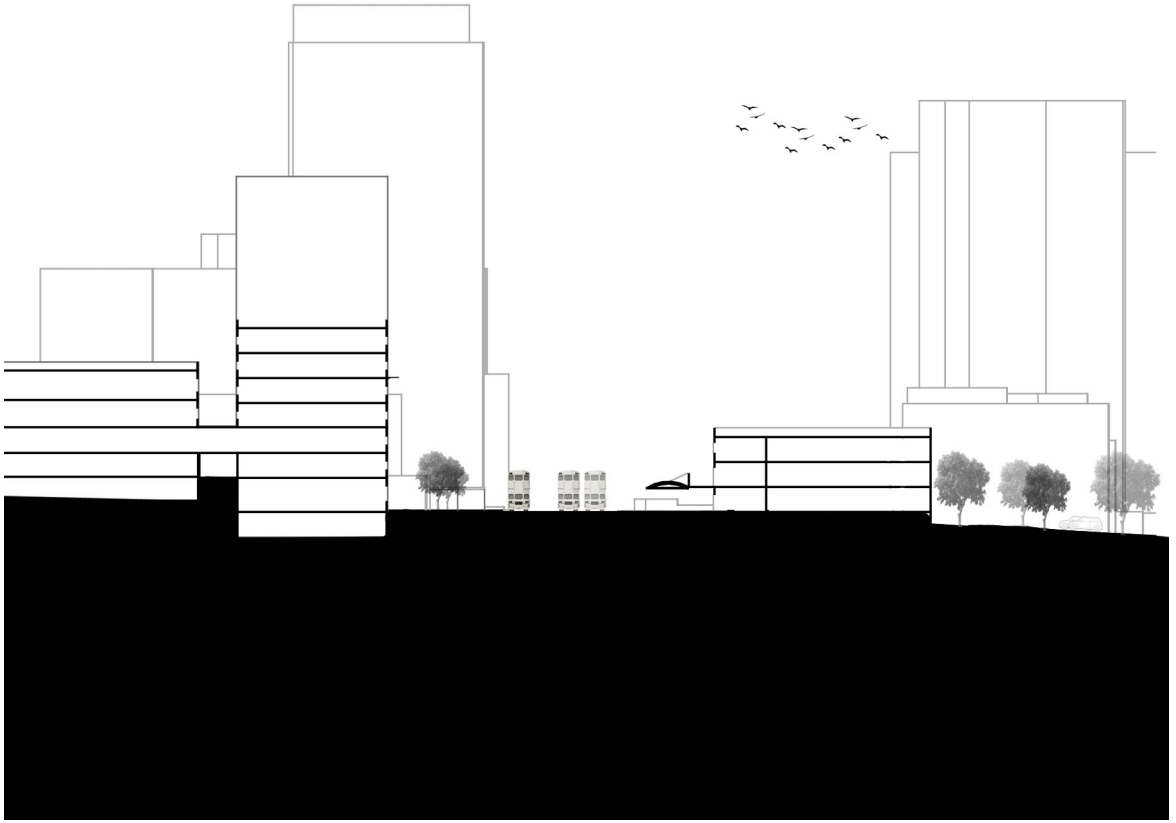
007. Street Sections 1:1000

1.040



Section 1

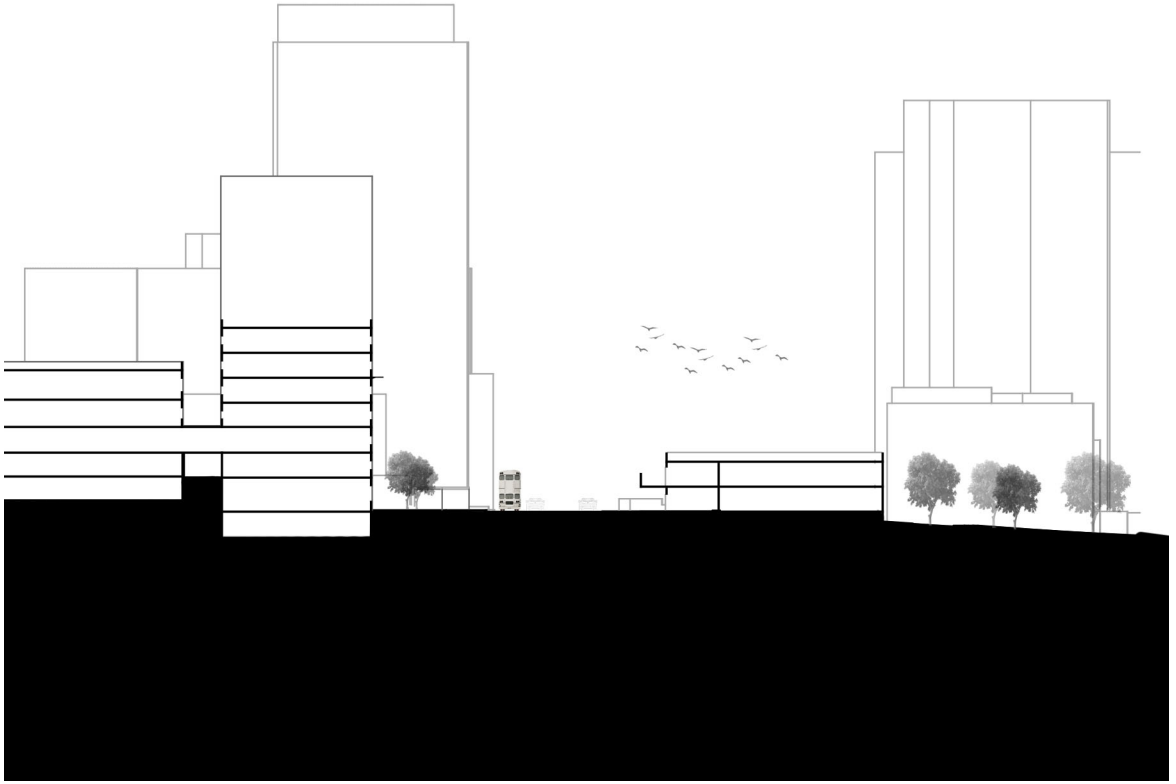
1:1000



Section 2:

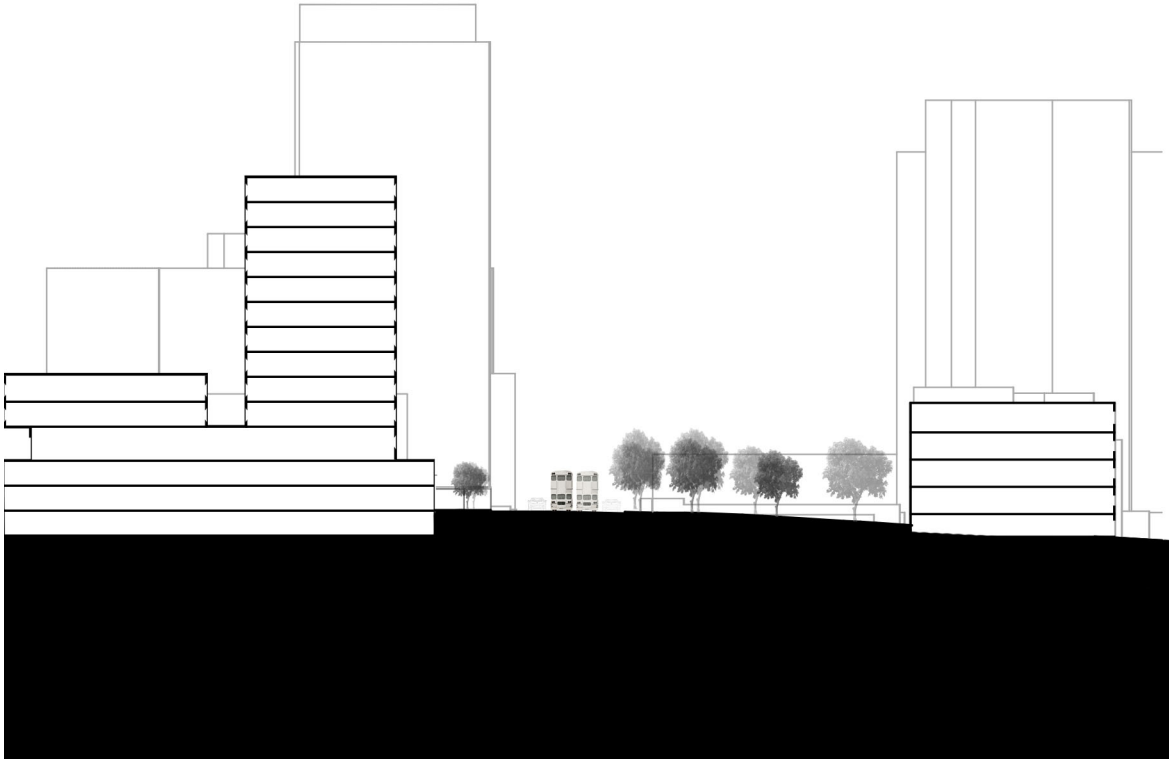
1:1000

1.042



Section 3:

1:1000



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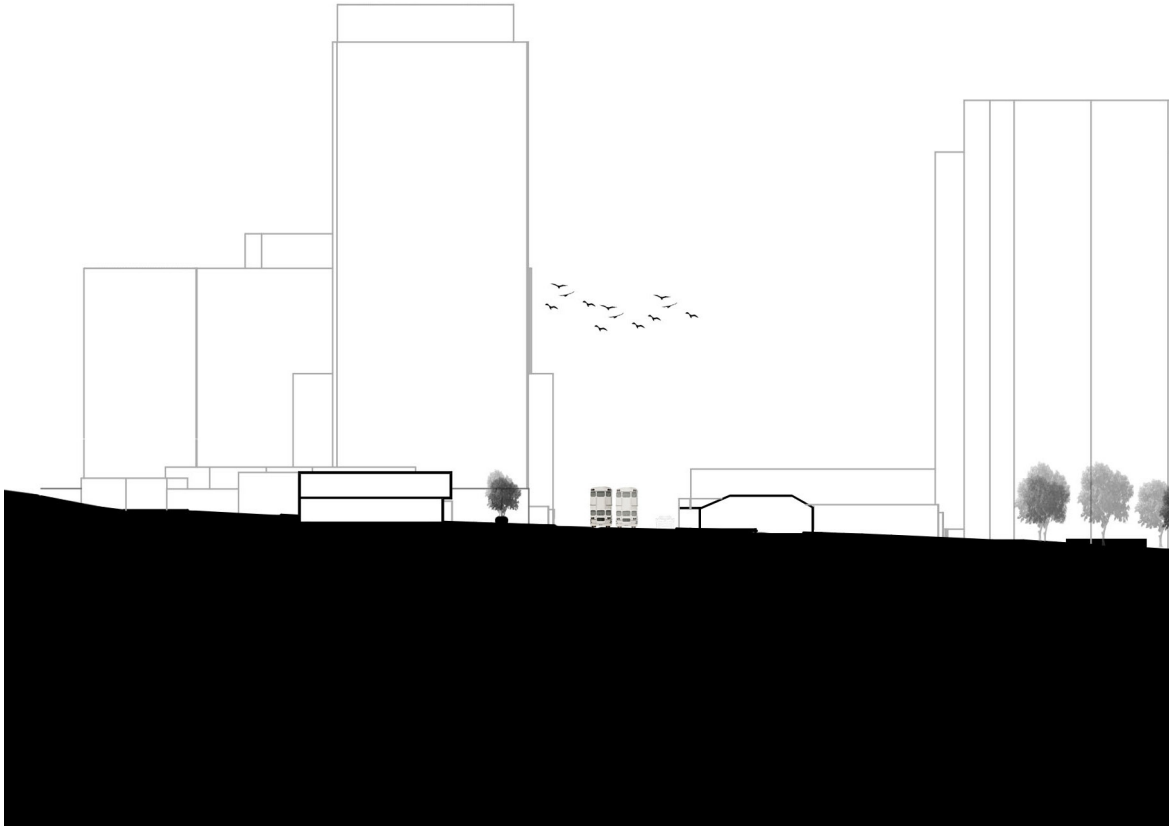
1:1000



Section 5:

1:1000

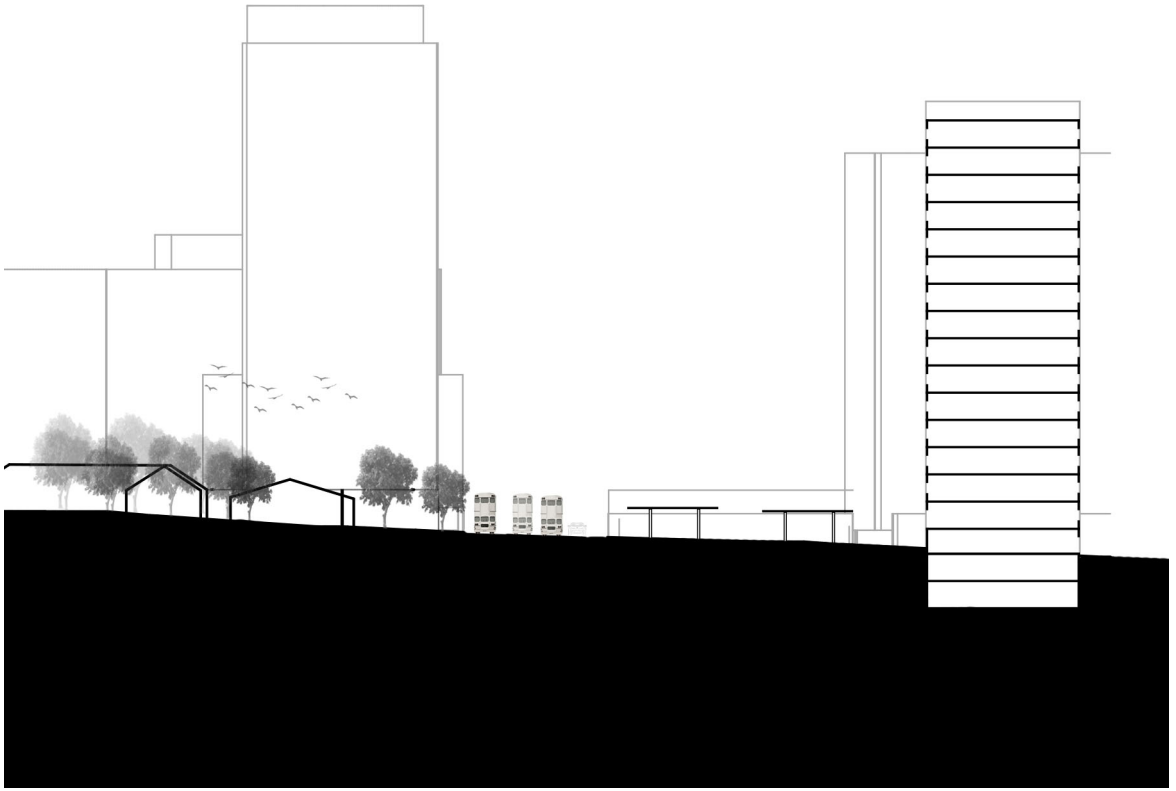


1.045

Section 6:

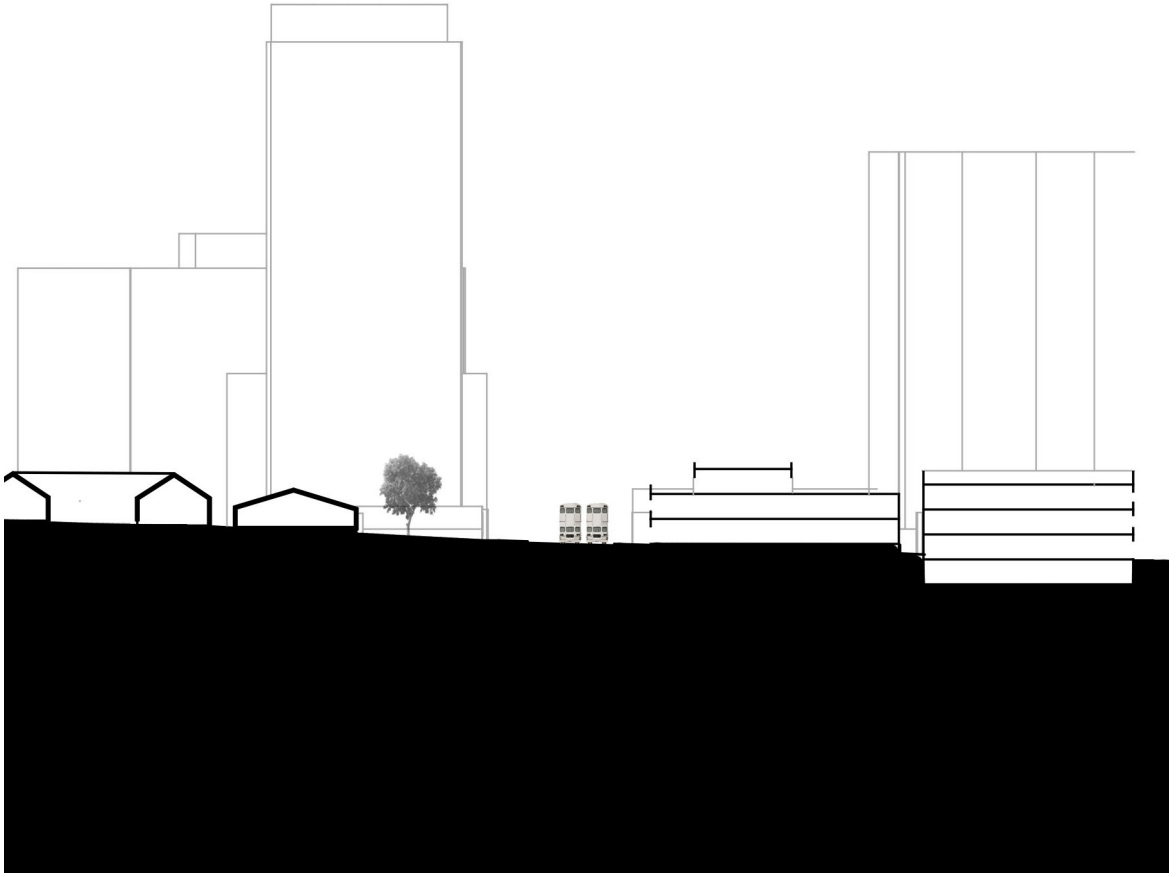
1:1000

1.046



Section 7:

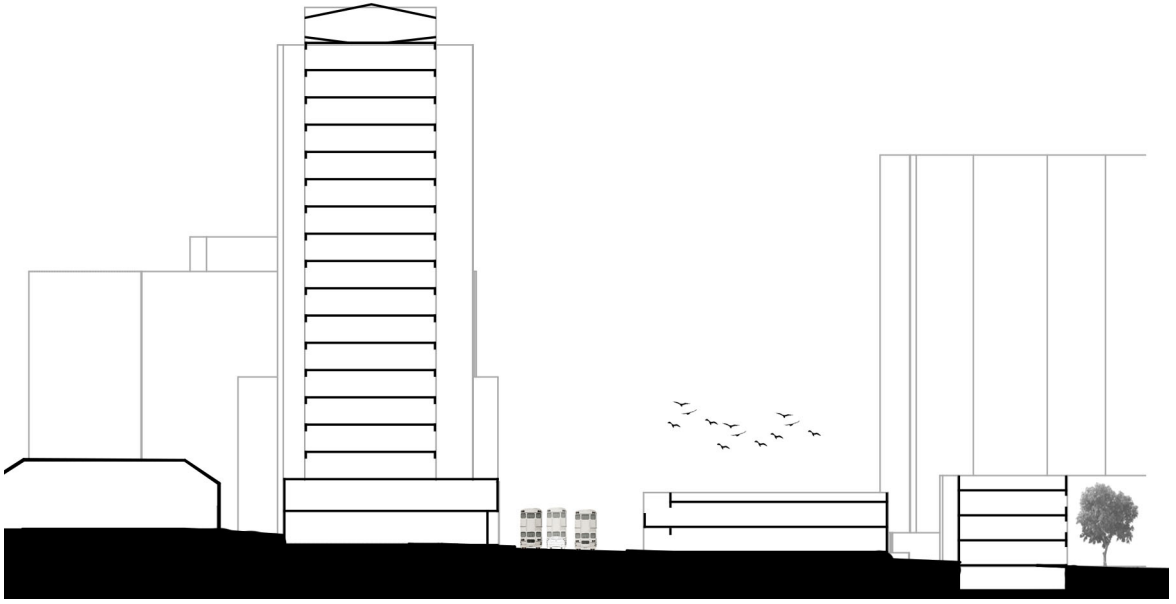
1:1000



Section 8:

1:1000

1.048



Section 9:

1:1000

Materiality of the street:



Hidden along Jorissen street there are pockets of creativity and life, typified by this mosais pattern created to give the street a more humane quality.

017. Mosaic



The street is dominated by precast concrete facades and curbs. From a distance the buildings read as autonomous blocks, up close the building edges feel harsh and rough.

018. Concrete



Face brick and concrete dominate the street. Hues of sepia and grey dominate the street in summer.

019. Brick.



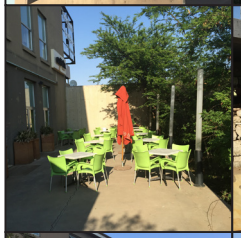
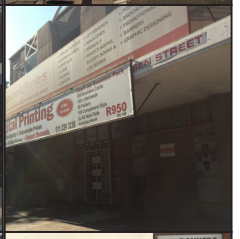
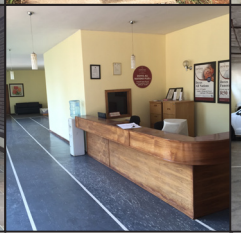
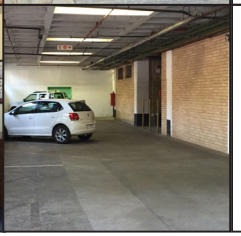
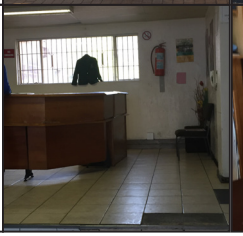
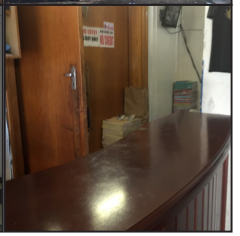


021. Braamfontein, a place where "things are possible."

020. Mosaic on Jorissen Street.

ACCESS (the modern paradox)

1.052

	WITS Origins Center	Doves Funeral Home	Richard Ward building	Bet Exchange	Supreme Educational College	22 Jorrisen Street
SIGN						
'PUBLIC'						
FRONT				Not Granted		
ACCESS				Not Granted		
INTERIOR				Not Granted		

Senate House	'Parking'	Graduate Lodge	Center for Indian Studies	Wits Theatre	38 Jorrisen Street

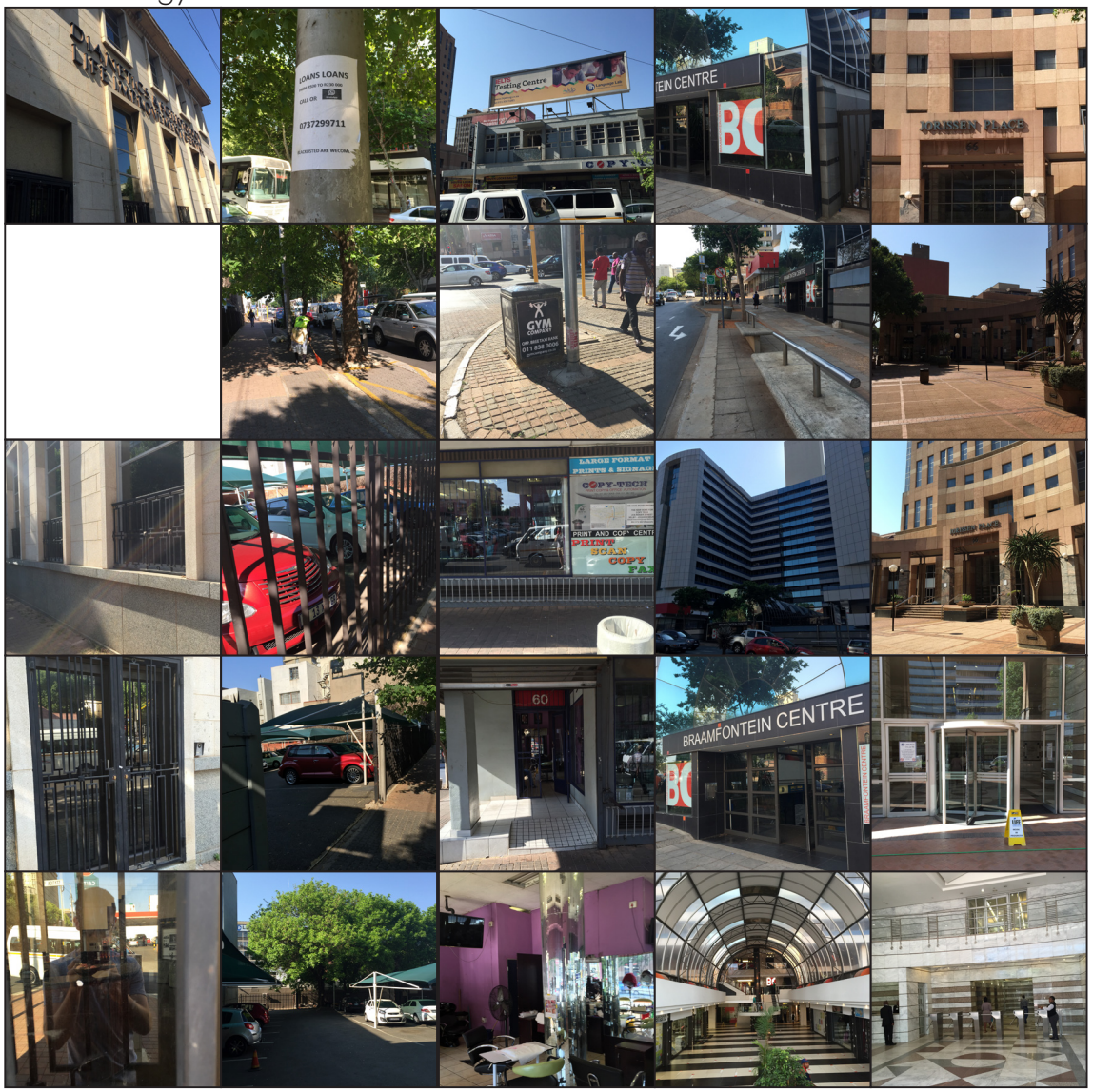


ACCESS (the modern paradox)



1.054

Dianetics & Scientology | 'Parking' | Retail Corner | Braamfontein Center | Jorissen Place



Site Notes:

Signage:

Signage dominates the urban fabric of Jorissen Street, most of which is for retailers or commercial attributes of the buildings on which they rest. What signage does is that it is the first form of access to a University, building or space. In a brief moment a student, pedestrian or motorist has the ability to see and conceive the function of the space, and then make a decision about what he or she is to do next The retail signage is dominated by bright colours and bold logos like that of; Doves, the Caltex Star, the print shop, and Bet Exchange. In contrast all of the Wits owned properties on the street the signage is bold, yet understated. When documenting the street I came across a lecturer who stopped me and asked me why I was photographing all the signs along Jorissen Street. After answering she pointed out the lack of University signage making the University of the Witwatersrand difficult to find for people making deliveries (as the University has a single address). The buildings to the south of the University are dominated by signage at all levels – from the billboard on the side of the building to the penis enlargement pamphlets pasted to poles and in some cases trees. Yet, the buildings on the northern edge rely heavily on the Architecture being signage.

'Public':

In few cases on Jorissen Street there are actually spaces made for the walking public to stop, relax, sit and wait. The places that are comfortable to wait and relax are used as public interfaces rather than out-and-out public spaces. The foyer of the Center for Indian Studies and café at the Origins Center are comfortable and well managed but require different types of permission to access. Along the street itself the public realm has been eroded down to just the sidewalk that runs parallel to Jorissen Street – reinforcing the west-east (one way traffic) movement towards the Braamfontein CBD. This firstly; channels people, and secondly; creates a huge amount of difficulty when trying to move north (to the University) and south (away from the University). There are two cases where the University has provided simple public amenities – benches and adequate outdoor seating – that create 'difficult situations.' The first is the bus stop and waiting area outside The Richard Ward building and the second is the breakaway area in front of the Wits theatre. The seating area in front of the Richard Ward building acts as a pew that either faces the frenetic road or the colossal mass that is the building behind it. The bus stop and row of benches is neatly set back from the road but is fenced off (by a knee high chain fence) from the Richard Ward Building creating an abyss between the public and the University. The public space in front of the Wits Theatre is visually appealing but its use is underwhelming. This is mainly due the heaviness of the architecture that surrounds it and the face that the theatre has no street entrance. The space is well kept, clean and well managed but is barren. When looking at the space one can almost imagine people flooding out of the theatre after a performance but this is not the case. The highly reflective doors facing the street reverts any onlookers gaze and a blue sign with white lettering reads: "This entrance is no longer in use. Please access the WITS Theatre via Senate House or Station Street." Further up Jorissen Street, in front of Jorissen Place, is one of the few designed squares in Braamfontein. The square is vast and looks on to the Braamfontein Center, it offers

little protection from the elements and has sparse vegetation. Although the square may seem public, I was reminded by the security that it is in fact not a public place.

Front:

Jorissen Street typifies Braamfontein's built fabric (and Johannesburg's urban fabric to a certain extent), as it acts as an architectural museum. Some of the spaces and places are frozen in time. Each building is an attempt at re-imagining Johannesburg and is on display, for all to see. Passing up or down the street building form and exteriors add to an astonishingly harsh environment. The exterior space of the buildings differs vastly depending which side of the street a pedestrian is. Dotted along the southern edge of the street there are corner store typologies reminiscent of a much older Braamfontein. These verandahed corner stores punctuate a street mixed with face-brick utilitarian buildings, 3-storey Bauhaus-esque offices and modernist mega blocks (on the southern edges of these blocks). The overhang of the corner shops creates a pleasant, cool space in summer and warm(er) space in winter, and creates a space more attuned to the human scale.

The buildings that sit between these 'corner stores' (the face-brick utilitarian buildings, 3-storey Bauhaus-esque offices) have stark facades with little or no cover for pedestrians.

The northern edge of the street – the Wits edge – is an astonishingly harsh environment due to massive, concrete blocks with completely anonymous (and characterless) facades, and sheer scale. The Richard Ward Building and Senate House, clad in precast concrete panels, are overwhelming in stature and uninviting. The built fabric of the Wits edge acts as ominous border – each building acts as a sentry staring down every passerby.

Access:

Typical access to buildings on Jorissen Street evolves through a codified progression; Front, Signage, Public space, Threshold and Interior space. These 5 areas of inquest can be broken down in to two specific categories; Visual Access (Front, Signage and Threshold) and Physical Access (Public Space, Threshold and Interior). The Front, and form, of the buildings on the street offer an understanding of what their function is. The buildings on the southern edge of Jorissen Street are easier to understand at a glimpse. The corner stores fit in to a typical typology of pitched roof, covered walkway and a simple two storey vertical scale, the Doves funeral home has a church-like quality and the petrol station fits into the easily recognisable brand of service station typologies. The buildings on the Northern edge are slightly more confusing. Their scale and form don't read as what would as typical places of learning, more like that of authoritarian institutions.

Physical access in to the buildings on the Southern side of Jorissen Street are simple thresholds at a normal scale (except for Bet Exchange which has an added level of security – metal detector as well as revolving security gate). None of the thresholds are articulated in any sort of way except for a doorway being punched in to the wall plane. The University buildings on the other hand that do enter on to the street have heavily articulated thresholds and offer a holding space before actually entering the building.

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1. A part of the Witwatersrand Super Group of minerals.

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3. Summerfield, C.J., Devine, M.E., Levi, A. (Eds.), 1998. International dictionary of university histories /: edited by Carol Summerfield and Mary Elizabeth Devine. Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, Chicago. Pg 642.

4. Summerfield, C.J., Devine, M.E., Levi, A. (Eds.), 1998. International dictionary of university histories /: edited by Carol Summerfield and Mary Elizabeth Devine. Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, Chicago. Pg 642.

5. Private Act of Parliament, Act. No. 15 of 1921. saw the creation of the University of South Africa (UNISA), the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Stellenbosch, and the University of Cape Town.

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7. Summerfield, C.J., Devine, M.E., Levi, A. (Eds.), 1998. International dictionary of university histories /: edited by Carol Summerfield and Mary Elizabeth Devine. Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, Chicago. Pg 642.

8. In 1924 the suburb of Saxonwold was laid out by Charles Presswell Tomkins with axial avenues that met at grandiose monuments – the Monument of the missing Soldier and India Gate (both by Edwin Lutyens) – typical of the thinking behind the school of beaux arts (in Paris).

9. Chipkin, C.M., 2008. Johannesburg transition: architecture & society from 1950. STE Publishers, Johannesburg. Pg 53.

10. Simons, H., Usher, R., 2012. Situated Ethics in Educational Research. Routledge. Pg 103.

11. Murray, B.K., 1982. Wits, the Early Years: A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and Its Precursors, 1896-1939. Witwatersrand University Press. Pg 298.

12. The Act of 1959

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14. Simons, H., Usher, R., 2012. Situated Ethics in Educational Research. Routledge. Pg 104.

15. Shocking cost of SA's universities [WWW Document], n.d. . Fin24. URL http://www.fin24.com/Economy/Shocking-cost-of-SAs-universities-20150118 (accessed 10.10.15).