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The appropriated city: an investigation into urban land redistribution through the appropriation of post-industrial landscapes/Newtown

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ABSTRACT

THE APPROPRIATED CITY

An investigation into urban land redistribution through the appropriation of post-industrial landscapes/Newtown

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As inequality heightens in South Africa (Hasell, 2018), human rights and its relation to environmental/spatial rights becomes increasingly important. In Johannesburg, ideological impressions of power and the ensuing stratification of people has always manifest spatially.

After a history of discriminating spatial practices, marred with racial segregation and the dislocation of communities, spatial inequality in South Africa is persistent. So far, land reform strategies have done little to redress spatial economic patterns and Johannesburg still exists as an unsustainable, racially isolated, inverse poly-centric city. These factors contribute to the Spatial Mismatch Hypothesis (Kain, 1968) and creates a poverty trap, whereby poor people are confined to reside in areas least likely to provide them with the opportunity to get a job and support themselves.

Land expropriation seeks to redress these persistent spatial inequalities. Yet the discourse and practice surrounding land expropriation is almost always intertwined with issues of food security and the expropriation of arable horizontal land. Land reform in the past 20 years has gone from prioritizing security of tenure for previously disadvantaged communi-ties, to a highly prescriptive process that benefit few, where the state and agribusinesses attempt to control and manage land-use decisions (Hall and Kepe, 2017).

This dissertation is an investigation and explorative proposal for vertical, urban land (and property) expropriation. It stems from the urgency with regard to land redistribution and other economic restructuring practices in South Africa. It will investigate how urban design can assist in not only increasing and enhancing the right to the city, but also how this process can simultaneously incentivize improvements to the urban fabric. It will illustrate how the expropriation and appropriation of space can empower city-dwellers to change the city fabric as they change themselves (Harvey, 2013).

It will attempt to understand how polycentricity and the spatial mismatch effect arose and how they can be redressed. It will consider the memory of place and how these (often con-tested) fragments can be re-articulated, specifically for its every-day use value (Ouf, 2008).

It will be founded on the understanding that 1) land expropriation is ultimately about tenure security rather than the exclusive acquisition of arable horizontal land, 2) urban land/property is inherently more financially sustainable than rural land/property and 3) land redistribution is only a small part of economic restructuring and additional services such as infrastructure, markets, public space, social services, amenities and networks have to be addressed in order for these strategies to be comprehensive and successful.

It will explore various alternative and non-prescriptive land use strategies and associated economic activities and will ultimately propose a prototypical urban framework that strategizes and codifies the urban land expropriation process. It will experiment with various expropriation and appropriation typologies and expects to find ample opportunity for re-distribution of underutilized land. The dissertation anticipates that an increase in land ownership (as opposed to leasing) will be beneficial to the quality of urban realm, and an enhanced urban realm can simultaneously support appropriation and expropriation. W