Reinventing the Johannesburg inner city

Lindsay Bremner
Faculty of the Built Environment, University of the Witwatersrand, PO Wits, Johannesburg 2050, South Africa

After the discovery of the Witwatersrand gold reef in 1886, the city of Johannesburg became, within a very short period of time, the financial and commercial hub of sub-Saharan Africa. It maintained this position throughout the earlier half of the twentieth century in the face of increasing opposition to the apartheid political system. By the late 1980s, however, this had changed. The restructuring of the global economy and increasing political pressure had resulted in a city whose economic base was declining and in which the social and economic exclusion upon which it had been built was no longer sustainable. This resulted in successive attempts by the urban authorities to reinvent a city which could claim a position in the mainstream global economy and become a city all its citizens could feel part of. This paper sketches these attempts, locates them in certain traditions of urban regeneration and exposes their theoretical and practical inadequacies.

Keywords: South Africa, Economic development, Globalization, Urban images

Introduction

Since 1990, Johannesburg’s local authority has spearheaded two local economic development initiatives to reinvent, re-image and re-formulate its inner city landscape. These have been driven by the twin objectives of positioning the city advantageously in the global economy and averting the urban economic decline experienced from the 1970s onwards. To do this, images have been constructed of the city’s future, around which investment, public opinion and social accord have been mobilized.

This paper begins by outlining the changing character of the Johannesburg inner city, in particular from the 1970s onwards, as a background for examining these local economic development initiatives and the images invented to shape them. It then presents the successive approaches to urban revitalization in Johannesburg and traces the threads of commonality and difference between them, in particular their quest for “world city” status and their changing, but continually ambivalent, relation to Africa. Having explored the conceptual inadequacies of this official policy making, I conclude by locating Johannesburg’s future within a theoretical understanding of the complexity, interdependence and unevenness of current global restructuring and of Africa’s likely place within it.

The changing character of the Johannesburg inner city

After the discovery of the Witwatersrand gold reef in 1886, the city of Johannesburg became, within a very short period of time, the financial and commercial hub of sub-Saharan Africa. Within the first 10 years of its existence, banks, finance houses and mining company headquarters lined its streets (Chipkin, 1993). Successive waves of economic activity, corresponding largely to the booms and slumps of the gold mining industry, produced, by 1990, a city housing the headquarters of 65 out of the 100 largest public companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, 13 of South Africa’s 30 largest companies, 6 of the 8 mining conglomerates and 9 of the 18 leading life assurance companies. In addition, it functioned as the national banking center, housing 11 of the leading 16 banking institutions, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and the National Reserve Bank (Tomlinson et al, 1995). Its adjoining high density residential suburbs, developed speculatively in the 1960s (Chipkin, 1993), served as a point of arrival for new European
immigrants to the city. The black working class, set apart by apartheid legislation, lived and commuted from Soweto, the sprawling township to the south west of the city.¹

From its inception, the city was constructed to conform to images of Western modernity. Its building boom prior to the turn of the century drew on the Fin de Siecle European style, while the boom following the Boer War (1889–1902) produced monumental imperial buildings, consolidating the gold mining industry and the financial district in the appearance of British Edwardianism (Chipkin, 1993). The depression of the 1930s, which saw the abandoning of the gold standard in 1932, resulted in foreign capital flooding into the country and transformed Johannesburg into a little New York, or if not New York, then at least Chicago or Saint Louis (De Kiewiet, 1966, in Chipkin, 1993). By 1936, at the time of the British Empire Exhibition, Johannesburg was described as the “largest and most densely populated European city in Africa” with “fascinating shops and smartly dressed shoppers” (Times Weekly Edition, 1936, in Chipkin, 1993: 105) and claimed for itself the status of “the Empire’s great gold center” (Rogerson, 1996: 141).

This image began to be tarnished by the 1970s, as growing opposition to apartheid revealed the city’s racial segregations and political divisions (Rogerson, 1996). The city’s image was an exclusive one that “celebrated white dominance and brushed aside the alternative black experience of the city” (Rogerson, 1996: 141). By 1986, at the time of the city’s centenary celebrations, black opposition to the image of the “city-with-a-golden-heart” reached its peak and rendered the celebrations meaningless. The authorities realized that the city needed reinventing.

Over this period, a gradual movement of black people from the township areas into inner city suburbs picked up momentum. The lifting of influx control and escalating repression and violence in the townships under the apartheid government’s State of Emergency contributed to this. By 1986, at the time of the city’s centenary celebrations, approximately 20 000 black people, of a population of 120 000, lived in the inner city suburb of Hillbrow (Morris, 1996). Migration into inner city suburbs accelerated rapidly. By 1993, 85% of the inner city residential population were black (Morris, 1996) and by 1996, only 5% were white (Crankshaw, 1997). Unlike in United States inner city neighborhoods, the bulk of this population did not constitute an underclass or ghetto poor (Wilson, 1987, 1991). The majority (ICHUT, 1996; Crankshaw, 1997; Morris, 1996) were more affluent than their counterparts, who remained in the segregated “ghetto” of the black township.

This rapid “greying” of the inner city was accompanied by physical decline and racial stereotyping of new residents (Morris, 1996). In many cases, the exodus of white residents had been aided and abetted by landlords, who saw the “illegal” status of black tenants as an opportunity for raising rents and reducing building maintenance (Zack et al, 1989, in Morris, 1996). In many buildings, rents were increased, apartments overcrowded and services not maintained. These conditions fueled the racial prejudice of white inner city residents who had left and who romanticized life before the arrival of black residents (Morris, 1996).

Further demographic shifts have occurred during the second half of the 1990s as Africans from countries further north, mainly Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo, have arrived in the inner city. In 1995, 23 000 Congolese were estimated to be living in Johannesburg (Kadima and Kalombo, 1995), while Morris (1996) estimated 3000 Nigerians to be living in the inner city. These population groups have been subjected to high levels of persecution from South Africans (Dhloko, 1997). They are blamed for the overcrowded informal trading sector, the growth of the narcotics trade and deterioration of the physical environment (Simone, 1998). Increasing xenophobia, assaults and conflicts over space and access have led to the construction of a defensive, ethnically defined spatiality. Immigrant communities can, in many ways, be compared to immigrant minorities in the United States (Morris, 1996; Ogbu, 1993).

Turning to the economy of the inner city – in ways typical of similar cities across the world, Johannesburg’s economy has declined since 1980. Its traditional manufacturing base (clothing, printing, textiles, food, fabricated metals) lost activity across all sectors, declining from R3.4 billion in 1980 to R2.5 billion in 1994 (Pienaar, 1994).² At the same time, its financial and government sectors increased (finance from R3.2 to 4.8 billion, government from R0.8 to 1.2), while commercial activity on the other hand, remained stagnant at R3 billion (Pienaar, 1994).

Between 1982 and 1994, 17 of the 65 top 100 national public companies located in Johannesburg

¹Urban residents were spatially segregated on the basis of race in terms of the Group Areas Act, No. 40 of 1950. Each racial group was allocated to areas reserved exclusively for them. The movement and residence of Africans in particular was further controlled by an array of legislation, including the Blacks (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1945. This legislation meant that the vast majority of Johannesburg’s estimated 3 million black residents were confined to townships on the periphery of the city, while its approximately 1 million white residents were located close to the city center.

²Rogerson and Rogerson’s (1996) research on Johannesburg’s inner city manufacturing activity indicates that its overall downturn arose from the high death of inner city enterprises in relation to the birth rate of new enterprises (237 as opposed to 182) and short-distance relocations to adjacent areas. The inner city has lost its competitive advantage to new industrial sites favoring smaller, cleaner locations along main road and rail routes (Tomlinson et al, 1995: 90).
moved from the Central Business District (CBD)\(^3\) to decentralized locations (Tomlinson et al, 1995). Similarly, of a total of 104 top national business enterprises located in Johannesburg, in 1994, only 27% were located in the CBD. Of the top 10 retail companies in the country having their head offices in Johannesburg, only two remain in the CBD. In the area of accounting, all leading accounting firms in the country have retained their head offices in Johannesburg, but, whereas in 1982, all seven were located in the CBD, by 1994, only three remained. In the advertising industry, of the top 15 firms in the country, 14 are based in Johannesburg. In 1994, these were all located in decentralized areas, whereas in 1991, seven were located in the CBD. While these relocations can be attributed to many factors (infrastructure requirements, convenience factors, corporate restructuring, prestige factors etc; Tomlinson et al, 1995), a clear picture emerges of capital flight from the CBD (Business Day Property Supplement, 1996; Muyanda, 1996). While the Johannesburg area has maintained its national head office function, the central city has weakened for nearly all sectors, with the exception of retail.\(^4\)

Remaining in the Central Business District are the major financial institutions which have sunk considerable investments into property over the last 90 years. Of these, life assurance companies (Old Mutual, Sage and Sanlam), national banking institutions (ABSA, who announced a R400 million four-city block development in 1996, Standard, First National and Nedcor), mining houses, Anglo American and the Johannesburg Chamber of Industry are dominant. With approximately 13 other owner occupiers, this group own and control the major landholdings in the CBD (Tomlinson et al, 1995).

By far the most rapid transformation of the inner city area from the early 1990s onwards, however, was the growth of the informal commerce and catering sector (Billier, 1997). Informal trading became one of the most “spectacular expressions” of the desegregation of urban space associated with the end of apartheid (Tomlinson et al, 1995: 123). This growth can be attributed to an official policy change, from repression to tolerance or promotion, a downturn in the formal economy, repeal of influx control and an increase in international migration (Tomlinson et al, 1995). By 1993, it was estimated that there were 15 000 people earning their living on the streets of Greater Johannesburg, mostly at a survivalist level (Johannesburg, 1993b). Four thousand of these were located in the inner city, and 45% of them were foreign (Star, 1993; Citizen, 1993). By 1999, the number of traders in the inner city was estimated to be 10 000, with 300 000–400 000 “tourist shoppers” passing through its streets each month (Greater Johannesburg, 1999a: 2).

In response to these changing conditions, the Johannesburg City Council (1991–93) and later the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council (1995 onwards) developed an evolving set of local economic development initiatives to reinvent, re-image and re-market the Johannesburg inner city (Fig. 1).

The city’s response 1: Gateway to Africa

The first of these (Rogerson, 1996) was based on models of urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989) and urban regeneration (Imrie and Thomas, 1993) drawn from North America and Western Europe, centered on physical regeneration and investment in buildings and infrastructure. It falls squarely into what Beaurregard (1993: 26) called the “mainstream” approach to urban economic revival. It had very little to do with the economic, social and physical changes which had taken place in the city over time, instead seeking to capitalize on South Africa’s imminent re-entry into the world as an opportunity for re-imaging and regenerating the city. Typically, this approach involved “glossy plan preparation; public sector infrastructure investment; partnership development of flagship schemes in retailing, leisure and commercial development; an emphasis on arts and culture; and strong marketing to reverse or alter existing poor images of the city” (Fitzsimons, 1995: 7–8, in Roger-son, 1996: 139). Imrie and Thomas (1993), Boyle (1988) and Ettlinger (1994) elaborate the emphasis on the shift to public–private partnerships for development inherent in this approach. The role of the local state shifts in emphasis from one of provider of social services and goods to the promotion of local growth and the reversal of economic decline (Bingham and Mier, 1993).

Johannesburg’s late–apartheid vision and strategies for regeneration were based upon an aspiration towards “world city” status, as a goal to be achieved through urban policy making (Shachar, 1994). Johannesburg’s authorities began to portray it as the “Tokyo or New York of Africa” (Wright, 1992: 13). The city began positioning itself in the new economic geography of global capitalism through styling itself as the “Gateway to Africa” (Rogerson, 1996: 141).

We are looking forward to Johannesburg resuming its rightful place as the economic and social powerhouse
of South Africa’s most prosperous region. It will become the Gateway to Africa (Anon, 1994, in Tomlinson et al, 1995: 57).

Strategies were devised to achieve this, involving a typical property-led development programme, an aggressive marketing campaign and a particular emphasis on sport and culture as vehicles for investment, drawn from the experience of a number of British cities (Glasgow, Sheffield and Birmingham) (Tomlinson et al, 1995). Johannesburg was marketed to the world through its locational advantages, communications infrastructure, and mature financial dominance, as a launch pad into the hinterland of Africa (Rogerson, 1996). This assumption of the position of frontier town displays a characteristic colonial ambivalence to Africa (Rostron, 1999). Johannesburg lies on the edge of Africa, beyond the frontier of the civilized world. At the same time, it presents vast, untapped resources for exploitation. Executive directors of commerce and industry, sport and culture were appointed by the City Council in 1991 for the first time and Johannesburg was proclaimed the fourth of the top ten growth cities in the world. International business delegations were hosted by the city and a number of corporate business partnerships designed to promote business and partnership arrangements between Johannesburg and other cities such as Atlanta, New York and Birmingham.

At the same time, the city authorities attempted to overcome negative perceptions of the city’s racial exclusivity by ironically (and unsubstantiatedly) proclaiming it as South Africa’s most “integrated city” (Johannesburg, 1993a, in Rogerson, 1996: 143).
Attempts were made to style the city as “inviting and integrated” (Rice, 1993: 15), not through investment in social or service infrastructure, but through an emphasis on the importance of culture and urban design (Rogerson, 1996). A “Civic Spine” was created by tying together existing public buildings in the central business district into a cohesive designed precinct, and a neglected council-owned tract of land on the western edge of the city was transformed into the “Newtown Cultural Precinct” through substantial public sector investment and cultural events. The annual “Arts Alive Festival” and the bi-annual Johannesburg Biennial were inaugurated. These hoped to capture local and international cultural imaginations and establish the area as a recreational and cultural theme park, emulating waterfront developments in Baltimore, Boston, San Francisco or Cape Town (Horak, 1994).

Through these initiatives, the inner city was portrayed as a “world city showroom”, able to “assert itself unequivocally as the key economic center of a subcontinental region” (Johannesburg, 1993b, in Rogerson, 1996: 148). In 1991, ten top strategic projects were identified to involve the private sector in rebuilding the local economy and enhance Johannesburg’s chance at world city status. The choice of the projects was based on a “boosterist” strategy (Tomlinson et al, 1995: 10), aimed at attracting and keeping investors in the city and on the basis of apparent research into the characteristics of world cities (Rogerson, 1996). They included: inner city housing; a R200 million light rail link between the high rise inner city suburbs and the central business district; the “Bara-link” project, involving the development of the area around the Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto to integrate Soweto with the city; the establishment of markets for inner city street trading; a R200–300 million convention center in the inner city; the development of a R100 million commercial theme park, known as “Jewel City” in the eastern sector of the central business district; and a series of projects using culture and sport as vehicles for local economic development. The Newtown Cultural Precinct and the Ellis Park Sports Precinct on the opposite eastern side of town were initiated. A world class 35 000 seater athletics stadium was completed in 1995. Johannesburg was ambitiously billed as the “premier cultural center of the country” (Francis, 1992: 53, in Rogerson, 1996: 152) and the “premier sports and entertainment venue in Africa” (Engineering News, 1995, in Rogerson, 1996: 152). A handful of small scale projects were initiated to improve sporting facilities in the high density inner city suburbs.

This reinvention of the city had some impact. In 1994, Johannesburg was voted as one of the world’s top 50 cities by Fortune business magazine (Rogerson, 1996). In 1994, bidding against 20 other cities in the new province of Gauteng, Johannesburg won the vote of the newly formed provincial legislature, which relocated from neighboring Pretoria to the Johannesburg central business district, thereby showing confidence in and throwing its weight behind the city’s regenerative efforts.

Nevertheless, it failed to impress the new metropolitan and local councillors elected in 1995 to supersede those of the former racially-based local councils. In a very short time, the key architects of the old new Johannesburg – the executive directors of trade and industry, culture and sport were demoted or fired, budgets were cut to the top ten strategic projects and a new more inclusive process devised to reinvent the inner city more in line with local imperatives.

The city’s response 2: Golden Heartbeat

The new re-imaging initiative was based, not on a speculative gamble for world city status, but on stabilizing decline and promoting neighborhood organization as a precursor to growth (Roysten, 1997). It was developed through an inclusive partnership between government, civil society, labor and the private sector, known as the Johannesburg Inner City Development Forum (JICDF). Its vision, adopted in 1996, aspired towards an inner city which was:

- The Golden Heartbeat of Africa.
- A dynamic city that works.
- Liveable, safe, well managed and welcoming.
- People centered, accessible and celebrating cultural diversity
- A vibrant 24 hour city.
- A city for residents, workers, tourists, entrepreneurs and learners.
- Focused on the 21st Century, respecting its heritage and capitalizing on its position in South Africa, Africa and the world, a truly global city.
- The trading hub of Africa thriving through participation, partnerships and the spirit of ubuntu. (Roysten, 1997: 5)

This implied a substantial change in emphasis and approach from that which had preceded it. Johannesburg is still portrayed as the city with a heart of gold, staking its inherent identity on its founding and most popularly identifiable feature. However, it is no longer located at the edge of Africa, as its gateway, but as its center, its life-force, its heartbeat. For the first time, Johannesburg acknowledges its location in Africa, rather than on its margins, and seeks to incorporate its African-ness into its image of itself. The focus of development is not primarily directed at the attraction of foreign investment, but rather at local upliftment (“livable, safe, well managed and welcoming… a city for residents, workers, tourists, entrepreneurs and learners”) while the aspiration to global status is maintained (“focused on the 21st Century… capitalizing on its position in South Africa, Africa and the world, a truly global city”). The driving force of economic development is trade rather than sport or culture.
This vision was launched with great fan-fare in 1997 at an event on the library gardens in the central business district, opened by then Deputy Present Thabo Mbeki (Reeves, 1997). It was accompanied by statements of support by all sectors and a general mood of optimism that the inner city was about to be “turned around” (Alfreds, 1997: 1).

Its strategy focused on developing environmental and infrastructural programs targeting crime, grime, congestion, homelessness and deteriorating public sector services through public–private partnerships (Sunday Times Metro, 1996; Russell, 1996). Legislation (Gauteng Provincial Government, 1997) legalized the existence of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), facilitating private sector supplementation to local authority service provision. Soon the management of these districts claimed great success in the reduction of crime, improved cleanliness, reduction in office vacancies and increase in office rentals, with the Johannesburg project winning the international Downtown Association award in New York (Citizen, 1996). By 1999, muggings in Improvement Districts were down 90% from 1994 figures, a retail survey indicated that 42% of the formal retail sector in BIDs was optimistic about staying in the inner city and employment had been created for 250 cleansing and security staff in the areas affected (City Vibe, 1999).

Key urban renewal projects in this new reinvention of the city demonstrate the shift from “spectacle” to “environment” as the cornerstone of urban regeneration. While limited resources have been allocated by the city to maintaining the investments previously made into sport and culture, major public/private investment has gone into infrastructure for the relief of environmental or social problems – taxi-ranks, informal trading markets or homeless people’s shelters. These include a R160 million upgrade of the Johannesburg central station (Radebe, 1996), three taxi management facilities catering for 6000 taxis (Greater Johannesburg, 1999a: 6), the re-imaging of squares and parks in the inner city (City Vibe, 1999) and the provision of six housing facilities for homeless people, two of which are already operational (Greater Johannesburg, 1999a: 6).

Management and development of street trading, the taxi industry and other forms of micro-business activity are seen as high priorities for confidence building and stabilizing the inner city’s economic environment. A progressive and accommodative stance towards informal economic activity was adopted and a quasi-government development agency, the Informal Trade Management Company created (Urban Market Joint Venture, 1999). This is responsible for restructuring informal trade within the inner city. Its current initiative will build six market places which combine trading stalls, productive and housing units and give 2400 traders a more permanent stake in the inner city economy (Urban Market Joint Venture, 1999).

One of the major thrusts of the new vision is to stabilize the inner city residential environment (Chalmers, 1996; Du Venage, 1996; Mantjiu, 1997). The public media has recorded some success in this regard (Star Business Report, 1996; Star, 1996). Existing housing stock has been upgraded for ownership through joint ventures between public and private sectors and by promoting the maintenance and proper management of buildings through incentives and public relations exercises. By 1999, 18 upgrading projects involving 2000 housing units were in progress (Greater Johannesburg, 1999a: 6). A bad buildings programme is facilitating the transfer of buildings to new owners prepared to invest in management, maintenance and refurbishment (Greater Johannesburg, 1999a: 5).

Many of these ideas have been tested in a pilot project around the largest inner city park, Joubert Park. The project covers seven city blocks, where congestion of streets and overcrowding of apartments are particularly serious. Strategies have been developed and are being implemented to improve the public environment and upgrade the private residential environment through, eg, the creation of refurbishment funds, incentives for the external maintenance and management of buildings, better local authority management procedures and employment creation for residents of the area (Roysten, 1997: 15).

This project exemplifies the shift from a high-profile, leisure-industry driven public/private regeneration strategy to one focusing on people’s living and working environments, employment creation and social equity. It too has had some impact. The media have announced that the city is “winning the battle against crime and grime” (Lund, 1996: 3), that home ownership will “halt inner city rot” (Mantjiu, 1997: 6) and that the Station upgrade will “save the decaying CBD” (Radebe, 1996: 19). Swart (1996: 3) goes so far as to claim that “crime is no longer the prime concern in the scruffy CBD”, focusing rather on the aesthetics of “scruffiness” as its major distraction. The inner city is no longer a frightening place, just a messy one.

Conclusion

This recent and ongoing history of development in the Johannesburg inner city tells of the transformation, reformulation and re-imagining of an urban landscape. The decline of its industrial base, loss of relative strength in the national economy, the flight of corporate capital, changing racial demography of its residential suburbs and burgeoning informal sector transformed a business district which could rightfully claim its position as the financial and commercial hub of sub-Saharan Africa into one which, in the latest formulations of the city authorities, is identified as a Priority Intervention Zone (PIZ) (Greater Johannesburg, 1999b).

This paper has traced the responses of the city authorities to this transformation by examining the two
local economic development initiatives formulated since 1990, one before and one after the democratic elections. The first was expansionist and buoyant. It relied on an aesthetic, property-led development programme to regenerate a declining economy, re-image a city tarnished by its oppressive, racist past and position Johannesburg as a “world city” as it entered the global economy. The second was more cautious and less speculative, advocating an environmentally-led programme of stabilization and neighborhood development to address immediate problems of inner city decay, as a precursor to growth.

This is in line with most discussions of the future of cities post-1980 (Davies and Champion, 1983; Williams and Smith, 1986), which argue that the world economic crisis of 1973 and the subsequent restructuring of the global economy have rendered speculative extrapolation impossible and linked national and local economies into complex, integrated, interdependent unpredictable networks (Williams and Smith, 1986; Castells, 1996). However, it is this complexity and interdependency, and the substantive forces involved, which are not yet fully acknowledged or embraced in Johannesburg (Tomlinson, 1998). City authorities are still fixated on the image of Johannesburg as a “world class, globally competitive city” (Greater Johannesburg, 1999b: 10). This mantra has justified political and economic programs of urban restructuring (the most recent being the iGoli 2002 plan (Greater Johannesburg, 1999b) in the interests of corporate capital. Amongst other things, these are characterized by somewhat naïve understandings of the wider processes of global restructuring taking place and of Johannesburg’s position within them.

Integration of regions and cities into the world economy is uneven and contingent upon multiple contradictory tendencies. Castells (1996: 135) ominously predicts the “structural irrelevance” of most of Africa in the newest international division of labor. However, within the internal differentiation of Africa, South Africa is most likely to attract certain of the productive and managerial functions of the global economy. In doing so, it will also become a depository of large segments of the population around it who have been marginalized and who perceive the opportunities it offers as their only chance of survival. The large cities of South Africa – Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town – are the places where this marginality will most likely make itself visible.

This is what has been witnessed recently in the inner city of Johannesburg. Capital disinvestment has created a space for those excluded from formal economic activity to gain a foothold in the urban system. Micro-enterprise, survivalist trade, illicit economic activity (Jennings et al, 1995a, b; Rogerson, 1995; Tomlinson et al, 1995) and, more particularly, migratory economic activity, cross-border trade and the presence in the city of immigrant entrepreneurs (Crush, 1997; Simone, 1998; Reitzes et al, 1997; Rogerson, 1997, 1998), are becoming significant and possibly structural features of the inner city economy as in other parts of the world (Castells and Portes, 1989). In addition, the increasing occupancy by small African enterprises of the lower grade office space in the inner city has changed the complexion of inner city commerce (Tomlinson et al, 1995). These new presences are, however, largely absent from official policy making (Haffajee, 1998a, b).

These new residents have been well-used by the popular media to construct new urban imagery of the inner city as diseased, crime riddled, dangerous and disordered (City Press, 1997; Warren, 1996; Robertson, 1997). They are less than social; they are part of the physical environment to be sanitized, relocated and rendered invisible (Ramotha, 1996). Reactionary protectionism against foreigners demands their restriction into enclaves of exclusion or repatriation (Simone, 1998; Paton, 1999; Masunda, 1999). Frontier imagery, reminiscent of that in American literature and popular media (Smith, 1986), portrays the inner city as the new “meeting point between savagery and civilization” (Turner, 1958, in Smith, 1986: 15). Images of nature (“Hillbrow tenants conquering their own Everest”, Prabhakaran, 1997: 6) and conquest (“Send task force to save Hillbrow", Madondo, 1997: 26) connote a place beyond the limits of civilization. It is black, threatening, untamed and barbaric. Urban regeneration has, to date, aimed at its conquest and re-incorporation into the civilized white world of corporate respectable.

Until this image of the future is superceded by one which incorporates the multitude of contradictory presences and dynamics at play in the new global city, Johannesburg’s present will continue to be defined along modernist lines as defective, degenerative and decayed. While new efforts to consolidate an African identity and position in the global economy through the image of an African Renaissance are currently emerging (Mangeu, 1998), these have only provisionally touched upon the issue of a contemporary African spatiality. Simone (1998) suggests the recovery of the original function of most African cities as points of crossing – entry, exit, crossroads, railheads, etc – as a means of making sense of current translocations, while Tomlinson (1998) premises a vision for the future on the principles of economic and social inclusion. This means finding appropriate institutions to manage the co-existence of transience and stasis, of global and local, corporate and provisional, in any political or economic programme of urban restructuring. It requires adopting critical relations to current institutions, urbanism and practice and defining new ways of working, thinking and representing the city. Here the “blank———” exhibition (Judin and Vladisavljevic, 1998), and certain contributors to its catalogue, are significant in redefining the terrain. Students in
my department have been engaged in work which grapples with issues of urban transformation, seeking to interpret the found, modernist landscape according to its new dynamics (Place et al., 1999). They are currently involved in a programme to track social change through the making of things, in this case, for hair stylists and street gamblers, with a view towards designing an emporium of such activities in a disused parking garage. Instead of seeing the inner city as lost or abandoned, this work sees it as something being remade according to new presences, occupations and programs, in whose logics and intersections the future lies. Making such presences visible will give them a chance to shape a new, fragmentary, provisional image of the future.

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Reinventing the Johannesburg inner city: L Bremner


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