Johannesburg: a lens for architecture and photography

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Johannesburg's built environment was shaped initially by the gold mining industry whose influence was indelibly writ upon its architectural symbolism. This has however, been intermingled and covered over by the residue of its transition from colonialism to apartheid and the post apartheid city. Although Johannesburg was once known through first hand experience and direct engagement of the senses with built structures, a feature of the city of the last two decades is that it is dangerous. A consequence of this perception is that photographic images, rather than first hand experience, form a point of access and understanding of the city. Furthermore buildings—iconic buildings—are known through images. In public consciousness and imagination the image is critical, and this is the domain of architectural photography. How we understand the built environment is therefore dependent both on how buildings function within the city, and how they are depicted. What the photograph tells us about the building, and message it conveys is an important constituent of architectural photography. Buildings acquire the marks of age; they may be renovated and used in ways that are at variance with their original social or political purpose; additions may be made to them. Photography has the capacity to capture these aspects and stretch time. A key property of photography therefore, is its ambiguous relationship to time. This article seeks to explore photographic representations of architecture in relation to Johannesburg's built environment from its colonial past to it post apartheid present.
Keywords: photography, architecture, Johannesburg

Die Stadtlandschaft von Johannesburg wurde ursprünglich geformt durch die Goldberkwerksindustrie, dessen Einfluß langfristig in die architektonishen Symbolic geschrieben ist. Dies wurde jedoch gemischt und verdeckt von den Restbeständen des Kolonialismus, der Apartheid und der Post-apartheidstadt. Obwohl Johannesburg einst bekannt war durch direktes Erfahren und Erfassen der gebauten Landschaft, ist die Stadt in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten dafuer bekannt das sie gefährlich ist. Durch diese Warnehmung sind fotographische Darstellungen, anstatt direktes Erfahren, wichtig im Verstehen dieser Stadt. Zusätzlich sind Gebäude – vorallem iconsche Gebäude – bekannt durch ihre Symbolik. In öffentlichen Bewußtsein und Imagination ist die Darstellung (‚*image*') kritisch, und dies ist das Gebiet der Fotographie. Wie wir die gebaute Landschaft verstehen hängt daher einerseits ab von der Funktion der Gebäude innerhalb der Stadt, und andereseits davon wie sie Dargestellt werden. Was uns das Foto von einem Gebäude sagt, und die Nachricht die sie kommuniziert, ist ein wichtiges Element der Fotographie. Gebäude erhalten die Zeichen der Zeit/des Alters; sie mögen rennoviert sein und zu einem Nutzen gesetzt sein der im Gegensatz zu ihrer ursprünglichen sozialen und politischen Funktion steht; sie mögen Anbauten erhalten haben. Fotographie hat das Vermögen diese Aspekte wiederzugeben, und somit die Zeit zu strecken. Eine zentrale Eigenschft der Fotographie ist daher sein zwiespältiges Verhältnis zur Zeit. Dieser Artikel erforscht die fotographischen Representationen der Architektur im Verhältniß zu der gebauten Landschaft von Johannesburg, von seiner kolonialen Vergangeheit bis zur post-aparheit Gegenwart.
Schlüsselwörter: Fotographie, Architektur, Johannesburg

Using photographs, this paper will attempt to interpret some of the meanings and histories of Johannesburg's built environment through an examination of work by Leon Levson, David Goldblatt, and Guy Tillim[1]. Iconic buildings and iconic images form the basis for my selection of images. Levson, and Goldblatt have focussed on some of Johannesburg's earliest iconic buildings that represent the corporate power and financial might of the mining industry. Their work forms an important historical record of the period leading up to apartheid, and of high apartheid. In contrast, Tillim focuses on Johannesburg's flatlands, presenting a poignant portrayal of the way that the built environment has altered since 1994, reflecting social and political transitions of post-apartheid Johannesburg.

Origins of architectural photography

The history of architectural photography offers examples of modes of architectural representation; its trends and approaches form some of the ways in which the buildings are understood and critiqued. Architectural photography is a distinct genre, whose main aim is to make a building

comprehensible to someone who has not had the opportunity to visit it (Ursprung, 2005: 66). Photographers portray the materials, siting, and facades of buildings in a manner that gives an impression of what it is like to stand in front of the building. Yet, one of photography's limitations is that it offers only a partial view. Hence, the scale of buildings may prevent their being presented in their entirety. What we behold as a result is fragmentary, composed and ordered by the photographer to present particular and incomplete views of a building (Ursprung: 2005: 66).

The affinity between the disciplines of architecture and photography dates back to the beginnings of photography itself. The purpose of early architectural photographs was twofold: one as documentation, the other as artistic expression for public consumption, particularly for those undertaking the *Grand Tour*, projects such as the *Mission Heliographique*, (1851) in France, and *The Society of Photographing Relics of Old London* (SPROL)(1875) being notable examples of the former[2] (see Elwall 2004 15). As images from far off places were reproduced, architects became influenced by the compendium of architectural styles to which they were exposed[3]. In addition, they realised that photographs could be used to publicise and promote their own work. In the 20th century the genre of documentary photography also exerted a significant influence on architectural photography most notably in the work of photographers such as Eugène Atget (1857-1927) Walker Evans (1903-1975) and Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004) which offered an alternative to mainstream architectural photography of the 20th century.

Eugène Atget for example, created a massive pictorial archive of Paris claiming 'to possess the whole of old Paris' in his collection (Adam 2001: 185), and is regarded as one of the most important photographers in the history of the medium (Adam 2001: 25). His experiential images of architecture offered unconventional treatments of architectural photography, and his divergent stylistic approach formed the foundation of modernist photography, influencing Berenice Abbott and Walker Evans in the United States. Although he used the equipment of an architectural photographer—large format camera, and wide angle lenses—his bold handling of light and shadow, and his idiosyncratic choice of viewpoints, set him apart from conventional architectural photographers (Elwall 2002: 91). Likewise, the photographs of Walker Evans, composed in a seemingly simple and direct manner, with a clarity and understanding for historical context, formed an important influence in the field of architectural photography in the United States from the 1930s. For example, *Architectural Review* of 1939 included a review of his seminal publication *American Photographs,* in which nine of his photographs were reproduced (West 1939: 218-220).

Architectural photographers of the twentieth century were confronted by two opposing demands: one of producing images that their patrons required, the other of developing a personal and unique form of expression. Thus, sometimes uneven, competing approaches to the portrayal of built forms emerged. These conflicting styles form the basis for the genre's stylistic shifts and development throughout the 20th century, and, more importantly, as Elwall (2004: 92) points out, it was precisely this tension that lay at the heart of the genre's creativity.

During the 19th century buildings were frequently presented in one singular image, principally because the cost and effort required to produce each picture was considerable. By the 1890s the halftone printing process was introduced; image and text could be combined in printed form for the first time on the same page, affording innovative approaches to magazine layout. A classic example is *Architectural Review* of this period. This, together with reduced costs of reproduction afforded the opportunity for a wider range of visual images to be presented, which heralded the age of commercial photography.

In the early 20th century, the tensions between a fastidious and painstaking approach to recording architecture, and the more impressionistic style of photography adopted by Pictorialist photographers emerged. A major proponent of the Pictorialist style was Alfred Stieglitz, (1864-1946) whose *Flat Iron building* (1903) exemplifies the genre (Elwall 2004: 92). His concern with light and mood in the service of poetic statement sets his work apart from the crisp and neutral exemplars of architectural photography of the time.

Figure 1
Alfred Stieglitz, *The Flat-Iron,* New York
1903.

In reaction to the painterly Pictorialist mode, German photographers began to develop a dispassionate, crisp and clear style of photography, allied to modernist architecture's insistence on truth to materials, and on abstract compositions. Termed, *New Objectivity*, this style of photography concentrated on surfaces and formal elements, dislocated from their context. A parallel strand, called the New Photography emerged in the work of Moholy Nagy and Rodchenko that marked a shift in the practice of architectural photography. Rejecting traditional perspectival views, and the articulation of volume and mass that had preoccupied photographers since the 19th century, they expressed their vision with radical worms eye views, montages and alternatives to the static architectural views that had characterised the previous decades (Elwall 2004: 121).

The climax of modern architecture and modern photography however, was expressed in the work of Dell and Wainwright, whom Elwall notes, 'exploited to the full the components of the New Photography; including tipped views with strong diagonals; bold cast shadows; oblique angled shots and the cinematic walkthrough'(2004: 123). Their work had a visual power

that set it apart from mainstream architectural photographs. However, by the end of the 1930s criticisms again began to emerge of the breach between built form and image: architectural photography was yet again criticised as static pattern making aimed only at 'selling architecture to the public', rather than conveying any real sense of the architecture. Two distinct threads of photographic presentation are evident in *Architectural Review* of this period that point to an expanded field of expression: one of glossy portrayals of the latest achievements of architectural Modernism, the other of low key images both by photographers such as Walker Evans[4], and by amateurs comprised of the magazine's editorial staff and journalistic contributors (Elwall 2004: 128).

Technical advances in photography

By the 1970s technological advances facilitated by the development of small light weight cameras enabled the production of images at variance with the static straight style that had prevailed for so long, although slower more cumbersome medium and large format cameras continued to be used. This technological advancement brought about shifts in the perception of what constitutes architectural photography. The roots of this movement were diverse and included Walker Evans mentioned earlier, and Cartier Bresson, who was known more as a photojournalist than an architectural photographer. 'With smaller format cameras and faster films', Elwall maintains, 'the movement's adherents sought to show buildings in context and in use by people performing real tasks, as opposed to simply placed to indicate scale'. (2004: 162).

Figure 2
Walker Evans,
Licence photo studio 1936
"Walker Evans: License Photo Studio, New York (1972.742.17)", in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History,* New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/evan/ho_1972.742.17. htm (October 2006, July 2009).

Figure 3
Walker Evans,
Street Scene, Vicksburg, Mississippi
"Walker Evans: [Street Scene, Vicksburg, Mississippi] (1999.237.1)", in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History.*
New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/evan/ho_
1999.237.1.htm (October 2008, July 2009).

A photojournalistic approach, in which built form appears secondary, formed the basis of a critical period of architectural photography in the 1970s when *Architectural Review* launched its "Manplan' series.[5] (Elwall 2004: 163). In this series commissioned photojournalists such as Tim Street-Porter, Patrick Ward and Tony Ray Jones, employed a social documentary style of photography which exposed harsh testimony of a social reality architects were unwilling to acknowledge. The studied and timeless style of presenting buildings in a pristine state began to give way to the casual passing moment that was emerging in the humanistic style of 'street photographers' such as Henri Cartier Bresson.

Despite technical advancements during the 20th century, an adherence to some traditional methods prevailed. Up until the 1980s most architectural photographers preferred to portray the built environment in black and white rather than colour, even though multi-layered films had been developed by Kodak and Agfa in the 1930s (Koetzle 2004: 34). It was felt that black and white matched the pared down aesthetic of modernist architecture itself. It conveyed the essence of artistic expression seen in the work of Walker Evans whose images of the effects of the depression in the United States became synonymous with the genre of documentary photography. Black and white therefore became branded as authentic, while colour was eschewed because it was regarded as superficial, and also since it had strong associations with amateur photography. The absence of people in architectural photography was likewise an aesthetic retained for decades, even when faster films made it possible to capture movement without blurred figures.

South African architectural photography

South African architectural photography has two founts, powerfully influenced over the decades by transatlantic models: documentary and street photography. Johannesburg's built forms present evidence of its multiple temporalities. Its transition from a colonial and apartheid

city to a post-apartheid African metropolis is evident in the ways it has been and is presently inhabited. As early as 1903, the imprint of New York and Chicago's high-rise architecture was registered on the highveld (Chipkin 1993: 44), and by the 1930s it boasted elegant examples of art deco, reflecting high-density fashionable living. A decade later, during the post war boom, Johannesburg's built environment was considered an 'outstanding contribution not only to South African architecture, but also to the international scene' (Beavon 2004: 155).

Golblatt and Levson identify and depict two of Johannesburg's most important structures, built by the mining houses of Rand Mines and Anglo American that figure as landmarks within the city. Their modernity and 'investment in prestige' is evident in their presence, position and edifices. Photographs of these buildings, by David Goldblatt (1930-) Leon Levson (1887-1973) represent two eras of the city's beginnings: the turn of the century and the 1940s respectively. These photographs embody the aspirations and circumstances of their time, but point also to ways in which these buildings, as images, have come to connote the mining industry. Comparing these photographs thus provides illuminating perspectives on the early life of the financial district of the city, and gives fresh insights into the work of Goldblatt and Levson.

David Goldblatt's Corner House

Corner House, erected in 1903 and designed for the Central Mining-Rand Mines group by William Leck and Frank Emley, stands as a monument to Johannesburg's beginnings. At the time of its completion it was the tallest and largest commercial building in South Africa and hence, the first to be called a 'skyscraper' (Chipkin 1993: 43). Comprised of a steel frame designed on the 'American principle' it was three storeys higher than the company's London head office.

Its fittings included a store room on every floor, designed to hold bullion bars, a separate water tank and power generating equipment that maintained its independence from outside electrical supplies, and the instalment of its 5 lifts particularly, which came to symbolize its modernity. The building heralded a new era for the city. As Cartwright (1965: 202-3) notes, 'Ekstein's magnificent new building—and its five lifts—meant that the old mining camp had gone. Johannesburg was on its way to becoming the biggest mining city in the world'.

David Goldblatt's photograph of the western façade of Corner House, entitled 'Head quarters of a mining corporation', 1965 is an imposing manifestation of financial power, but the overriding image is of a beam of light at its centre, which evokes the expression of a mine shaft. Here the architectural design and the function of the building reinforce its meaning. It creates an impression of being underground —metaphorically embodying the sources of wealth of pioneers such as Ekstein, Beit and Wernher, the original proprietors of the building.

Photographs do not show a before or after, rather they depict a particular moment selected and extracted from the continuum of time. The scene and its contents offer the spectator a way into the picture, for analysis and interpretation. But, in this picture the historical moment when the photograph was taken is ambiguous, since Goldblatt's cropping of the building, extracts it from its context in the city. The complete dearth of cars, and the virtual absence of pedestrians give the spectator no hint of the period. Yet, despite its starkness, Goldblatt's framing of this particular view alludes in a terse and enigmatic way to two periods; one, the city's past, its mining town beginnings and the period of the building's erection when the mining industry dominated, and fuelled the expansion of the Reef, an era which in some respects only finally began to decline in the 1960s; two, to the city in 1965, when the photograph was taken, in the midst of the period of high apartheid when the government's prime pre-occupation was

to confine, even reverse industrialisation on the Reef. In this way, the image stretches time, embracing and spanning two significant moments in the city's history. In retrospect, it heralds the county's growing isolation from the rest of the world, reinforced by the tight framing and absence of context. Metaphorically, this image may also be read as the loneliness of the underground miner, looking up towards the earth's crust, cut off from the outside world.

Figure 4
David Goldblatt, *Head quarters of a Mining Corporation*, 1965
(reproduced with the kind permission of David Goldblatt).

The grid layout that characterises Johannesburg served as an organising template almost from the very moment that gold was discovered. Orientated on an east-west and north-south axis, this layout served a twofold purpose: it enabled the land to be easily surveyed and administered, and the scale of each city block, 50x100 Cape feet, afforded the economic benefit of generating many corner sites(Van der Waal 1987: 7).

The building was named after the proprietor Herman Ekstein, founder member of the Johannesburg community, whose name translates literally as 'cornerstone'. It was first referred to as Ekstein's building, and later, 'Corner House', a name that persists to this day. Goldblatt's selection of this building, and of this particular façade shows how it connotes the city of Johannesburg: rising out of the gold bearing reef it proclaimed a new urban form for the city.[6]

A unique characteristic of photography is to suspend, frame and halt action, and also purposefully to select certain scenes in preference to others. Framing may be likened to seeing. As Bunschoten (2001: 159) states, '[t]o see something is to exclude most other things. To frame is to focus on a particular thing, to articulate a singular condition'. Here the position of the camera relative to the building is worthy of note: taken from above ground level, the point of view minimises distortions of perspective, and coheres with the conventions of architectural drawing, most notably that of an elevation. However, Johannesburg's city blocks are small and its streets narrow: to create this view was extremely difficult to achieve photographically since it required access to the building across the street, a wide angle lens and a camera with a rising front, to minimise perspectival distortions. A more characteristic view of this façade is from an oblique and acute angle. In consequence, Goldblatt demonstrates his mindfulness in selecting and framing a particular view, and above all, of the meanings the image may offer to the spectator. As Lionel Abrahams (2006: 7-10) argues, 'photography is at least as much a matter of creating images as of simply recording them'.

Its façade presents a condensed image of mining, yet the building is not an icon of Johannesburg, indeed, it is not even very well known. Moreover, the name does not appear on the building itself. In comparison to iconic buildings in New York it does not seem to possess the visibility of the Empire State, for example, or Flat Iron, rather, it symbolizes a precise moment in the city's beginnings. Why it never achieved iconic status may be attributable to a number of factors: Johannesburg's wayward population, since the first decade of its existence, Clive Chipkin explains, 'was seemingly indifferent to everything except the pursuit of money' (1993: 9). 'The city's fabric', Mbembe and Nuttall observe, 'has been described as a structure in need of radical transformation and only rarely as an expression of an aesthetic vision' (2004: 353). In addition, they state, the city 'is either denigrated as being a set of ugly urban agglomerations, a crime city, or a security–obsessed dystopia, or it is elevated as a place of rapacious survival, "making do", and chance encounters' (2004: 367). Latterly, one may argue that it is not an icon in Johannesburg today because the city centre is divorced from Sandton, where capital locates itself. Yet, the photograph, more than anything else, still reminds us of how iconic it is.

Leon Levson's 44 Main Street

Leon Levson (1887-1973) was South Africa's first documentary photographer of note. On the one hand he was a renowned portrait photographer, depicting Johannesburg's elite. More importantly he was concerned with the changing social conditions of his time, documenting the origins of the migrant labour system and the growing urbanisation that was occurring in South Africa during the 1940s and 1950s.

While much social documentary photography[7] has focussed on the apartheid era, for example *Drum,* and the Afrapix collective that exposed the injustices of the period from the 1960s-1990s, scant attention has been paid to the period leading up to Apartheid. Levson's

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images of the city of Johannesburg are especially important in that he focuses on the moment when floods of people began to come to the city, and on its growing image of modernity.

The 1940s were an uncertain period in South Africa. As Saul Dubow (2005: 2) observes, '[m]ore than anything it was the war that shook up established certainties and lent the 1940s its remarkable sense of fluidity and flux…[t]he conjunction of war overseas and political turmoil at home proved a powerful stimulus to new thought'. After the war, when petrol rationing ceased, Levson and his wife travelled South Africa by motorcar, documenting the transitions that they saw around them in the country.

Figure 5
Leon Levson, *44 Main Street, Johannesburg,*
**1940s (courtesy Mayibuye Centre, UWC).**

Levson's photograph of 44 Main Street, the headquarters of the mining concern *Anglo American*, was taken in the 1940s. Erected in 1937-9, and designed by the London firm of architects, Burnet, Tait & Lorne, this particular framing, taken at street level, attempts to foreground the spatial organisation and structure in relation to its neighbouring buildings. The position of the camera at ground level is especially important since he presents the building as it would be experienced by passers by. No special access determines his viewpoint, rather Levson's photographic style is as a street photographer—taken on and in and from the street—in the style of Cartier Bresson. This portrayal of Anglo's headquarters is distinctive. Eschewing detail, his image matches the restrained monumentality and refined understatement that characterise the structure. Most notably, Levson's photograph represents power in the service of civic responsibility: open spaces around the building permit it to be viewed from a distance. Occupying an entire city block, a pedestrian walkway has now replaced the original street, (Main Street) that widens in a semi-circle where a series of steps rise towards the four-storey volume entrance. Planted gardens along this passageway now extend from West to Mclaren Streets offering a sanctuary in the city that is rare. Most commercial buildings in Johannesburg are built hard up against the street creating seamless facades of windy corridors and narrow pavements. 44 Main's five storeys is at variance with the high rise skyscraper style that was fast becoming the trend in Johannesburg.

Both Levson and Goldblatt's respective photographs of mining corporations reveal spaces of power, but each is responsive to the particular properties of the built form itself, and its expression of a particular set of values. Levson's image, in contrast to Goldblatt's, is taken at ground level, emphasising the generosity of 'public space' around the structure, that sets it

apart, and thereby heightens its seclusion from its context. Alternatively Goldblatt frames the façade of Corner House so as to deliberately extract it from its context within the city.

Architectural journals

The portrayal of this building at the time of its completion in contemporary architectural journals provides an alternative lens for examining Levson's image of it. Photographs by Alan Yates in the *South African Architectural Record* of 1940, reflect the typical layout of the journal—one image reserved for each page, accompanied by a short caption. The lack of people, trees, foliage and cars indicates the building's recent completion and the genre's preference for depicting buildings in a pristine state[8]. But it is the absence of 'the street' in these pictures that emphasises the architectural content above all else. Levson's picture of the building, in comparison seems more humanistic and personal a portrayal of it.
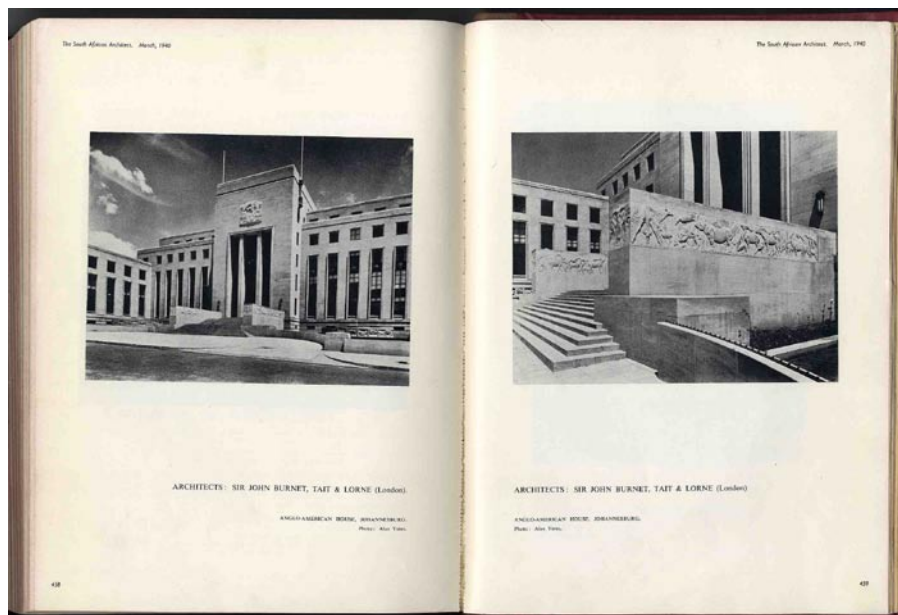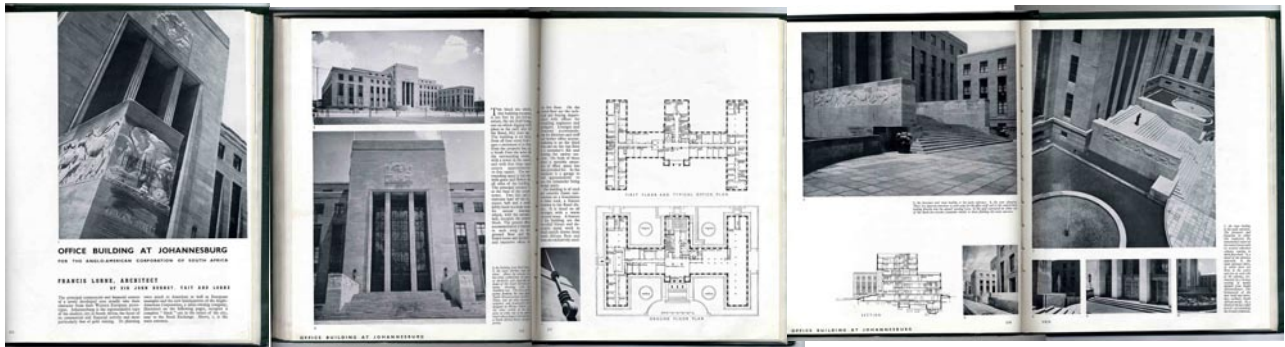

Figure 6
Alan Yates Anglo-American Corporation,
South African Architectural Record, **March 1940.**

Since British architects were employed to design this building, the *Architectural Review* of May 1940 also showcased it. Here 23 dramatic photographs, representing exteriors, interiors, plans and sections, reveal a much livelier layout and imaginative style of photographic presentation[9].

Both journals show the building divorced from its context: the street, pedestrians, cars and neighbouring buildings are not permitted to intrude upon the image. Only in the final picture, a hint of a mine dump is deliberately included, as the caption indicates, to inform us that these particular dumps were owned by the proprietors of the building (Lorne 1940: 182).

In relation to the photographs of Levson and Goldblatt, a distinct difference in approach and in the style of photography is apparent. Levson and Goldblatt convey more about Johannesburg, and the socio political context in which these buildings are placed. They go beyond mere reportage, attempting to convey critical observations about the time and place in which they work: their images are enduring above all for the ways in which they manage to shape our understanding of the city. Goldblatt's picture is an apartheid picture, although it was built much earlier; Levson's picture is pre-apartheid, where things were more open-ended. Both

photographers engage in different moments and different aspects of street photography, and perhaps it takes post apartheid to put all this into perspective.

Figure 7
Office Building at Johannesburg,
Architectural Review **May 1940.**

Street photography

In contrast to Goldblatt's image of Corner House, taken in 1965, *Braiding hair on Bree Street, Johannesburg. 7 September 2002,* represents a visual manifestation of the transition that the city has undergone. Where the city was previously deserted, now Goldblatt shows intense activity. Reflecting on the changes in the city he notes (2005:98),

> There have been many changes in South Africa since the demise of apartheid. Here are some that I have begun to look at: From 1964 until about 1986 regulations prohibiting trading by black people in white areas were rigidly enforced. Black hawkers and tradesmen were hardly to be seen on the streets of Johannesburg or other South African cities. But then, as sanctions began to bite and the government found it more and more difficult to maintain its elaborate structures of control, small traders began to filter back into the streets. Hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps millions, from all over Africa, poured into our cities, particularly Johannesburg. Few had high skills or capital. Very many became hawkers. And with the coming of the cell phone a man with a paintbrush or a trowel could advertise his skills and phone number on pavements and be in business. Whereas, black people previously needed a 'pass' to be on the streets of the city, and were subject to arrest in its absence, they now possess the streets. Perhaps for the first time, Johannesburg is truly an African city.

Figure 8
David Goldblatt,
braiding hair on Bree Street, Johannesburg, 2002
(reproduced with the kind permission of David Goldblatt).

Where the earlier image points to the activity of mining, visually evoking a reaching down into the earth's crust to mirror the built environment's physical form, the later image offers an alternative to this view. Densities of the city have shifted from a vertical dimension to the horizontal, suggestive of a 'thickening' of the city, reminiscent of its physical expansion. In the far distance Astor Mansions, built in response to New York's Crysler Building, is packed against the compendium of styles that influenced the city from its beginnings.

The buildings form a backdrop to the picture that portray its former life and evolution, and here set the stage for the current incarnation, with the greatest action and enterprise focussed at street level. A hairdresser refashions the image of an individual—metaphorically evoking the broader makeover the city itself has undergone. In the many portrait photographs exhibited in the picture, Goldblatt draws attention to the act of photography as a process of remaking an image,(of the city) in much the same way that the barbershop may restyle the image of an individual—a theme that originates in Walker Evans's *American Photographs*[10]. Chinese and English signage, popular international labels, and the diversity of architectural styles connote the cosmopolitan nature of the city: a magnet for the style conscious. Moreover, it signals the beginnings of the world phenomenon of globalisation. Notably, within the very particular conditions of the photographic process of isolating a particular moment in time for the spectators' contemplation, Goldblatt identifies universal themes that embrace the city's ongoing process of urbanisation.

In Johannesburg people are on the move, literally, economically and socially. A characteristic feature of the city is of streams of strangers who endlessly arrive from elsewhere: Goldblatt's image shows how the influx of people continues to be visibly writ upon it. In contrast to the period of Apartheid that sought to keep racial groups separate, and African people penned to rural areas, this image is a celebration of all that the previous regime sought to suppress.

Goldblatt's technical handling of images is important to the function of looking at these pictures. The large scale of his photographs[11] and technique of printing gives the spectator a very tangible sense of being immersed in the space of the street. Using a view camera Goldblatt (2005: 105) explains, enabled him to produce this effect, as he states, 'our impression is that everything is 'sharp' from objects near us to the distant horizon'. The depth of field and overall sharpness is close to the way one sees, and of visual perception. One's eye can wander over the surface of the picture; linger on one part or another, in order to take in the haptic (and optic) quality of the street. But his dispassionate style and (seemingly) straight forward depiction of scenes relates to his earlier style of black and white photography. The effect of these images is very close to the way in which one experiences these spaces. An absence of long lenses, and of atmospheric and dramatic lighting, coheres with his modus operandi in the days preceding apartheid. In contrast to the Corner House picture, the position of the camera is now at ground level, emphatically denoting his involvement within the scene in order to create the image, a position which reinforces the actors' possession and occupation of the ground plane, and contrasts with their exclusion from the city in the preceding period. His use of colour here is significant since his work preceding 1994 was exclusively black and white. While colour photography evolved along with digital photography in the late 20th century, particularly in the field of architectural photography, Goldblatt's use of colour latterly, in his personal work is especially significant, as he remarks,

> 'In the late '90s I began to use a new generation of colour negative emulsions that had considerable latitude and a very even-handed palette. When I felt the sweet breath of the end of apartheid and the wish to become somewhat more expansive in my photography, it was natural to put the two together: the new colour emulsions and photographic printing through digital technology on non-plastic papers that I like'.(2005: 95).

It seems apposite here to consider Levson's photograph of a street photographer in Johannesburg, circa 1930 since, like Goldblatt's image, the architecture creates a stage for the action; but here a shaft of light creates dramatic effect, suggestive of a theatrical production. In both photographers work, it is the people and their presence against this backdrop that they highlight. Separated by 70 years, Goldblatt's concerns mirror Levson's, although Goldblatt appears more mindful of the

architectural backdrop to convey histories of architectural heritage, both photographers select and frame scenes purposefully to convey an artistic statement. What the comparison points to moreover, is the extent to which apartheid, in all senses, was an interlude. Levson photographing before, Goldblatt, (in this image) after.

Figure 9
Leon Levson, Street Photographer, Johannesburg, c1930
(collection: Bensusan Museum of Photography).

Contesting the legacy of colonialism and apartheid

In contrast to the preceding photographs Guy Tillim's work offers an alternative to the images of power that Levson and Goldblatt present. Tillim's work is borne out of South African struggle photography of the 1980s, when he worked as a photojournalist during that period. His publication, *Jo'burg,* (2005) was produced in response to the changing fortunes of Johannesburg's inner city. Struck by the city's poorer citizen's court battles to remain in the city, Tillim presents a poignant document and perceptive appraisal of the South African city after apartheid.
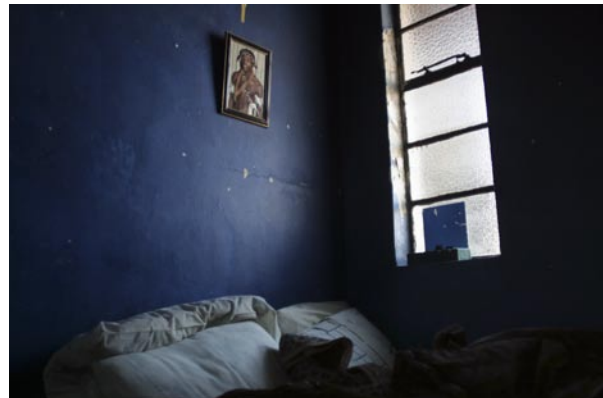

Figure 10
Guy Tillim,
Tayob Towers, Pritchard Street. 2004.
(reproduced with the kind permission of Guy Tillim).

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Where Goldblatt and Levson focused on the spaces of authority in the city, owned by the wealthiest and arguably the most powerful organisations within the city, Tillim focuses primarily on the hyper dense suburb of Hillbrow—Johannesburg's flatland. Concentrating on residential buildings within the metropolis, Tillim depicts the exacting conditions to which these buildings and their inhabitants are subject. These buildings, it must be noted, were originally designed and built for occupation by Johannesburg's immigrants, many of whom held ties to Europe. Today, immigrants from other parts of Africa, and black South Africans, for whom the city was not previously 'home', occupy them. Designed in the colonial period, to appeal to a particular kind of consumer, detailed and fashioned according to the tastes and styles of 1930s 40s and 50s European and American architectural trends, they are now occupied by a clientele for whom that style in no way evokes a 'home' from which they have come (Ashcroft 2002:182-205). As Pevsner forecast, in 1953, 'when the sites had been built upon most flats would be gloomy, rents would drop to compensate for a fall in demand, and the class occupying the flats would change dramatically' (Beavon 2004:155). In part, the buildings and the ways in which they have come to be occupied are portrayed as a contestation of the colonial and apartheid periods. They are inhabited and decorated in ways, at variance with the styles and tastes of middle class Europe, as Tillim's photographs testify. Moreover, it is the very nature of use, and the *changing* uses of buildings that contribute to the shifting democratic history of the city.

Figure 11
Guy Tillim, Jeanwell House, Nugget St.
(reproduced with the kind permission of Guy Tillim).

Figure 12
Guy Tillim, Export House, Bree Street. 2004
(reproduced with the kind permission of Guy Tillim).

Façades of buildings, for example, are lit structured and composed to allow for a slow contemplative examination primarily of the hyper dense suburb of Hillbrow. Faded colours on the facades are a consequence of Johannesburg's harsh light, but they also connote the passing of time, the city's past, referring to the trends of its art deco history and colonial times. Textures such as rusted tin and peeling paint, worn balustrades, broken windows, cracked window sills and chipped plaster, make manifest the extent of wear and tear that the increase in population the metropolis has witnessed since 1994. Where Goldblatt focuses on the movement of people through the city, Tillim depicts the effect of this flood, and its visual impact on the built environment. Stylistically, Tillim's images are unlike those of Goldblatt and Levson, nor the pristine exemplars of the architectural journals. Rather, his images are interconnected montages that denote the layers of the city, and the diurnal cycles of day and night. The effect of this montage is filmic, operating at different paces: some show a slow measured approach while others parallel the haste of late 20th century life in Johannesburg, offering the spectator fragments and glimpses of the metropolis. He poignantly shows interiors that symbolize highly individual lives. Here, Tillim's empathy for his subjects becomes apparent: he shows us private spaces that neither subjugate nor violate the owners, nor does the work sentimentalise their

plight. As retired journalist, Doc Bikitsha once observed, 'It is not the buildings that make the city, but the people in those buildings'(2006: 13).

In *Tayob Towers, Prichard St.*, for example, tight cropping offers a parallel for congested living. Rusty tin and under-felt reflexively point to the upheaval of evictions that characterise the fate of tenants' precarious occupation. Alternatively, *San Jose*, is shown from close proximity, looking up at the building, which recedes perspectively into the sky. In this picture the mode of presenting the building is at variance with the conventions of 'architectural photography' where facades are presented parallel to the picture plane. Rather Tillim subverts this mode, using an acute angle of view that causes the building to loom up above the spectator; patched windows and the charred section of the façade reveal episodes of its recent past. Tillim's mode of photography is to maximise the effect of density and scale as they are experienced in the inner city, and in so doing he eschews conventional modes of architectural photography. As a project the images tell a bleak story—one of dispossession, of cycles of eviction and homelessness: of the uncertainty of individual lives and their lack of viable alternatives.

Figure 14
Guy Tillim, San Jose, 2002
(reproduced with the kind permission of Guy Tillim).

Conclusion

In these photographers images histories and periods of the city's past are preserved and presented for our contemplation. They depict the transitions that it has undergone, but also offer critical insights of the effect of those periods on individual lives. Levson portrays the beginnings of rapid urbanisation in the city. An overriding feature of images of the apartheid period was how unpopulated it was—particularly stark in archival images of the period—and contrasts overtly with the intense activity that we presently witness. Moreover, Goldblatt and Tillim's photographs communicate an experiential dimension of the city. This sets their work apart from erstwhile architectural photography of the twentieth century. Their technical expertise forms the basis for challenging the viewer intellectually to see beyond the surface, engendering a deeper understanding of the city—of the ways it is occupied and of the challenges it presents to city planners, and those who live there. What they observe and present for our contemplation

becomes, ultimately what we begin to notice, thereby shaping our understandings of it; offering alternatives to the ways in which we might see it in the future. Tillim's work in particular may be seen to go against many of the conventions of architectural photography of the past—the use of extreme angles, the depiction of damaged structures together with the people who live there. His is a personal and humanistic portrayal of its evolution. His images are a far cry from the pristine exemplars found in architectural journals, yet they tell us much about the structures and the people who inhabit them.

Notes

1. Although these photographers may not be regarded as architectural photographers in a narrow sense, they are selected here because their work has dealt with the photography of architecture in considerable depth.

2. The *Mission Heliographique* was established by the *Commission des Monuments Historiques* in 1851 to compile an inventory of France's historical architectural monuments. In the case of the SPROL documentary images were used as an aid to restoration.

3. For example, Antoni Gaudi's fascination with the heliotype reproductions acquired by the Escuela de Arquitectura de Barcelona of Spanish, Indian, Egyptian and Palestinian architecture became important influences in his work.

4. What sets Evans apart from mainstream architectural photography is his interest in historical architectural structures and forms that did not easily fit the contemporary modernist architectural production selected by photographers such as Dell and Wainright.

5. Published in eight issues between 1969 and 1970 the series sought to expose the dystopia which professional architectural photographers had avoided since their mandate was to *promote* architectural design rather than expose its flaws.

6. Comparisons between early photography of NY proved fruitful and questions posed by Alan Tractenberg with regard to the work of Stieglitz and Hine formed much of the basis for this analysis see Alan Tractenberg, *Reading American Photographs,* Hill and Wang, 1989: 209-230.

7. A genre of photography that began with the work of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine in the US during the 1880s-90s and grew to include the Farm Security Administration (FSA) file created during the depression of the 1930s and early 1940s. Their images were intended both to effect social reform and to move the spectator. FSA images were available free to any publication that wished to use them, and appeared in the magazines *Fortune, Look, Time, Life* and exhibitions and books.

8. Due to competition between journals each sought to be the first to cover new buildings, and immaculate images of them, frequently taken the moment they were completed, and before they were occupied, was preferred by many architectural journals at that time. See Elwall, p.126.

9. Despite the precedence given to the photographs in the layout the photographer, is however, not acknowledged.

10. See Featherstone, D. (ed) (1984), *Observations, Essays on Documentary Photography,* California: The friends of Photography for a deep analysis of this theme.

11. Printed for exhibition purposes Goldblatt's images measure more than 1metre across.

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