

They shut the road through the woods
Seventy years ago.
Weather and rain have undone it again,
And now you would never know
There was once a road through the woods
Before they planted the trees.
It is underneath the coppice and heath
And the thin anemones.
Only the keeper sees
That, where the ring-dove broods,
And the badgers roll at ease,
There was once a road through the woods.
Yet, if you enter the woods
Of a summer evening late,
When the night-air cools on the trout-ringed pools
Where the otter whistles his mate,
(They fear not men in the woods,
Because they see so few.)
You will hear the beat of a horse's feet,
And the swish of a skirt in the dew,
Steadily cantering through
The misty solitudes,
As though they perfectly knew
The old lost road through the woods ...
But there is no road through the woods.
- Rudyard Kipling



Figure 91: *The forgotten forest* (Author 2015).

Chapter 5

The Politics of Nature: Site Studies

‘Authority’, from the Latin *auctoritas*, from *auctor* meaning author, means ‘the right to command’ or ‘the power to impose obedience’. Associated with a hierarchy, in politics authority can be arbitrary, autocratic, despotic, oppressive, totalitarian or tyrannical. It is closely linked to hegemony, which means to have a controlling authority over somebody. As an adjective, it is to have prestige, influence, reputation or to be esteemed (Le Petit Robert 1977).

Stories from the hills
Grand Narratives

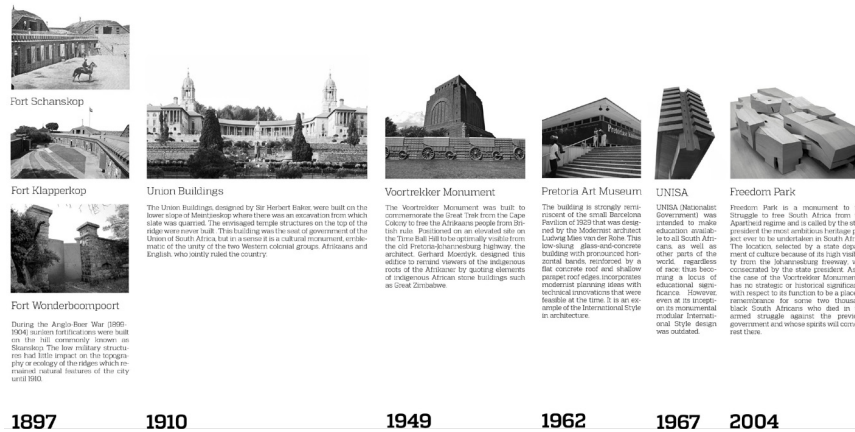


Figure 92: *Stories from the hills* (Author 2015).

The Union Buildings stand proudly atop Meintjieskop Hill. Since their construction in 1913, they have housed very different governments and yet have ‘weathered’ these transitions well. The gardens, which terrace down towards Sunnyside, provide some of the best-used public space in the city; the recent addition of Nelson Mandela’s statue draws visitors throughout the day. The symbolism and meaning of the Buildings, and their gardens, have transformed over time, their relevance today is not due to a ‘rewriting’, ‘rewiring’ or ‘recoding’ of their fabric but rather their value is implicit in the layering of the histories. There are few public platforms within Pretoria and it is fitting that the seat of Government should also provide a space of event, which reminds that power arises from below. The history of the building’s changing occupation is a testament to the instability of power, any form may represent any hegemony, inhabitation and use make the monument.

Pretoria as a city is a basin, framed and contained within a series of surrounding mountains and hills. On these ridges, objects signifying power mark the landscape and in some cases focus their watchful eyes on the proletariat below. In this relationship, three methods of proclaiming power are unveiled: the series of forts, embedded in the hills, speak of watchfulness and defence (the panopticon), Unisa speaks of the power of education (with some exclusivity), Freedom Park, the Union Buildings and the Voortrekker Monument are all clearly visible from across the city and more than acting merely as landmarks they are descriptive of the domination of the ruling classes and their removal from the life of the everyday. In the same vein, those ridges unmarked by monuments pay homage to infrastructural prowess with their communication and signal towers as well as the water towers. Underlying this glorification of infrastructure lies a threat, if the power relations topple, the city will cease to function. This is reminiscent of the grand aqueducts of Ancient Rome, while a powerful engineer-

ing feat in their own right, their architectural expression is one of domination and control, conquering landscape, re-channeling and containing water, striking upwards into the sky, operating between the elements of earth, air and water, and thereby acting as masks of control. The object of this exploration is not to topple existing structures but rather to forge new relationships between the power of the city and the power of the monument. The withdrawal of the ‘seat of power’ from the city, is further exaggerated by the barring of public access which occurred after 1994 during Thabo Mbeki’s term of office. The gardens at the Union Buildings present an interface between the monument and the people of Pretoria; this relationship could be enhanced through the introduction of additional programming that serves to mediate this transitional landscape.

The site, lying just to the west of the Union Building Gardens proper, is cut off and disconnected from potential connections to City and to Park. Carriage Drive, snaking its journey up the hill, provides an abrupt completion to the terraces of the formal gardens. A quiet and unobtrusive suburb to the west of the site, comprising primarily of social housing flats, has no access to this left over piece of garden which is currently fenced off. As a result, the site has poor relationships with both its primary edges and at its lowest edge, where it curves into the city’s way, inactivity on-site leaves it to serve merely as a traffic circle. The urban question which is raised from these observations is as follows: how can this piece of park better serve the urban conditions at its edges and how can possible connections to the formal gardens of the Union Buildings begin to draw activity across to activate new programmes.

The northeastern bowl on the site is part of the original botanical gardens, which is disconnected from the Vredehuis Complex by the incision into the land made by Carriage Drive. The entire western leg of the site

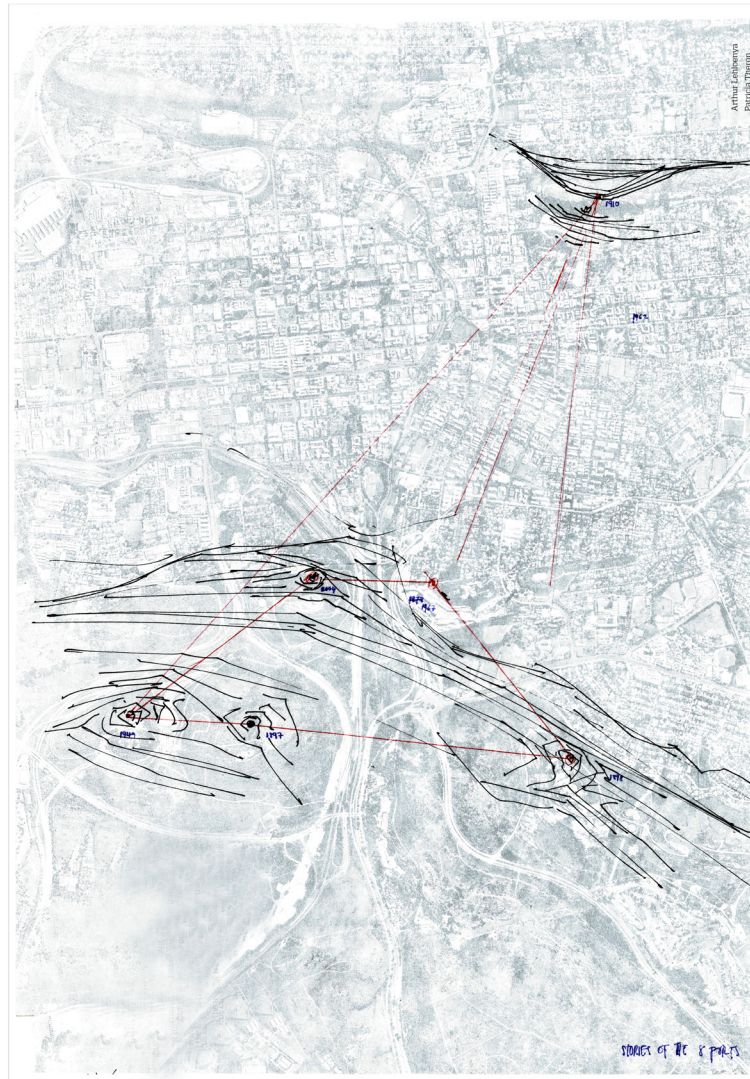
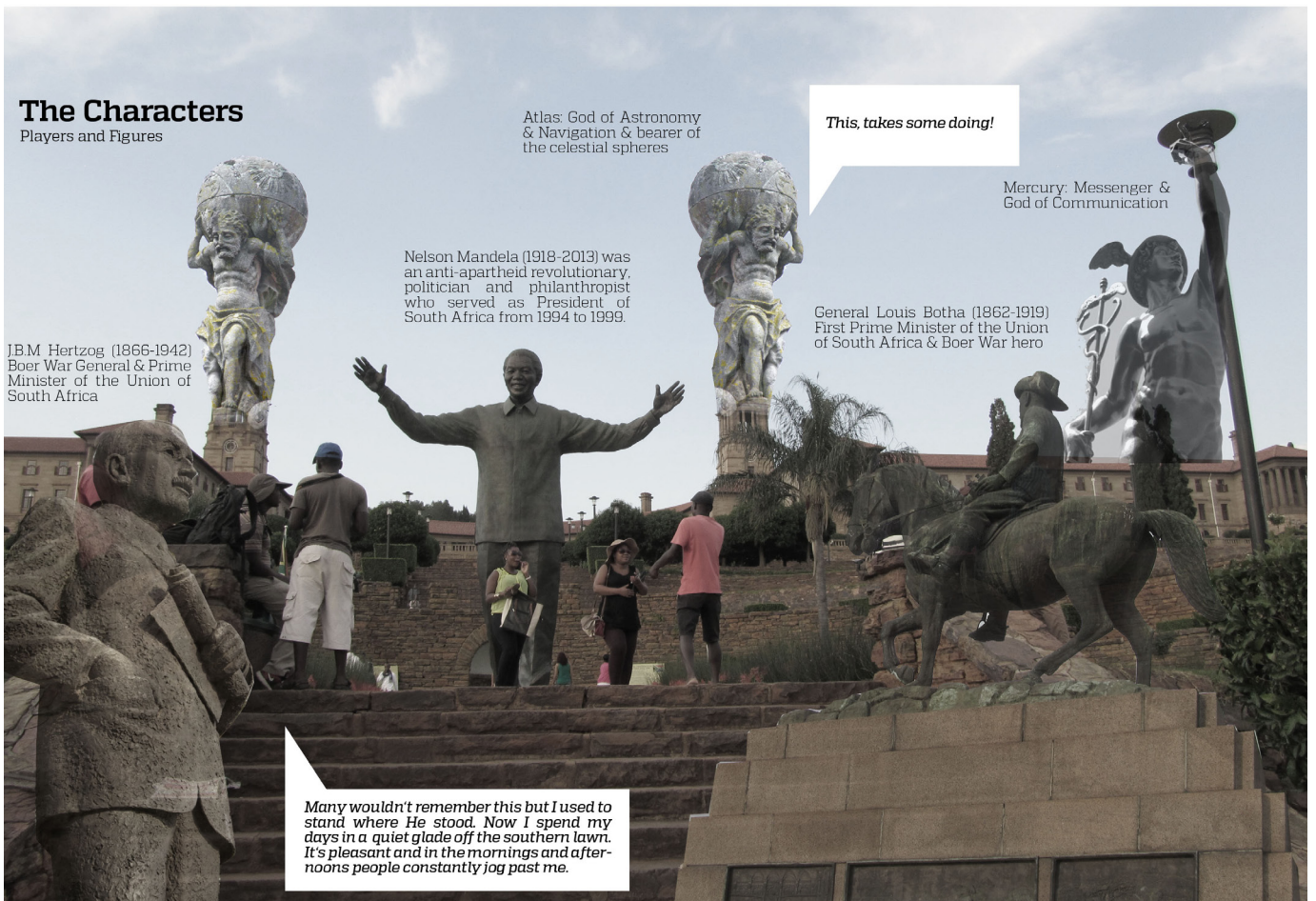


Figure 93: *Stories from the hills* (Urban Framework 2015). Figure 94: *The characters* (Author 2015).



is a pine forest. Early plans made by Herbert Baker earmarked this piece of the gardens as a position for possible development of a governmental precinct to complement the role of the Union Buildings themselves. The old tramline at one time ran through the entire length of the site, this is evidenced by a long slit-like clearing in the pine forest, providing a line of possibility for the establishment of a new presence within the existing and for the entry of light as an intrusion into the density of the trees.

History

The construction of The Union Buildings was completed in 1913, but well before this, Sir Herbert Baker envisioned a setting that would complete the buildings, complementing and forming with them a unified whole. He decided that Meintjeskop would provide a suitable site, as with a terrain that echoed those of Athene, Segesta, Acro-Corinth and Argigentum in Greece. What Sir Herbert Baker wanted, was a building of monumental dimension, which would impose upon the city of Pretoria, in much the same way as the Greek Acropolis dominates Athens. A series of terraced platforms rising above the city would confirm the building's dominance. He was much inspired by Reginald Blomfield's description of the Ancient Greek city of Pergamos, and went to Greece to visit the site. In 1909 he wrote a letter to the Public Works Department, in which he specified that he had selected Meintjeskop because would provide a suitable setting for: 'ambitious architectural projects in the future, on the koppie above' and that there would be 'ample level ground below for endless future extensions and for laying out parks and grounds' (Muller & Young 2005).

He described the Union Buildings as being: 'open to the south to the valley of Pretoria and the distant hills of the highveld'. He requested Government to purchase all the terrain adjacent to the Union Buildings Estate, to ensure that the views would remain unspoiled. He was greatly influenced by his good friend Sir Edward Lutyens, who, in 1890, introduced him to Gertrude Jeckyll, a famous garden designer. One can see the influence of her massed informal plantings within a structured layout. Herbert Baker was also influenced by William Morris. He also became a member of the Art Workers' Guild. He was also greatly influenced by the architecture of the Italian Renaissance: Villa d'Este and the Boboli Gardens (Muller & Young 2005).

Area L: Garden Services and Botanical Garden

The Garden Centre (L-1) is situated below Government Avenue, to the West of the terraced gardens. It is still used as a central depot for all garden-related activities. The Botanical Garden (L-1) is no longer used by the public as it is considered unsafe. The indigenous garden (L-2) on the opposite side of Carriage Drive has recently been fenced off, discouraging public use. Part of Area L was set aside for future use by the Agricultural Department, as all initial plans indicated. Photographs from before 1930 show that there were no buildings in this area. It probably served as a garden centre, and an informal nursery was built after 1930.

Area L became a testing ground for the Department of Agriculture, in 1913. IB Pole Evans, Chief of Botany, suggested a botanical garden on the Union Building Estate, an idea which Jan Smuts supported. On subsequent tours of Southern Africa and regions further north, a variety of plant species were collected, and planted in the botanical garden, including an indigenous garden on the west side of the Carriage Drive.

Area L-1: This area is an informal garden housing the horticulture services. It was originally a part of the gardens surrounding the national herbarium, serving both as a botanical and a trial garden. Today the garden is a forested area with deep shade and a neglected forest floor. Pathways in the southern section are neglected, although the garden is watered and lawns are maintained.

A major pedestrian pathway linking the southern part of Area L-1 which forms part of the original system that guided visitors through the beautiful botanical garden has been blocked by a security fence, isolating and marginalising this area.

Area L-2: This area of the garden has been blocked off by a fence that isolates one third of the garden off from the rest. The rock garden in the unfenced area bordering onto the roadway boasts mainly succulent species. This section has little appeal with a 'relic' of a pathway leading into the undergrowth. Part of this fenced area is semi-forested with massed plants in the Southern section bordering on area N. The area lacks character, however a new section near the road is currently being planted with a mixture of indigenous species (Muller & Young 2005).



- A Western Smuts Garden
- B Western Terrace Garden
- C North Building Garden
- D Eastern Terrace Garden
- E Northern Parking
- F Eastern Entrance
- G Meintjieskop
- H Southern Terraces
- I Southern Lawn
- J Craigelea
- K Southern Triangle
- L Garden Services & Botanical Garden
- M House Vrede & Herbarium
- N West Old Tram
- O North Edmund Street
- P Government & Edmund Streets
- Q Amphitheater and Courtyards
- R Flanagan Arboretum
- S Police Monument
- T Soutpansberg Nursery

Figure 95: Portions of the gardens (Muller & Young 2005).

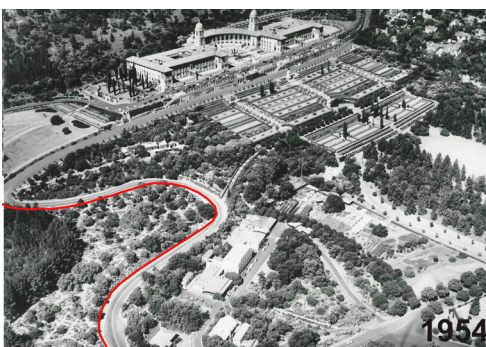
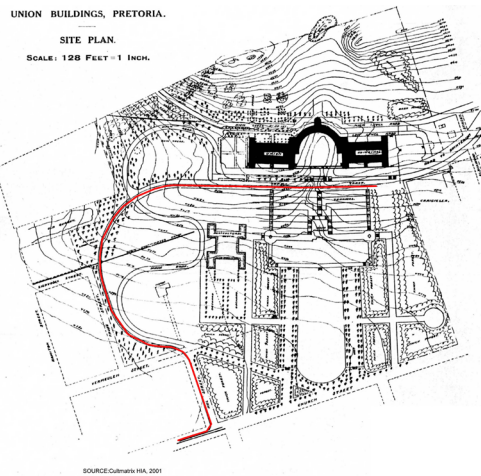


Figure 96-99: Old photos of the buildings, gardens, and the tramline (National archives).

Heritage Value

Much of the original garden has been lost, which is unfortunate as this section provides a valuable resource for botanical research, and is of major historical significance, as important historical figures contributed to its formation. This satisfies the NHRA 25 (1999) Clause 3(3) criteria due to its potential to yield information contributing to a better understanding of South Africa's natural and cultural heritage, its rare or endangered plants and its special association with the life or work of important personalities and groups in the history of South Africa.

Area L has a medium heritage value, as recent changes and plans have ignored the potential of the area which is largely neglected and seldom visited. Gardens in the Estate should be restored in accordance with the original plans, since this was an essential part of Herbert Baker's vision. Area L-1 and L-2, where there are remnants of the original botanical garden, should be redeveloped and pathways restored to allow access to the area. Rare and interesting plants should be identified with information plaques.

Areas L-1 with L-2, which were historically linked, should be restored to their original layout, providing pedestrian access through the security fencing. Prominence should again be given to the main pedestrian link between Carriage Drive and the formal terrace gardens (Muller & Young 2005).

Area N: West Old Tram

This area, where the old tram line ran, lies at the extreme Western section of the Estate. It is in a state of neglect as the new security fence has cut off public access to this area. Edmund Street connects Government and Hamilton Streets. Adjacent to Edmund Street is the beautiful Engelenburg House, residence of Dr F.V. Engelenburg, a prominent journalist and Pretoria socialite. The house is called 'Het Witte Huis', and was built in 1903. Dr Engelenburg was a collector of art, valuable furniture and other memorabilia, which he exhibited at his house. After his death, the house with its the valuable collection of artefacts, was donated to the South African Art Association (Muller & Young 2005).

In his original plans for the layout of the gardens, Herbert Baker proposed a route for a tramway in the North-

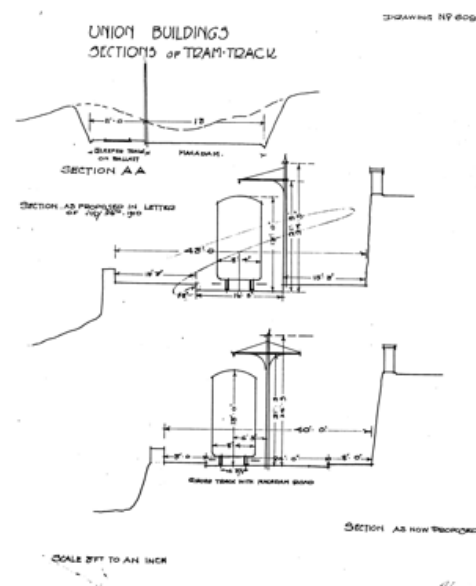


Figure 100: *The old tram system* (National archives).



Figure 101: *Neo-tribes in the suburbs* (Author 2015). Photocollage using Nick Cave's creatures.

west corner of the Estate. He disliked the idea of a curve in Carriage Drive and insisted that the road in front of the buildings be straight. He also felt that the tramline should stay outside the Estate as much as possible, entering the Estate at Hamilton Street, to avoid going past Meintjes' House. The tramline was routed from Church Street via Nel Street to Vermeulen Street. Nel Street was widened and an avenue of trees was planted.

A girder track, with the track macadamised, was laid from Church to Vermeulen Streets. From here to the Union Buildings Terminal, the track was of the 'vignole' type resting on sleepers and a ballast.

In 1911, Baker suggested the using poles rather than stone obelisks for the tramline as there would be no strain on them. The Assistant District Forest Officer advised the planting of *Pinus Longifolia* in the area, but said that *Pinus Insignis* or *Pinus Canariensis* could be planted if *Pinus Longifolia* was unobtainable. In 1929, turnstiles and a gate were placed at the Hamilton Street entrance.

A plantation of *Pinus Pinaster* is the dominant feature in this area, being planted all around the Western boundaries of the Union Buildings providing an avenue along the tram track. This gentle slope is covered in tall pines. There is a clearing in the middle of the plantation where the tramway used to run through the plantation from the Southwest to Northeast corner. On its Eastern reaches the avenue of pines has gone. Some stone terracing and a water furrows lined with slate remain.

The area is covered in tall pine trees, however, there are some beautiful indigenous plants mostly along the Eastern border of the site: *Brachylaena Discolor*, *Acacia Sieberiana*, *Cussonia Spicata*, *Aloe* and *Combretum Molle*.

The gardens in this section lack cohesion with beds of massed plants. The area bordering onto Faure Street is neglected. The Northern part has an eerie pine forest with a number of indigenous shrubs. The forest floor is carpeted in a thick layer of pine needles (Muller & Young 2005).

Heritage Value

The pine trees lining both sides of Edmund street were planted to frame the view along a narrow vista from the city to the buildings, but the original open vista is gone. A security fence encircling the Estate does little to improve the beauty of the site.

Area N has been neglected, with remnants of eroded tramline route and broken drainage channels. Due to this, Area N has a low heritage value. It is imperative to restore its historical status as it has the potential to yield information that will contribute to a better understanding our South African cultural heritage.

Since Area N represents an important aspect of the original Herbert Baker design, which was intended to integrate the building into its setting, it is important not to turn our backs on this area. The history of the Pretoria tramway has been forgotten by urban developers. It would have provided a novel way to make the public and visitors aware of this important aspect of our heritage. These remnants of the tramline, stone steps from Ziervogel Street and the water channel should be included in plans to restore the original design for the gardens.

The Engelenburg House art and craft collection could be extended to serve as an exhibition space for original Union Building artworks (Muller & Young 2005).

The different categories of Heritage Value are the following:

1. Low - Heritage elements that are generally negative in character with few, if any, valued features. Scope for positive enhancement frequently occurs.
2. Medium - Heritage elements that exhibit positive character but which may have evidence of alteration to/degradation/loss of features, resulting in elements of more mixed character. Potentially sensitive to change in general; again change may be detrimental if inappropriately dealt with but it may require special or particular attention to detail.
3. High - Heritage elements (components of sites) that exhibit a very positive character with valued features that combine to give the experience of unity, richness, integrity and harmony. These are elements that may be considered to be of particular importance to conserve and which may be sensitive to change.



Figure 102: *Heritage gradings for the gardens* (Author 2015).