

CHAPTER 2



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THE SQUARE

A HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF LILIAN NGOYI SQUARE

Lilian Ngoyi Square, formally Strijdom Square and formally Market Square has a rich and contested history. The aim of this chapter is to understand the role of this site in the history of Pretoria and to understand the effect that the modern movement had on it. The squares contested history became the main driver for the urban vision.

Market Square

The city block between Lilian Ngoyi (Van der Walt) Street and Sisulu (Prinsloo) Street and between Helen Joseph (Church) Street and Pretorius Street used to be the Old Market Square of Pretoria.

The Market Square was proposed in September 1882 to develop as a successor to the original Church Square (Staatsteater Pretoria 1981). In 1889 J.D. Celliers was assigned the task to build a structure that could accommodate markets. The market hall was finished in 1891 (Staatsteater Pretoria 1981).

“n Reeks winkels en ‘n hoofingang tot die markgebou is later tussen die saal en Kerkstraat gebou. Toe is verdere markgeboue en winkels opgerig en die hele terrein het in ‘n bedrywige sakebuurt ontwikkel” (Staatsteater Pretoria 1981).

The market hall was used for fairs, receptions, court procedures and political gatherings (Staatsteater Pretoria 1981). Animals were kept at the back of the

Figure 2.1 - The old Market Square.psd



Market square had a vibrant edge with vigorous pedestrian interaction. It was the place to meet people, to trade stories and news and goods and to have needs met and appetites satisfied.

market hall – a precursor of the zoological gardens that later developed in Boom Street (Staatsteater Pretoria 1981). Furthermore it used to house the first museum before the Staats Museum was built in Boom Street (Staatsteater Pretoria 1981). In July 1895 the official opening ceremony of the Delagoa Bay Railway Line was held at the Market Square for which artists Frans Oerder and Anton van Wouw created wall murals of the landscape between Pretoria and Delagoa Bay (Staatsteater Pretoria 1981). On 27 April 1896, the market hall also became the courtroom where Lionel Phillips, George Farrar, John Hays Hammond and Frank Rhodes, were sentenced to death for the Jameson Raid (Ball 2013). In front of the market hall a diverse array of shops developed, lining the street. This included, amongst others, a music shop, animal feed traders, cafés, a liquor store, a cycle shop, a typewriter agency, a pharmacist, and a confectioner. (Staatsteater Pretoria 1981). Market square had a vibrant edge with vigorous pedestrian interaction. It was the place to meet people, to trade stories, news and goods, but also a place to have needs met and appetites satisfied.

Strijdom Square

This all changed around the 1960s when South Africa became an independent republic. In order to show the world that South Africa could compete as a world class city, large scale building projects were launched. The plan was to demolish the western façade of Church Square to make way for a brutally modernist building. Fortunately after long and aggressive opposition from the public, the plans were not approved and the original western façade was saved (Bolsmann 2001).

In the same spirit of modernisation the area around Sisulu (Prinsloo) Street was also being re-envisioned. The old vibrant Market Square was demolished to make way for the State Theatre, The ABSA Building and Strijdom Square.

Figure 2.2 - Planned new administration building.psd [Bolsmann 2001:99]

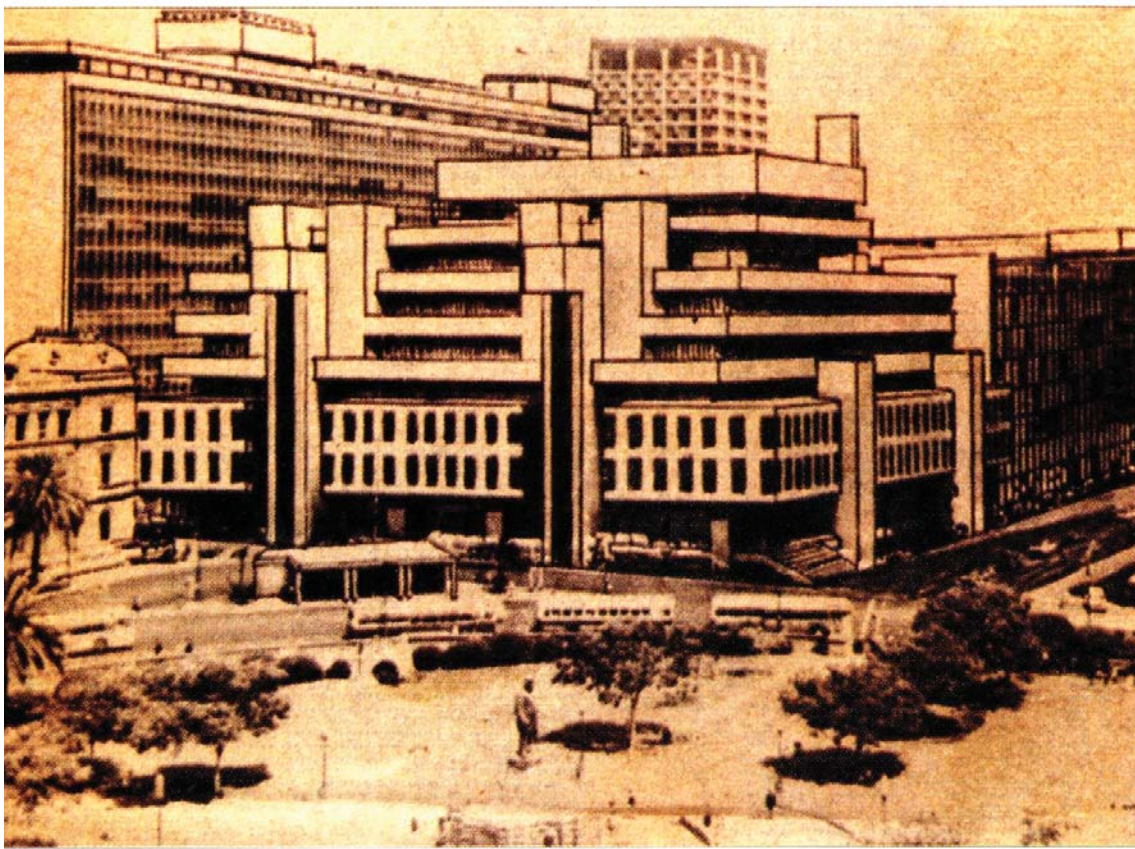


Figure 2.3 - Watercolour by Carola Brotherton of Church Square west facade.psd (Bolsmann 2001:100)



Public Reception of the modern Pretoria

In an article by William Saunderson Meyer in the Rand Daily Mail on 23 November 1979 Mr Alan Konya, from the Department of Architecture at the University of Pretoria said,

“Pretoria’s architects and town planners have identified closely with the brash and discredited US architecture of the 60s – and this has led to the razing of almost all the old buildings of the turn of the century. Many of the modern developments, like Strijdom Square, seem hell bent on destroying the city centre for people” (Saunderson Meyer 1979).

According to another unnamed architect the square is a “fiasco” (Saunderson Meyer 1979). “It was never designed to attract the public to sit around and enjoy the sunshine. With the new Volkskas (ABSA) building looming over it and the vast expanses of marble, it is as cold and draughty as a mausoleum” (Saunderson Meyer 1979). Alan Konya continued by saying that with the new State Theatre on the same block it makes it “just a jumble of concrete” (Saunderson Meyer 1979). Ten year earlier it was an appealing and energetic market square with many diverse shops and stalls connected by charming paved lanes. (Saunderson Meyer 1979) Alan Konya suggested it,

“...could have been changed into a flea market with craftsmen’s stalls, artists’ and fresh produce stalls. Combined with the spicy Indian shops which lined Prinsloo Street... the whole area could have become similar to ... Portobello Road in London” (Saunderson Meyer 1979).

*“Diversity is being built out of the city centre.” ~Dieter Holm
(Saunderson Meyer 1979)*

Professor Dieter Holm, from the Architecture Department of the University of Pretoria said,

“Diversity is being built out of the city centre. The small businessman who could afford the rentals in the older buildings is being forced out because of the high rentals in the skyscrapers” (Saunderson Meyer 1979)

He states that,

“with its attractive surroundings, its out-of-doors climate and its old buildings, careful re-use and restrained but imaginative urban planning could have made Pretoria one of the most beautiful cities of the world. Instead it is becoming one of the ugliest – lifeless and cold, forgetful of its past” (Saunderson Meyer 1979).

Before the large scale modernisation of the area the buildings and streets accommodated the pedestrian and street life. It was an energetic space. Today the monumental structures of the State Theatre, ABSA, the Reserve Bank and the new Womans’ Memorial do not cater for street life or pedestrians. It is totally inaccessible and uninviting. In the early 1990s the Sammy Marks Square tried to counter that and succeeded in a small way, but a lot more could be done.

However, the resilience of the city trader can be seen in the hundreds of informal vendors that line Helen Joseph (Church) Street. Today hundreds of gazebos appear every morning at around 10:00 to start catering for the lunch hour and disappears when the sun goes down after capitalising on homeward bound pedestrians. The existing modernist structures are merely a backdrop for the real daily life happening on the street. They make no contribution to the public street life of the city.

“Pretoria ... is becoming one of the ugliest (cities) – lifeless and cold, forgetful of its past” ~ Dieter Holm (Saunderson Meyer 1979)

Figure 2.4 - The finished State Theatre.psd [Staatsteater Pretoria 1981]

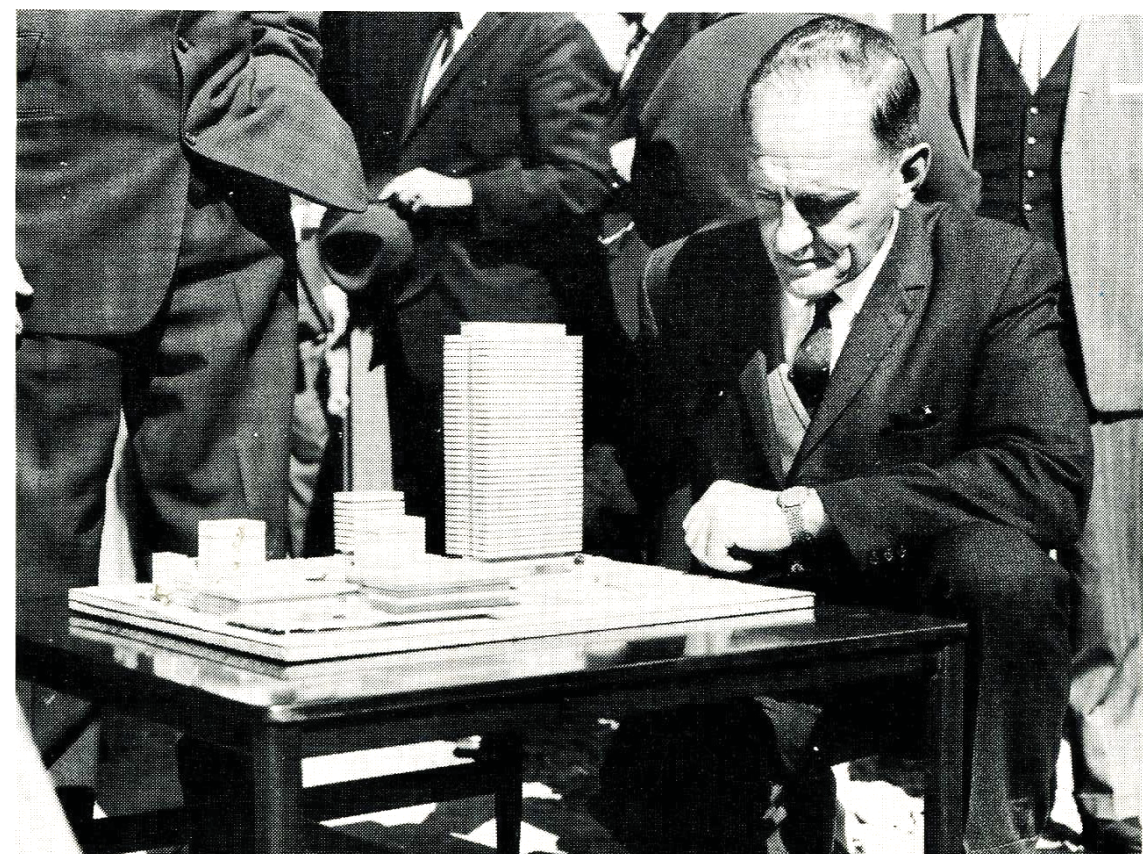


Figure 2.5 - Model of the State Theatre and the Volkskas Bank.psd [Staatsteater Pretoria 1981]



Figure 2.6 - State Theatre and Volkskas Bank in construction.psd

Contested histories

Considering the history of the market square we observe that the square is most effective and vibrant as a public space when the architecture allows for interaction with the street life. During the time of the Market Hall the structures lined the street to tap into the pedestrian traffic. Today the formal architecture makes no contribution to the street and neither is its program dependent on the pedestrian. This increases the opportunities for the informal vendor to use the existing street energy.

So why is it that the physical city lost its connection with its dweller? The modern movement in architecture adapted the modern philosophy of objectifying the city as an image, an efficient machine, an ordered program, a sanitised entity and a universal application. In the classical city the physical structure was conditional. Panu Lehtovuori stated that “a city was conceived of as a political and ethical unit. In contradiction, the modern city was a physical object and a technical project” (Lehtovuori 2010:114).

The city became the tool to manipulate and empower each new system of hegemony. The initial purpose of the Market Square was for trade and information. It was for the sole purpose of serving the people.

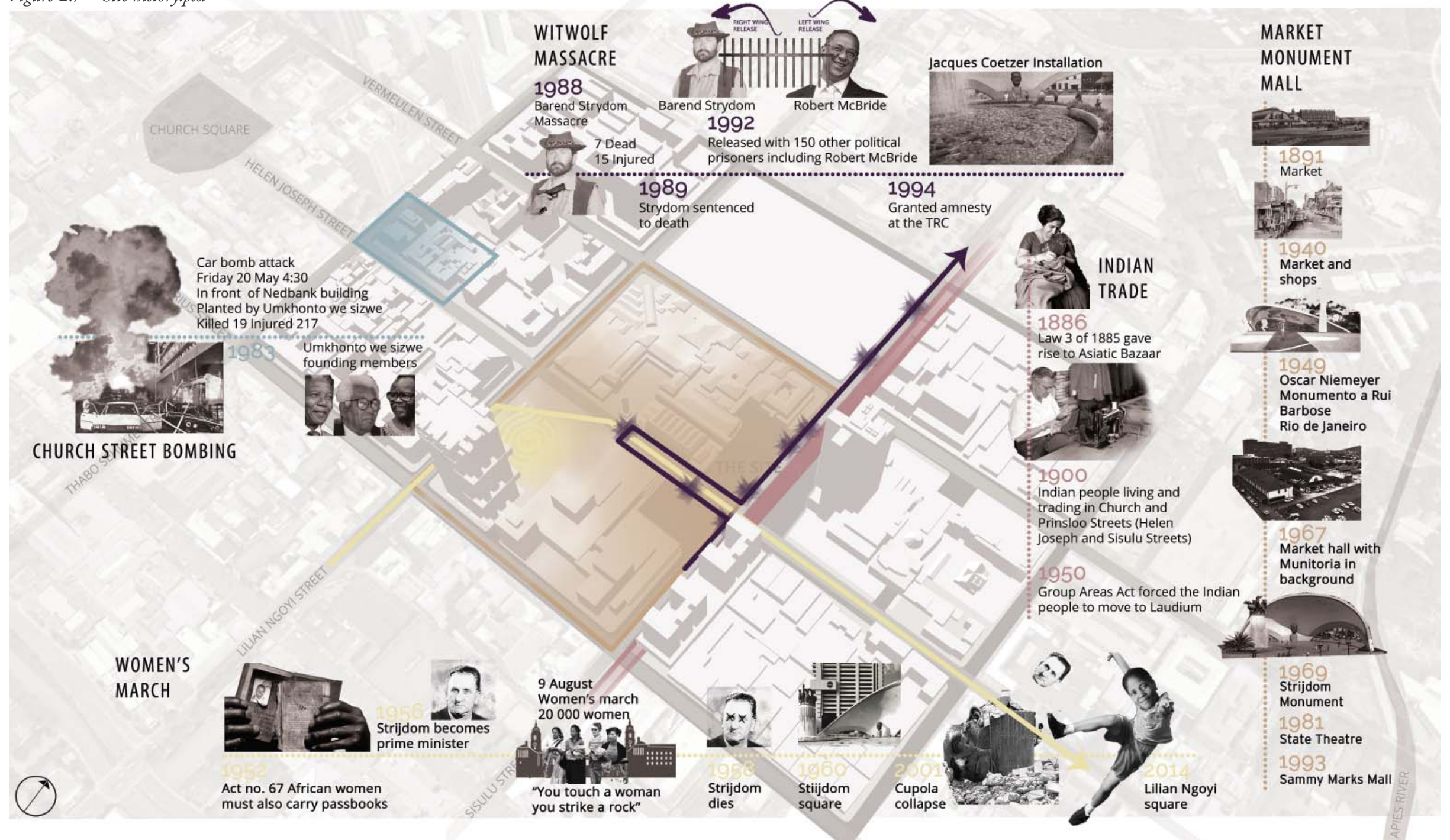
During the 1960s the purpose of the large scale building project was to establish Pretoria as an image of a world city. Disregarding more than half of the population with its apartheid laws, it created a biased version of a city they thought represented the ruling party. For the first time Pretoria explicitly adhered to the modern movement by following the lead of Brazil to create monumental buildings that propagates the success of the independent Republic of South Africa. Rob Krier stated that society became obsessed

by the free-standing building and it became a prerequisite of the modern movement in architecture and for urban planning. (Krier 1979)

With the collapse of the cupola of the Strijdom Monument in 2001 the post-apartheid government only reinforced this bias: A massive memorial to the women who marched to the Strijdom administration at the Union Buildings in 1956. The march against the pass book laws of 1952. The only difference is that the bias is now in favour of the previously disregarded. The pendulum just swung the other way.

Apart from the physical effect of the biased representations of the city the square is also steeped in historic contrasts. By 1900 Sisulu (Prinsloo) Street was a lively street, a vibrancy that was derived from an array of Indian traders. These traders were however forced to relocate due to the Group Areas Act of 1950 leaving the area desolate and falling into ruin. It opened up the space for a national building project of monumental scale, a project where J.G. Strijdom was venerated through the Strijdom Square design. Today it is Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Sophie Williams and Rahima Moosa who are being honoured through the new Women’s Memorial building. Furthermore, in 1983 left-wing uMkhonto weSizwe founded by Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki planted a bomb in Helen Joseph (Church) Street that killed nineteen people. No reference is made of this tragedy. It is a part of history is swept under the carpet. Also in 1988, right-wing Barend Strydom’s massacre killed seven people on the square and in Sisulu Street (Prinsloo Street). No mention is made of this either. The victims’ names are not even known. This aims to illustrate how deeply this site is steeped in historical biases. To this day history still vies for attention on this site.

Figure 2.7 - Site history.psd



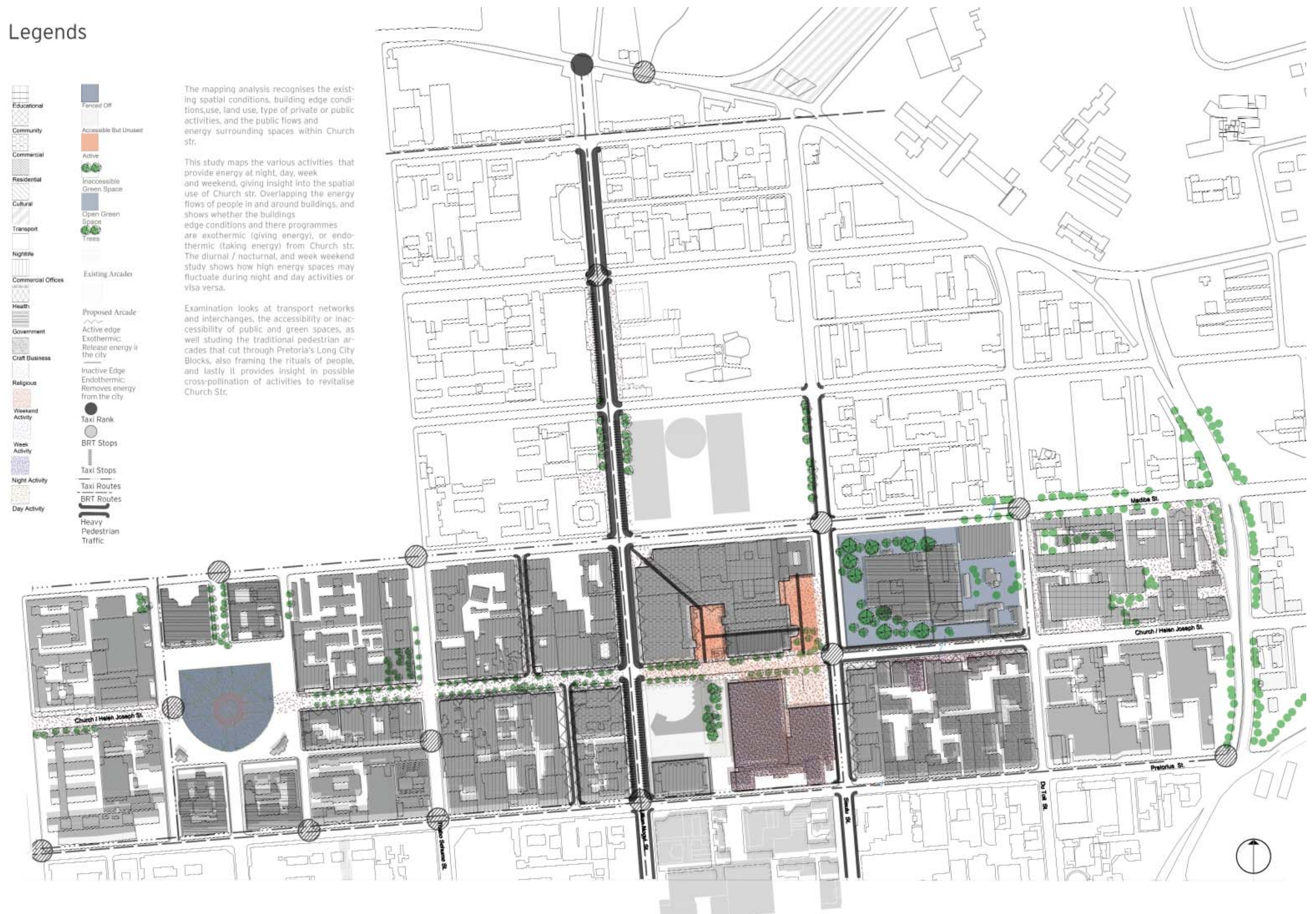
Mapping and urban vision

An analysis of the site both of its physical and historical character, led to the following conclusions.

Conclusion to mapping

Mapping of the site revealed the following problems. Pedestrians do not have priority, both Sisulu (Prinsloo) and Lilian Ngoyi (Van der Walt) Streets are highly trafficked and dangerous to cross. A vision to promote pedestrian hierarchy must be put forward. This includes more and better quality public seating spaces. Pop-up market stalls in Helen Joseph (Church) Street are plentiful and vibrant. Giving these vendors amenities for their stalls will raise the standard of the stalls and encourage entrepreneurship. Arcades are an important form of circulation in Pretoria due to its large city blocks and should be incorporated in the larger vision. The problem of inaccessible façades should be addressed and new interventions must accommodate for access from the street. The existing programmes on site must be more visible to the city user and more easily accessible.

Figure 2.8 - Summary of site analysis.psd (Oosthuizen 2015)



Urban vision

The following decisions form the urban vision for the city area immediately surrounding Lilian Ngoyi Square.

- Establish the two city blocks between Madiba (Vermeulen) and Pretorius Street and between Lilian Ngoyi (Van der Walt) and Sisulu (Prinsloo) Street as the cultural precinct due to the State Theatre. Treat it as one square and promote Helen Joseph (Church) Street between these blocks as a pedestrian-only street by narrowing it and changing the surface treatment to something more appropriate for pedestrians.
- Design purposeful pedestrian-priority foot crossings over the busy streets.
- Articulate the existing arcades and lengthen it towards to south and the tram sheds.
- Establish Helen Joseph (Church) Street west of Lilian Ngoyi (Van der Walt) Street as a retail precinct including the shopping centre of the Sammy Marks Centre.
- Strengthen the existing pop-up market west of Lilian Ngoyi (Van der Walt) Street by providing amenities through robust street furniture designs. Use trees as shading devices and spatial structures to support the market.
- Design a space of repose with lots of seating space and a high density of trees in front of the new Women's Memorial. This will form a connection between the tree pockets of the market and the urban forest by the South African Reserve Bank.
- Establish the space in front of the State Theatre as an extended foyer and allow for public outdoor programmes to facilitate this.
- Establish the space including Tshwane House, the Es'kia Mphahlele Library and the FF Ribeiro Clinic as a civic precinct.
- With the Tshwane House being built just north of the site, the vision is to create a large staircase south of Tshwane House towards Madiba (Vermeulen) Street. This will serve as an invitation into the civic space. In addition to this, a part of the Sammy Marks Centre building must be opened on the north-west in order for it to face north. At the moment the Sammy Marks Centre's northern façade is completely closed and impenetrable. Opening the north-western corner will create a gateway into the retail precinct. Its location will be ideal for an outdoor cooking space to cater for the thousands of people moving to and from the Bloed Street Taxi Terminal to the north.
- The space around the South Africa Reserve Bank was designed as a public garden with water fountains, urban furniture, artwork and trees. However, it has since been fenced off from the public. The vision is to open it up once again and declare it an urban forest. More trees should be planted and the space underneath purposefully designed as a space of repose for the city user. This will serve as the pivotal point from which all of the extended tree pockets will radiate out into the rest of the city.
- East from Sisulu (Prinsloo) Street a myriad of schools, colleges and academies can be found most of them with inner courtyards. This must be established as the didactic precinct and programmes and interventions in this precinct should provide for that. Concentrated tree pockets must be introduced into the courtyards.
- The site opposite the State Theatre and the South African Reserve Bank forms the corridor that connects the civic precinct, the urban forest, the State Theatre foyer and the didactic precinct. Its purpose will be to connect and augment the existing programmes. It is an overlooked, un-programmed former building site that is mostly fenced off from the public. It has a non-distinct entrance to a clinic and includes a library façade with no connection the street at all. Stronger, more visible entrances to both the clinic and the library must be designed towards the north and onto Madiba (Vermeulen) Street. The new intervention must make the space useful and contribute positively to the city.

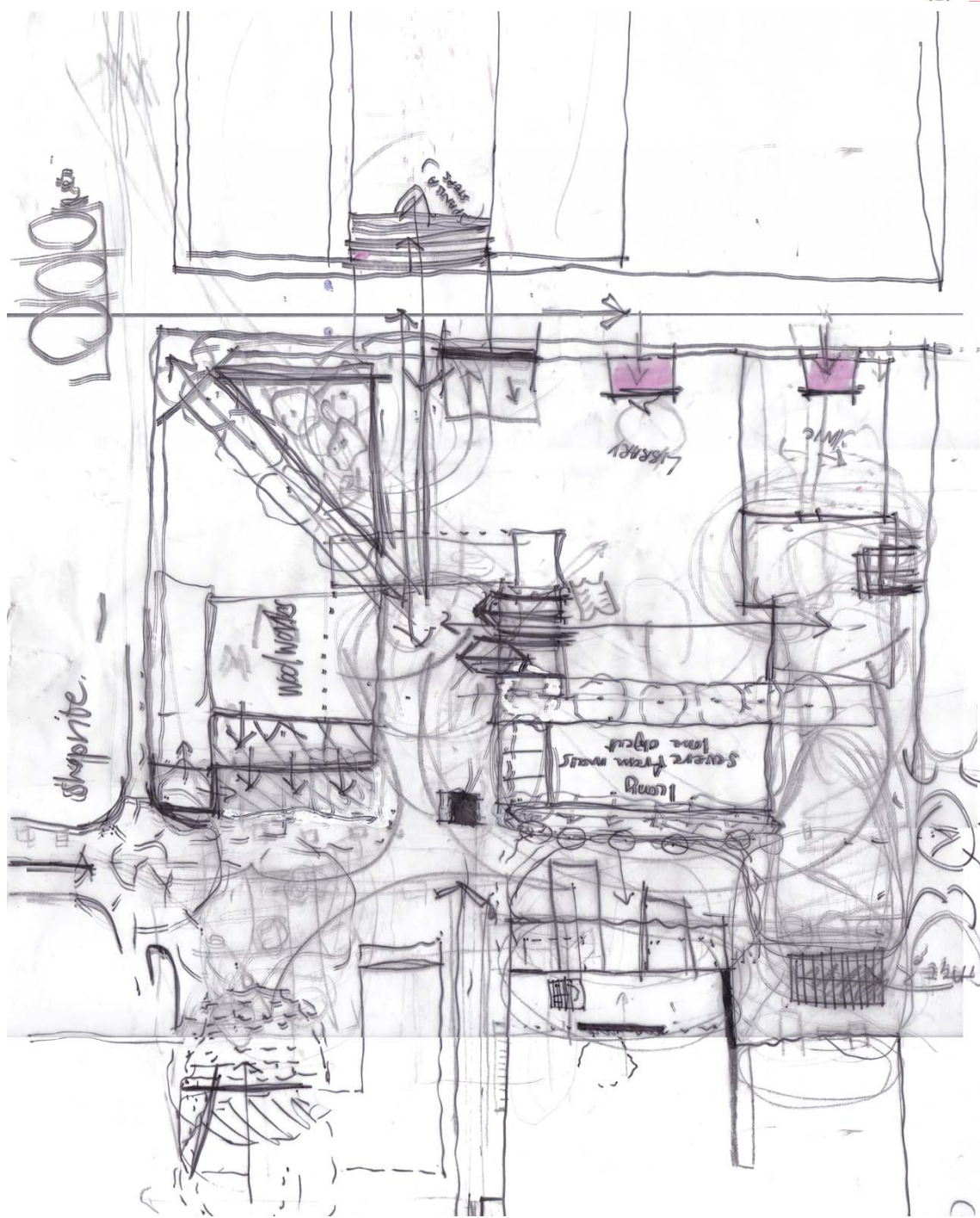
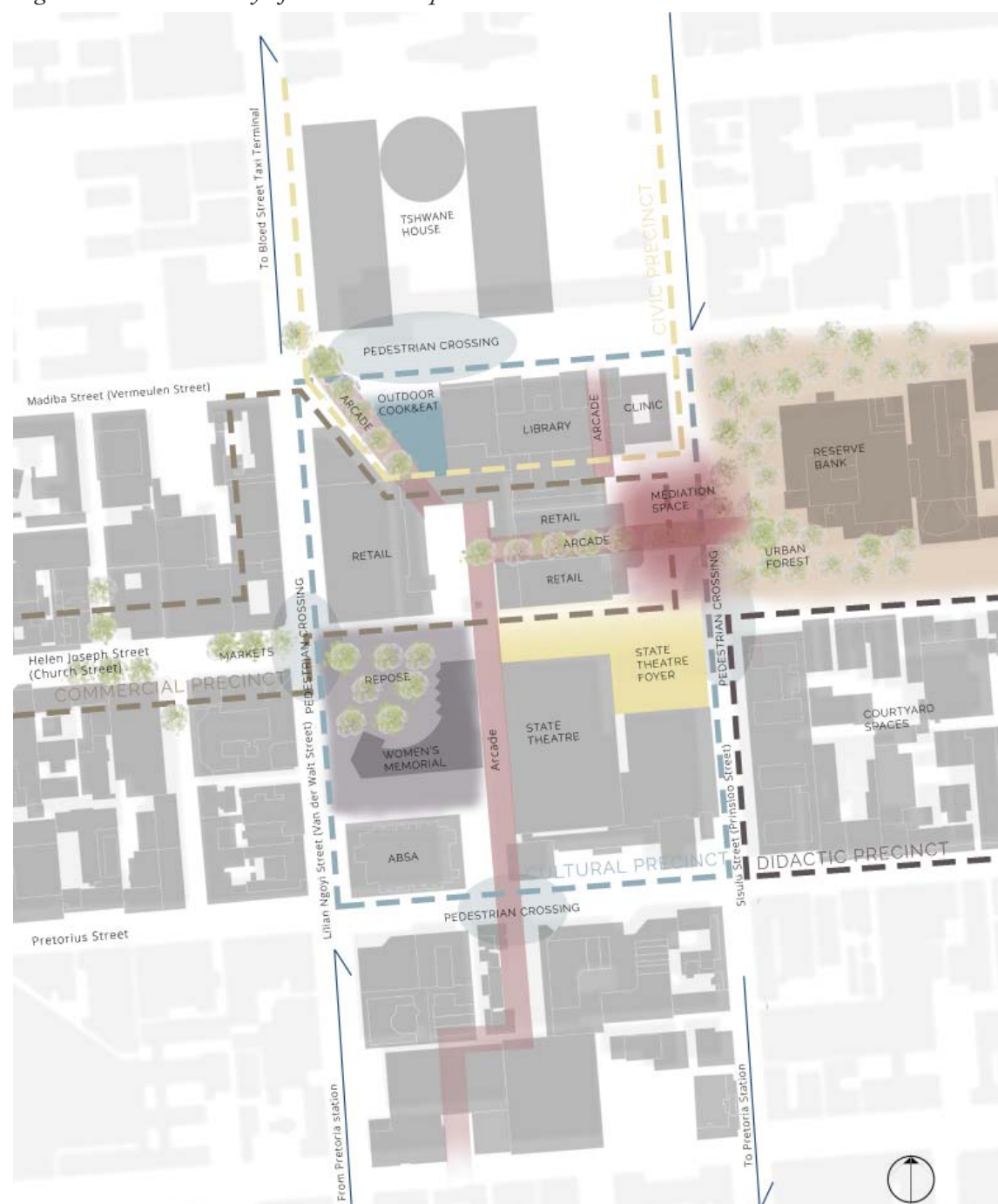


Figure 2.9 - Urban vision process work.psd

Figure 2.10 - Summary of urban vision.psd





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“Buildings are not merely physical form but cultural and social constructs which relate to wider, changing ecological, economic, political and technical sensibilities and concerns.” ~ Robert Brown and Daniel Maudlin (Brown & Maudlin 2012:354)

“Ideas forged in the Parisian intelligentsia of the 1920s came to be applied to the planning of working class housing in Sheffield and St. Louis, and hundreds of other cities too, in the 1950s and 1960s; the results were at best questionable, at worst catastrophic” ~ Peter Hall (Hall 2002:219)