



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
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# 04

site

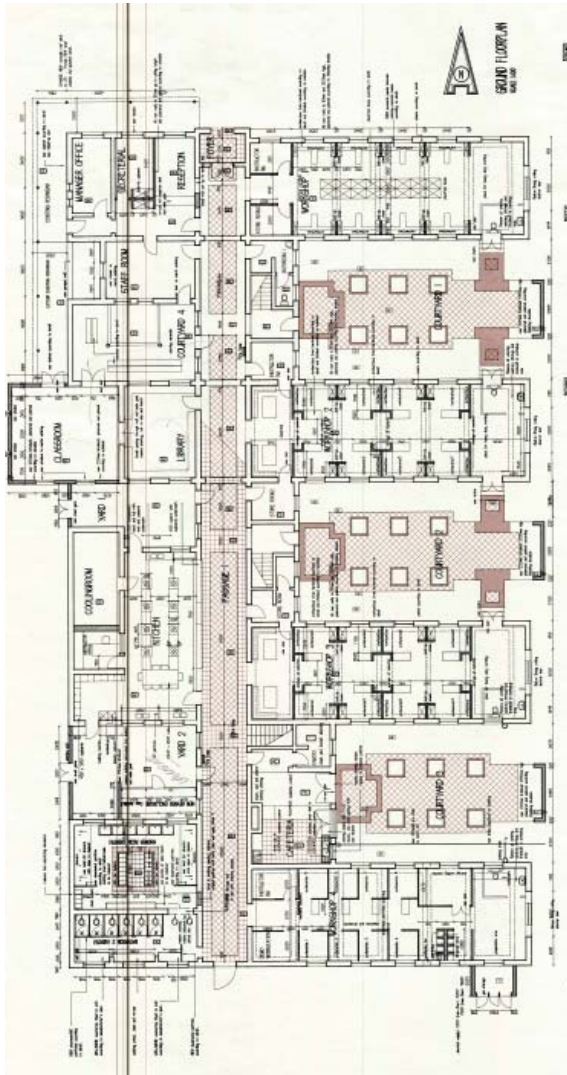


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*“Then there is a reception depot, where all unemployed Natives are compelled to reside. The place is a boon to a certain class of Native, but, on the other hand, it is a veritable hell to the man who has friends, or, though unemployed, can temporarily afford to hire a room. The raw Native is only too glad to stay at the reception depot, because he has no friends, but a Native who has friends and who can temporarily afford to get a room, should not be compelled to stay at the reception depot of the Native Affairs Department” (Native Economic Commission 1931:8064)*

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## A RUIN OF CONTROL



Situated on the South-West periphery of Marabastad, the proposed site is centred on a utopian remnant of the apartheid government, inserted as an agent of restriction. Viewed as a latent ruin of utopia, the Old Native Reception Depot building has an unapparent history and under appreciated cultural significance worthy of improved exposure.

Located on the corner of Es'kia Mphahlele Drive and Johannes Ramokhoase Street the historic site forms part of an important district within the context of Marabastad. Significant neighbours include the Old Clinic building to the East; Heroes' Acre Cemetery to the South; and the Refugee Reception Centre to the North-West. Under post-apartheid governance the site has, over time, been re-appropriated by numerous skills training and craft organisations.

The close proximity of the site to the Refugee Reception Centre positions it as an opportune area for creating a sheltered environment that, through meaningful architectural intervention, is capable of reducing the vulnerability of migrants while remaining sensitive to the past.

**Figure 4.1:** Floor plan of the Old Native Reception Depot building (Source: Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria, 1995).



65 | **Figure 4.2:** An aerial photograph indicating position of proposed site in relation to Marabastad.



## Imposing Control

*the history of a 'ruin'*

Erected as an edifice of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act (No. 21 of 1923) the Native Reception Depot was completed in 1927 (Naidoo 2007). The legislation dictated that all Africans (men and women) report to a reception depot immediately upon arriving in any urban area, and that they were to remain there until assigned a job (Eales 1987:11). Through these reception depots the apartheid government enforced the principle that Africans were not permanent urban residents and that they “should only be permitted within municipal areas in so far and for so long as their presence is demanded by the wants of the white population” (Worden 1994:43).

Later, during the 1940s (Friedman 1990), the Native Reception Depot, the Old Clinic Building, the Municipal Hostel, the Main Compound and Tin Town were incorporated into a temporary housing compound for municipal workers. The area was largely unpleasant due to overcrowded sleeping quarters and very few amenities (Grobler 1992:32). Typologically, the living conditions in Tin Town were defined by semi-circular corrugated iron hut structures or tanks. Originally intended to accommodate eight adults, the tanks more often than not housed between twelve and twenty labourers at one time, where inhabitants suffered extreme temperature variations due to the nature of the

tanks' construction.

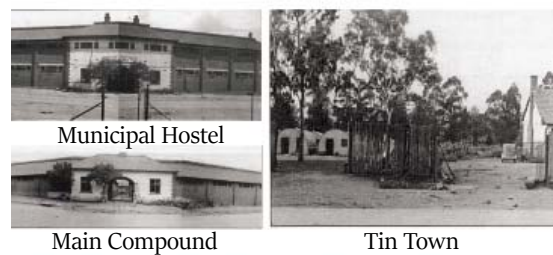
Jack Simons and Ray Simons quoted in Mbembe (2008:52) provide further insight of the living conditions experienced in these labour compounds of the time:

*“The compound was an enclosure surrounded by a high corrugated iron fence and covered by wire netting. The men lived, twenty to a room, in huts or iron cabins built against the fence. They went to work along a tunnel, bought food and clothing from the company's stores, and received free medical treatment but no wages during sickness, all within the compound”.*

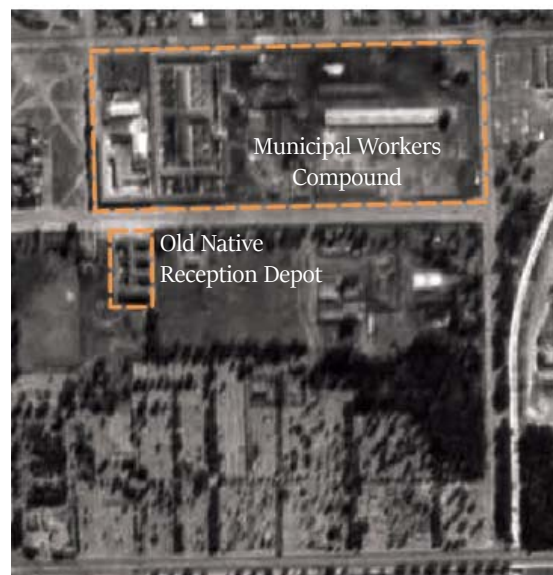
Identified as a historically and culturally significant property, the Old Native Reception Depot was declared a national monument under the National Monuments Act, (No. 28 of 1969) (Government Gazette No. 19719, Notice No. 122, 5 February 1999) and is currently protected under the National Heritage Resources Act, (No. 25 of 1999) as a class II provincial heritage site. The growing notion of heritage and the elevated importance of heritage places in relation to their surroundings define an important change in conservation thinking (UNESCO 2013:15). Places with heritage significance can no longer be protected in isolation or as museum pieces, separated from the concerns of the communities in which they exist. As such a relevant strategy for conserving and maintaining the heritage of the Old Native Reception Depot will need to be developed and will be furthered explained later in the investigation.



67 | **Figure 4.3:** An aerial photograph of the proposed site and its significant neighbours.



- ① Old Native Reception Depot
- ② Old Clinic building
- ③ Department of Home Affairs Refugee Reception Office
- ④ Informal waiting area for Refugee Reception Office
- ⑤ Heroes' Acre Cemetery
- ⑥ City of Tswane Water & Sanitation service compound



**Figure 4.4** (top): Photographs of the Municipal Compound and Tin Town  
(Source: Grobler, 1992).

**Figure 4.5** (bottom): Aerial photograph of the Municipal Workers Compound and Old Native Reception Depot  
(Source: Department of Public Works, 1937, adapted by Author).





**Figure 4.6:** A bird's-eye view of the site  
(Source: Google Maps, 2016, adapted by Author).

- ① Old Native Reception Depot
- ② Old Clinic Building
- ③ Department of Home Affairs  
Refugee Reception Office
- ④ Heroes' Acre Cemetery
- ⑤ Welding Shed
- ⑥ Storage Shed
- ⑦ Ablution Facilities
- ⑧ Existing Office Facilities
- ⑨ Covered Parking

### Adaptation and Change

*the appropriation of a 'ruin'*

The Old Native Reception Depot building is currently being utilised by a non-governmental not-for-profit organisation known as Youth for Survival. Primarily concerned with reducing poverty and minimising abuse against women and children the NPO has, since 2007, appropriated the spaces within the building to provide support for vulnerable members of society. Through ingenuity and management the organisation has appropriated the existing spaces of the 'ruin' in order to promote skills development and job creation.

Situated to the East of the Old Native Reception Depot, the Old Clinic building which once also formed part of the Municipal Compound, has likewise been reinterpreted by a new community. Inhabited by the Ngezandla Zethu Craft Centre, the building now hosts a mixed use centre that aims to promote and preserve craft as an indigenous and legitimate industry in the South African economy. Although struggling with the competition of Chinese imports, the centre aspires to enhance and accommodate small art and craft businesses in the area (Filipe 2012:86). Programmes including fashion design workshops, up-cycling of clothes, a woodworking business, beading, and an outdoor sculpture workshop for recycled materials all produce marketable goods within the rooms of the heritage building. This merchandise is then sold to tourists through a small retail component. This resultant adaptation of the site, through new community oriented organisations, has added a new contradictory layer to the heritage of the area. Once intended to subject control and segregation on migrant populations the site and buildings upon it have been reprogrammed to promote and extend the livelihoods of citizens. This reversal of roles becomes paramount to the cultural significance of the site. Not only do the Old Native Reception Depot and Old Clinic remain historical tangible expressions of the past and its identity, but they also become a place that expresses the current complexities of the communities in Marabastad and surrounding areas.



## Insurgent Visitors

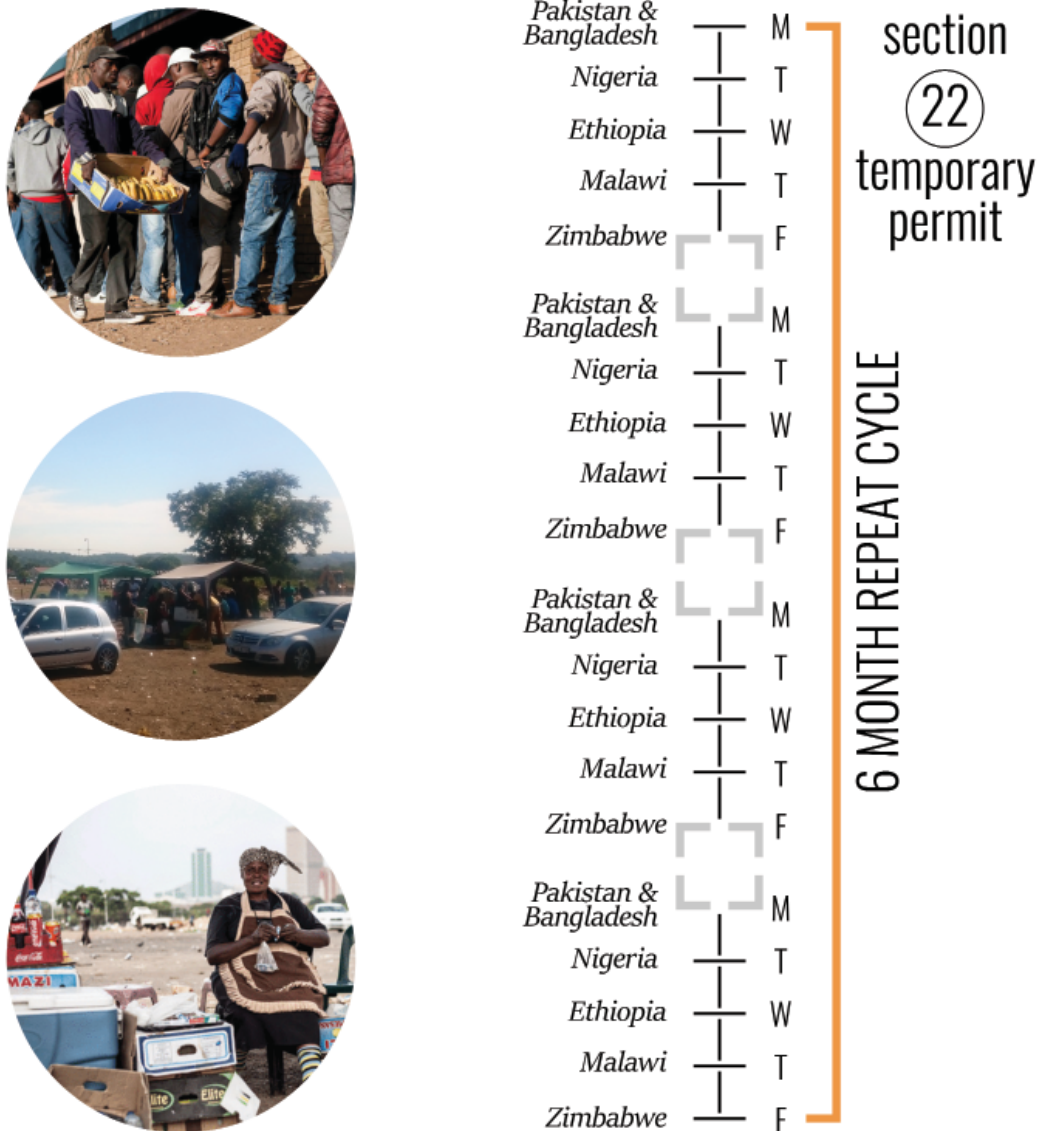
*the influence of informality*

Situated to the North West of the Old Native Reception Depot, on the Western side of Es'kia Mphahlele Drive, the Department of Home Affairs Refugee Reception Centre serves as the primary point of contact for asylum seekers entering Pretoria (DHA n.d). Under the regulations of the Refugee Act (No. 130 of 1998) asylum seekers are to report to such a centre within 14 days of being issued a temporary Section 23 permit, where they are then required to apply for a Section 22 permit and refugee status. During the six month duration of the permit asylum seekers are required to attend a second interview to determine their refugee status. As extensively discussed in Chapter 2, this application process exposes the site and surroundings to an extensively temporal influx of various cultures and ethnicities throughout the year. On most weekdays the Refugee Reception Centre receives anywhere between 500 and 1000 expatriate visitors seeking to confirm or reconfirm their status as an asylum seeker or refugee (de Wet 2015).

Based on observations conducted on site and the processing schedule of the Refugee Reception Centre the differing communities that line the edges and sidewalks surrounding the building consist, typically, of visitors from Bangladesh and Pakistan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe; all arriving on alternate days of the

week. This varied influx of people has given rise to numerous symbiotic informal activities in the open areas around the Centre. Many informal hawkers have erected temporary stalls selling cold drinks, loose cigarettes and airtime. Other instances of insurgency appear in the form of informal hosts and 'travel' agencies which offer temporary accommodation and transport for new arrivals in need of assistance (specifically documented in the Ethiopian community) (Ratlebjane 2016). Furthermore, the temporary rows of cars parked across from the centre become cultural nodes for the day, where traditional meals such as biryani are sold from open car trunks with music reminiscent of home playing in the background.

The informal activity centred around the arriving of international visitors has a large influence on the cultural value of the site and its significance will need to be carefully considered in conserving and maintaining the heritage of the site.

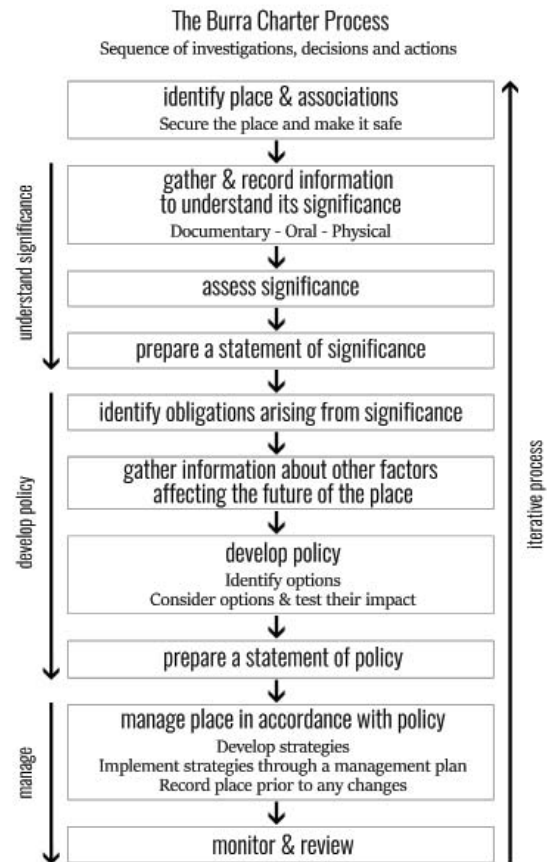


**Figure 4.8** (left): A series of photographs capturing the insurgent activities that populate the informal waiting area outside the Refugee Reception Office  
(Source (top to bottom): de Wet, 2015; Author, 2016; Rattlebjane, 2016).  
**Figure 4.9** (right): The cyclical schedule of international visitors to the site.

## Relevant Conservation

*establishing a significant heritage strategy*

Rather than relegating heritage to a collection of monuments and museums presenting physical confirmations of the past, the international community has, in recent times, begun to acknowledge the importance of conserving cultural heritage as places where cultural and social facets have been and continue to be critical in defining them. In this regard international good practice, often defined by Western thought, has provided sporadic guidance in strengthening traditional heritage management systems, especially in places which accommodate multiple land and property uses (UNESCO 2013:15). Utilised as an initial departure point for developing a method for engaging with and managing the complex heritage of the site, the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 1999 provides useful insights. Under the Burra Charter all of aspects that contribute to the cultural significance of place should be respected. As such, it is the role of the custodian to achieve a compatible balance between the fabric, uses, associations and meanings related to the particular site (Burra Charter 1999:11). The guidance provided by the Charter instils a standard of practice that entails an iterative process of understanding significance through the gathering and recording of information, developing a policy that is evaluated by external inputs and obligations, and managing the site



of significance in accordance with the policy, all while monitoring and reviewing the implication thereof on place (ibid).

Although the Burra Charter provides many comprehensive articles that assist in developing an approach towards heritage there is very little practical guidance to dealing with heritage architecture specifically. Some articles provide direction in attending to change, new work and adaptation however the overriding tone of these protocols can be perceived as restricting. Changes to the existing architecture should be reversible and demolition is generally not acceptable, restoration is only deemed appropriate when justified by sufficient evidence, and new work should be easily noticeable not detracting from the cultural significance. The ideologies encompassed by the Burra Charter are not to be completely disregarded and are important in the conservation process however the approach outlined is conveyed as overly intellectual, lacking humanistic qualities and ultimately disconnecting the process from the hopes and memories associated with the flow of time in individuals (Lynch 1972:29).

Kevin Lynch (1972:1) argues that the passage of time is an internal interpretation of the external physical world. In this reciprocal relationship, individual well-being is strongly linked to the quality of the personal image of time, and that the outer built environment we presently live in plays an important role in reinforcing and shaping this image of time. Thus, the desirable

image becomes one that celebrates and encourages the present while connecting with the past and future.

The physical environment we live in is constantly changing, whether through abandonment, development, social and political shifts, or natural processes. Throughout these events, people commemorate the past and envision the future. Thus, as stewards of the physical environment it becomes paramount for architects to develop places as emblems of past, present and future time (Lynch 1972:3).

In striking this balance, it is important to note that past events may become relevant to present possibilities, explaining causes or pointing to likely outcomes, and that memory alone cannot retain all of this information. Furthermore, since we are unable to establish what will be most pertinent in the future, heritage architecture has the responsibility of creating an environmental archive (Lynch 1972:49) that encapsulates and communicates some characteristic historical knowledge of the past through the built environment for the enjoyment and education of the public.

It is therefore worth noting that different communities place different values on the remains of the past and that present value will be specific to a certain group of people. Thus, the usefulness of heritage buildings, in extending the longevity of existing building stock and the lives of its inhabitants' life, is defined by their actual current qualities instead of some enigmatic



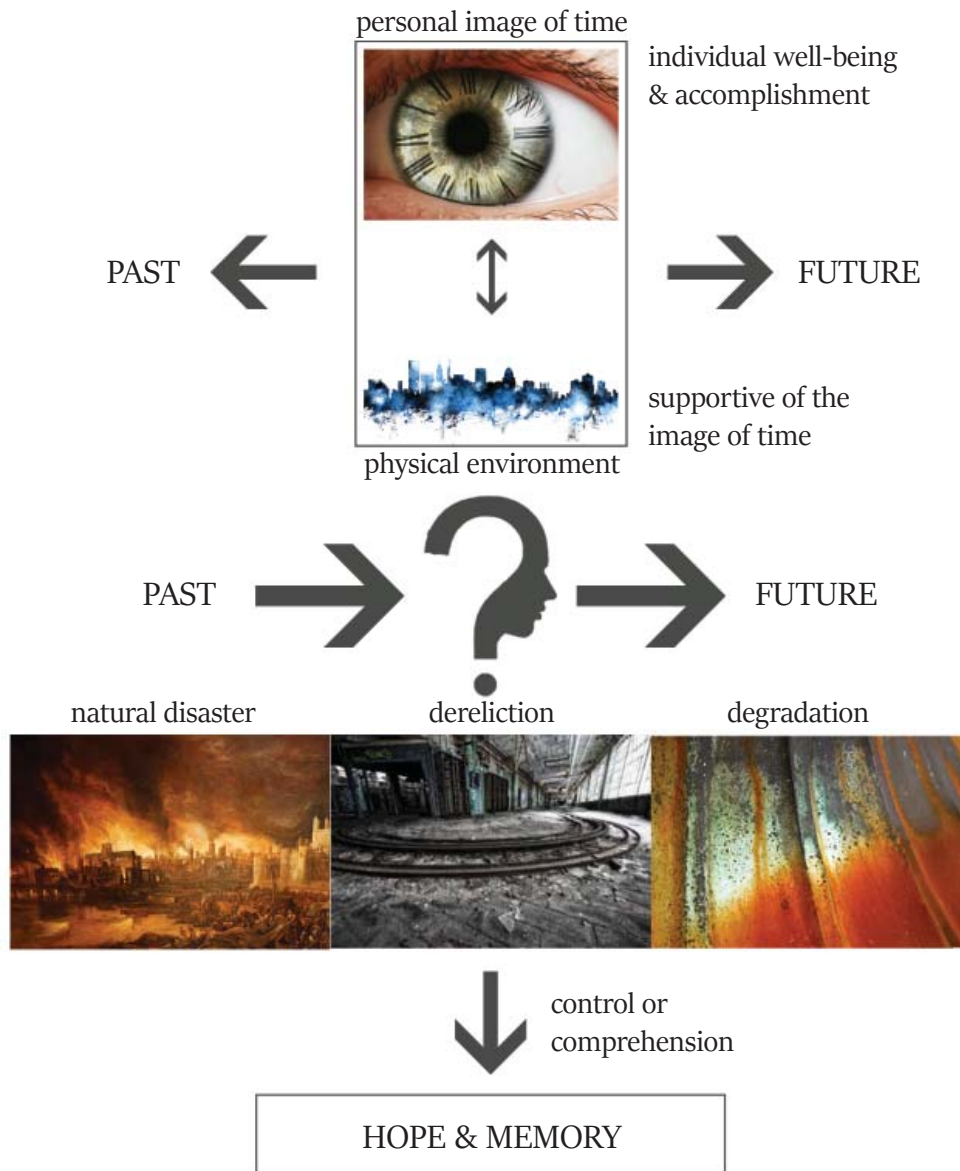
essence of the past.

In summary, an environment that is resistant to change encourages its own ruination, and should rather become a place that has the ability to be progressively altered against a backdrop of valued remnants of the past, where one is able to apply a personal impression alongside those of history (Lynch 1972:39).

Considering the above, the design investigation intends to develop an conservation approach to the heritage and cultural significance of the site that:

- Allows current inhabitants to choose to remain in the renewed structures,
- Uses the resultant environment to educate visitors about change in place of permanence and how that environment constantly shifts in the setting of the immediate past,
- Places emphasis on current utility rather than historical integrity,
- Allows for modification through addition and suppression to stimulate the existing architectural elements,
- Maintains a contemporary response of re-appropriation and insurgence towards the controls of the past,
- Permits the use of the existing building to enhance the complexity and significance of present use rather than becoming overly concerned with conformity to the past form,
- Intensifies the contrast and complexity between new and old by making the process of change and new use visible through

- proficient demolition and addition, and
- Promotes a humane environment that allows people to inscribe their own growth within the environment.



**Figure 4.11:** Diagrammatic expression of Lynch's approach to heritage architecture (Source: Harrison, Hough, Sibanda, 2015, adapted by Author).