



**Figure 2:** Discovering the site. The condition between JAG and Joubert Park.

# 2

## DISCOVERY

Chapter 2 deals with the discovery, history and current conditions of the site.

## 2.1. LOCATING SITE



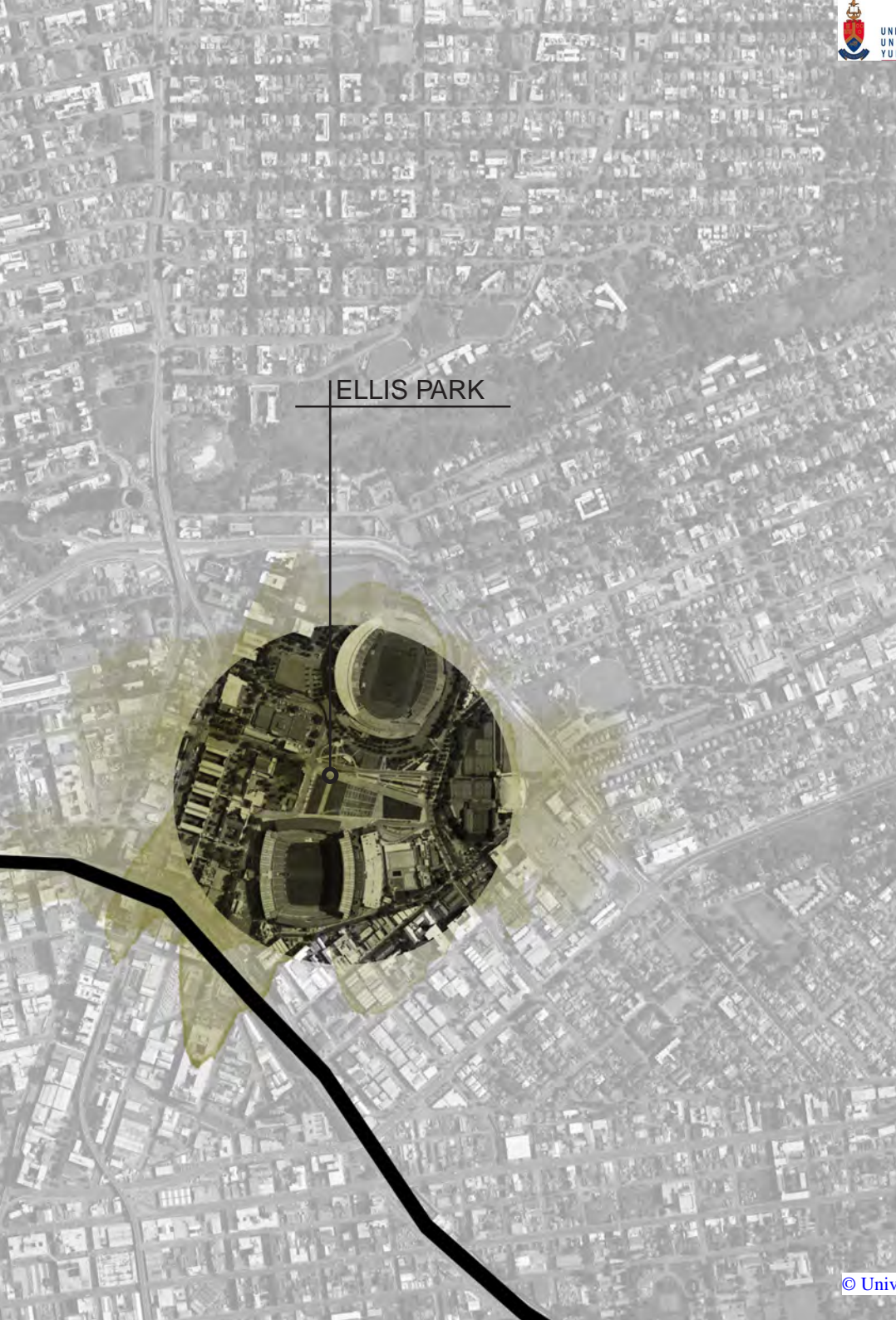
CONSTITUTION HILL

BRAAMFONTEIN

JOUBERT PARK

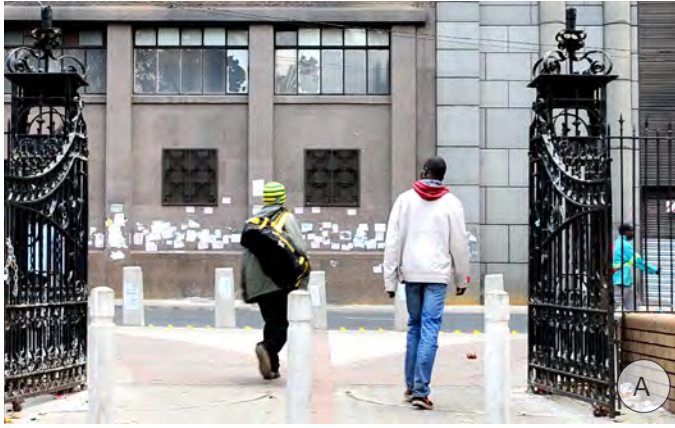
NEWTOWN

PARK STATION



# JOHANNESBURG

Figure 2.1: Aerial picture indicating location of Joubert Park relative to other known precincts in Johannesburg.



**Figure 2.2:** One of the entry points into the park through historic gates. This entrance is situated on the north of the park and was originally the main entrance of the park, facing JAG.

**Figure 2.3:** The current day promenade leading from the gates in figure 2.2.

**Figure 2.4:** Walking with our guide from the Community Patrol.

**Figure 2.5:** The chess culture.

**Figure 2.6:** Currently not operational, one of the fountains in the park has become a collector of waaste.

**Figure 2.7:** Large chess boards. The surrounding wall separates the park and the Greenhouse Project located in the north-western part of the park.

## 2.2. DISCOVERY OF PARK

### Site introduction

# NARRATIVE OF DISCOVERY

January 2016

*I began my journey this year by going on various walking tours with fellow students through Johannesburg and Pretoria. Upon moving through the streets of central Johannesburg I noticed the contained vibrancy and the juxtaposition between moving from one street in Newtown to another in Brixton. This overwhelmingly dynamic place was one I did not understand due to limited exposure to places outside of the elitist areas in Johannesburg.*

*After reading an article on News24 by three architecture students from the University of Witwatersrand, as well as a very emotive, albeit inaccurate, Wikipedia article, my interest in the site of Joubert Park was sparked. The seemingly richly layered story of this place and its drastic changes has created, over time, a place that brings great heritage value to the city of Johannesburg.*

February 2016

*On our first visit to the site we struggled through traffic congestion of taxis to make our way to the parking lot at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the only quiet area that offered a spot to park our vehicle. The entrance off King George Street into the gallery grounds was an underwhelming one (see figure 2.30). Upon entering the gates, we drove toward, what seemed to be, a service space of the gallery. After all I heard about the gallery building, I can say with all honesty, that I was disappointed. It would only be at the end of this site visit that I would find the entrance to the gallery and discover the beauty within.*

*Our group of five adults made our way down King George Street towards one of the original gates to Joubert Park (see figure 2.4), the one through which we entered. While walking through to the centre of the park to the wet pit filled with trash where the wrought iron fountain once stood (see figure 2.6), we were met by many shocked and interested looks from the locals. We tried our best to feel indifferent towards the abundance of onlookers until two women came up to us animatedly trying to convince us to turn around and leave the park. "This place is unsafe" they kept repeating, telling us of all the recent horror stories of attacks and muggings that took place there, some even directed at the police officers moving through the area. Eventually, understanding our unease and obvious reluctance to leave our potential project site,*

*they called a man who was part of the community watch to help.*

*This group of individuals were formed from within the community to ensure that their home (Joubert Park and surrounds) remains safe for themselves and visitors. "We need to make sure nothing happens to people who visit this area, especially those who stand out like you. We do not want our Hillbrow to support the bad reputation it has today, we want it to be a space where everyone feels safe." With his optimistic outlook and willingness to help he became our personal guide for the months to come.*

10 March 2016

*On our second visit we (Ilbaam Tayob, Lisa Verseput and I) were introduced to a few individuals who are almost always in the park. This group of workingmen have become well known as inherently part of Joubert Park's history and its current condition.*

*These men sit scattered at the entrances to the park, on low brick walls with their cameras around their necks and their mini photo printers at the ready for any willing customer. The story of these men is a fascinating one, with their professions being passed on from father to son. However, the inevitability of their relevance decreasing became a reality with the rise of cell phones (Kurgan 2012) and selfie sticks, which will result in the loss of a great many memories of the park (see images 2.12-2.15).*

26 March 2016

*The vibrancy of the park is continued on a Sunday (2016-03-26) when church groups gather under trees to host informal services. The park comes alive with the various coloured outfits that differentiate each group, forming a moving collage of colour and culture.*





Photographs expressing haptic qualities of the park.

Figure 2.8: People in the park on a weekend.

Figure 2.9: People playing chess under the trees.

Figure 2.10: A dash of colour.

Figure 2.11: Resting, walking and socialising.



5 May 2016

On this Thursday afternoon hundreds of protestors are gathering around the promenades, getting ready for the possible excitement that may ensue (see figures 2.9 & 2.10). Loudspeakers have been erected to the east of the site, causing crowds of people to gather; dance and sing, blocking the foreign BRT station from view (see figure 2.8). The birds of the park are happy with this surge of human activity as breadcrumbs and chips are dropped on the grass, resulting in a feast for them to enjoy.

On any weekday afternoon there are children playing on the large colourful jungle gym, animating a portion of the park that is usually quietly shaded and resting before the excited storm of after-school fun.

This community seems to be one of great contradiction as on another section of this playground a handful of youths are gathered in one of the boxes of the jungle gym and the only hint of the activity inside is the pungent smell and cloud of smoke that surrounds the colourful plastic structure.

There is a strong drug presence in the area and in the park itself. The southern section of the park is strewn with sleeping bodies, soaking up the sun after a nyaope hit. This no-mans' land hugs the fence that surrounds the Johannesburg Art Gallery.

Our guide tells us of the attempts of the community to eradicate the drug presence in the area, but they have seen very little success.

Throughout our visits to the site, the under-utilised potential remained an unchanging aspect of the Johannesburg Art Gallery, which is located at the southern edge of the park. The presence and long-standing history of the gallery leads to an undeniable inclusion of the gallery and its users as stakeholders of the park. The inclusion of this institution can only be understood through understanding the histories that bind these places together, although many would argue that the connection has since diminished, mainly due to physical proximity instead of mutual influence.

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*“Once the epicentre of genteel Joburg, but now a public space alive with activities both healthy and unhealthy, Joubert Park is the story of the clash of modern Africa and colonial structure.” Christy, Drewe & Uys (2014)*

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Figure 2.12: The BRT station forming a barrier at the eastern entrance.



Figure 2.13: Gathering protesters.

Figure 2.14: Waiting for the protest to begin with JAG as a backdrop.





Figures on the current page indicates the parks edge condition along King George Street.

Figure 2.15: Looking south on King George Street.

Figure 2.16: Barriers between the park and the street.

Figure 2.17: Roasting nuts.

Figure 2.18: Vendors.

Figure 2.19: Entrance to Joubert Park.

Opposite page:

Figure 2.20: The playground as seen from the street.





Current page:

**Figure 2.21:** One of the photographers sitting on the low brick walls which frame the gates.

Opposite page:

**Figure 2.22:** Calvin Mazibuko had worked in the park for 7 years in 2011. (Roane, 2011)

**Figure 2.23:** Varrie Hluzani waiting for customers. Varrie has been working in the park since 1993 (Roane, 2011)

**Figure 2.24:** One of the photographers reflecting on his past work (Roane, 2011)



## 2.3. THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

### Introduction of the park's archivists

In Brendan Roane's article entitled *Playing it by Eye* (2011), he discusses the situation of Joubert Park and the relationship between various protective bodies and the photographers. The photographers are the unofficial "eyes and ears of Joubert Park" (Moodley, as cited in Roane 2011). They are a permanent presence and are aware of any criminal activity that happens there, essentially making them the watchmen. The Metro Police, the SAPS and Johannesburg City Parks are of the bodies that recognise the photographers as a passive surveillance institution that is in turn allowed to freely trade within the park (Roane 2011). The relationship between the community watch and the photographers also seems to be a strong one based on observed interactions on-site and a verbal confirmation from our community guide.

Over the past few decades (the exact number is unclear) multitudes of photographs have been taken and purchased from these men. Before their upgrade to portable digital printers (in order to compete with the speed of technological advancements), there were a great many photos that remained uncollected by the subjects, of which some of the photographers have been kept (Kurgan 2010). Others may have had duplicates made of people of importance or interest.

Their photographers of Joubert Park's body of work is considered by some as an "extraordinary social history archive" since they document who was visiting the park then and who visits it now (Kurgan, 2010). Many of the images captured have been of people portraying their best selves in their church attire in family portraits (Kurgan, 2010).

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*"The photographers are like living statues, scattered across the walkways, and are as much of a feature of the park as the flowerbeds and fountains..... [they] are a part of the park's culture, part of its economy, part of its history and part of its future." – (Roane, 2011)*

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Figure 2.25: Joubert Park as taken from the roof of JAG - approximately taken in 1920. (JAG Archives)

## 2.4. SITE HISTORY

### History and Development of Joubert Park

# JOUBERT PARK

In 1886 Johannesburg was established (Murinik 2015) as a temporary mining town and was built around a railway line. At the time no governmental grants were awarded to Johannesburg to erect any form of public institutions as all funding for these types of ventures was invested in Pretoria, the capital at the time. In the eyes of South Africa at large, Johannesburg was and should always have remained a temporary town to support the functioning of the mines until their depletion after which all capital ventures would return to Pretoria.

The town was erected with aspirations of profit and fortune, attracting businessmen and prospectors from all over the globe. Johannesburg soon became a hub of activity and commerce, bringing with it the elite from Europe, which brought the desire to turn Johannesburg into a respectable place to call home (Grundlingh 2015: 40). This affected a great many development decisions during the early phases of Johannesburg's growth, one of which was the establishment of Joubert Park (see figure 2.25).

Situated in the heart of the city, Joubert Park was the first green public space in Johannesburg. The Diggers' Committee put forward a request that a piece of land be set aside for a green space to escape the hustle and bustle of the dusty and dry town. The land on which Joubert Park rests today was granted to the committee in 1888 (Grundlingh 2015: 38).

It wasn't until 1895 that the park was formally laid out and structured. Its first defining feature was a cast iron fountain at its centre (see figure 2.31), surrounded by beautifully manicured gardens and defined walkways stemming from it (see figure 2.27). It was typical of the time within an "elitist society" for an individual to fund public spaces and in this case, Jan Eloff funded the park (Grundlingh 2015: 34). The result was a green space that was open strictly to Europeans.

The park attempted to recreate the ideals of a traditional Victorian park, both in layout and function representing values and familiarities that the European settlers longed for (ibid.). The park was further developed

to feature activities commonly housed in English parks; the bandstand fulfilled the prerequisite for a space of cultural gathering (see figures 2.28 & 2.29) and the conservatory introduced education (through botany and horticulture) and housed an array of exotic plants (see figure 2.30). The use of water was also incorporated with the use of fountains as well as elements of smaller and larger scale creating intimacy within the large area. These were elements that were carried over from British garden design (Grundlingh 2015: 37).

The most important aspect of the daily use of the park was that of the promenade. The park served as a backdrop for the daily parades of visitors in the latest fashions, walking along the promenade with grace (Grundlingh 2015: 34). This relationship saw the park growing in popularity with events such as the Sunday afternoon performances at the bandstand, which drew as many as 4000 people by 1923 (ibid.).

The settlers in Johannesburg aimed to reach the levels of sophistication and comfort found in Europe (Grundlingh 2015: 35). The desire for culturally-rich places and people representing the epitome of respectability led to the conception of another idea (Grundlingh 2015: 38). The Johannesburg Art Gallery was the brainchild of one Lady Phillips, wife to Randlord Lionel Phillips, who wanted to bring contemporary artworks from Europe to South Africa to maintain a connection to the developments of art and culture in Europe (Carman 2015: 16).

The gallery was established as a status symbol for the Europeans settled in Johannesburg; of what the British viewed as the "superior city" (Grundlingh 2015: 39). At the time, it was considered that a city with a decent society should have places of cultural prominence where people could learn about and enjoy the arts (ibid.). This was imperative in establishing ideas of *respectability and sophistication* (Grundlingh 2015: 34).

In the park's formal design, the gallery formed the heart of the city (see figure 2.33).





Image descriptions listed from left to right, row by row. All images from the JAG Archives, none of which are dated.

**Figure 2.26:** The green park before the formal layout.

**Figure 2.27:** The promenade.

**Figure 2.28:** People congregating at the bandstand for a weekend performance.

**Figure 2.29:** The bandstand with surrounding benches on a normal park day.

**Figure 2.30:** The original conservatory building housing exotic plants.

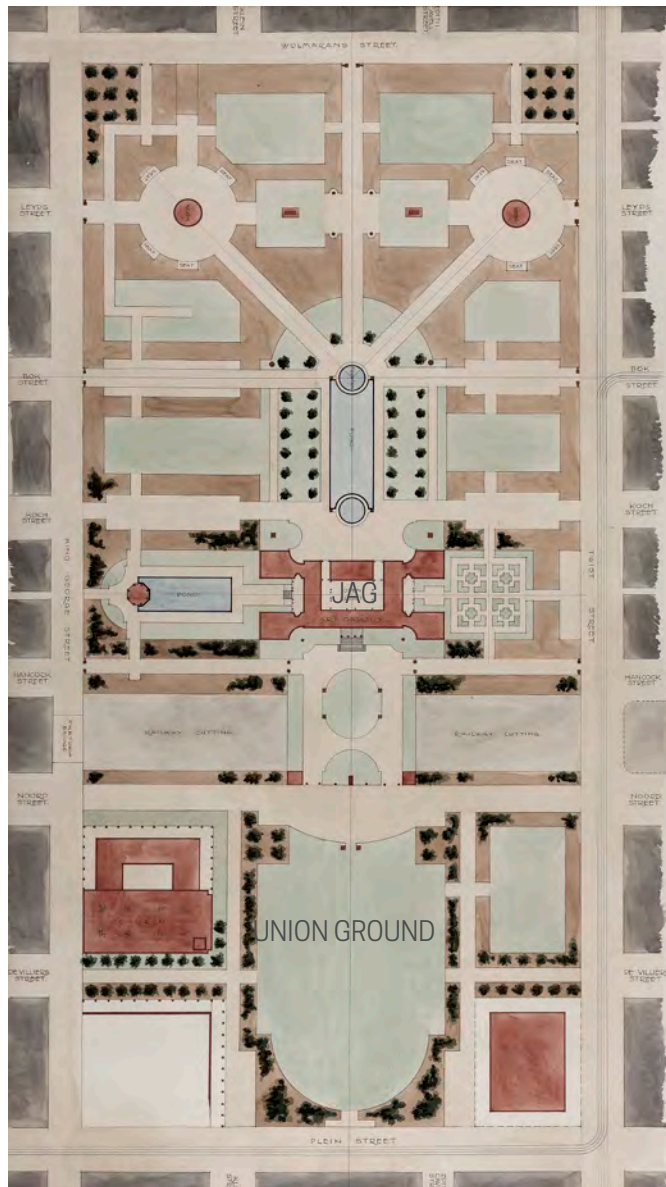
**Figure 2.31:** The original central fountain built in 1895.



Figure 2.32: Old city map of Johannesburg central (JAGA n.d.)

## 2.5. TRANSFORMATIONS OF JOUBERT PARK

Spatial changes of the park over time





# TRANSFORMATIONS



Opposite page:

**Figure 2.33:** The original design for Joubert Park by Edward Lutyens - pre-1915 (JAGA N.d.)

**Figure 2.34:** Aerial photograph - taken pre-1940 (JAGA N.d.)

Current page:

**Figure 2.35:** Aerial photograph of Joubert Park - pre-1987 (JAGA N.d.)