I - BRIXTON CEMETERY 1908

II - BRAAMFONTEIN CEMETERY 1888

UITVALGROND

Cemetery Avenue

fig. 1.19. (author) Brixton cemetery mapped in relation to the city.

Chapter 2

Site Context: Brixton Cemetery

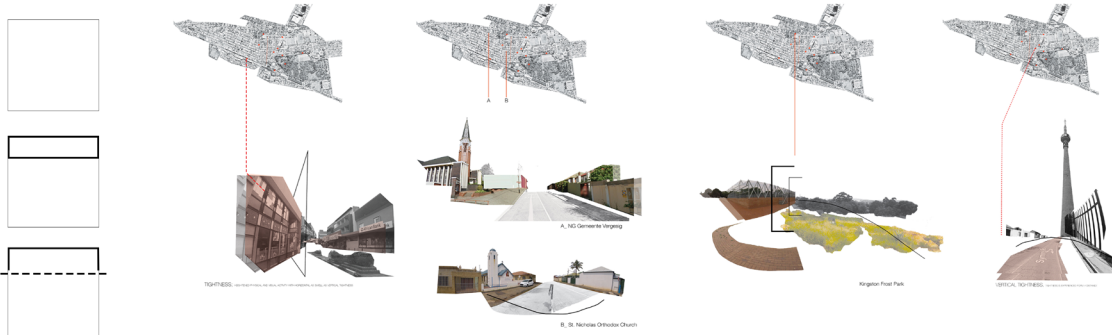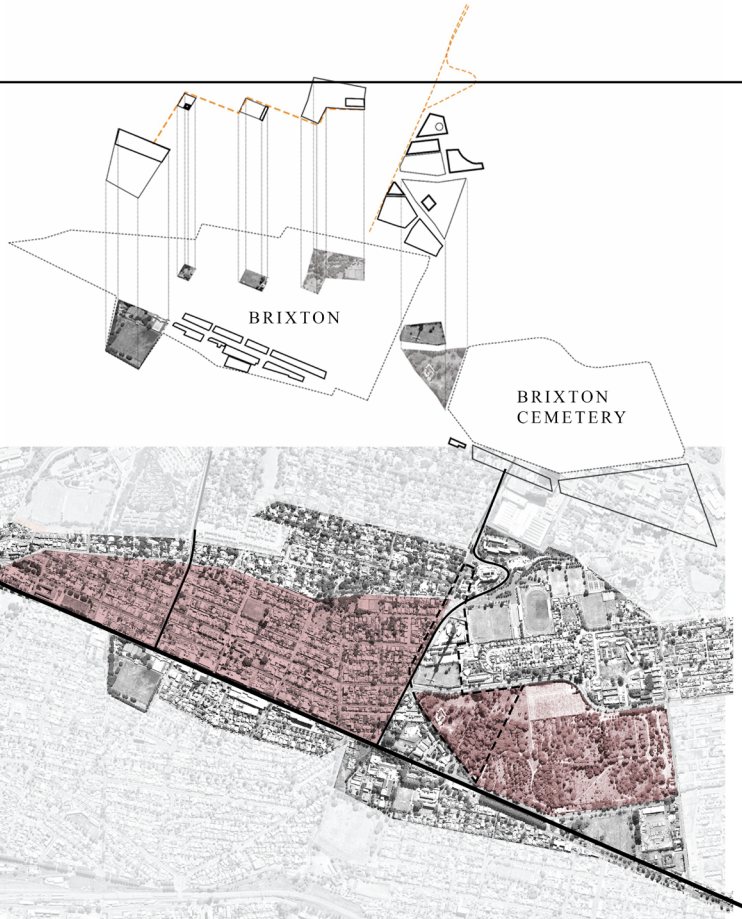**Brixton as nostalgic suburb** (morphology of looseness and tightness):
Brixton, the suburb where this project is situated, is one of the oldest (mainly) working-class neighbourhoods in Johannesburg. Proclaimed in 1902 as a labourers district, and named after the suburb in London in the United Kingdom, it is located towards the western edge of the city's core, on one of the highest points on the ridge that straddles the watershed between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The neighbourhood is characterized by a fine urban grain, resulting from the relatively small properties charted from its outset, and has been largely disaffected by the influences of urban decay and gentrification, retaining much of quaint character of its Victorian heritage (although this has recently come under threat due to developmental pressure). High Street, the main vital corridor linking the suburb to the city, has been the most affected by change seeing an influx of commerce and development of mostly student residences, although this has taken place in a slow, incremental nature. The Brixtonian population is highly diverse, despite the majority of neighbourhood's residents having been settled there for relatively long periods of time. The community is well integrated, but insular with retail, work, recreation, religious spaces and social opportunities being abundant and mostly within walking distance, although, a host of these places have become territorialized. This has fostered conditions for crime to become rife, and often encountered in the parks (some of which have attempted to be formalized to combat these activities), cemetery and unoccupied parcels of land throughout the suburb (Kotze, 2014). While these conditions have incapacitated the progression of Brixton and, to some extent, barred its inclusion into the city, recent development in Chiswick Street (binding High Street with the ridge) have attempted remediating the effects of this through gentrifying pockets of the old fabric. Furthermore, the *Empire-Perth Development Corridor* is a document released by the Johannesburg Development Agency in 2017 which includes a redevelopment framework for Brixton as a medium to high density residential area (with new mixed use commercial, retail and recreational services, mostly accommodating students

BRIXTON

The suburb where this project is situated, is one of the oldest (mainly) working-class suburbs in Johannesburg. Topographically, it bears the distinction that it straddles the watershed between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans that traverses this part of the city. This means that the suburb is situated on one of the highest points in the city. From the start, its relatively small properties resulted in a fine urban grain. Despite the suburb being well situated in terms of work, leisure opportunities and its proximity to metropolitan connector routes, the change that gentrification or urban decay can inflict on an urban area has largely passed it by. The change that has occurred is of a slower and more incremental nature. The population living in Brixton is, like that of many inner-city areas, highly diverse and cosmopolitan. Most residents have lived here for a relatively long period of time; long enough to form lasting bonds with the place and the other inhabitants. This has resulted in a pronounced pride in, and ownership of, the area by the majority of its residents.

Brixton's Victorian heritage, whilst under threat, is also enlivened through a diverse citizenry not too concerned with appearances but appreciating the convenience of children playing in the street, shopping in spazas and corner cafes, repairing and washing cars on pavements, conversing from verandas and over low walls or winding down in taverns and boutique B&B's. The neighbourhood is well served internally with retail, work, recreation and social opportunities -all mostly within walking distance."

(from http://artefacts.co.za)

BRIXTON

BRIXTON
CEMETERY

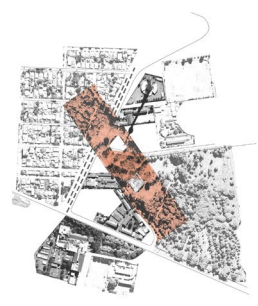# BRIXTON AND THE FOREST

A MORPHOLOGY OF LOOSENESS AND TIGHTNESS

1_ LOOSENESS / SCHISM

2_ COLLAPSING THE SCHISM

3_ BINDING NEIGHBOUR-HOOD AND FOREST

TEXTURAL BINDING AS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

fig. 2.20. (author) Brixton morphologies.

fig. 2.21. Brixton cemetery in relation to the city.

from the University of Johannesburg and the University of the Witwatersrand), as well as a strategy to formalise Auckland Park, which includes the Universities, their sports grounds, as well as some schools, as a *Knowledge Precinct*. This precinct includes the Jan Hofmeyer and Vrededorp suburbs which are immediately adjacent to the northern edge of Brixton cemetery, and are to be redeveloped as four to six storey apartment blocks (Empire Perth Development Corridor Strategic Area Framework, 2017:83-93). The framework proposes the integration of these precincts to the city through the Johannesburg BRT system.

The schism created by public institutions and civil amenities (particularly Garden City Hospital and the fire station) bordering the suburb's eastern and southern borders have to a large degree bolstered the degree to which Brixton is isolated from the city, and further severs Brixton from the cemetery, impeding its necessary rehabilitation as a public park [17].

17 According to the *Empire Perth Development Corridor* document, open space and the rehabilitation thereof is crucial to the densification of these precincts, stating that the current availability of green spaces is already insufficient for the existing population. Out of 195 hectares of space available in the corridor, 104 hectares belong to the three cemeteries established here (Brixton cemetery being the largest), although they have become impenetrable to the public. A ratio of 1,5 hectares per 1000 population (CSIR guidelines require a ratio of 0,5) can be achieved with the rehabilitation of cemeteries as public parks (Empire Perth Development Corridor Strategic Area Framework, 2017: 44-45).

History of Brixton cemetery:

Johannesburg's City Parks department regards cemeteries as parks, recognising their potential as green pockets in urban belts, however, most of the cemeteries have become isolated from the city, unused and neglected. From the outset, Brixton cemetery was landscaped, planned and organized as a park with a curviform nature in the tradition of English and Scottish urban cemeteries with the various religious denominations permitted to have isolated sections (Munro, 2017). The cemetery is currently one of 35 cemeteries in the greater Johannesburg area, 26 of which are passive and the remainder of which are being rapidly occupied. According to estimations an additional 1 500 hectares will be required for burial within the next half century, and while the City of Johannesburg has set aside R20-million for developing new cemeteries (ibid., 2017), custodial bodies are forced to consider and encourage alternative burial methods which include: extension of cremation facilities (although only 6% of the city's population makes use of cremation), columbariums and mausolea, gardens of remembrance, second and third burials, reduced space coffins, upright burials, and deep-freeze liquid nitrogen cremation (Jhbcityparks. com, 2008:3-7). Reduction of burial graves is also considered in attempt to preserve green spaces. Brixton cemetery's first burial on the 34 hectare site took place in 1912 with Braamfontein cemetery nearing its full capacity. The cemetery provides burial to various religions and races including a Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Roman Catholic section, and hosts two crematoria towards the north-west portion of the site, the first, with a wood-burning oven, was built in 1918 after a request was made by Mahatma Gandhi in 1908 to the Town Council on behalf of the Hindu community. The second, more efficient gas-fired oven, was built in 1956 to accommodate increased demand.
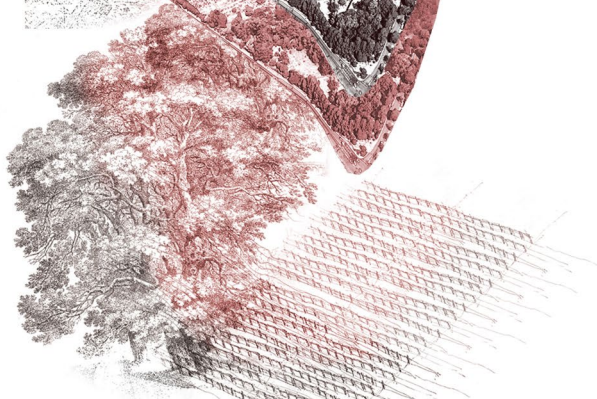
Dates of significant events in Brixton:

1902_ Brixton proclaimed
1911_ Brixton Recreation Ground established
1912_ Brixton Cemetery
1918_ Brixton Hindu crematorium established by Mahatma Gandhi
1922_ Site of the pitched battle during the Red Rebellion
1925_ Kingston Frost Park established
1940_ Brixton Swimming Pool built
1955_ Group Areas Act
1962_ Sentech Tower

BRIXTON TOWER

JAN HOFMEYER

CHISWICK ST

SYMMONS RD

BRIXTON

CAROLINE ST

III

II

BRIXTON RD

IV

I

VI

HIGH ST

MAYFAIR

A - *Caroline Street entrance*
B - *High Street entrance*
C - *Jewish cemetery entrance*

I - VII *Informal entrances*

	Hospital and health care
	Public schools
	Fire Station
	Religious

BR
CON
SCAL

VREDEDORP

PAGEVIEW

KRAUSE ST

BARTLETT STREET

C

A

V

B

VI

VII

BRIXTON CEMETERY
CONTEXT, SITE AND EDGE CONDITIONS
SCALE 1:2000

0   20   50   100   200

fig. 2.22. (author)
Mapping Brixton
cemetery.

[ARTIFICIALITY OF ESCAPE]

REVENANTS / (*"verbeeld-ing"*)

I_ *ESCAPE THROUGH AXIS MUNDI*

Cemetery as simulacra of Elysium / Paradise sanctified in religions' isolated pockets and rituals.

II_ *ESCAPE THROUGH ARTIFICIAL FOREST*
Cemetery as nostalgic, synthetic European forest.

III_ *ESCAPE THROUGH MEMORIALIZATION*
Deferral of Death/death through memorialization.
Tombstones (especially Jewish cemetery) as artificial granite surface.

AMNESIA / (*"ontslape"*)

I_ *Cemetery passive from 1960's.*

II_ *The forest reclaims the cemetery as lived memory of the buried is lost. The cemetery is desacralized and amnesia is exacerbated as significance of the cemetery becomes ambiguous.*

III_ *Deepening of edge and nefarious occupation occurs as desacrelization occurs as the artificiality of escape recedes.*

IV_ *Developmental pressure threatens erasure of large portions of Brixton, the cemetery, and its engrained memory.*

Artificiality of escape manifested in Brixton cemetery.

Escape inherent in axis mundi:
Brixton cemetery can be regarded as an archetypal precedent of the narrative of escape in as much as it primarily attempts to escape to a mythological realm through its simulacral reimagination of Paradise. This is not only represented by the forest and tombstones existing as axis mundi binding the immediate to the cosmic, but is also sanctified in the various religions' isolated pockets and rituals.

> *Memorials ritualize remembrance and mark the reality of ends… The memorial is a special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the dead* (Young, 1993:3).

Escape inherent in the artificial forest:
Secondly, escape is captured here in the cemetery existing as a nostalgic, synthetic European forest that provides serene, but claustrophobic seclusion from the city. More significantly, however, the site (which was previously a camp for native labourers) is a dense verdant forest, lined on its peripheries with towering blue-gum trees, overgrown as an arboreal forest - rid of any indigenous species - attempting to escape through the familiarity of nostalgia. According to Foster this artificial reproduction of European nostalgia identifies that "the differentiation of nature was not just spatial but temporal, and incorporated history, and that a people's nature was linked to their environments" (Foster, 2012:45).

The artificiality of the landscape furthermore manifests in the tombstones, mausolea and shrines forming a new surface of granite monuments [18]. These memorials now subject to cultural amnesia "suggest themselves as indigenous, even geological outcroppings [where]... in time, such idealized memory grows as natural to the eye as the landscape in which it stands" (Young, 1993:2).

Escape through memorialization:
Escape is also characterised in the process of memorialization, which, according to Young further exacerbates the process of amnesia, with particular relevance to cemeteries:

> *For once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember. In shouldering the memory-*

fig. 2.23. (author)
Artificiality of escape in
Brixton cemetery.

18 This is especially evident in the Jewish section, a poignant mirroring of the city rising in the background towards the east.

BRIXTON TOWER

Caroline Street

Brixton Road

F

Hindu graves

African section

Jewish section

Church of England

Roman Catholic

Nonconformist
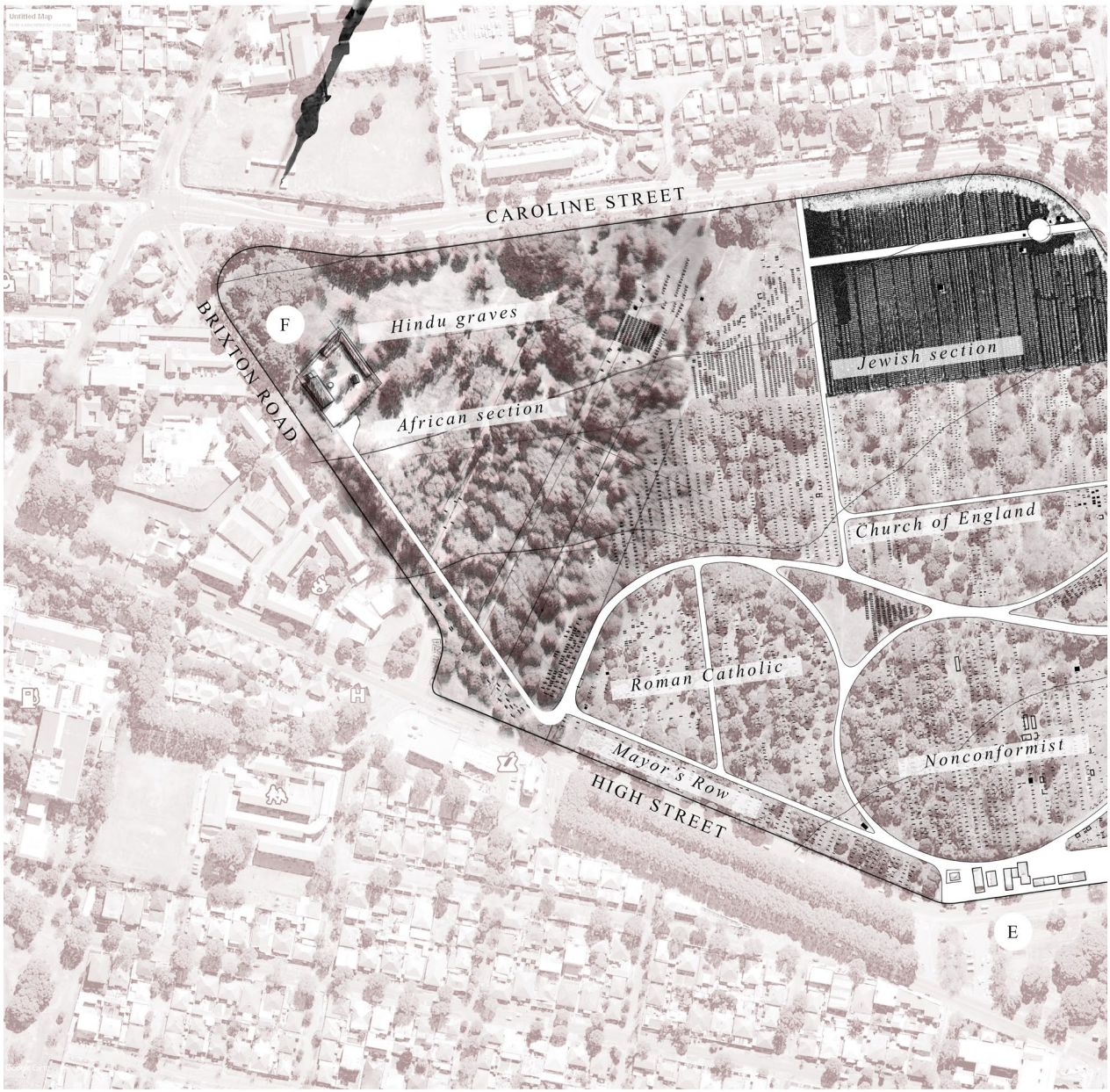
Mayor's Row

HIGH STREET

E

fig. 2.24. (author) Sacred division and sublime escape in the artificial forest. Brixton cemetery as nostalgic remnant.

"The map is no longer the territory":

"[...] and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours" (Baudrillard,1994:1).

CYPRESS
Cupressus sempervirens
Eastern Mediterranean

SYZYGIUM
Syzygium gerrardii
Australia

WHITE STINKWOOD
Celtis africana
indigenous

BLUE GUM
Eycalyptus globulus
South East Australia

PLANE TREE
Platanus x acerifolia
European

BOTTLE BRUSH
Callistemon
Australia

LILAC
Syringa vulgaris
Asian

work, monuments may relieve viewers of their memory burden (Young, 1993:5).

The cemetery provides a framework for two dialectics of death through which the argument is developed: firstly, *physical Death* and *amnesic death* experienced when memory fatally attempts to reproduce a model (through desire to recreate the familiar) and eventually erodes (aptly described by the Afrikaans word (*verbeeld-ing*) or, secondly, death [19] that is experienced when reimagination claims the original model to create the new (*verbeelding*). This becomes a process with particular relevance in relation to the pervasiveness of Death in the cemetery, and is appropriates to reanimate the forest and its material through this process of Death/death.

Amnesic conditions in Brixton cemetery:
a nostalgic remnant of the *first artificial landscape.*
Amnesia is encountered in Brixton cemetery where its artificiality has manifested itself as a nostalgic remnant in the *first artificial landscape*, the world of the dead belonging to the living (Munro, 2017). Escape here has become residual. The cemetery gradually undergoes typological metamorphosis as amnesia ensures its gradual transformation into an uninhabitable forest and graves are reclaimed by nature. The cemetery, which provided physical and imaginative escape to the dweller, has dilapidated into urban blight and become impenetrable to the public (both as cemetery and forest) firstly because of the extent to which it was intended as escape and isolation from the city, and secondly due to the desacralization it undergoes as lived memory of those buried there is exhausted (the cemetery has been passive from the 1960's). The loss of significance caused by these conditions has resulted in further isolation from the public as its ambiguity has become a haven to vagabonds, nefarious activities, vandalism and desecration of graves, and has had an adverse effect on all the surrounding neighbourhoods (ibid., 2017).

The cemetery is further isolated from Brixton's residential fabric as public institutions and civil amenities form an impenetrable belt severing these spaces, while the lack of articulation of edge conditions on the eastern and southern edges, and shortage of public entrances has led to the insurgent opening of informal entrances to the cemetery, which become festering crime nodes afflicting pedestrians.

As developmental pressures from the city and densification further threaten the erasure of significant portions of Brixton, the memory enshrined here further recedes. It is an heirloom in suspended animation.

fig. 2.25. (author) Herbarium of exotic species in Brixton cemetery.

19 Death (deceased): "*ontslape*" / little death (awakened): "*La Petit Mort",* "*ont-slape*".
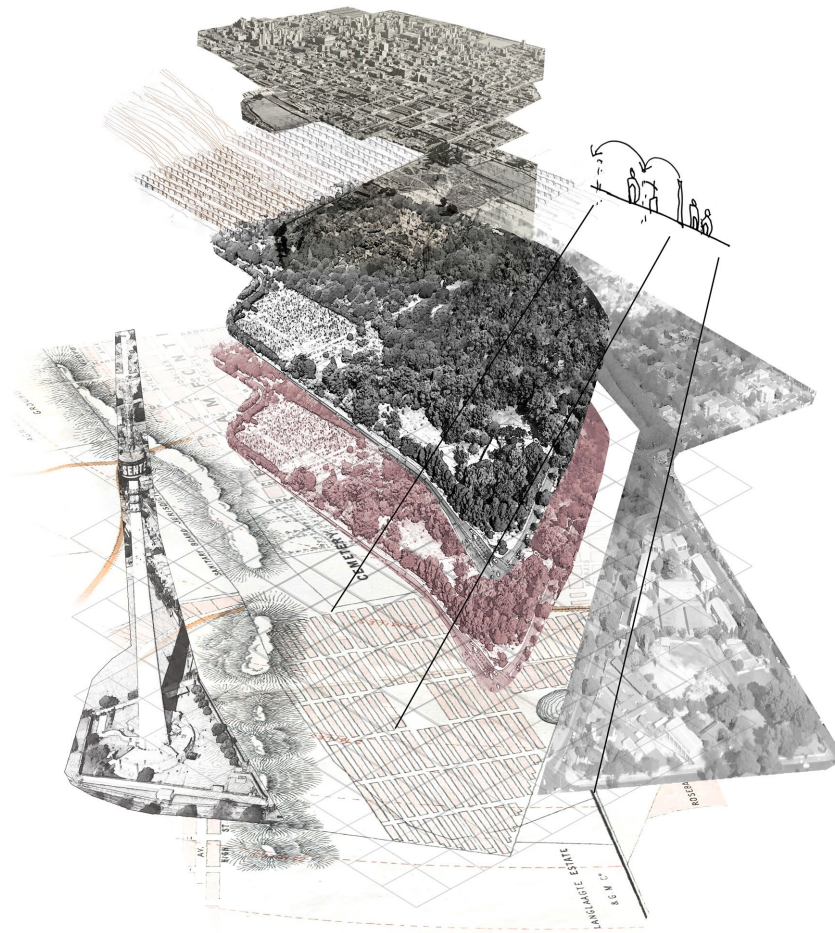
fig. 2.26. (author)
Desacralization of Brixton
cemetery.

Necessity of intervention and the role of reimagination.

Recognising the cemetery as a physical manifestation of cultural amnesia still in a degenerating state of dilapidation (as custodianship over the cemetery withers), acts of desecration, vandalism and crime becoming pervasive, it has become a priority for the city to intervene here. Current urban development plans from the city propose rezoning Brixton, Vrededorp and Pageview as medium to high density residential, which will infringe on the cemetery due to the availability of developmental space, and further threaten the erasure of heritage value of large portions of Brixton and the memory ingrained in the cemetery. This loss of significance due to amnesia and erasure will induce further desacralization and exacerbation of current conditions.

Desacralization of the cemetery causes its transformation into a forest while densification of residential developments surrounding the cemetery and the *Knowledge Precinct* proposed in the *Empire-Perth Development Corridor* by Johannesburg Development Agency (2017) just north, adjacent to the cemetery necessitates its reanimation into a park for public recreation and exploration. The city council further expressed the urgent need to expand the city's overburdened crematoria as well as the dire need to reconsider burial methods as the availability of burial space in the city drastically diminishes (with an estimated 1500 hectares required for burial grounds in the next 50 years), although superstition around the exhumation of graves foster stigmas preventing any intervention in cemeteries. Furthermore, the highly sanctified proximity around the Hindu crematoria causes pedestrian corridors between Caroline Street (northern edge) and Brixton and High Street (southern edge) to press deeper into the forest making its crossing dubious, while the heritage significance of the Hindu passive resistance graves surrounding the crematoria makes physical intervention and necessary expansion of the currently overburdened crematoria problematic.

This new landscape captures excess by being "increasingly permeated by culturally constructed geographical images, narratives, and discourses that shape the disposition of urbanites toward the spaces they inhabit" (Foster, 2012:44-45) and can thus be understood as being as much a metaphorical image as physical space (ibid., 2012:44-45). Nuttall further stretches the significance of this geographic reformation witnessed in the city by observing that this newly created surface is inseparable from the narrative of fantasy in which originates, arguing that "the entanglement between surface and underneath constitutes one of the defining metaphors by which to understand the city" (Nuttall and Mbembe, 2008:91). Nuttall further argues that understanding this essential metaphor allows for a deepened interpretation of the city. Instead of relying on the city dweller's ability in modes of translation and translatability, enabled by the reading of the city, the understanding shifts to an understanding of how cultural forms sustain the movement and reconfiguration of the city (Nuttall

A

fig. 2.27. (author) View into the forest towards Hindu crematoria. Taken from an informal entrance on High Street on the southern edge.

B

fig. 2.28. (author) View into the forest towards the intervention site. Taken from an informal entrance on Brixton Road on the south western edge.

C

fig. 2.29. (author) View into the forest taken from the informal pedestrian corridor in proximity to the Hindu crematoria on the north western edge.

D

E

F

fig. 2.30. (author) D. Informal pedestrian corridor from south western edge.

fig. 2.31. (author) E. View into the forest from western edge.

fig. 2.32. (author) F. Jewish cemetery on northern edge.

fig. 2.33. (author) Photographic mapping in proximity to the site.

fig. 2.34. (author) Remnant conditions throughout Brixton cemetery.

fig. 2.35. (author) Graves claimed by the forest throughout Brixton cemetery.

and Mbembe, 2008:93). It is by understanding the *second landscape* as a socio-nature assembled of material and cultural practices, always through this narrative, that the relation of perception and the potential of imagination to the creation of lived environments is revealed (Kruger, 2013:7).

Brixton cemetery provides a realm where slippage between architecture and the dweller's imagination can occur, where the architecture lures the dweller's imagination to revive the forest. The forest is reanimated in recognising the symptoms of amnesia in the desire for artificially creating escape. As the architectural intervention uses artificiality divisively to facilitate the re-imagination (*verbeelding*) of the existing material, and to create a condition for fantasy that engages the dweller's imagination, the forest and the architecture is experienced intimately. Fantasy here further functions on a mythological scale in that the forest is regarded as an archetype for revealing the unfamiliar and engaging death through imagination.

Proposed urban intervention in cemetery:

The conceptual analysis of Brixton as a morphology of looseness and tightness is appropriated as language to intervene in the site. The schism existing between cemetery and urban context is collapsed firstly by removing the hard edges and impenetrable barriers to the cemetery and formalizing the insurgent entrances to the cemetery, and secondly, through binding the natural texture and intimate grain of the cemetery into the immediate surrounding urban context, deepening the periphery and creating a profane edge around the cemetery as a sacred belly. This intervention will further instigate pedestrianization of the cemetery by formalizing existing and inserting new pedestrian corridors which intersects to establish nodes at various points within 100m by 100m radiuses, allowing points for repose as well as passive surveillance around these areas. The pedestrian corridors are divided into arterial routes (3m wide) stretching between the formalized entrances and significant structures (chapel, crematoria, mayor's row graves), and subsidiary routes (with varying widths) which deviate between these routes, hosting landscape follies and highlighting significant shrines, graves and memorials in the cemetery. This will facilitate entrance into the cemetery from the newly proposed medium to high density residential buildings bordering the eastern and southern edges, while further development of retail, commercial and recreational facilities are proposed to mediate this transition on the southern edge following High Street, and expanding on the vigor which already infuse this street. New BRT stops are further proposed in Caroline Street to serve Brixton, the cemetery and educational band to the north as well as in High Street bordering the south, serving the retail, residential, recreational, religious and health care facilities. This establishes the cemetery as a new destination on the BRT transit.

BRIXTON TOWER

SYMMONS RD

JAN HOFMEYER

NEW KNOWLEDGE PRECINT PROPOSED IN

CHISWICK ST

CAROLINE ST

BRIXTON

formalised entrance

II

BRIXTON RD

INTERVENTION

HIGH ST

I

III

NEW COMMERICIAL

NEW MEDIUM TO HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

MAYFAIR

1 - 4: NEW AND FORMALISED
ENTRANCES TO CEMETERY

EXISTING:

Hospital and health care
Public schools
Fire Station
Religious

PROPOSED INTERVENTION:

Medium to high density residential
Retail and commercial
Recreational

BR

SITE
DEV
SCA

ED IN BRIXTON DEVELOPMENT PLAN

NEW RECREATIONAL

NEW COMMERICIAL

NEW MEDIUM TO HIGH
DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

KRAUSE ST

NE ST

formalised entrances

CAROLINE ST
ENTRANCE TO
CEMETERY

IV

V

VREDEDORP

PAGEVIEW

III

NEW PLAZA

BARTLETT ST
ENTRANCE TO
CEMETERY

NEW MEDIUM TO HIGH
DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

KRAUSE ST

formalised entrance

NEW RECREATIONAL

NEW COMMERCIAL

HIGH ST

BRIXTON CEMETERY
SITE INTERVENTION AND URBAN
DEVELOPMENT PLAN
SCALE 1:2000

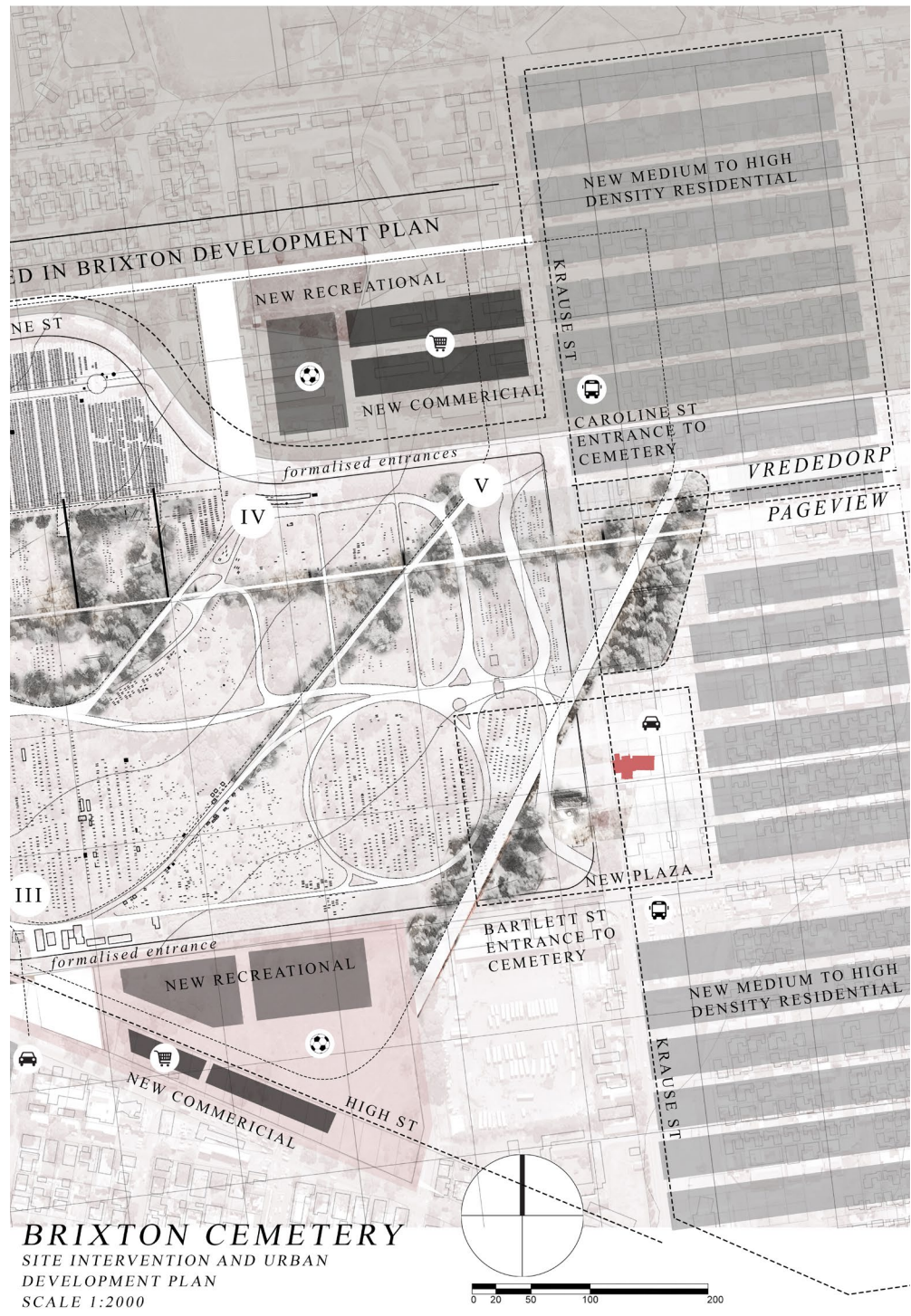0   20   50   100   200

fig. 2.36. (author)
Proposed urban
invtervention in and
around Brixton cemetery.