

# Urban consumption of place: Maboneng as a case study

by

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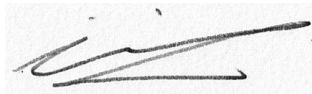
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## ABSTRACT

This study explores Maboneng as a creative district where art serves as a medium of expression and encourages the utilisation, not only of the space, but also what it offers as its by-products in terms of consumer goods and services. I consider how residents and visitors interact with spaces within Maboneng; what attracts users to this space; and the relationship that exists between art and gentrification. I deliberately use the term users to include all residents and visitors to the Maboneng precinct and place emphasis on their role as consumers in the area.

This research contributes to an existing body of understanding around reinventing urban space, specifically in the post-Apartheid city of Johannesburg. The study starts by looking at the history and context of Johannesburg as a post-Apartheid city to understand the origin and motivation behind the creative district of Maboneng. I move on to gentrification as a phenomenon in a global context and looked at the repositioning of space within regenerated areas. The urban experience and people's interaction with it, especially in Maboneng, serves as a case study that focuses on its aesthetics and its presentation as a trendy, 'arty' precinct. The case study is further examined through a body of work in the form of installation drawings that aim to demonstrate my interpretation and reconstruction of city experiences within Maboneng.

As part of my research, I found the role of consumption and art to be integral to the establishment and sustainability of Maboneng. Most of the activities in and around Maboneng revolve around retail experiences. Through my research I have gained an understanding of the phenomenon that more people actively seek out to be part of or associated with art practices or activities that surround art making, which further emphasises the power of the visual arts in society. Despite its shortcomings, Maboneng, as a neighbourhood, has managed to create a place that is culture-led and physically transformed to increase community engagement on the aesthetics of place.

Keywords: gentrification, urban regeneration, urban art, placemaking, urban consumption

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## **CHAPTER 1 - Introduction**

### **1.1 Background to study**

Johannesburg in recent times has been accumulating more attention with an area of regeneration Maboneng, located in the inner city demonstrating this regeneration initiative. This new transformation is rooting itself in the run-down inner city and is playing a vital role in uplifting Johannesburg (Murtagh 2015:8).

Most of the activities in and around Maboneng revolve around retail experiences, urban regeneration and the power of art to help redefine a community, awareness of the constructed nature of Maboneng as a manufactured ‘cultural precinct’, one ostensibly manufactured by specific corporate agents to generate profit.

This study addresses gentrified urban areas with particular reference to the Maboneng Precinct as a space of consumption and the feasibility of the regeneration of this area in a decaying inner-city. Consumption, according to Rob Shields, “is a social activity built around social exchange as well as simple commodity exchange” (Shields 1992:16). In this view, consumption in spaces is not purely economic; it is also spatial, social and cultural (Zukin 1998). Users experience spaces in built environments in a particular way; how they feel in terms of the material features of the surroundings (Yu 2014:79) as urban architecture is both dependent upon and affected by their perceptions and experiences.

Maboneng’s developers’ claim that their desire to regenerate the inner city is not artificial, or a manufactured community, based on conspicuous consumption. This may contradict the expressed beliefs that there is an organic, integrated community that “just happened” (Nevin 2014:198).

### **1.2 Brief history of Johannesburg**

With the discovery of gold in 1886, Johannesburg (once a small mining camp made up of a few tents) quickly grew into a bustling economic hub. Being a relatively ‘young’ city in comparison to other



metropolises globally, and initially conceived and developed to be a 'whites only' settlement, Johannesburg developed a fractured visual history. As a growing economic hub, Johannesburg invited a stake into creating personal wealth that meant that masses of people flocked into the city, resulting in a perpetual shortage of accommodation and within a short space of time slums soon developed (Land: dispossession, resistance and restitution 2017). Forced removals from 1960 onwards and Apartheid land policies under the Native Land Act of 1913 (Land: dispossession, resistance and restitution, 2017) forced Johannesburg's local black population into townships more than 20km away from the city. This meant that a large part of the population that worked in the city and served as a labour force (domestic workers and mining labourers) lived outside the city boundaries with little opportunity to influence the city's development and evolution.

During the late 1950s until the beginning of the 1970s, clean lines and new materials defined the aesthetics of the city such as precast concrete that was used in the expansion of the Central Business District (CBD). From the 1970s onwards, the first signs of impending inner-city decay became evident, with vacant land and abandoned properties exacerbating changes in the social fabric of the community. The white residents of the inner city migrated to the northern suburbs following the increased development of businesses and wealth opportunities outside of the original city centre. Crime rates during the 1990s rocketed. "While levels of recorded crime stabilised between 1995 and 1996, crime has been increasing since then. The annual increase in the overall number of recorded crimes was greater in 1999 than in any previous year after 1994" (Schönteich & Louw 2001:1). Whites moved north to 'clean' shopping malls and suburbs away from the poverty experience of black people and their fear of the 'other'. The move of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange from Diagonal Street to the mostly residential hub of Sandton further magnified the void already apparent in the CBD (Dlamini 2012). By 1993, the demographic of the inner city was inverted entirely in comparison to only ten years prior, with blacks comprising 85% of the inner-city residents and whites only 5%. Low-income communities from the townships migrated to cheap unsafe 'homes' within neglected buildings, and the inner city experienced the continued decline of public spaces, provision of essential services and public works, increased crime rates, and an almost immediate decline in investment opportunities. Johannesburg in 2013 still indicates signs of neglect and lack of service delivery, as seen in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Contemporary Inner-city Johannesburg. 2013.**  
*(Madalene Cronjé, Mail & Guardian)*

### **1.3 A shift in inner city Johannesburg**

As a result of a demographic and socio-economic shift, Johannesburg's aesthetic became defined by, in its very essence, 'grit'. 'Grit' refers to the virtual no-go zones principally characterised by undesirable factors such as crime and grime. The industrial qualities of the buildings, with their untidy façades and neglected infrastructure, are signs of the decaying urban fabric (Bahmann & Frenkel 2012: 8). Synonymous with being on the 'edge', the symbolic connotations of grit lend a sense of purpose to young artists and creatives attempting to assert their subjectivity into the marginal spaces of urbanity.

“The valorisation of grit is the core on which the mundane and abject state of industrial decay becomes desirable and, indeed, fashionable” (Hui-bon-hoa 2012). Inheriting the ruins of industry (including factories, warehouses, and transport infrastructure), the spatial landscapes are undoubtedly gritty, illicit, and marginal. However, the very project of regeneration of urban decay is achieved by transforming such sites through cultural and symbolic reversals.

A city's urban fabric comprises its unique character, represented by elements such as smell, form, colour, texture, sound and culture. Cities are more than just a collection of physical materials and matter; they are symbolic and subjective, occupying the private and collective imaginaries of citizens.

Johannesburg's turbulent past of exclusion, rapid modernisation, and futuristic ambitions led to its

subsequent decay in a relatively short period, creating a rich and evocative, albeit complicated, urban fabric. Johannesburg was not isolated in its restructuring of human habitation; other international cities grew similarly, however, the reasons for change differed. Although the white flight in America was certainly a phenomenon in the northern cities of the United States, the transformation of industrial cities to post-industrial cities in the first half of the 20th century meant development and expansion of the overwhelmingly white suburbs. Manufacturing industries based in downtown areas of the cities, for example, the cities of Chicago or Detroit, made way for service industries and trade (Florida 2013).

In South Africa, the end of Apartheid (1994) meant that all cities were open to all its citizens (Parnell & Robinson 2012). In 2014, the city of Johannesburg announced a plan to remake its inner city into a ‘World-Class African City’ (Vejby 2015:2). The specific use of the term ‘world-class’ attracts people who link this term to European cities that are considered to be classy (Gurney 2013), with attributes such as being well-designed, secure and maintained. Arguably, Johannesburg's corporate strategy was to transform it into a world-class city that would rival the booming African metropolises like Lagos and Nairobi (Reid 2014). This vision of transformation included ideas of gentrification, a process which is often criticised for failing to include or acknowledge the indelible history of any city.

Johannesburg Executive Mayor, Herman Mashaba, has declared Johannesburg’s inner city open for business. He identified 71 properties for tender to secure private sector development into mixed-income housing, student accommodation and small business rental space (Arnoldi 2018). Johannesburg’s developing agency is pursuing economic infrastructure projects as one of its priorities in *The Joburg 2040 Growth and Development Strategy (GDS)* and *Integrated Development Plan (IDP)* (Johannesburg Development Agency: Business plan 2018).

The IDP forms part of the City of Joburg’s inner city revitalisation project, which was approved by the council in September 2017. According to Mashaba, “The city will sustain its efforts in regenerating the inner city by ensuring that neglected buildings that have been allowed to deteriorate and become invaded will be expropriated and redeveloped within a legal framework since these buildings result in urban blight and hinder city transformation.” (Arnoldi 2018).

## 1.4 Gentrification

Gentrification was first coined by sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964 (Slater 2011:571). The term gentrification refers to a process that forces out existing residents from inner-city neighbourhoods in order to attract more affluent inhabitants, creating what she called “upper-class ghettos” that are “cleaned up” and transformed into more expensive habitats for middle and upper-class residents. Gentrification tends to occur in districts with particular qualities that make them desirable. The presence of large industrial buildings and their proximity to major travel routes become qualities that are either romanticised or modified for more modern uses. The diversity and ambiguity of gritty urban areas are attractive features to a particular sector of the community including artists, youth, single people, and people with ‘alternative’ lifestyles, i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender and queer community members, also referred to as LGBTQ (Grisham 2016).

Gentrification is a complex urban process and its definition has sparked considerable debate since its appearance in the lexicon. While Glass (1964) focused on the residential housing market and the rehabilitation of existing properties that emerged during the era of deindustrialisation, the concept of gentrification has broadened once again to become a new form of urban policy, and researchers are arguing for a more expansive understanding of the process (Lees, Slater & Wyly 2008:4). Kate Shaw explained gentrification as “a generalised middle-class restructuring of place, encompassing the entire transformation from low-status neighbourhoods to upper-middle-class playgrounds” (Shaw 2008:2). Gentrifiers’ residences are no longer just renovated houses but newly-built high-rise apartments. She further argued that the restructuring of place goes hand-in-hand with a particular lifestyle and choice of specific retail and commercial outlets. Designer shops, art galleries, bars and restaurants form the landscape of the gentrified space (Shaw 2008).

In the province of Gauteng, Maboneng (situated towards the lower end of central Johannesburg’s CBD) was identified as an ideal site for gentrification (Reid 2014). Located within the inner-city suburb of Jeppestown, Maboneng has given middle-class people from the suburbs and further afield the opportunity to participate in an urban lifestyle that simultaneously allows developers to attract creatives and tourists and cater to a more affluent way of life. The Maboneng Precinct is a privately developed urban area on the eastern side of Johannesburg’s central business district. The word Maboneng is a

seSotho word meaning ‘place of light’ (Maboneng Precinct [sa]). Maboneng originated in 2009 when property developer Jonathan Liebmann bought a group of warehouses in a run-down city block bordered by Main, Fox, and Berea Streets. Liebmann set up the Propertuity company and named the development ‘Arts on Main’ and filled the space with galleries and artist studios. Propertuity soon bought more buildings in the area and named the new district Maboneng. Propertuity opened a boutique hotel, residential buildings, restaurants, and shops, which served as the catalyst to get people to come into the once ‘no-go’ areas of ‘town’ and exposed the conservative and isolated inhabitants of the suburbs of Johannesburg to a new potentially vibrant and energetic space, turning the degraded inner city around (Murtagh 2015:58).

What makes Maboneng distinctive is that it has been established as a strongly-branded area by a single private developer, Propertuity, which unofficially renamed a part of Johannesburg the Maboneng Precinct. This ‘mixed-used’ precinct is an area that has a variety of purposes, from residential to commercial or retail spaces; it is dynamic and contested. Due to its history, Maboneng is a place of complexity, which raises questions around the desirability to be and be seen there. What are the qualities of its physical landscape? Why are they desirable? As well as, how should we theorise and narrate its conditions?

## **1.5 Aims and objectives**

I seek to understand how people interact in a space like Maboneng, an urban space transformed and marketed as a solution to inner-city decay and what attracts users to spaces. My aim is to understand the relationship that exists between art and gentrification. Maboneng is marketed as a creative district where art serves as a medium of expression and encourages the consumption of not only the space, but also of its by-products. Consumers here can distance their spending habits (and thus themselves) from mass-produced products through a claim of uniqueness and authenticity; the authenticity of craft-production in a setting seemingly detached from modern production and marketing (Ley 2003). Art assumes a central role in the public consumption of Maboneng as it becomes increasingly integrated into the middle-class patterns of consumption as a form of investment, a status symbol and a means of self-expression.

## **1.6 Literature review**

### **1.6.1 Publications**

Researchers publish critical texts about gentrification and urban regeneration as the phenomenon increases throughout many global cities. Gentrification as an urban phenomenon is not new to older or established cities of Europe and the United States and has been studied extensively. The main body of research around gentrification focusses on displacement and its effects on existing residents. Displacement is probably the most prominent and researched aspect of gentrification, which is the focus of much of the early research and literature on the subject.

Gentrification is a specific form of urban renewal aimed at accommodating the young, highly skilled, innovative workers of the new information age. While gentrification initially became a means of addressing the decline of many inner-city areas, this research argues that this process is now fully integrated into a more comprehensive global urban restructuring. Gentrification was once closely allied to the acquisition and upgrading of existing housing stock within traditional working-class neighbourhoods. However, this research highlights that contemporary gentrification also involves purpose-built construction.

Contemporary debates concerning gentrification are seen most notably in the works of Loretta Lees (2000), Neil Smith (1986, 1996) and Tom Slater's (2006, 2011) work from the proposition that the extent and meaning of gentrification have changed markedly since the term was initially coined. Tim Butler (2007:162) agrees to a more comprehensive definition by stating that the restrictive analysis of gentrification as simple displacement by no means encompasses the trend towards new forms of urban renewal. Gentrifiers often refer to 'people like us', those they deem as sharing similar needs in terms of lifestyles. The gentrifiers have been the focus of work by Butler, who has extensively researched the gentrifying middle classes in London. Butler (1997) noted how many of his respondents wanted to live amongst 'like-minded' people, seeing themselves as part of a middle-class community of couples and families finding ways to negotiate and adapt to various aspects of life in a global city. What emerged clearly from the collection of research findings on gentrification is that in most parts of the world we would recognise some form of gentrification.

There is a substantial literature on the reasons for gentrification with seminal research done by Loretta

Lees (2000, 2008) David Ley (1986, 2003) Tom Slater (2006) and Neil Smith (2011). Smith in *“Toward a Theory of Gentrification: A Back to the City Movement by Capital, not People”* (2007) underlines the change from manufacturing to service industries and the rise of accessible roads and cars into the city during the 1960s and 1970’s meant that living near the city centre became less critical (Smith 2007:538). Typically, higher paying jobs in the city centre now offered wealthier people that work close by shorter commutes. Changes in the external economy affected the relationship between people and the places that they lived in, in specific places at particular times (Butler 2007).

In her prior work, *Reinventing the Johannesburg Inner City*, Bremner (2000) contextualised the failure of urban regeneration in tackling issues of social equity. She argues that from the onset, the urban regeneration ‘was based on models of urban entrepreneurialism and the promotion of local growth, thus falling ‘squarely into the mainstream approach to urban economic revival’. This, she argued, had “very little to do with the economic, social and physical changes which had taken place in the city over time, instead of seeking to capitalise on South Africa’s imminent re-entry into the world as the opportunity for re-imagining and regenerating the city” (Bremner 2000:187).

Sociologist Sharon Zukin wrote numerous papers on cities and space. In her article *Gentrification: Culture and Capital in the Urban Core* (1987), she identified further research in the field of urban studies and gentrification. She argued that further research “needs to focus on investigating urban morphology – the shape the city takes in terms of economic and cultural analysis” (Zukin 1987:131). The most influential study of gentrification came from Sharon Zukin in her classic work *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, first published in 1982. In the second edition, Zukin explained how derelict manufacturing spaces in the Soho district in New York City attracted artists in the 1960s and 1970s and thereafter provided a cultural impetus for the commercial redevelopment of Lower Manhattan. Zukin’s notion of an “artistic mode of production” represented an early attempt to correlate capital and culture by linking the real estate industry to the culture industry. Catalysts for vibrant urban centres are often artists and ethnic diversity (Zukin 1982). Zukin (1982,1995) is a forerunner in discussions around new forms of understanding of the cultural- symbolic - economy of cities. This connection between artists and urban space foregrounds an important development in the rise of the post-industrial city. In a more recent text, *Naked City: The death and life of authentic urban places* (first published in 2009), Zukin wrote that the wave of middle-class gentrification is now as much a

threat to the diversity of communities as is the corporate city. The result is an ‘overbearing sameness’. Cities are losing their ‘authenticity’. They are no longer places where people can put down roots, but simply ‘experiences’ that people may consume before moving on (Zukin 2011:2).

Urban areas of decay across the world, through a deliberate injection of culture by their developers, essentially use art and culture to transform these areas into dynamic destinations which offer an urban experience of sorts. According to Graeme Evans, some culture-led regeneration is now a feature of cities, old and new, as they seek to revive former industrial and waterfront sites and city centres and establish themselves as competitive cities of culture (Evans 2005). The increase in competition to highlight a city's uniqueness and differentiate it from other cities uses culture as a contributing factor (Yelinek 2009). Academic writings on the design of post-industrial urban change have focused on the impact of the visual form of urban regeneration projects, for example, David Harvey (1990) and Christine Boyer (1988). In a fiercely competitive global economy, city landscapes are increasingly under pressure to perform as marketable commodities.

The notion of gentrification and its effects on urban environments often reflects a more hegemonic North American view of the nature of urban change (Butler 2007). Increasingly there has been a call for a more comparative analysis between Northern and Southern contexts (Lees, Shin & Lopez-Morales 2015:10). The global phenomenon of urban regeneration has been echoed in numerous South African cities and underpinned by a range of commonly recognised urban processes. Cities of the global South share similar dynamics to that of South African cities, namely in Brazil and India. The international perspective essentially provides an understanding of urban regeneration outside of the ‘Apartheid City’ context. Visser and Kotze (2008) referred to decentralisation as ‘white-flight from inner-cities, and ‘suburbanisation of high-order service functions’ as some of the contributory factors.

Juliet Carpenter & Lees (1995) argue through the comparison of various gentrified areas that “despite different local contexts, the symbols of affluent consumption from all three neighbourhoods appear to adhere to a global code, with only minor contextual differences” (1995:300). Although some of the trends and features are relevant to global experiences of gentrification, other aspects might be argued as being more locally related and perhaps a sole indicator of gentrification in comparison to European or American cases. In Gauteng, South Africa, the neighbourhoods of Johannesburg that make-up the inner city includes the suburbs of Yeoville, Bellevue, Jeppestown, Berea to the east and Fordsburg to



the west.

The studios at The Bag Factory<sup>1</sup> where artists work and exhibit their artworks is closely associated with the process of regeneration (Francis 2017), although it is very different to artists' studios in Maboneng as it is artist and not developer led. A more likely reason for the occurrence of urban regeneration in Johannesburg is a rise in anti-suburban attitudes that fuel the demand for central city development. The arrival of conspicuous consumption and the commodification of art and artistic lifestyles (Ley 2003) have led the new middle-class to want to move away from the monotony of the suburbs. Artistic lifestyles move away from mainstream consumption, idealise individuality and value bespoke commodities. A gentrified neighbourhood has a certain feel to it, a certain look, and a landscape of conspicuous consumption that makes the process readily identifiable, as applied to Maboneng. Urban degeneration has affected the environmental, economic and social aspects of the inner city. An environment that attracts crime, disorder and social turmoil forces the poor to continue living there, as wealthy citizens escape the grime through havens on the outskirts of the city.

In Maboneng, old historical buildings that have been repurposed and rehabilitated house African-themed 'tourist' with a contemporary twist that in time will become "synonymous with the Johannesburg inner city and strengthen the Johannesburg and South African identity" (Murtagh 2015:99). Although it can be argued that Maboneng does not convincingly display all the classic key issues of gentrification (displacement, evictions, and controversy), a gentrified landscape aesthetic is evident (Visser 2008). In the case of Maboneng, Visser (2008) suggests that South African research presents little evidence of a "local voice" on the desirability of gentrification as the process has been uneven across the urban hierarchy in terms of where it takes place and what socio-economic groups are involved. The use of an area like Maboneng as a commodity for profit serves a capitalist economy, and the identity of "culture and arts" drives the marketing of the space with a desirable lifestyle and collective identity.

<sup>1</sup>The Fordsburg Artists' Studios (also known as *The Bag Factory*) opened in 1990 as a non-profit organisation promoting the visual arts through a broad range of activities in the inner city of Johannesburg (Bag Factory [sa]).

Understandably, a Johannesburg that aims to be perceived as an 'African world-class' city follows suit. In *Renegotiating space* (Bahmann & Frenkel 2012:14), Johannesburg is placed in its historical background as its historic past greatly fuels the current changes in the urban landscape. The authors delve into the artistic enclaves and urban renewal of Maboneng and another similar area, but on a much smaller scale in Johannesburg, named Stanley on 44 in Braamfontein, that followed a similar exodus from the city centre. Although research is ongoing on Apartheid displacement<sup>2</sup>, there has been little evidence of “typical” gentrification in South Africa, according to Visser (2003).

The post- Apartheid city of Johannesburg has rather seen an influx of African immigrants post-1994. The variety of immigrants adds to the richness of the Johannesburg urban experience. With various cultures and ideas, they become as much a part of the city as the other local urban actors and add to the diversity of the experience of the city, although this is contested.

In the publication of their interactive e-book, *Creative districts around the world: Celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bairro*, Marques & Richards (2014) investigated creative districts in London, New York and Portugal. An essay in this publication by Rogerson & Rogerson looks positively at the role of creative industries in the economic and physical regeneration of inner-city Johannesburg. The development's contribution to tourist spaces that are 'consumed' by both residents as well as a growing number of international tourists is also recognised (Rogerson & Rogerson 2014). The use of art in gentrified spaces is part of a broader process of aestheticising space to attract particular forms of capital and culture. Gentrified areas often take on the identity of being 'artsy,' 'family-friendly,' or some other identifier that attracts similar people that accelerates the process of gentrification. The question posed by Zukin (1995) and Binns (2005) is very relevant: whose culture is being produced and consumed? The upgraded sidewalks and facades of the buildings of Maboneng reflect the 'culture' of the recurrent users with access to disposable income (Meek 2017:72).

<sup>2</sup>T. Schoeman. 2018. The special influence of apartheid on the South African city & S. Field. 2012. Oral history, community and displacement: Imaging memories in Post-Apartheid South Africa.

Bahmann & Frenkel write in the article *Renegotiating Space; Arts on Main, 44 Stanley, Johannesburg* (2012), that the “streets of Maboneng are open and welcoming to a wide variety of users of all races, classes and cultures.” They emphasise the importance of ‘packaging’ Maboneng as a place of seduction, and the promotion of the inner city as part of the tourism economy of Johannesburg (Bahmann & Frenkel 2012:18). The authors focus on the permeability of the district, enabling its usage by people who cannot necessarily afford the retail aspects of the district. Arts on Main, on the other hand, is a creative hub that features art galleries, artists' studios, eateries and shops in Maboneng. These upmarket amenities act as a drawcard for the upper and middle classes within communities. As such, Maboneng offers propinquity between different races, classes and cultures which appears to be absent elsewhere in Johannesburg. Despite the ending of legalised racial segregation and discrimination against the non-white population, the city continues to endure deep socio-economic inequalities between the different racial groups (Mohamed 2010:152).

Interactions that occur here allow specific groups to operate within the relative safety and security of their own group identity without forcing a uniformity or conformity (Bahmann & Frenkel 2012). By re-negotiating our relationships with the seemingly ‘other’, people with diverse social identities, we are poised to re-negotiate our understandings of the identity of the city (Bahmann & Frenkel 2012).

In his book, *Cities and Consumption*, Mark Jayne (2006) examines the relationship between cities and consumption and provides a critical review of the understanding of urban consumption. He seeks to address the question regarding the extent to which consumption shapes the city and how the city, in turn, shapes consumption. The author summarises the core idea of the text as: “Consumption stands at the intersection of different spheres of everyday life, between the public and the private, the political and the personal, the social and the individual” (Jayne 2006:1). The link between consumption and the city is “an ongoing process rather than a momentary act of purchase” (Crewe 2000:280). The streets of the urban space constitute a space consumed by a variety of people, many not merely ‘buying or selling’. The spaces are sites of display, of “stroll and see”, much like the nineteenth-century activity of the flâneur<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>Edmund White (2001) defines a *flâneur* as a stroller, a loiterer, someone who wanders without apparent purpose but is mindful of the history of the streets and is in search of aesthetic adventure.

Consumption is not limited to the using or buying of physical commodities but it is also linked to the creation of identities, commodification and aestheticisation of everyday life (Hudson 2005).

Steven Miles (2010) asks in his book, *Spaces for Consumption: Pleasure and Placelessness in the City*, “Is the soul of the contemporary city being sold to the consumer and if so, what does that mean for the sustainability of our cities?” (Miles 2010:35). Representations of cities label them as 'urban renaissance' or a surge of reinvestment and positive change, which enables consumers of the city to access areas previously undesirable and experience a new trendy place of consumption. How artists negotiate the city for living/working space is an integral part of understanding the re-imaging of space through art (Miles 2010:35). Miles refers specifically to European cities, but the reference to urban renaissance can also apply to the Maboneng precinct in Johannesburg, where this enclave looks and feels different.

Some of the buildings in Maboneng have a historical look and feel, and others, concrete-coloured walls, exposed brick and fire escapes that show an industrial aesthetic. Although this urban landscape is a space for consumption, there remains industrial noise generated by a few factories that still operate in the area.

The ‘developing South’ that includes cities like Sao Paulo in Brazil and Johannesburg is known for extremely crowded and large residential populations in inner cities and exacerbated social and economic division when compared to the ‘developed North’, which includes cities in Europe and North America. Such cities are not only associated with poverty; there are pressing issues around wealth and consumption as well as the scarcity of natural resources (Parnell & Robinson 2012:593). In these cities, the questions around gentrification seem to centre on the extent to which the state and market agents interact with each other to boost property-led redevelopment and create market incentives to attract financial capital. The absence of social participation and political accountability is problematic for these developments (Shin 2011). When comparing cities such as Sao Paulo and Johannesburg, it appears as if gentrification is not happening in deindustrialised post-industrial cities. The highly urbanised landscapes of Sao Paulo and cities in South Africa support unequal societies with a large number of residents living in Southern ‘slums’.

In the city and more so in the contemporary urban space, the motivations and identity of the so-called *flâneur* has changed somewhat: to an active consumer and participant in the spaces of the city. South Africa has more relevant similarities with Latin America than with its African neighbours, because of its significant white minority and the more powerful influence of market forces in the economy compared with most other African countries (Few, Gouveia, Mathee, Harphan, Cohn, Swart & Coulson 2004:429).

### 1.6.2 Review of Public Artworks

When reviewing the work of artists such as Stephen Hobbs' *Dazzle* (Figure 2) and *End of Cities* (Figure 3), and public artworks discussed in Chapter 3, there is no shortage of representation in and of the urban space. Many artists have engaged with the city as a source for artistic and creative production. Since creativity fuels place value, the benefits of using arts and culture to tap into a place's unique character extend well beyond the art world. Many of the works produced take the form of public art, evident in gentrified areas globally as well as in Maboneng.



**Figure 2: Steven Hobbs, Dazzle installation, 2009**  
(*Steven Hobbs.net*)



**Figure 3: Steven Hobbs, End Cities, 2009**  
(Steven Hobbs.net)

Kim Lieberman's work *Human Intersection* (2016) (Figure 4 & 5), is modelled after nine pioneers or visionaries closely related to the development and success of Maboneng. Lieberman's designs symbolise the power of events as well as the impact and influence people have on each other and their surroundings. The wire lace, the figures, and the buildings are all drawn together by cables that stretch across the Canal connecting Main and Fox streets.



**Figure 4: Walking Street with sculptures by Kim Lieberman, 2016, Maboneng**  
*(SA Jewish Reporter)*



**Figure 5: Detail of Human Intersection by Kim Lieberman, 2016, Maboneng**  
*(SA Jewish Reporter)*

Six iconic African animals (the giraffe, hippo, elephant, rhino, springbuck and sable antelope) painted on top of one another decorate a building façade on Sivewright Avenue (Figure 6). ROA, a Belgian artist and the creator of the work, focussed on indigenous animals within the concrete landscape of man that serves as a sharp reminder of the beauty of nature within the environment of concrete.

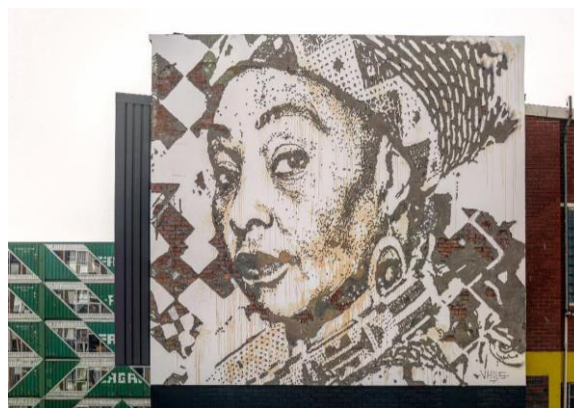




**Figure 6: ROA's mural for I ART JOBURG can be seen at Sivewright Avenue, Maboneng**  
(89 Candy photography)

Street art is known to comment on the social and cultural zeitgeist of the spaces where it is created. The built environment becomes a canvas, and often a palimpsest. The original exists as a reminder but is overwritten somewhat by street art and new retail marketing symbols, engaging the passive passer-by. Shelley Sacks (2005) defines art as instruments that involve transactions between people, issues, and places.

Just as the Maboneng precinct is an area of development where the boundaries are fluid, in this case, the fluidity applies to the lines that demarcate Maboneng. The works of street artists in the neighbourhood come and go; for example, in July 2018, one of the first iconic images in Maboneng, the mural of Jan van Riebeeck, was replaced by a mural of Yvonne Chaka Chaka (Figure 7), also known as the 'Princess of Africa'.



**Figure 7: Mural of Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Maboneng**  
(Mulpix.com)



Faith47 is an artist who regularly contributes to the public art scene of Maboneng (Figure 8). According to her website, she investigates what traces and memories people leave on their surroundings. In most places and in found objects she sees beauty and brings to life that which has been forgotten and often discarded by society (Faith47 2018).

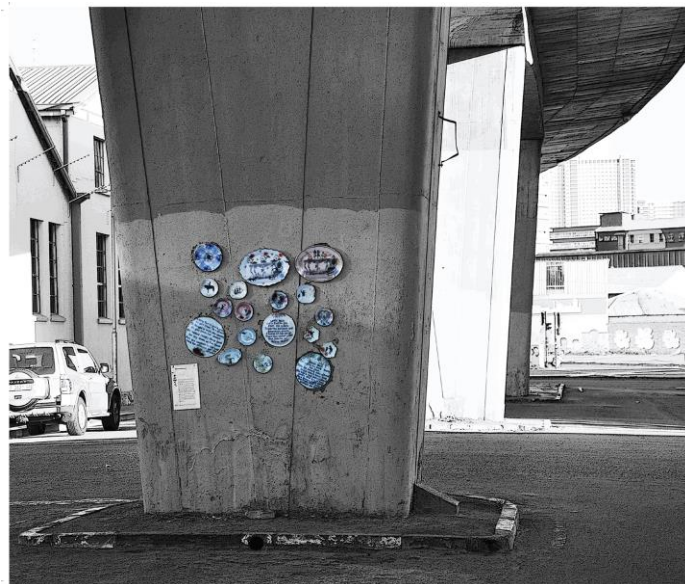


**Figure 8: Una Salus Victis Nullam Sperare Salutem, Faith 47**  
(*theculturetrip.com*)

Julie Lovelace is a ceramicist who focuses her work on urban dwellers and their engagement within the city. She describes these public installations as “interventions” and is particularly interested in the symbolism of bridges. Bridges, in Lovelace’s mind, are symbolic of liminality and transition. She states that she constructs a vision of her culture by layering and juxtaposing eclectic objects in the particular spaces she selects. Through this type of unsanctioned work, she challenges the visual narrative layers of the city with these immobile artefacts. “Lovelace likens her interventions to the impromptu public events (‘interjections’) staged by South African performance artist Steven Cohen” (Von Veh 2017:251).

Lovelace’s *If You Go Down to the Woods Today* (2011) consists of ceramic plates and found objects placed on a pillar (on the off-ramp of Joe Slovo Drive) at the intersection of Berea and Fox Streets (Figure 9). The plates, with their domesticised look and feel, seem out of place in the very grimy, industrial underpass. It was created in December 2011 in response to a call for works by the Immigrant Movement International. Lovelace’s choice of place is significant as it highlights ‘non-places’ and

infuses them with the notion of possibility. While the title apparently refers to the playfulness of the work, it also conjures associations with a domestic setting that seemingly looks and feels out of place on a concrete underpass (Von Veh 2017:248)



**Figure 9: If You Go Down To The Woods Today, Julie Lovelace, 2011.**  
(*cfile.org*)

While all of these artistic works are undoubtedly interesting and contribute to the overall visual fabric of Maboneng as envisioned by its creators, what seems to be missing in Maboneng is more unsanctioned, organic, and spontaneous public art interventions that emphasise the transitioning nature of ‘repurposing space’, thus creating a new understanding and experience of the space. Perhaps more could be done to authentically engage with the neighbourhood and make the physical spaces feel less ‘curated’ (Armstrong 2005).

## **1.7 Methodology and theoretical approach**

In evaluating Maboneng as an urban space, I document the contemporary spaces through the production of a body of artwork supported by a theoretically based dissertation. This study began with initial observations and fieldwork which are considered a classic research method that grounds the creative production or practical component of this study. Traditional drawing practices with charcoal and ink on paper emphasise the unpolished perception and appearance which represents the decay of

the surrounding areas of Maboneng referred to in the text. Papercut images layered with drawings visually articulate the ‘packaging’ and ‘consumer’ identity that is so closely related to Maboneng. This ‘visual thinking’ involves curating elements together using practices such as construction and assemblage, and deconstruction of implied space. Qualitative research methods allow the research process to gain an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons of the “why” and “how” of decision making associated with social sciences (Corbin & Strauss 1990).

Grounded theory offers a theoretical explanation of the social phenomena under study and applies to both the practical as well as the theoretical parts of the study. According to the principles of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss 1990:16), continuous interviews and observations must be conducted throughout the study to incorporate relevant information into the next set of interviews and observations in order to avoid a once-off finding and support the legitimacy and reliability of the data and the interpretation thereof. This continuous observation also helps move the findings towards redundancy or saturation, a critical feature for the accuracy and applicability of qualitative research.

I conducted random interviews with visitors to Maboneng, as well as staff and owners of shops and kiosks. The analysis of the interviews allowed a concise formulation of the features of this particular urban landscape. This process included the exploration of various spaces that Maboneng has to offer through the perspectives of those interviewed and thus examined questions concerning the desirability of gentrification in the South African urban context (Corbin & Strauss 1990:5). The research processes include sustained engagements with urban dwellers and users of diverse urban experiences to make new connections and capture additional evidence.

Undertaking extensive reviews of academic papers relating to gentrification nationally and internationally supplemented the theoretical component of the study. The research aimed to situate gentrification within the theoretical framework of urban geography and position the process as one of the critical ideological arenas within this paradigm. Urban geography aims to understand both the distinctiveness of individual urban places and the consistencies within and between cities in terms of the special relationships that people develop with their environment (Knox & McCarthy 2005:2).

As support to my practical research, I considered artworks by Gideon Appah, Zwelethu Mthethwa, William Kentridge and Alison Kearney. The works were selected because of their relevance to the

topic of the exploration and documenting of everyday urban space and mobility. These works also explore the notion of the urban landscape and the postcolonial city space that serves as the focus of the artists' gaze.

The production of a body of artworks for my exhibition encompasses a cross-sectional view and a collection of visual references to and about Maboneng. The exhibition of works visually reveals my view of Maboneng and encourages the viewer to explore the research question, Maboneng as a space of consumption, through visualisation. Through the medium of drawing and experimentation with materials and processes, the work encourages a different way of seeing the cityscape (monochromatic and somewhat distorted) that allows the ambiguity of visual language to gain strength; ultimately aiming to inspire the viewer with a sense of fascination (Gray & Malins 2004). These drawings examine the factors that influence consumption in a space like Maboneng, a consumption that reveals itself both on the surface (the visual) and through the experiences that both residents and visitors have within the space as place.

The aesthetic of the gentrified landscape, as is the case with Maboneng, often includes intentional elements characterised as 'edgy', 'run-down,' and 'experimental grit'- essentially an unpolished look that aims to emulate the look and feel of the original spaces and which artists are often attracted to. The fascination with these spaces is widespread and perennial. Decaying structures, derelict places, abandoned lots and other urban imperfections have been the inspiration for many artists and writers throughout history. In rejecting artificial and overly-planned spaces, it is understandable why artists, myself included, are attracted to these types of urban spaces (Ley 2003; Mathews 2010). Likewise, the informality of the nature of the practice of drawing allows the process to develop organically through the application of mixed media. The drawings are uninhibited by an obligation to make 'finished objects'; thus, some of the artworks represent only traces of ideas and observations that echo ideas of memory based on those interviewed.

The broader aim of the practical component of this study is to present an installation of drawings that will provide an audience with the experience of an urban setting similar to Maboneng. Through the arrangement of the artworks as an installation, the viewer navigates the exhibition space much like a city dweller navigates the 'streets' and becomes a consumer of the staged urban space. Examining the gentrified areas and the specific look and feel that surround them, also referring specifically to

Maboneng, led to establishing a clear link between the aesthetic of the visual and written components of the study.

## CHAPTER 2 - Gentrification

### 2.1 Gentrification and the repositioning of space

According to Brian J.L. Berry (1985:69) gentrified spaces are mere “islands of renewal in seas of decay” (Figure 10). As evident in the literature review in Chapter 1, many authors have grappled with gentrification and the subsequent effects on cities and communities in a global context. Chris Hamnett (1991:173) adds to the narrative by pointing out that historically, gentrification paints an image of the restoration of inner-city, blue collar housing by middle-class, well-off gentrifiers, and the consequent displacement of the original residents from the neighbourhood.



**Figure 10: The surrounding areas of gentrified spaces are often dilapidated and gritty.**  
*Photo: Isabel Marx*

Today, gentrification is understood as a nuanced phenomenon and the definition has expanded to include the diversity within the realm of gentrification in terms of reinvestment and upgrading. Urban transformation processes have often been referred to as ‘regeneration’ projects. Most cities across the globe are in a process of constant transformation by reinvestment and redesigning of buildings. Regeneration and gentrification are often used interchangeably, however Kate Shaw (2008) argues that there is a tipping point from ‘regeneration’ to ‘gentrification.’ On the distinction between the two, Shaw is clear: when displacement occurs as a result of capital investment and urban transformation, it is gentrification. This extension of the definition of gentrification has been debated and now includes re-urbanisation and the term gentrification is used to describe areas where direct displacement takes place. Shaw (2008:1) argues that by understanding gentrification as a complex but clear concept, the unequal

effects of gentrification on communities are highlighted.

Gentrification involves the transition of inner-city neighbourhoods from a status of relative poverty and limited property investment to a state of commodification and reinvestment. According to Sharon Zukin's (1987) initial research, gentrification and speculation act as mechanisms that can significantly reverse the processes of suburbanisation and inner-city decline. Despite the large body of literature on gentrification's causes and effects, there remains a gap in the research regarding the habits of the gentrifiers in terms of consumption. This chapter investigates gentrification as a spatial manifestation of the broader paradigm of consumption/consumerism, and the gentrifiers as a critical community of consumers.

## **2.2 Space and place**

Space is important as a landscape of action and creation by people, and gentrified spaces may be seen as the result of a distinct process of urban renewal which acts to replace specific places to a certain extent (Palermo 2014:538). Space and place are not fixed or innate but rather created and re-created through the actions and meanings of people. To frame the understanding of space and place in this manner emphasises the actions and responsibility of its users and producers in relation to these spaces, as well as the impact of the spaces on social exchanges and consumer behaviour. Gentrification becomes a by-product of consumption, and in a broader sense, of urban lifestyle; expressed through choices such as the rejection of fast food and appreciation of ethnic and organic foods instead. The dwellers of the urban space can be seen as modern-day flâneurs: conspicuous consumers synonymous with observing the 'pleasure-zones' of the city. Such individuals are essential to the very existence of places like Maboneng, as they reject conventional society.

The urban experience exists for people through their interaction with it. David Harvey (1990) argues that space is complex: it has direction, area, shape, pattern and volume as attributes, as well as distance. Within this definition, space is detached from material form and cultural interpretation (Hillier & Hanson 1984). It is an abstract three-dimensional setting void of human meaning and interpretation. Space is not place. Place, on the other hand, is space which is occupied by people, practices, objects, and representations with negotiations of social relations within the built environment itself, both real and imagined (Massey & Jess 1996).



Modern cities began to show signs of re-imagining, re-invention and renewal of space in order to attract the desired young, qualified workforce to create a vibrant climate. In many cases, those who reside within the city centre do so in order to be close to places of work as well as to specialised shops and trendy restaurants. Increasingly, cities have also felt the pressure to cater to the tastes and postmodern sensibilities of its residents and visitors by being reinvented as cosmopolitan spaces that cater to every taste, fashion, and niche. As the imagery of the gentrified community (Figure 11) circulates in the public discourse, the area attracts more people and a particular sense of community intensifies.



**Figure 11: 'Beautified' building as regenerated space.**

*Photo: Isabel Marx*

The character of the modernist, mass production of the industrial city has shifted with the restructuring of urban space in post-industrial cities, where representation is prized over function. The new sense of community still involves markers of traditional communities, such as shared beliefs and traditions. Increasingly, this shared consciousness is reflected in the consumption practices of gentrifiers, creating a sense of what are appropriate consumption practices and what are not (Ilkucan & Sandikci 2005). This also helps explain gentrification as a spatial manifestation of wider consumption ideologies.

The illusion and promise of the city as a place of bountiful opportunity is often contrasted by the reality of widespread poverty, increasing crime, and challenges in accessibility and pollution. This ultimately leads to the counter image of a "problem city", and as degeneration continues to occur, more and more challenges arise. Migration to urban areas during the post-apartheid era contributed extensively to the pressure on the South African urban environment. Urban redevelopment initially occurred as a



response to the urban degradation which arose during the industrialisation that took place globally. These processes have contributed significantly to the destruction and deterioration of cities around the world (Deane 2000). According to Hall, while the city is in a constant state of flux, many of these changes can be regarded as largely cosmetic and the underlying processes of urbanisation and the overall structure of the city remain largely unaltered. However, at certain periods, fundamentally different processes of urbanisation have emerged; the result has been that the rate of urban change has accelerated and new, distinctly different, urban forms have developed (Hall 1998:1).

### **2.3 The People factor**

There can be no doubt of the need for reinvestment in distressed inner cities. Upgradings are challenging with the high volume of abandoned buildings, illegal occupants and slumlords. The biggest issue facing local government is the eviction of illegal occupants and slumlords from buildings that have been abandoned which causes difficulties for revitalisation (Stephanus 2013:31).

Part of the challenges mentioned reflects the *sui generis* nature of the urban experience. Cultural, social and physical characteristics place the city dweller in contact with an exciting variety of people and places. The urban experience is not a passive condition, but is rather something created by each participant that enters the space, whether they are aware of their impact or not. The central argument is, rather than a simple internal-external relationship between people and the environment, there is a complex and dynamic exchange between those who interact with the urban space and everything in it; their experiences shape the environment (Gieseking, Mangold, Katz, Low & Seagert: 2014). The relationship between the physical spaces and social processes is influenced by the visual practices of the city: the planners and image-makers participate in urban representation and redevelopment. Planning and managing the development of contemporary cities has become one of the most important development and societal challenges worldwide. Recently, it was estimated that 54 percent of the world's population live in urban areas, which is expected to increase to 66 percent by 2050 (World Urbanization 2014 [O]).

The increasing need for urban space drives the notion of regeneration and the urgency felt by municipal bodies to undertake such efforts. Inner city revitalisation is a diverse concept that includes interventions such as commercial development, upgrading, gentrification, and renewal (Hoorgendoorn,

Lenka, Marais, Van Rooyen, Venter & Visser 2008) to be optimised. The process of renewal is far more complex than new features being inserted in place of others. Despite appearances to the contrary, cities do not completely change overnight. Rather, elements of the old city (including its former inhabitants) linger within the new, sometimes as relics, but often deliberately written into the landscapes and identity of the new city (Hall 2004). The 'postmodern landscape' becomes a blend of the past and present architecture, or as Mills (1988:176) described it, "an eclectic fusion of classical and contemporary details". The gritty character, diversity, and eclectic spirit that attracted the initial urban pioneers reveals a variety of activities based around the production and consumption of fashion and design, media, architecture, food and entertainment. Urban locations are increasingly designed to be unique and lively experiences for the people who use them. Urban regeneration, renewal, and revitalisation are processes that are interchangeable in the context of urban development.

The most distinctive and valuable factor to recognise is that urban regeneration is about people, not just buildings and infrastructure. The repositioning of space or the changing of the image of the city has been a central aspect of city-making. Places get re-named to convey future hopes and a more upscale or idyllic image, promoted by glossy brochures and promotional material (Vale & Warner 1998).

Like the almost universal process of suburbanisation, gentrification has had a profound impact on the lives of urban residents in hundreds of cities worldwide (Slater 2002). Neil Smith claimed that the crucial point regarding gentrification is that it involves not only a physical change, but also social and economic change in the land and housing markets. In general, the physical improvement includes the rehabilitation of architecturally unique and historical but otherwise run-down buildings (Jager 1986:78) and teardowns of uninteresting and generic buildings. As a gentrified space, 'newly' built developments are presented that include apartments and businesses.

## **2.4 The gentrified aesthetic and the role of art(ists)**

A gentrified neighbourhood has a certain undertone that is readily identifiable: a landscape of conspicuous consumption, young and hipster users on the street, and a definite presence of cool and trendy consumables. Lisa Law understands the unique way the city can be experienced. She notes that “the street looks and feels differently depending on the perspectives of those inhabiting urban spaces” (Law 2005:440). Exploring the transformation of an area happens through observing the narratives that reveal the relationship with the history of a space (Figure 12) and its people, as well as the way that it is collectively represented. In my research, narratives are used to combine 'spatial' and 'social' experience, as a way of understanding and ultimately documenting how individuals and communities transform and are transformed by their urban spaces.

When considering the concept of the gentrification aesthetic, one cannot ignore the phenomenon of 'loft living' in the warehouses and manufactured spaces of previous industrial buildings. Arguably the most important concept introduced in Sharon Zukin's book, *Loft Living* (1982), and central to her explanation of gentrification, is what she called the artistic mode of production.



**Figure 12: Maboneng's cityscape includes historic buildings with Edwardian façades.**

*Photo: Isabel Marx*

She explains this as the use of cultural industries such as artists' studios and creative businesses that serve as engines of gentrification that involves more than the overall aesthetics of old grit as a tool for

attracting capital (Figure 13). David Ley suggests that the artist is the pioneer for a specific fraction of the middle classes: a ‘new middle class’; professionals in the media, higher education, the design and caring professions, especially those working in the state or in non-profit organisations rather than the commercial sector, that Ley refers to as the ‘new cultural class’ (Ley 1996:15). The examination of the multifaceted relationships between art, aestheticisation, and the spaces in which they occur results in places prospering due to creative industries that include a diverse population of artists (Florida 2003; Ley 2003; Zukin 1987; Zukin & Kosta 2004).

The presence of art often leads to the shaping of identities and a sense of place, as art is often a visible expression of the residents and visitors of the space. Many consumers that visit regenerated places are often interested in buying works of art or objects of art; to associate themselves with a certain group of people and showcase their experiences and distinctive tastes. This does not only apply to the consumers of art, but also to those who create and market these products. Lee (1993) notes that this personal preference has an influence on the owners of art shops in deciding which pieces to display and how they are displayed. Although there are obvious economic, social, physical, and spatial advantages for the places in question in having this creative industry presence (Comunian 2011), the view is not always held that it is the “places which need the artists, but that it is the artists who need these places” (Ley 2003:25).



**Figure 13: Inclusion of gritty elements (shipping containers) are signifier of regenerated spaces.**  
(eatout.co.za)

Gentrification is typically viewed as a consumption practice through which new middle classes seek to distinguish themselves from the old middle class. However, contemporary gentrification differs from

previous gentrification in that it also involves purpose-built construction. This gentrified community resembles a brand in the sense that they become commodified by both residents and non-residents. Often, this construction is facilitated by mass media through the stories and images expressed about the neighbourhood.

From the streetscapes to the architecture of the new renovated spaces, images of the changed spaces try to recapture pieces of history. This happens in a very visible way: physical redevelopment and skilful marketing are some of the tactics developers use to promote a regenerated area. The aesthetics of gentrification not only illustrates the class dimension of the process, but also expresses the dynamic composition of the social class of which gentrification is a specific part, namely catering for the more affluent individual. The new urban patterns now unfolding involve the construction of ‘consumption landscapes’ in the city and the emergence of the ‘urban dream’, parallel to the suburban dream of the 1980’s (Smith 1987). Authentic coffee shops, vintage clothing stores and bars serving microbrews have been taken as a sign that the fortunes of struggling shopping streets are improving, with the new outlets often depicted as offering a better range of healthy, green and more modern consumption choices. These retail spaces play an important role in drawing people to gentrified spaces in urban landscapes, including that of Maboneng (Figure 14). When urban neighbourhoods gentrify, their retail strips will also experience a similar process of transition. In a non-gentrified area, these retail spaces will be characterised by a mix of shops and amenities catering to the different social groups living in the neighbourhood.



**Figure 14: A typical retail space in Maboneng.**  
(*timeslive.co.za*)

Gentrification is a powerful process which plays an important role in altering the physical, economic, and social characteristics of inner-city areas which also resonate locally. The journey to change a

dilapidated inner city into a thriving, bustling area has faced many challenges. In the South African context, the focus is on desegregation and deracialisation of the inner city. There is emerging evidence of a rise of gentrification in bordering 'black' townships where residents have invested heavily in their residences and continue to do so (Visser 2002). There is also a developing trend in rural gentrification, where wealthy urbanites, usually white South Africans, purchase and renovate very affordable second homes for themselves in smaller rural towns (Donaldson 2007, Hoogendoorn et al. 2009, Visser 2003).

Given South Africa's colonial heritage and its history of racial and spatial segregation under Apartheid, the study on gentrification involves the attendance to a whole host of historical, geographical, political, and socio-economic processes. The first aspect of the spatial arrangements in Johannesburg was the structuring of an early mining lifestyle. Due to the fact that miners, adventurers, capitalists, traders, and speculators flooded the town at remarkable speed, town planners had no time to thoroughly plan its layout. The early urban planners did not anticipate that Johannesburg would grow into a global city in such a short space of time. The next major factor that significantly impacted the physical planning of Johannesburg was Apartheid and the country's expanding economic structure. At the height of this political dominance, the city was perceived as an exclusive one that "celebrated white dominance and brushed aside the alternative black experience of the city" (Bremner 2000:186).

The dawn of democracy saw a rapid rise in urbanisation and the subsequent decentralisation contributed extensively to the physical decline of Johannesburg's inner city due to 'white flight'. As a result, the subsequent influx of people from lower socio-economic rungs and the formerly disenfranchised were suddenly allowed to live and work in these areas. In response to the deterioration caused by such a swift demographic shift and upheaval, many whites wanted to avoid the 'crime and grime' and chaos of the inner city and moved to the outskirts of the city to form 'edge cities' in the greater Johannesburg region of Sandton, Rosebank, Randburg, Fourways and Kempton Park. What has happened in Johannesburg's Central Business District (CBD) with the creation and revitalisation efforts of Maboneng is not unique to the city. Braamfontein, a neighbourhood 4 kilometres north of Maboneng, is currently also being regenerated. While Braamfontein was once the corporate heart of the city before businesses moved to Sandton, it was also abandoned with the rest of the inner-city.

Across the Nelson Mandela Bridge, to the South side of Braamfontein, is another regenerated area: Newtown. Formerly famous for jazz and political theatre during the Apartheid years, it continues to

exist as a cultural precinct but is now visited by a more diverse group of people. As with almost all gentrified areas, Newtown sports trendy shops, restaurants and art galleries, and more mainstream commercial interests have increased with the availability of venues like the Newtown Junction mall.

Looking at the aesthetics surrounding gentrification in all these areas of Johannesburg, it is important to look at the people involved in the process of gentrification: the gentrifiers. The ideal type of gentrifier has long been identified as belonging to small and usually childless middle-class households. Such individuals are often unmarried, primarily under 35 years of age, employed overwhelmingly in the advanced service sectors, highly educated, and considered as primary drivers behind the demand for the gentrification process (Ley 1996). The arrival of conspicuous consumption and the commodification of art and artistic lifestyles during the late 1990's and early 2000's started to become noticeable (Ley 2003) and has led a new middle-class wanting to move away from the monotony of the suburbs.

## **2.5 Place-making and new spaces of/for consumption**

Gentrifiers claim and create the city space as place by demarcating where artists and other creatives often play a central role with the occupation of space. Typically, the spaces in these areas are quite large and cheap, lending themselves to artistic production of a larger scale. The spatial practice of gentrification, the place-making, in other words, happens both in the physical and social realms. Physically, gentrification manifests in the location of the regenerated areas where the newly renovated built environment is on full display through the contrasts and mixtures of new and old buildings. The juxtaposition of the converted milling building, the newly constructed shipping container buildings, and the charming expensive coffee shop with its modern laser-cut signage in Maboneng, are all examples of such physical manifestations of gentrification.

City planners, developers and designers shape buildings and histories in the construction of space (Jager 1986:78). However, critics claim that the emphasis on marketing and branding of cities inevitably leads to a group of visually similar, cloned places. These places, which are typically products of regenerated spaces, do not always promote a comfortable interaction between the people and the space (Lehtovouri 2010:103). Sharon Zukin agrees that landscapes of consumption change the authentic social character of urban spaces. Authenticity is understood as the feature that makes a place

unique. She believes that consumption and consumerism are the means by which individuals create authenticity, which in turn has the power to turn a neighbourhood into a popular place to be. Furthermore, she argues that authentic consumption and consumerism enable cities to function at their best, in contrast to the destructive nature of modernist urban planning (Zukin 1991).

The significance of these new consumption sites is that their content of characteristic social activities and spatial practices are not new. Typical for such sites and areas are refurbished, 'preserved', and converted buildings, often factories or warehouses that served as 'back stages' of earlier commercial activities. Buildings that were built for production activities have been converted to host consumption. Processing facilities may be converted into market buildings, selling clothes or artisan foodstuffs. Consumption combined with leisure activities mark the urban sites of consumption; many vicariously participate in the activities without necessarily spending any money, much like the *flâneur* of the past whose presence in public spaces was considered a significant form of participation in and of itself. This creates an overall sense of spectacle<sup>4</sup>, which is marked by the exchange of gazes in the urban space of consumption, complementing the theatrical display of goods and commodities (Shields 1994: 6).

Spaces of consumption are also heavily monitored and controlled spaces; they are known to be subject to surveillance where the movements and activities are monitored. As such, they are by no means innocent nor 'organic', but are instead continuously fabricated as domains designed to attract attention, awaken desire, and encourage consumers take advantage of the goods and services on offer. Consumers want to be in a neighbourhood that has retail and services. The placement of a trendy coffee shop signals that a neighbourhood is now open for business, as well as consumer participation, in a way that it was not before.

However, the social space of gentrification is sometimes ever excluding. The emphasis is on a particular way of life associated with a particular type of people; as mentioned before, highly educated, young, middle class professionals. It is a re-imagining and reimagining of place that would attract investment and the professional employees that are needed for the post-industrial landscape. This representation of place also appeals to those who want to benefit from city living in an aesthetically beautiful environment.



Consumption has become an increasingly visible aspect of everyday life; a way of seeing (Debord, 1967). In this spirit of growing consumerism, places for liberation and desire (on the one hand) and repression and exclusion (on the other), are symbolised by objects or styles appropriated from past eras that are meant to appear as being ironic or novel through contemporary application, and are also potent sources of identity<sup>4</sup>. Consumption is fundamental to how geographies are made and experienced in contemporary society and constituted through places and spaces. Consumption is significant as a place-making process as it is an integral part of everyday life (Mansvelt 2005:29).

## **2.5 Stages of gentrification and the Johannesburg Central Business District (CBD)**

Though there are no exact thresholds for identifying different stages of gentrification, the concept of a stage is important with regards to housing strategy selection and its success. Neighbourhoods showing signs of revitalisation with the possibility of future gentrification - evidence of housing improvements and increased housing prices in an area proximate to other gentrified neighbourhoods - are characterised as the early stage of gentrification (Levy, Comey & Padilla 2006:2). Mid-stage neighbourhoods are those in which prices have risen sharply, yet affordable housing remains available along with some developable land sites. Communities at the later stage of gentrification are those where the housing prices have skyrocketed, there is little affordable housing or few developable land sites, and the demand for profitable, market-rated housing overshadows the needs of lower-income households (Levy et al. 2006). Around 2005, when the boom around regeneration started in the Johannesburg CBD, office blocks were rented at approximately R1 000 per square metre, which is considered extremely low for a space in a metropolitan area. Ten years later, values increased to R4 000 per square metre, creating a strong investment case for CBDs. The upshot in valuations has been a result of more players entering the market and wanting a share of the spoils (Mahlaka 2015).

As discussed in Chapter 1, gentrification has its roots in the emergence of ‘post-industrial’ cities (Bell 1973; Ley 1980). The decline of production industries and the rise of information-orientated and service businesses altered the uses of land in the urban landscape (Smith & William 1986).

<sup>4</sup>Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) argues that such *spectacle* is a cornerstone of post-modern life and also a sign of the increasing sacredness given to the profane and routine of day-to-day events.

Priorities have also shifted in the context of the city; consumption factors, tastes and aesthetics. Gentrification represents a new phase in urban development and the primacy of consumption over production, and subsequently, the expression of change in urban spaces. Gentrification contributes to the social inclusion-exclusion determination and differentiation of class (Smith and William 1986:11).

Within the broader framework of global gentrification paradigms (such as displacement and the role of governments on the gentrification phenomenon), more localised and culturally-specific studies on Maboneng move beyond the spaces researched by Anglo-American urban researchers and consider the African urban context. Anthropologist Abdou Maliq Simone considered the way people interact with complex and diverse environments found in African cities. His work *People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg* (2004) presented the argument that the inhabitants of the city have the ability to form its infrastructure. By infrastructure, Simone referred to the encounters and networks that allow people to operate in the environments of African cities (Sihlongonyane 2014). These mostly fast-growing urban centres are filled with potential for emerging consumers; unfortunately, these spaces also have a sense of uneasiness in their use and connections. The city becomes an increasingly dangerous and unknown place that is full of potential threats. Gentrification in the African context should address such challenges more vigorously, although security guards and closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras are used.

Gentrification can thus be viewed as a means of achieving a particular consumer identity. In contemporary cities there exists a combination of fragments with borders, edges, and boundaries that are in constant shift. The fascination with boundaries lies in their ambivalent role of dividing and connecting at the same time. They mark the transition between different modes of existence. They transmit and control exchange between territories. They are the playground for discovery and conquest (Richter & Peitgen 1985). Designer shops and niche goods exclude a large portion of the urban population, as those with limited income cannot afford to shop there. These economic borderlines are not only an invisible boundary which separates social differences, but also a spatial consequence which fragments the urban fabric and causes certain zones that some groups dare not enter as crime rates are high. During my personal observation, the border that encircles Maboneng becomes increasingly more noticeable.

## CHAPTER 3 - Maboneng – A case study

### 3.1 The Maboneng regeneration project

With gentrification taking place in many contemporary cities globally, Johannesburg is no exception. In fact, one could argue that Johannesburg is particularly suited for this kind of change due to a convergence of numerous factors. For example, Johannesburg's central business district had a thriving traditional manufacturing base since its founding in the 1890's, including clothing manufactures, printing and textile companies, and both informal and formal food retailers. From the early 1990s onwards, however, the growth of the informal commerce and catering sector replaced these industries (Bremner 2000:187). Johannesburg has always lacked a strong history of social co-habitation and cohesion; forced removals and Apartheid land policies ousted the majority of the city's black population into townships away from the city. While this new dynamic of human movement was most overtly visible in Johannesburg, it was evident to a lesser degree in Pretoria and Durban. Cape Town, often hailed as the South African exception, also suffered the same fate and launched regeneration projects that attracted more attention from the public (Cape Business News 2002). Much like major metropolises in other parts of the world, the dilapidated buildings and limited economic development left behind in the wake of post-industrial migration from the city centres to the suburbs eventually sparked an international trend for regeneration in Johannesburg.

Because of the outward appearance of decline and the abandonment of buildings, once occupied spaces have often been accepted and understood as a 'blank spaces' or a 'tabula rasa' (Murray 2011:41). This vision of a 'blank space' is held not only by the primary developers, but also by the shop owners and residents. Mark Paterson's idea of the postmodern city in *Consumption and everyday life* (2006) postures that the city is not some pre-formed space into which we humans simply exist, but is made and manipulated by our social interactions and practices, including consumption. Paterson continues, that the alternative spaces of the postmodern city provide places to look at and be looked at by others. Community boundaries start to blur because its members are constantly on the go, moving from one experience to another so that they never miss a pleasurable experience. The urban dweller would rather buy a temporary belonging from consumption spaces in the urban area than develop a rooted urban space. It seems the consumers are not interested in establishing a long-term connection with the urban

space, but rather a superficial fleeting interaction that can possibly be published on social media. Hence, urban space is created in such a fashion so as to meet the needs of consumers who are mere passers-by, who visit such spaces arrive for a temporary experience and then leave (Paterson 2006:21).

In this study, Maboneng is analysed through its departure from a “blank space” to its new cultural identity. It was chosen as a case study in order to understand the role of gentrification and cultural identity and in its consumption of space. Gentrification is related to the production of new social identities for the middle class through restoration or rehabilitation of deteriorated neighbourhoods. Central to these projects is a marked shift in strategy from developing high-profile, leisure industry-driven public/private regeneration to creating multi-purpose spaces that blend people’s living and working environments, as well as an emphasis on employment creation.

Maboneng is a gentrified space. Elements within Maboneng make one feel as if it could be any other major cosmopolitan centre in the world, like Berlin, Germany or Melbourne, Australia. Despite the signs of gentrification, however, Maboneng cannot simply be read through the traditional lens of gentrification as viewed from Western perspectives. Authenticity that embodies the ‘Africanness’ of Maboneng, is represented in its street art, food and experiences available. A vibrant street culture is seen as a key attribute for the ‘creative class’ when seeking out an urban neighbourhood to live and work in (Florida 2002:20).

The presence of informal traders in Maboneng (Figure 15) is a reminder of the context of Johannesburg’s demography and the desegregation of urban space associated with the end of Apartheid (Tomlinson, Hunter, Jonker, Rogerson & Rogerson 1995:123).



**Figure 15: Vintage goods on the streets of Maboneng, 2018.**  
(*inyourpocket.com*)

Likewise, their presence noticeably adds to vibrant street activity that is considered desirable in Maboneng. Maboneng is a good example of contrasting representations of space existing in one place. The area aims to be open and welcoming to a wide variety of users of all races, classes, and cultures. However, the marketing of the area sometimes masks the contradictions and struggles that exist in the transition from a forgotten to a desired place; this process fits into the international landscapes of post-industrial cities and upscale urban consumption. Places can be easily assumed to possess the characteristics of identity, differentiation, and personality, and can thus be managed to make the most of these alternative spaces (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005).

‘Alternative spaces’ is a general term referring to the various ways in which artists show their work outside commercial galleries and formally constituted museums. It includes the use of studios as exhibition space, the temporary use of buildings for work done on site, and cooperatives of artists, whether for the purpose of hosting an exhibition or for running a gallery on a long-term basis (Alloway 1978:4). By re-negotiating our relationships with the seemingly ‘other’, we are poised to re-negotiate our understandings of our own identities, as well as our relationship with, and identification of, the city (Bahmann & Frenkel 2012). The ‘high’ cultural activities in Maboneng attract the kind of individual that prefers an alternative lifestyle, a more moderate-income risk-taker who would not be scared off by the surrounding neighbourhood’s crime and grime. Mr Liebmann, the developer of Maboneng, stated that "up front there was a very strong focus on art... And we continue to invest in the arts" (Smart 2016 [O]).

Maboneng invokes a sense of separation from neighbouring Johannesburg due to the modernising of its architecture, the overall look and feel of the area, and the different social crowd it attracts. In comparison to the older businesses in and around the area, Maboneng Precinct’s outward appearance aims to be modern and shows the artistic preference of its desired clientele, as well as of its developers (Nevin 2015:193). Development of the area started officially in 2008, in an area that had primarily been dedicated to industrial businesses for most of Johannesburg’s history.

The transformation from the industrial to the new Maboneng Precinct reflects the “rush in many ‘global cities’ to convert old warehouses, factories, and even office buildings into elegant residences that suggests the gradual transformation of former economic areas into residential resorts” (Kotkin 2005:153). The buildings in the Maboneng area are mostly industrial in nature; mainly double storeys,

with some buildings displaying Victorian and Edwardian architectural influences due to the strong British and other European influences in Johannesburg in the early 19th century. Buildings on Main Street, one of the main arteries leading outwards to the suburb of Jeppe, show signs of transformation from 1970's light industrial buildings into contemporary and creative 'mixed-use' complexes. The series of warehouses retaining the industrial feel, with visible elements like metal fire escapes, also boast a number of new commissioned public artworks. The industrial feel of the retail spaces of the area provides a canvas for artists' work. Many artists in the area, as well as other city developers, have made similar arguments (Nevin 2015:194).

"Old Johannesburg" peeks through the so-called upgrades via what are commonly referred to as 'spaza', or corner shops (Figure 16), stocking fruits, sweets, and cigarettes.



**Figure 16: The inside of a typical 'spaza' shop.**  
*Photo: Pierre Coetzer*

With an influx of diverse people, new tastes and new food cultures are introduced. As consumers' tastes shift to the more gourmet, upscale, and organic foods, so does the fabric of the city. Organic grocery stores, fair trade coffee shops, and gourmet restaurants are now competing with the existing Indian grocers, fast food joints, and corner stores. This process of neighbourhood change, or gentrification, references what Sharon Zukin called 'domestication by cappuccino' (Zukin 1995:xiv).

Informal traders set up on the pavement (Figure 17), selling sweets, cigarettes and a small selection of fresh fruit. Shop owners also sit outside their shops, interacting with the informal traders and passers-by. *Newbrow*, an apparel store, reflects Maboneng's industrial heritage in the clean lines of locally

designed and produced T-shirts, jeans and sweatshirts, pinned to boards and displayed on logs in its understated store.



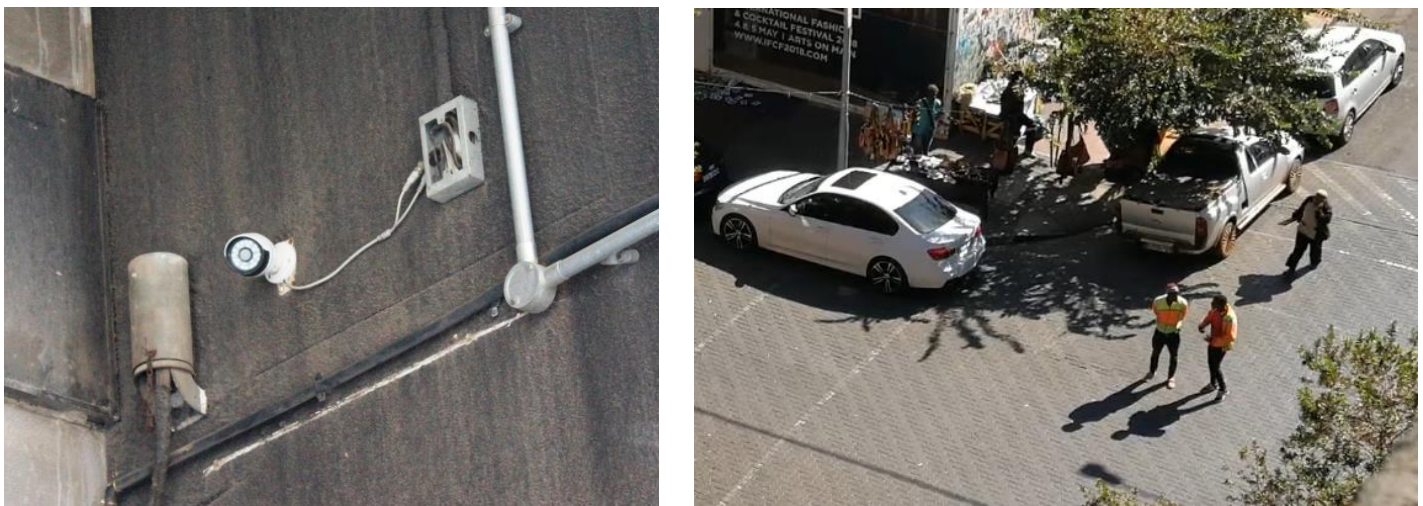
**Figure 17: Informal trader on the outskirts of Maboneng, 2018.**  
*Photo: Isabel Marx*

One can determine from people's everyday experiences the urban environment of Maboneng, that the overall feeling and experience of the space is optimistic and positive, if you are wealthy. Participants chosen for this study to be the interviewed provided useful information to articulate their experiences. The main reason for the involvement of the community was to characterise their sense of place. While the semi-structured interviews that were conducted may be open to criticism, it provides detailed views of the informants, and enables interviewees to "speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings" (Berg 2007:96), since the aim of the research was to gauge people's opinions and views and allow personal information and experiences to surface from the information gathered.

In Alexandra, some thirty minutes away from Maboneng there is an art project titled the 'Maboneng Township Arts Experience'. This art project was started prior to Maboneng in 2001 by local resident and musician Sipiwe Ngwenya. Township homes are converted into art galleries and tickets are sold to tourists.



Bremner (2000) refers to a security aesthetic of post-Apartheid Johannesburg, which in a way supports exclusion and emphasises borders. With the presence of security guards and CCTV cameras (Figure 18), it seems that one of the most important neighbourhood amenities in Maboneng is public safety. There is a sense of immediate relief when a guard or surveillance camera appears in sight of a visitor. Traveling through the surrounding intimidating and ‘unsafe’ neighbourhoods to reach Maboneng, there is a clear sense that you have ‘arrived’ in a gentrifying or gentrified neighbourhood. The idea of *panopticism*, a term coined by Foucault (1975) in relation to power, control and surveillance, emphasised the importance of the gaze and claimed that the mere presence of security elements make people behave according to socially-accepted norms (Simon 2005:8).



**Figure 18: CCTV camera in Maboneng with a street view (left). Guards patrolling Fox street (right).**  
*Photos: Isabel Marx*

The surveillance of urban streets through the use of CCTV cameras encourages a particular suitable behaviour. It follows that the more citizens know about where the cameras are and what counts as appropriate behavioural norms, the more likely they are to adhere to said norms. The idea that the streets are being patrolled and watched is a deterrent against crime and unacceptable behaviour (loitering, public urination, vandalism), even if the presence of security does not necessarily increase the actual safety of the area.

One of the respondents interviewed (Respondent 1 2018) a middle-aged business owner, commented that he got the impression that the Precinct is safe and one can walk around the area but that the areas around the Precinct are a little risky. The neighbouring areas like the Jeppestown community seem to



have gone through some degree of alienation from the developments in Maboneng proper. While they benefit from the added safety and security, it creates a sense of an invisible border keeping those who do not fit in with the desired ideas that make the precinct popular out.

While, locally, crime prevention is generally understood as the primary responsibility of the government, private sector companies doing patrols and offering visible security suggests that the available police presence is insufficient in providing a sense of safety and security in the area. According to Shaw & Hegamens (2015:326), the changes in shops and meeting places “neighbourhood resources that enable people to feel a sense of place” in public life occur at the cost of familiarity with the broader neighbourhood. Crime is deterred as the area is patrolled and guarded twenty-four hours a day by security guards and cars, as well as a central control room, but is limited to the precinct alone. In many ways it is good that tourists feel safe in the precinct. However, it is an unfortunate caveat that, by extension, they are not comfortable exploring surrounding areas alone due to the perceived lack of security and safety, thus potentially limiting their scope of experience and engagement with the community as a whole. Respondent 2 (2018), a young female working in the creative sector and living in Maboneng, noted during the interview that she felt just as safe in Maboneng as in many other areas historically considered ‘safe’ in Johannesburg. These other areas included many northern suburbs, and have historically been seen as ‘safe’ in comparison to the inner city that is considered ‘unsafe’.

Given the vast range of issues involved in gentrification, particularly claims of the lack of authenticity, it is important to highlight that people point to and highlight the authenticity in Maboneng. From the 10 respondents interviewed, 8 see Maboneng as being an authentic and original African urban environment (experience). While the original buildings might have been colonial or not traditionally ‘African’, they have been repurposed and infused with locally inspired designs that speak to a return to authenticity and a refusal to shy away from the area’s troubled past, but rather reconceptualise it into something meaningful, memorable, and even positive.

The *I was shot in Joburg* project store (Figure 19) is one example of such an undertaking, the play on words that is meant to bring ‘shot’ from a negative context (getting shot because of violence and lack of safety) to ‘shooting’ photography (one of the high cultural activities that Maboneng wants to be associated with). Bridge Books, which house a large selection of Johannesburg and African history books, is a testament to the desire of the community to emphasise the broader connection to uniquely

African elements.



**Figure 19: I was shot in Joburg shop. 2018.**

*Photo: Isabel Marx*

There are also the informal traders lining parts of the street network within Maboneng that give people the sense of being in an African urban metropolis that one cannot mistake for any other gentrified city elsewhere around the world (for example Europe or North America), where such informal business is not necessarily present or encouraged. All of the respondents, as well as other more informal encounters with visitors, had very positive responses towards Maboneng.

By setting up their own retail shops, creating original living spaces, producing and promoting cultural consumer goods, and renovating old buildings, the gentrifiers have embraced this ‘alternative’ kind of urban living and rejected the perceived conformity of suburbia and mass-market principles. All over the world, the most enjoyable, exciting parts of cities are the districts where galleries and bars flourish and where, as a result, diverse crowds congregate in cultural enjoyment, collective pleasure, and community.

One of the major goals of Maboneng, according to its developers, is to be inclusive and accessible to a variety of socio-economic classes, rather than an exclusive enclave for middle-class Joburgers. However, it falls short in that goal so far, it seems, based on the fact that people who genuinely want to be part of the community cannot because of financial/socio-economic barriers. Respondent 3 (2018), a

middle-aged female working at a bookshop commuting daily to Maboneng, said she would prefer to live in Maboneng (she now stays in Soweto) but it was too expensive. She works as a shop assistant in a bookstore and wants to continue earning this steady income. Her response highlights that not only is the cost of living too high in Maboneng for some, there are also not enough potential job opportunities to make the risk of ‘moving up’ worth it.

This apparent discrepancy between the developers’ vision for diversity and inclusivity, on the one hand, and the lived reality and actual openness, on the other, points to one of the primary hurdles to the gentrification project of Maboneng. Maboneng is solely a privately led development initiative that has received very little to no support from the government. The Maboneng developers use the word ‘community’ in their discourse in relation to the users and their interactions; however, taking into account Resident’s 3 response, it is contrasted by the continued use of the term ‘community’ by the developers. It is also used in their descriptions of “community development programmes” that they have tried to roll out in Maboneng.

It is critical to note that the community development projects, like Trim Park, a community training facility, and Common Ground, a public park, use the concept of “community” in the way that it is seemingly accessible to all. Private development initiatives fall short in ways that could be solved had public investment been included. People aren’t necessarily going to go out of their way to use these public spaces and facilities if they don’t live in the area and have to travel from outside of Maboneng to use them; but some of them can’t live in the area because it is too expensive, which is where public funding could bridge the gap. This can be seen as class-based discrimination. If a certain number of residential units were set aside for lower-income persons/families, or if local small business was encouraged through investment and microloans or lower tenancy contracts, as opposed to high rents that private developers demand for their profitability, Maboneng could develop as a greater diverse space that is representative of more Johannesburg residents.

The permeability of the district from a geographic perspective allows people to easily pass through, while upmarket amenities act as a drawcard for the upper and middle classes. As such, Maboneng offers some degree of closeness and interaction between different races, classes, and cultures, which is limited to a few other areas in Johannesburg. This allows specific groups to operate within the safety and security of their own group identity without forcing uniformity or conformity (Bahmann & Frenkel:

2012). However, it doesn't inspire ownership or responsibility towards the area due to the fact that the majority of its users are transitory - they visit, then leave, and as such are not particularly interested in the idea of community or kinship that this development was ideally intended to facilitate.

Many visitors to the area live in the suburbs and are excited about the idea of Maboneng in principle, especially considering the buzz surrounding it. However, they were still very apprehensive about the area, and felt that the broader idea surrounding the *identity* of the inner-city needed to change before people could accept the possibility of a liveable inner-city life. They are still trapped in their pre-existing notions of the area based on the historically unsafe character of the inner-city, and see it as intriguing and something of a curiosity, perhaps a place to visit, but still not a place that is 'for them' in the broader sense of moving into and becoming a part of the community.

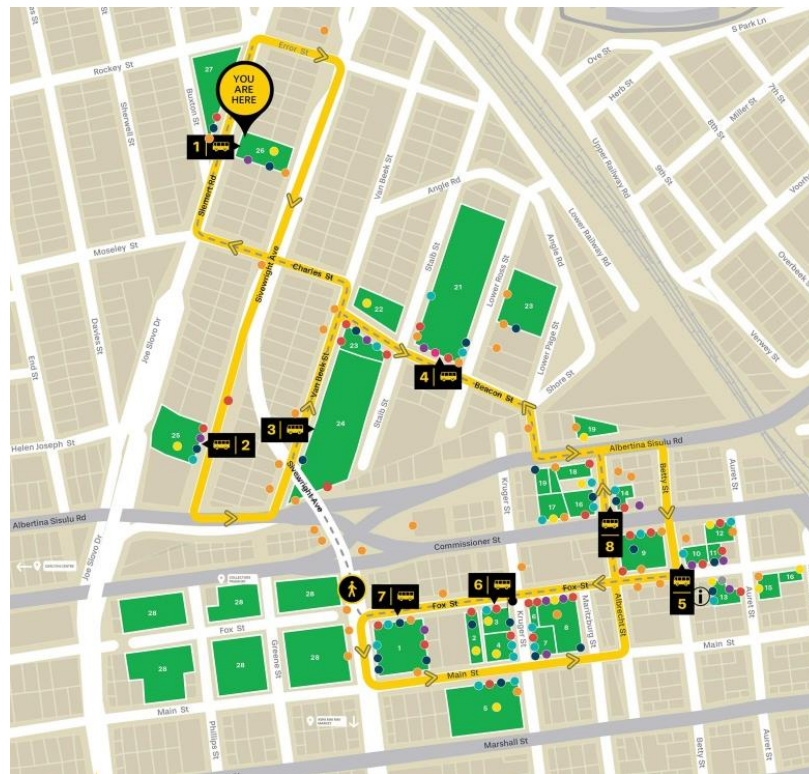
Despite these growing pains, non-corporate commercial tenants have shown increasing interest in the inner city, while businesses, including architects, graphic designers, marketers, social entrepreneurs and non-profit organisations, continue to take up space lured by comparatively affordable rentals and accessibility of the Johannesburg CBD. In addition, many of these buildings have incorporated restaurants and eateries, art galleries, small businesses and convenience services on the ground floor, thus making them even more sought after.

One of the primary areas of investigation that this study aimed to explore is how urban space is used and by whom: who is included and/or excluded, and what do interviewees think about the newly regenerated area. Interestingly, some consider gentrification not to have intruded upon people's usual behaviour in the specific area. Some students (completing a creative photography course) from a university in close proximity to Maboneng who reside near Maboneng, describe it as a safe space for recreation. They frequent Maboneng, especially making use of the nightlife to visit bars and lounges. One of female students (Respondent 4 2018) claimed that she found it safe to walk around at night with her friends, although she would want more streetlights provided. Having a supermarket in the area was cited by one respondent (Respondent 5 2018) as a desired major improvement. There is no current supermarket that provides for the broad range of goods that both residents in the community and visiting tourists would no doubt find an ideal and welcome addition to the precinct.

Aside from the need for at least one grocery store in the area, consumers in Maboneng often avoid the

mass-produced products of the malls and high-street chain stores, and instead opt for bespoke or one-of-a-kind objects d’art and artworks. This kind of consumption establishes symbolic value through a claim to difference and authenticity; the authenticity of craft production in a setting seemingly detached from modern production and marketing (Ley 2003:2530). The retail spaces are dedicated to small unique concepts; franchise chains are not considered and artisans are included in the project’s supply chain.

Maboneng covers a very specific area that consists of a few blocks, although it has expanded into the surrounding areas since 2008 (Figure 20). Maboneng is in close proximity to Troyeville and Hillbrow to the East, as well as the Fashion District and Johannesburg CBD to the West.



**Figure 20: The expansion of Maboneng, indicated in green.**  
*(creativefeel.co.za)*

As a participant-observer crossing into Maboneng Precinct from the surrounding neighbourhoods, I immediately felt less conspicuous, as it is the only place in the downtown area where white, middle class Johannesburg residents frequently visit with especially large crowds visiting on Sundays. Another respondent (Respondent 5 2018) interviewed stated that on Sundays, when the neighbourhood market is ‘happening’, it is the busiest day for visitors. Street furniture, lighting and landscaping have

also added to the liveability and aesthetic of the Precinct, allowing for more conducive pedestrian and road use that is reserved for users. Activation of the street and getting people to come out onto the street and be immersed in the community-orientated feel of the neighbourhood is imperative, and majority of the restaurants and stores open out onto the street. By paying attention to and investing in this type of infrastructure, Maboneng wishes to promote its use by pedestrians. This is a crucial part of what Evans (2015) refers to when he characterises gentrified spaces as having maintained their own ‘grit’; an area that can adapt to and be true to its own context and be authentic.

Booms, walls and palisades that act like boundaries are mostly absent in Maboneng, unlike the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. However, as discussed earlier, Maboneng also displays other, non-structural, signifiers of boundaries in the form of security guards, carefully designed signage, and patrolling for visitors to the area, tying into the idea of the “fortified enclave” or “island” (Bremner 2000:181). Propertuity, along with other stakeholders based in area, pay for and monitor the area, providing street cleaning, security and dealing with the city council on issues relating to the public space management. Propertuity, in partnership with other stakeholders, also raise funds from the private sector for public space upgrades and art installations (Propertuity 2016).

In this sense, public space has been transformed into fortified, controlled, and guarded spaces with an obsession with security systems, surveillance, and policing social boundaries through urban design. Smith (1996) also argues that the increasing commitment to urban entrepreneurialism attempts to reclaim lost or declining cities. The black African security guards serve to demarcate the area belonging to the Maboneng Precinct, forming something of a living border around the area, and act as signifiers of the regenerated space. They arrive for and leave their shifts seamlessly. The “guard house” outside 12 Decades Hotel on Fox street is an artistically fashioned wooden globe; very different from the ‘Wendy’ wooden guard huts frequently seen in the suburbs. Furthermore, Maboneng has standard security features like CCTV, precinct patrol vehicles, and biometric access control for residents to buildings (Nevin 2014:197).

The spine of Maboneng runs along its retail component. It remains an important drawcard as it forms an intricate part of the precinct. Experiences within the space, like dining at restaurants and nightlife, are one of the major aspects of the consumer culture. There is an African flavour to the experiences presented at Maboneng through the large variety of South African-inspired restaurant offerings. *Pata*

*Pata* serves contemporary African cuisine and *Sharp!*, a Shisa Nyama that ‘braai’<sup>5</sup> steak, chops and sausages for customers on demand. There is also the very eclectic restaurant where African sushi chefs (traditionally chefs in sushi restaurants are Asian) serve very popular and hip sushi dishes at *The Blackanese*. The owner, Vusi Kunene, felt that Maboneng Precinct was the perfect place for his business. “I thought this is where we belong, the lifestyle complement[s] *Blackanese* because it's very young and trendy, I don't think we would have been as successful if we have started in an area like Sandton,” he added (Boshomane 2013). Kunene now hopes to introduce more black people to sushi—a cuisine formerly considered popular amongst generally Asian and white people—and possibly grow the business through a couple of chain stores in the future (Boshomane 2013).

The demand for retail space has increased and there are numerous retail stores scattered throughout the precinct. The precinct has stayed true to its original ideas, ensuring that its developments remain ‘mixed-use’ due to the overwhelming advantages that this practice brings with retail stores being placed on the ground floors of all the residential and commercial developments. There are a variety of stores along the primary retail streets of Fox and Albrecht, as well as throughout the precinct, making it more integrated and interconnected and giving users a broad selection of spaces, while also encouraging them to move around the precinct to areas outside the centre of Maboneng.

In the face of this complex and complicated cultural and historical cocktail, one that risks undermining the goals, vision, and ultimate success of Maboneng, multiple public relations and pop culture initiatives have arisen in response to this issue. Shows like *Ayeye*, which airs on *Mzansi Magic*, present front and centre some of the characteristics that Maboneng wants to be associated with. Three upcoming young, edgy creatives share a loft in Maboneng, work at an advertising agency, and live a flashy metropolitan lifestyle, complete with an ‘edgy’ script and raunchy scenes intended to attract ‘switched-on’ viewers that want to experience the young and original (Coetzee 2018).

Aside from commercial media, public art is another significant contributor to the creation of Maboneng’s aesthetic and identity. It serves as a more accessible, permanent, and daily presence in the lives of its users, and provides an unmistakably African component, as the artworks are striking and hard to miss within the urban setting (Murtagh 2015:101). Public art is not simply art placed outside (Sharp, Pollock & Paddison 2005:1003).

<sup>5</sup> Grill meat over an open fire

Gallery spaces are viewed as public space in the sense that they are open to the public without admission fees; however, visitors are still actively and consciously deciding to view or take part in the work. Public art is art that's goal is a desire to engage with its audiences in a subconscious and assertive way and to create spaces where individuals can reflect on the community, the use of the space, and their interaction with it.

The development company Propertuity currently has over 50 commissioned murals and/or art installations throughout the neighbourhood, most of which are painted onto the facades of the buildings that the company owns. The City of Johannesburg Policy Document addresses the commissioning process in detail and it speaks to the White Paper's focus on access and redress. The way artworks are commissioned is very influential on the way artworks are produced, as well as the artists that are involved in the projects (City of Johannesburg 2006). Public art projects in open public space can reach the "hard-to-reach audience" that plagues policy makers. Public art offers the perfect vehicle for democratisation of culture, levelling out hierarchies and elitist art practices, given that effective project implementation is achieved. What the experience of urban regeneration continues to repeat is that the uses to which culture has been employed as part of the process of revival that immediately raises the question of 'culture for whom?' Social cohesion is the belief that public art, or the processes through which it is produced, are able to create a sense of inclusion. By this token, public art should be able to generate a sense of ownership, forging the connection between citizens, city spaces and their meaning as places through which subjectivity is constructed.

Main Street tours that offer tours of mainly Street Art provide the channels through which to see and experience Johannesburg on a broader plane. This encourages people to interact with spaces that they would normally not go to and interact with the so-called "World-Class African City". The idea is for visitors to not only go to central Maboneng, but venture a bit further outside the strict, patrolled, borders of Maboneng proper. It means they could get a great cultural experience and in return, Maboneng expands slowly from the original central Maboneng.

Keeping in mind Propertuity's vision (as stated on their website) for a diverse, inclusive, community-based inner city regeneration (Maboneng Precinct [sa]), the fact remains that today, maybe even more than before, Johannesburg remains a "discontinuous patchwork of fragments" (Murray 2013:327). The causes and the logic at work might be different now and then, but the resulting uneven urban forms are



quite the same. Space is not set but is rather produced by processes that are often contradictory. In the case of Johannesburg, specifically Maboneng, the succession of diverse urban narratives that includes colonisation, Apartheid, and rapid globalisation, has led to a city with diverse urban forms that aim to bridge the gap between its fragmented places. Therefore, it remains not only interesting but imperative to monitor Maboneng in terms of its sustainability and what will keep it relevant and feasible in the long-term; the future of the inner city remains complex, unclear and uncertain.

## CHAPTER 4 - Practical Work

### 4.1 Discussion of personal works

The visual research (Figure 21) is based on an observation in the use of and interaction with contemporary urban space, focusing on the regeneration that transpires in inner-city Johannesburg's Maboneng precinct. The exhibition of work conceptualises people's navigation and how they occupy the city. Jonathan Raban in *Soft City* (1974:1) noted that "Cities, unlike villages, or small towns, can be plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them." The work aims to demonstrate my interpretation and reconstruction of city experiences. Janine Marchessault and Michael Darroch argue that even though cities are not images, "they are images before they are cities" (2014:3).



**Figure 21: Visual research in progress.**  
*Photo: Isabel Marx*

My motivation to engage in this subject matter was to highlight an issue or phenomenon that others might be able to identify with, gentrification. Through a practice-led research approach, I have examined drawing as a generative medium in art making. This dual research consisted of interrelated artwork and writing (Macleod & Holdridge 2005:197). This body of work is curated within two adjoining rooms at the Anton Van Wouw House gallery space, dividing the work into two sections. Due to the size of the work, it was decided that two spaces were needed to house the artworks. Similar to moving between spaces in Maboneng, the viewer is invited to navigate between the rooms while negotiating around the artworks. As the artist, I wanted the viewers of the works to experience my version of the city, to see extracts and glimpses of my observations of Maboneng.

I think the global trend of gentrifying areas or transforming inner city spaces is happening more rapidly and on a more widespread scale. This particular experience of urban space focuses on Maboneng, looking at my experience of the space. Within many regeneration projects, as with Maboneng, the industrial history and aesthetics of these former spaces have been accentuated in striking and nostalgic ways (Balaisis 2014:2). The industrial history serves as an important symbol in the construction of the post-industrial or digital city envisioned by planners and politicians. A duality exists between my admiration of the endeavor on the one hand, and the critique of its implications and sustainability on the other. The intentions of the Maboneng developer were good: to create a place where diverse people can live and work together and attract even more participation from people from outside of this space. Fundamentally, however, it is a business project aimed at making money. As such, the push and pull in the artwork reflect my personal experience of tension between the intentions of the developer versus the outcome in reality. If the intention is that the space is truly to be used by all, will it then have failed if Maboneng becomes a place used more by the upper middle class?

Artists remain associated with large urban areas (Ley 2003:2534) and, as previously mentioned, play a pivotal role in gentrified areas. They are often present at the start of the gentrification process and retain their presence in galleries, studios and other creative places that become an attraction for urbanites. The process of regeneration is a deliberate one; there are clear intentions of clean-up and very specific aesthetic outcomes; much like my body of work, it includes a process and a product. The body of work is based on a series of snapshots that I took of what one might expect to see in Maboneng. My idea was to play with the idea of construction from destruction. It was with this in mind that I worked on paper, cardboard boxes, and introduced found objects into my works that I had collected

while conducting research for the study. It is precisely this act of transforming a product from junk (cardboard boxes) to art, to a commodity of purchase that seemed to echo the ideas of gentrification processes. The use of the found objects in my work draws on the viewer's memory of their lived experiences and the existence of place that may be of Maboneng or another gentrified space.



**Figure 22: Discovering Maboneng, Mixed media on cardboard (2017)**  
*Photo: Isabel Marx*

The artworks and drawings applied to a collection of cardboard boxes, paper cuttings and other items collected from the area (Figure 22), symbolise the idea of packing up or moving to another space. Thinking back to the early days of Johannesburg, it was initially a tented city. It was very transitory and easily moved or demolished; a tented city is not a fixed place. Cardboard boxes are similarly transported and moved. 'Homeless' people who live in boxes or use them to create some sort of shelter are also transitory. It can be argued that Maboneng, like the tented city, is similarly also in a state of transition and flux in its attempt to develop its own identity. Maboneng is a place of transition and full of stories of erasure; people and histories are erased. Public murals painted on street walls erase and create history, only to be removed or replaced by another artwork or advertisement.

Having to recreate the exhibition *in situ* after creating the works and planning the exhibition in a different site adds to the notion of movability, migration, packing up and assembling boxes in another location. Cardboard is an everyday material, so often cast off and thrown away or recycled. Being a

utilitarian material, it is easily obtained. It has versatile applications in our day-to-day lives in packaging, moving or storing, and of the disposable consumer culture. There exists a paradox of the ‘garbage’ boxes becoming ‘usable’ in art, and the ultimate transition to being perceived as ‘acceptable’ in the exhibition space. The discarded and old cardboard, like the one found on the street, is also closely associated with people sleeping on the streets and using boxes as protection against the elements. The cardboard boxes become signifiers for contemporary consumerist culture masquerading as high art.

The condition of the material (being either found and reused or new and clean) is embedded in the duality of its uses, either for survival or as packaging for consumers with spending power. The uncostly and modest material allows for the exploration of possibilities through layering and arranging sections of artworks, without the fear of ruining something that is precious. It allows the body of work to grow organically and mature as the research progresses. The surface of the boxes adds to the images, as they are not the only vehicle of the message that has a voice in the image that influenced the marks in surprising and exciting ways. Assimilating the cardboard materials with the environment that they create transforms the space and creates connections with the street aesthetic and the hustle and bustle of the moving city (Figure 23). This encourages one to question: if we can shape our own city and our interactions with it, what will happen? The stories and shared experiences of the people from the city can change the structures, the tales, and the memories it holds.



**Figure 23: Detail of Box City, Mixed media on cardboard (2018).**

*Photo: Isabel Marx*

The allure of drawing as a recognised medium and not only as a foundation for art practice started with Georges Seurat, who developed his own drawing-style by using the nature of surfaces to actively influence his black *conté* marks (Davidson 2011:10). The focus here in my work was much more on the relationship of the marks on the plane and the interaction between drawing tool and surface.

The flexibility of drawing is important (Berning 2009) as it is an artistic construct that has a symbolic relationship with experience. Applying the fundamental elements of drawing (lines and smudges) with a variety of tools and materials, ideas and images are accurately registered. But as with the nature of drawing, the development of these initial concepts can get lost in subsequent processes where the work is developed, refined, or even translated to other media (Hall 2013). I realised I have come to rely on drawing as an essential artistic medium by intuitively registering marks during my art-making process (Figure 24). Other components of the work deal directly with my choices of subject matter, imagery, medium, surface materials as well as in my handling of materials, including my drawing skill. These artistic practice decisions assist with the discovery, preparation, exploration and development of each artwork, and these distinguishing choices reflect a distinct quality in a body of artwork (Hall 2013).



**Figure 24: Artwork (unknown artist) on electric box in Maboneng.**

*Photo: Isabel Marx*

The ink washes and acrylic backgrounds applied to some of the works demonstrates a similarity to other contemporary artistic practice, this body of work also defies strict divisions between disciplines and media, and while the body of work was evolving, it was not limited to or defined by only one medium; therefore, reflecting a dominant contemporary trend.



Fragments of ideas and thoughts come to the fore when moving from place to place. Raban (1974) believed these moving figures or city dwellers in drawings symbolise city cultures that arise from the fleeting, contrived masks which people are prone to wear when in a milieu with strangers. Unlike the small town, where a person is a known, the city is a place where you can assume a pose without easily being recognised.

Other artists that have worked with the urban environment offer similar yet equally personal and nuanced rationales for their interaction and conceptualisation of art in relation to space and place. My work reflects both a certain degree of influence as well as intentional dialogue between my practice and theirs; in other aspects, it deviates from, questions, or challenges their conceptions, methods, and execution. For example, Gideon Appah (Ghanian artist) finds inspiration in salvaged objects, imagery, and marks of temporary structures and informal signage of the socio-cultural/economic landscape of Accra's urban spaces. His works flow between figuration and text. Appah explains, "My work has an urban feel to it because it borrows visual-cultural elements mostly from slum settlements in some places in Ghana... my current projects are conceptually born out of the influence of imagery and marks of temporary structures, informal signage and a general deterioration of parts of Accra's urban landscape." (Gideon Appah 2017 [O]).

Zwelethu Mthethwa, a South African photographer, recoded environments through his work, transforming them into settings. Creating walls patched together from cardboard, plastic, or whatever was available, his artworks could pass for modernist abstractions. Other interiors that he photographed were papered with liquor-bottle labels or advertisements for food and furniture, giving off a very Pop Art-like feel. However, the themes that overlap in Mthethwa's work deal with boundaries, identity, narration, culture, relationships between subject/object and photographer/photographed, history, authenticity, and marginalisation within a South African context. Mthethwa's "photographs blur the boundaries that South Africa has historically tried so hard to maintain" (Ross 2012:53). Carol Magee (2007) argues in her article, "*Spatial Stories: Photographic Practices and Urban Belonging*" that, "Mthethwa's photographs make these workers visible. He ensures that they are remembered, acknowledged, made present in understandings of South African urban spaces. Mthethwa claims that his work belongs to the urban fabric of South African life" (Magee 2007:110).

In my work, I explore the visual language of text, movement and representation from creative purpose to accidental discovery, to help the viewer navigate and make sense of the space. As mentioned earlier, gentrified areas share a common aesthetic, while the use of text specific to Maboneng implies or conveys the notion that the aesthetics surrounding Maboneng make the space unique (Figure 25). By intentionally introducing the text of signage, the drawings become a specific representation of a particular and localised gentrified area.



**Figure 25: Assembly and stacking of boxes for the installation, Mixed media on cardboard**  
*Photo: Isabel Marx*

My practice consists of fixing and stacking cardboard boxes that include individual charcoal drawings showing the street life of Maboneng; glimpses of buildings, people, and everyday scenes are renewed on the sides of these boxes (Figure 26).





**Figure 26: Everyday scenes depicted in Box city**

*Photo: Isabel Marx*

The idea of boxes—and the new stage in the lives of these boxes which formerly contained groceries and other consumer goods—speaks to the fact that they are both a vehicle for, and a record of, daily activities of transaction. It implies commercial exchange and the physical movement of goods from one place to another. The cardboard box is also a testament to our modern culture of disposable goods; stacks of broken down or dismantled boxes piled on the streets for recycling and pushed around in the trolleys of their collectors (Reidel 2006). When considering the agency of these cardboard objects, I would argue that the box has agency insofar as it demands physical engagement on the part of the observer. I award the boxes with agency by turning them into surfaces for drawings. So, although I provide the box with a new role, the object still carries the symbols of its original function and emphasises its life cycle. It carries evidence of its past (through printed labels and stickers) but also functions as an object of art in the present.

There is a contrast between the real flatness of the paper drawings and the real dimensionality with illusory drawings on them that allows the viewer to move between the implied and the real. Even when the surface is three-dimensional, a drawn image that is wrapped around it is made emphatically flat by sheer contrast. During the process of research, I have continued to methodically work and rework pieces throughout the artmaking process so that the works were imbued with my presence, sub-

conscious memory, and experiences of navigating Maboneng.

In *Inside spaces* (Figure 27), the viewer gets to peek into a large open box to view retail space windows.



**Figure 27: Inside spaces, Mixed media on cardboard.**

*Photo: Isabel Marx*

Visual research, when considered and evaluated, involves an inherent assumption of the unfamiliar. In the process of developing my artwork, new images or ways of drawing emerged which then provided a basis for subsequent works. The drawings allow the viewer to engage with the spaces of Maboneng by navigating my installation. Some of the images captured are viewed from a distance and are stacked high so as to communicate the scale of place that towers over pedestrians. The audience is then drawn by details and smaller marks into areas of interest within the large drawings, retaining the interest of the viewer.

The significance of black and white images also communicates a sense of seriousness, documentation and places a focus on the subject matter. My work documents a transformation in space, place and time. Far from being passive observers of the contemporary scene, the earliest documentary photographers were active agents searching for the most effective way to communicate their views. The contrast between the pitch-black charcoal and the white pastels on the natural background of cardboard connects to how urban transformation involves certain conflicts and contrasts; a push and pull effect

between modernism and tradition. Furthermore, there exists a tension in the work that reflects the admiration versus the skepticism that surrounds Maboneng.

The body of work researched represents a fragmented view of Maboneng so as to recreate a framed physical space, which is recorded and remembered. Some of the finished drawings avoid the expected rectangular forms of finished paper drawings because of the 3-dimensional objects of cardboard boxes. Some of the drawings are represented as bundles of drawings; they resemble the stacks of cardboard boxes collected by the recycle workers. The idea is to present the drawings in a way that is removed from the sterile gallery space so that the viewer can page through the drawings in an unpolished portfolio format and physically engage with the work. This grounds the viewer in a tangible environment where they are active participants, much like a consumer would look through and touch goods in a retail environment. The drawings capture and celebrate the distinctive atmosphere, the *Genius Loci*, or "Spirit of Place" which is a reflection of the culture and consciousness of the people that inhabit these spaces within Maboneng.

The choice of media is an intricate part of the artmaking process, it is not only the manner in which the content of the message interacts with the audience, but, more importantly, the ideas that come through the medium itself. The work should not only be engaged with in terms of its content or imagery, but likewise the materiality through which it manifests itself. Therefore, it is the "intersection of concept and materiality" (Erber 2006:12) through which art is realised. In my research, I have viewed the history of materiality and the meaning of materials. The Pop Art movement's fascination with the mundane and commercial, in fact revelling it, is echoed in the contemporary art practices of Andy Barrett and the Cardboard Box Office duo who leave labels and printing on the found cardboard visible in order to include its materiality in the value of the work (Anapur & Martinique 2016). Similarly, in my work, labels and printing on the boxes become visual images that support my intervention and marking on the cardboard surfaces. This draws attention to the materiality and the consumer value of the materials. In dealing with urban landscapes, concrete, steel, and glass suited for subject matter deal with the kind of grit and dirt that is expected to a certain extent and associate it with the industry or city. Similar to the cardboard boxes, the same raw materials have varying degrees of prestige.

The use of mock video surveillance equipment emphasises the significance of security and monitoring in Maboneng. The presence of CCTV cameras on the streets, and not just the inside of buildings as would be expected, makes the streets of Maboneng different from the surrounding urban areas. The inclusion of the videos, as well the insertion of security guards and cameras in the drawings (Figure 28), place emphasis on the security and surveillance element of the precinct, as well as the idea of security that saturates the lives of South Africans.



**Figure 28: Surveillance, Mixed media on cardboard.**

*Photo: Isabel Marx*

Drawings are positioned as glimpses into the ‘private spaces’ of the occupants or hidden inside cardboard boxes, drawing attention to the importance of the viewer. The audience is either looking up (Figure 29) or looking down, searching for familiarity that relates to moving around the space. The relationships between the marks, which embody the main meaning of a drawing with its composition

and structure created from different angles, allows different viewpoints not only through the placement of work, but also the composition of the drawings.





**Figure 29: Look up, Mixed media on cardboard, 2018.**  
*Photo: Isabel Marx*

City windows, as viewed by passers-by from below, often reveal some intimate details about the occupants of the spaces within. In the works, *Window dressing 1* (Figure 30) and *Window dressing 2* (Figure 31), the viewer looks up at the works as if they are standing at street level and gazing up at two windows. Visible to the viewers are curtains and blinds, somewhat obstructing the view of the interior. However, cleaning products and pigeons that are often present in urban environments, the viewer gets a glimpse of the interior to remind them that buildings are not sterile and impersonal, but that there are people living inside these spaces going about their everyday lives.



**Figure 30: Window dressing 1, mixed media on Fabriano**  
*Photo: Isabel Marx*



**Figure 31: Widow dressing 2, mixed media on Fabriano**  
*Photo: Isabel Marx*

## CHAPTER 5 - Conclusion

### 5.1 Study Review

Maboneng is a slightly ‘scruffy’ neighbourhood, yet its prime location as an inner-city precinct made it an inevitable target for gentrification. The community of Maboneng is centrally located and historically relevant because it used to be the hub of activity for old Johannesburg. Over time, however, this old inner-city neighbourhood shifted from being hip and desirable to a risky area, void of any amenities. The turn for Maboneng came with the investment from a private company called Propertuity in 2008. Buildings were ‘fixed-up’, pavements cleaned up, and safety features upgraded to eventually have Maboneng nominated as one of the ‘coolest neighbourhoods’ in the world ten years later (Abel 2018).

This study has highlighted the urban experience as a space intentionally created that encourages participation; not simply a passive place to be consumed. There are two kinds of experiences: the unintentional and the intentional, the natural and the created. The idea that something needs to be created rather than just existing is the key factor of intentionality in this study. Intentionality demands some sort of manipulation: a deliberate attempt or direct action being projected onto the experience so that it becomes something ‘made’. In my work, I craft and curate the experience of Maboneng in order to recreate a nuanced view of the perceptions and interactions that happen in an urban space like Maboneng. However, as with any curated experience, there is always the element of the unplanned involved. My intentions as an artist around my work and the way the installation is presented is deliberate, but within this curated environment there is still an organic experience that is influenced by the viewer and their perceptions and ideas in relation to the work.

Through written research and drawings, I examined Maboneng as a thriving inner-city hub by investigating the consumption of space as well as the role consumption plays in the making of Maboneng. Consumption does play a major role in the production of space; where the aesthetic and cultural ideals are incorporated into buildings, open public spaces and streets, which in turn inform how these spaces are consumed. The practice of consumption of goods and services also plays a pivotal role in the existence of Maboneng, as it draws different communities of people to the area. The process of



renewal is complex and from the research it is clear that it is not always site-specific, murals in Maboneng were created by traveling artists from other parts of the world that created similar works.

Gentrification definitely has an aesthetic (Figure 32); there is uniformity and a monoculture to it. Raw and unadorned brick walls, reclaimed containers, and public art are supposed to be markers of a more authentic aesthetic that likewise signify a non-corporate franchised space. When I examined the physical aesthetics of place in Maboneng, it revealed a more generic look. Similar spaces in Buenos Aires and Williamsburg resemble the aesthetic of Maboneng (Figure 33 & 34). Although many of the businesses are not a part of the chain that prescribes the aesthetics of the interiors, these spaces have a way of mirroring the same ‘retro-hipster’ style and feel that is typical of most global urban regeneration projects, and do not necessarily represent the specific aesthetics of Johannesburg. The space should, however, aim to suggest authenticity. Authenticity supposes the coexisting of the original disposition of place or what users would naturally associate it with, and the new infused culture of place that is not forced or actively planned by any one party. If Maboneng becomes too corporate and sterile, it will not attract the type of diverse community it aims to.



**Figure 32: Maboneng, Johannesburg reflects a gentrified aesthetic.**  
(*bizcommunity.com*)



**Figure 33: Palermo, Buenos Aires that shares the aesthetic of Maboneng.**  
(*lovin.ie*)



**Figure 34: A streetscape from Williamsburg, New York that shares the aesthetic of Maboneng.**  
(*nypost.com*)

Secondary considerations within this research included the aesthetics around gentrification and the habits of the people using repurposed spaces such as Maboneng. Through observations, interviews and other studies examined, it seems that the precinct reflects a homogenous ‘mixed-income’ middle class demographic. Maboneng could also be seen as an in-between space. On one street, there is a waste



collector or hawker pulling loaded trolleys of collected ‘waste’ goods, on the next street is a young hipster looking for a Wi-Fi connection at a coffee shop and a group of students filming footage in the middle of the road under the iconic M-A-B-O-N-E-N-G lights (Figure 35).



**Figure 35: Maboneng, a Sotho word meaning “place of light” that is signified by the iconic sign.**  
(Enca 2014)

## 5.2 Chapter Review

In Chapter One, the idea of gentrification as a phenomenon was unpacked in terms of trying to identify a workable definition of consumption as a practice through which urban identities are formed. Through examining a broad body of research on gentrification, there appears to be a distinct difference between contemporary gentrification compared to previous positions on gentrification. Initially, evictions and high property prices were the only markers of a gentrified area. Currently however, gentrification includes an urban space that appears ‘abandoned’ and that needs to be ‘redone’ with a specific grit and glamour aesthetic for a specific audience/resident. Spaces benefit because gentrifiers reinforce aestheticisation, which is crucial for the appropriation of space central to any case of gentrification (Zukin 1998). Gentrification should not be seen as a single process of the transformation from a lower- to an upper-income neighbourhood. Seminal researchers on the topic like Zukin (1987,1989), Lees (2000,2008), Ley (1994,2003) and in a South African context Visser (2002), examined the link between gentrifiers and the ‘new middle-class’ which emerged in post-industrial cities and argues that gentrified spaces have become representations of their cultural and aesthetic values.

Chapter Two focused on the repositioning of space in terms of gentrified areas, highlighting that space and place are not fixed or innate entities, but are rather created and re-created through the actions and meanings of people. To frame the understanding of space and place in this manner emphasises the actions and responsibility of its users and producers, as well as the impact of the spaces on social exchanges and consumption behaviour.

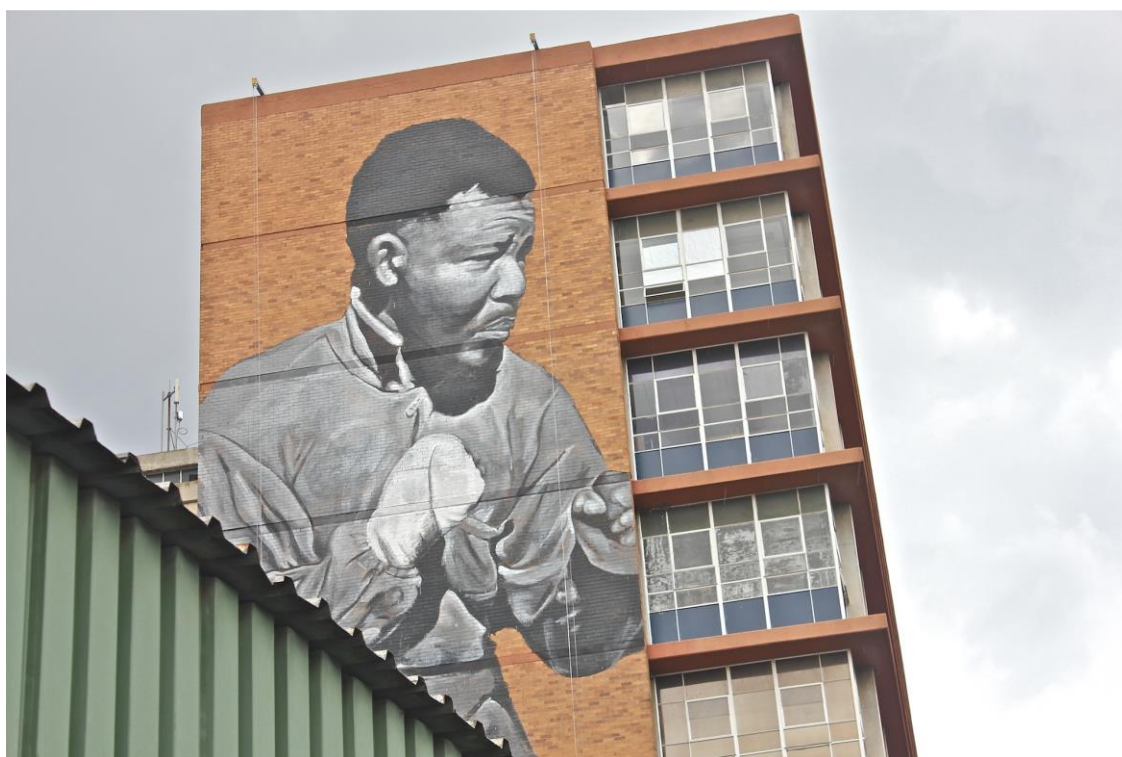
The retail spaces serve as signifiers for gentrification in urban landscapes. The significance of these new consumption sites includes their social activities and spatial practices. Thus, the urban experience exists for people through their interaction with it. It can be deduced then that gentrification is no longer about rent increases and displacement, but rather street-level spectacles, trendy bars and cafes, social diversity, and small hip creative outlets (Slater 2006). To make the ground floor attractive benefits all the floors above it. These mostly fast-growing urban centres are filled with potential for emerging consumers; unfortunately, these spaces also have a sense of uneasiness in their use and connections with one another and the people within them. In this chapter, the study looked at gentrification in ‘pockets’ of transformation to emphasise the readiness of the inner-city of Johannesburg’s derelict neighbourhoods to renovate buildings to offer shopping, business and retail spaces on the ground floor, with the upper floors serving as residential units. Therefore, the creation of spaces for young entrepreneurs in the inner city has led to a rise in new and innovative ideas.

In Chapter Three, Johannesburg’s evolution from a simple mining town to its visions of a global city is examined. It was discovered that one of the most prominent changes in terms of gentrification happened here in the regenerated enclave of Maboneng. One of the main objectives was to examine the elements that are usually associated with the regenerated areas within Maboneng. Despite the signs of gentrification, however, Maboneng is a place where these stark differences and contrasts are created, even as the space is more shared and more “mutual.”

Since 2008, Maboneng has turned into a fashionable destination and crime rates have fallen sharply in the precinct. Because safety and security is an issue throughout most of South Africa, it was imperative for the developers of Maboneng to address criminal activities in the neighbourhood as well as provide a sense of physical security so as to attract people to the area. The spine of Maboneng runs along its retail component and it is one of the aspects of the consumer culture. It remains an important drawcard

as it forms an intricate part of the precinct. There is an eclectic mix of independent retailers selling mostly clothing and local crafts, a range of restaurants and coffee shops, the Museum of Art and Design (MOAD), and an independent cinema called The Bioscope (Property 2016, n.p). Experiences within the space, like a variety of culinary tastes at the various restaurants, draw people to this space.

A key component of Property's redevelopment work has been the strong branding done by the company that defined themselves as the 'creators of Maboneng' (Property 2016). Jo Buitendach from 'Past Experiences', a walking tour company, explains Johannesburg as jam-packed with graffiti (Greeff 2016) and takes pride in large scale masterpieces that promote it as an attraction. Some of the street art in Maboneng visually and directly ties in with the area being firmly embedded in an African context with the largest public art mural of Nelson Mandela painted on the west-facing side of Access City (Figure 36).



**Figure 36: Public art in Maboneng serve as signifiers for regeneration.  
Mural of a Young Nelson Mandela by Freddy Sam.**

*Photo: Isabel Marx*



**Figure 37: More public art in Maboneng serve as signifiers for regeneration.**

**The Cosmopolitan building had a facelift in July 2018 when colonial settler Jan van Riebeeck's image by Gaia and Freddy Sam, was replaced by a mural celebrating the legendary singer, Yvonne Chaka Chaka**

*Photo: Isabel Marx  
(Instagram)*

Since 2009, the physical, social and economic transformation of Maboneng has been, to a large extent, led by Propertuity. The company has been commissioning, and paying for, large-scale artworks in Maboneng which helps to make the area more visually appealing and emphasises the role of the arts in the making of alternative spaces. The 'Jan van Riebeeck' mural behind the Cosmopolitan hotel, a collaboration between American artist Gaia and Cape Town-based Freddy Sam, is an enormous portrait of Dutch colonialist Jan van Riebeeck swathed in modern African wax-print fabric. In July 2018, this mural was replaced by an image of singer Yvonne Chaka Chaka (Figure 37). This mural was part of the Portuguese street artist Alexandre 'Vhils' Farto and Hennessy's (an elite cognac producer based in France) collaboration which also included new-look limited edition bottles exclusively designed by Vhils. The collaboration is promoted on social media as #MakeTheInvisibleVisible. The involvement of a global corporate company in Maboneng's public art emphasises the involvement and importance of consumption in a place like Maboneng.





**Figure 38: More public art in Maboneng serve as signifiers for regeneration.**  
**AK47's triptych by Ralf Ziman.**  
*Photo: Isabel Marx*

In close proximity, at the front of the Cosmopolitan in Albrecht Street, a triptych by Afrika47 explores gun violence by decorating weapons with traditional Zulu beadwork, photographing and painting the results. The local public is becoming increasingly more interested in street art and numerous tours focus solely on the city's public art (Figure 38).

The study concludes with a body of work as my visual research in the form of an installation that aims to create an experience of an urban space like Maboneng. The exhibition plays with the idea of appropriating discarded objects like cardboards, shopping bags, bottles, cups, and receipts, which ties in with the urban experience and transports the viewer through the use of these materials to an authentic Maboneng. The images that I created serve to illustrate a series of subjective snapshots of what one might expect to see in Maboneng. My intention was to re-create a juxtaposition of the old grit of the city and the newly converted upmarket spaces. There is a flow and flux that reflects my trepidation in the artworks, with fading and erasing some parts only to draw over them again, so that the work often remains unpolished and unpredictable.

The focus on the consumption of space for this study manifests in the artworks on boxes and paper, as the cardboard boxes becomes signifiers for contemporary consumerist culture (lifestyle shopping, visiting ‘hip’ space, migration, poverty, living experiences). Urban retailing is one important element in urban regeneration due to its ability to create local employment and fit into lifestyle experiences for ‘new’ local communities of people that are always in a state of flux.

My intention as the artist of these works was to use found objects and cardboard boxes and create an immersive experience that addresses the aesthetics of the urban environment. By making images on the outside of the cardboard boxes, the work connects with the mark-making of the graffiti on the walls outside the buildings of Maboneng. There is an interplay between the outside appearance and the secure spaces of life on the inside found in glimpses through windowpanes. The viewer gets to see the inviting and open retail spaces but also the obscured private spaces of those that live in Maboneng.

My own personal attraction and interest in Maboneng reflects a space that has a favourable place that is tolerant and that attracts individuals I deem creative and interesting. The diverse traffic of people (local, national and international) changed my perception of what an urban landscape could be in terms of inclusivity and accentuates the need for the transformation of inner-city Johannesburg. The process of drawing as a medium to convey my ideas allowed me to actively challenge the historical position of drawing as a preparatory or ‘lesser’ medium, and use it as ‘drawing for drawing sake.’

### **5.3 Final conclusions**

In this thesis, I used various sources of information: personal observations documented through notes, photographs and sketches, interviews and more formal academic writing research. I followed an approach that allowed me to capture as many aspects of the precinct as possible in my artworks. As part of my research I found the role of consumption and art to be integral to the establishment and sustainability of Maboneng.

Most of the activities in and around Maboneng revolve around retail experiences. For example, the busiest day of the week for the precinct is on a Sunday when *Market on Main* takes place. Since 2011, *Market on Main* has been a weekly up-market market (Figure 39) that trades in regional foods and local design and promotes a typical cosmopolitan inner city lifestyle on their website (Market on Main 2018).



Without the practices of makers to trade, and locals and visitors to spend their weekend leisure time here, the identity of the creative and hip community and viability of the precinct would be lost.



**Figure 39: A Food festival in Maboneng on Main street (2016).**  
*(citybuzz.co.za)*

Through my research I have gained an understanding of the phenomenon that more people actively seek to be part of or associated with art practices or activities that surround art making. This further emphasises the power of the visual arts in society. Despite its shortcomings, Maboneng, as a neighbourhood, has managed to create a place that is culture-led and physically transformed to increase community engagement on the aesthetics of place. My body of research adds to the wider discussion of Maboneng by drawing attention to its potential to attract more communities back to the city to participate in an urban experience, even if it is one that is intentionally made.

The truth is that gentrification works in a discerning way that, even if subdued, prevents spaces from being truly open and accessible to all. The question remains, is gentrification a solution to inner-city decay in an urban South African context, or is it stopping us from achieving an inclusive and truly diverse society?

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