

Chapter 3

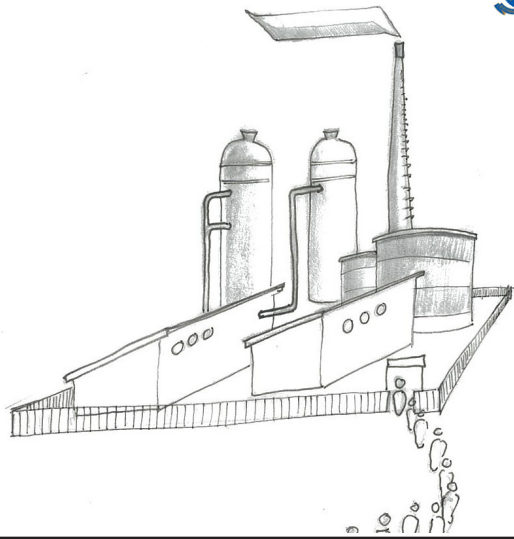
Appropriate theoretical framework

Introduction

Post-Industrial landscapes are unique heritage assets that speak volumes of the time in which they were initiated. Since many of these sites globally have been decommissioned, they have since undergone deterioration or, more dramatically, demolition. Often, the extent to which any intervention can be done on these sites depend upon the extent that remedial action of the natural resources is required. However, remedial action and more extensive intervention such as re-purposing of existing structures can be done in a way that negates the uniqueness of the terrain. These sites, and the Johannesburg Gas Works site were unique indeed. These sites of manufacture that were once alive with noises, smells, fumes and labour are now frozen in time and often possess the ephemera of austerity and mystery. Therefore particular theoretical stances have to be explored that recognize this intangible uniqueness. Two theories that deal with the intangible aspects of the site cover the aesthetic behind austere artifacts and the inherent “personality” that these sites seem to possess. The theory that the site can be read as a series of sequential layers will grapple with the existence of post-industrial sites as base layers upon which new interventions are to be scripted as new layers that create a purposeful juxtaposition with the existing base layer. And lastly, as a theoretical reference, appropriate charters and approaches to the commemoration and reconstruction of structures will be discussed in order to arrive at a clear point of departure for any new intervention at the Johannesburg Gas Works site.

The theoretical approaches that are to be discussed in this chapter are as follows:

- 1) The International Council for the Commemoration of Industrial Heritage (TICCIH) guide to industrial heritage conservation as well as the Nizhny Tagil charter for Industrial heritage.
- 2) Japanese Wabi-Sabi aesthetic.
- 3) Reconstruction and commemoration.
- 4) the “Genius Loci” of place.
- 5) Reading the site as a palimpsest.

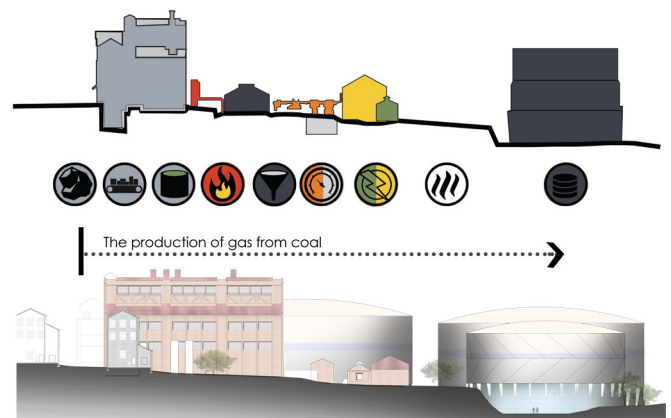


TICCIH

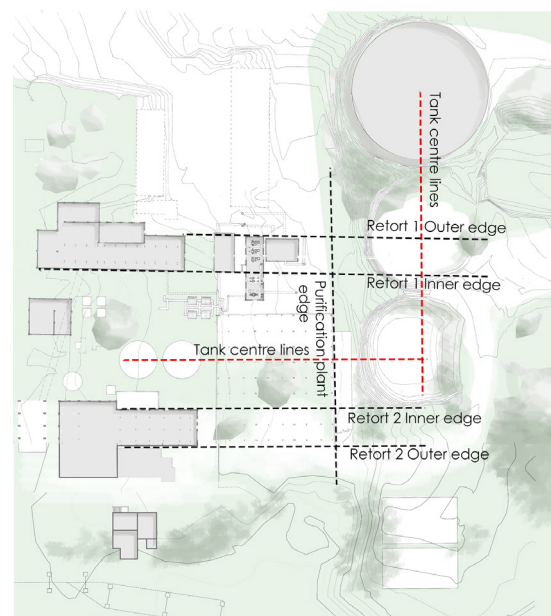
The TICCIH has put together a useful guide in approaching industrial heritage in their book *Industrial Heritage Re-tooled* as well as the Nizhny Tagil charter for industrial heritage. The Nizhny Tagil charter summarizes the value of industrial heritage firstly as “evidence of activities which had and continue to have profound historical consequences” and the global significance of this evidence; secondly as something of social importance and how it provides a sense of identity to a community; thirdly, that the value is intrinsic to the site itself and lastly, value lies in the rarity attributed to pioneering or innovative technologies of the era (ICOMOS 2003). The charter also states under its guidelines on conservation and maintenance that a thorough understanding of the various processes on site should guide the nature of any conservation work or interventions. The charter discourages exact reconstruction and views it as an exceptional intervention which is only appropriate if it benefits “the integrity of the whole site, or in the case of the destruction of a major site by violence.” (ICOMOS 2003). The charter also encourages the education of industrial heritage in educational institutions. This didactic potential could also be realized much more with in-situ visits.

Unique elements:

1) Relationship between process and the landscape.

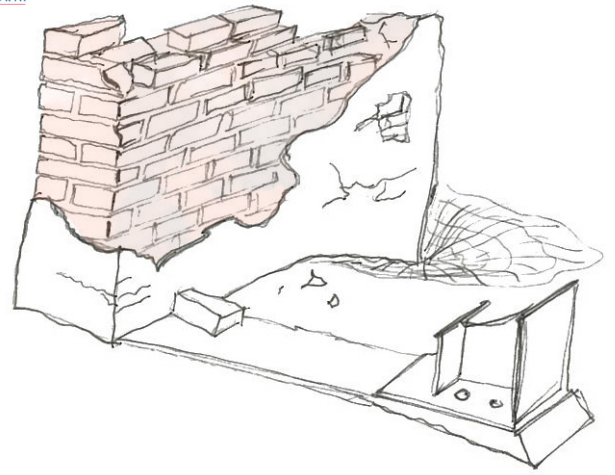


2) Spatial ordering system



Below left: **Figure 37** Noteworthy heritage aspects of the Gasworks site (Author, 2017)

Below right: **Figure 38** Wabi-Sabi application on the Gasworks site (Author, 2017)

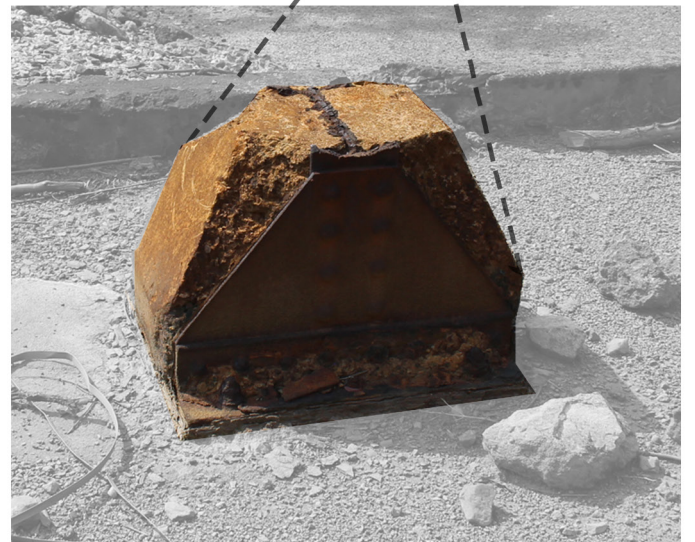
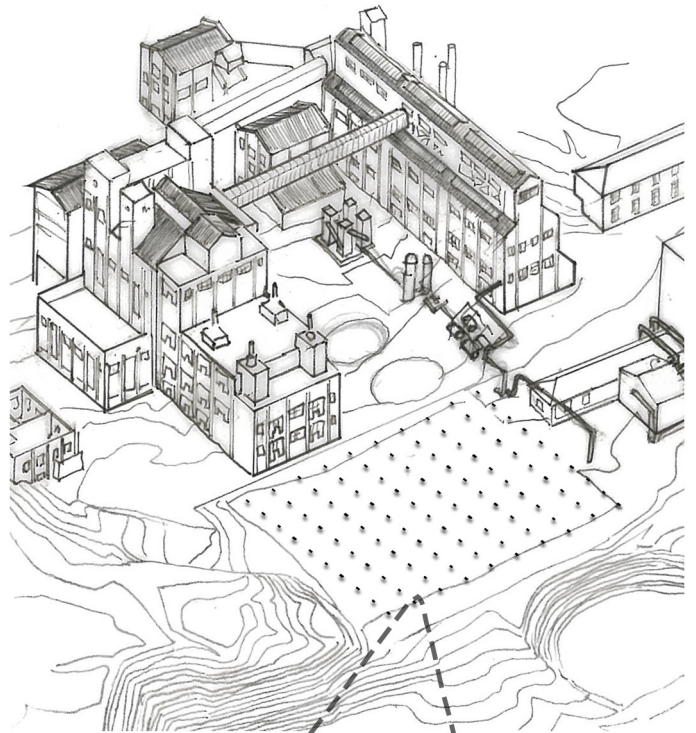


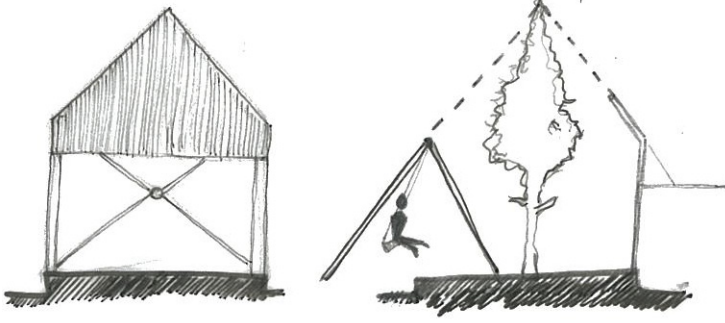
Wabi-Sabi aesthetic

Masaaki Okada in his article in *Industrial Heritage Re-tooled* titled *Industrial ruins* speaks of two explanations behind the appreciation of the aesthetics of ruin. He derives an understanding of this appreciation from the 18th century English Picturesque gardens in which the superficial value of the placement of ruins within these gardens spoke of a connection between the garden landscape and nature since natural processes caused the current state of decay of the ruin (Okada 2014:153). They possess the elegance of ephemera, recalling the notion of the passage of time and decay. He also mentions the Japanese concept of “Wabi-Sabi” which speaks of the tranquillity and higher beauty seen in the austere, incomplete or the absence of apparent beauty. The appreciation of the post-industrial landscape was brought to the surface in the essay by Robert Smithson in 1967 *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* although the first industrial to park typology had occurred in the 1860s in the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont by J.C. Alphand (MOMA 2008:25)

Industrial remnants:

The foundations of the purification plants.





Reconstruction and commemoration

In a recent article by Professor Piet Vosloo from the University of Pretoria on the conservation of the Tswaing salt works in Gauteng, the words of J Hunt are quoted to strengthen the importance of capturing a site's identity and telling its story to the public, whether the strategies employed are conservation, restoration, alteration or re-use, "If the designer draws out, reaffirms the meaning of a site – whether that theme or narrative is ideological or geomorphological, general or site-specific – he celebrates a site's identity." (Hunt cited in Vosloo 2015:47), and in quoting Treib, "Humans imbue landscape with memory using several vehicles... The most direct action maintains the historical form of the land: preservation...a second means of commemoration retains the noteworthy elements of the original landscape, ... perhaps a building typology..." (Treib cited in Vosloo 2015:47)

In agreement with the Nizhny Tagil charter, Scott emphasizes that any demolished work should not be reconstructed without a thorough interrogation and he maintains that the purpose of alteration is that of translation, "to translate a building into the present, in so doing making it suit a modern way of life". (Scott cited in Vosloo 2015:44)

In approaching the commemoration of demolished industrial buildings, a strategy would have to be informed by a thorough questioning of the original structure and the altered form after translation into appropriate materials, function and scale have been applied. How would the translated form pay homage to the earlier form, yet be distinguishable as a new creation? A further understanding on the subtleties of commemoration is required

Industrial remnants:

Demolished buildings and their building typologies

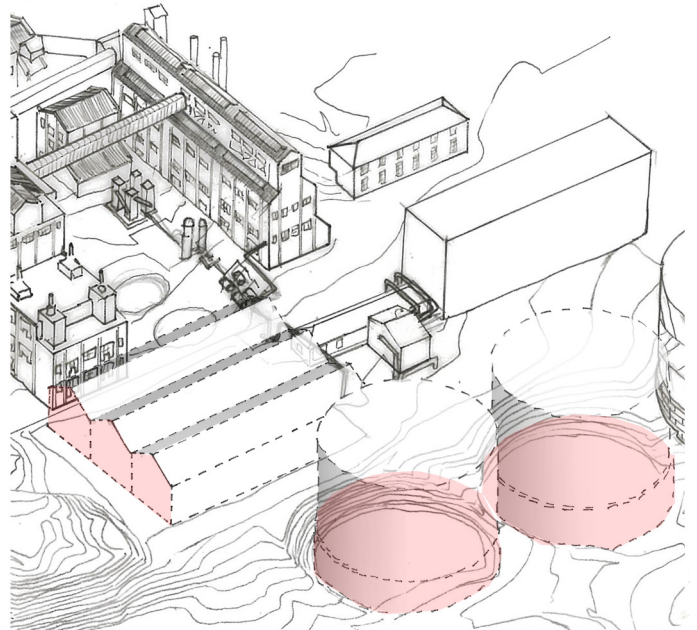
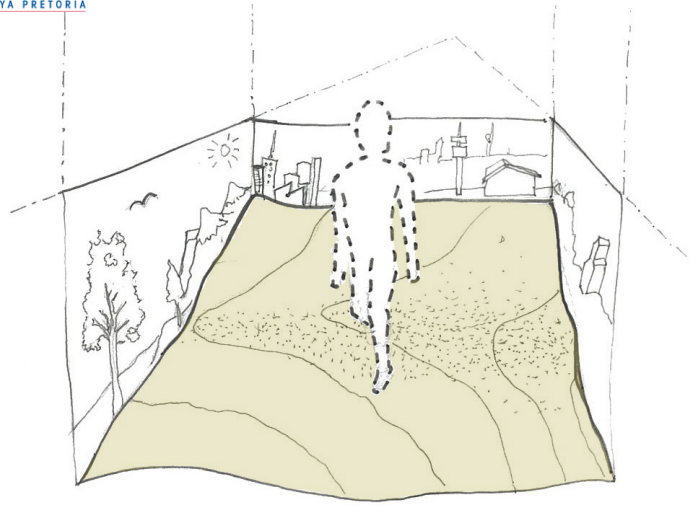


Figure 39 Noteworthy aspects of demolished structures. (Author, 2017)



Genius Loci “The Spirit of a place”

This notion, written about by Christian Norberg-Schulz in his book *Genius Loci: towards a phenomenology in architecture* speaks about the unique character and identity related to a particular place that is so intangible that the metaphysical notion of a “spirit” belonging to that place is put forward in this theory. In a more realistic sense, it can be acknowledged that each place possesses a set of attributes that determines its uniqueness. Alexander Pope said “consult the Genius of the Place in all” and this can be done by identifying and maintaining the components of a place’s identity to guide any architectural intervention (cited in Garnham, 1985). Garnham suggests that these major components of identity are: physical features and appearance, observable activities and functions and lastly, meanings or symbols (Garnham 1985). Maintaining these components is essential since, according to Garnham, “the essential bond between person and place can be broken” if this “Genius” is not guiding new interventions (Garnham 1985:7)

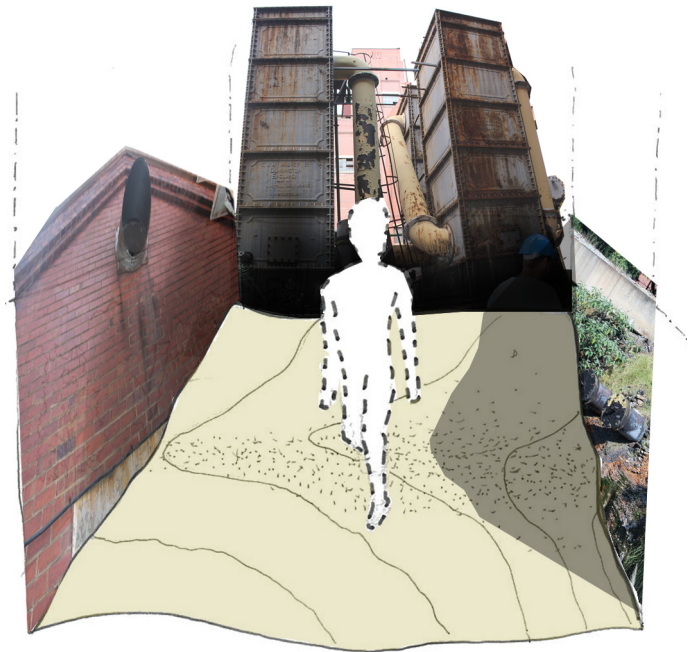


Figure 40 Genius Loci of the Gasworks site. (Author, 2017)

The qualities unique to the Gasworks site that can be identified as it’s “genius” are among others:

- 1) Rusted steel industrial artifacts in stark contrast to intrusive vegetation
- 2) Steel and brick construction and the expression of structure
- 3) Austerity brought about by recognizing the absence of demolished structures through their varied remnants
- 4) Abandoned machinery

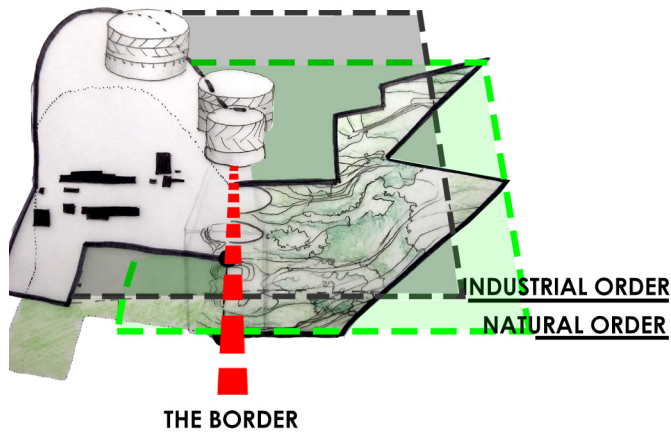


Figure 41 The layering of the Gasworks site and reading the intervention area the location of the overlap (Author, 2017)

The site as palimpsest

The word palimpsest means “writing material (such as a parchment or tablet) used one or more times after earlier writing has been erased” (Merriam-Webster 2017) This metaphor is used in architecture to describe the sequential layers of intervention as they have left markings on a site or building.

Thinking of the site as a palimpsest allows designers to utilize the site's layers of history to reveal aspects of the site, or even to add a new layer of self-conscious fiction. Using principles of collage and juxtaposition, history is seen not as linear phenomena, but as layers or discrepancies between a past event (history) and present recall (memory) (Krinke 2001:128)

The potential of reading a site or a work of architecture in its relationship to another layer is made possible in this approach and maintaining a discernible difference between layers is essential to the legibility of these layers and making unscripted imagination possible in the mind of the user. Since the brief of the intervention is the restitution of ecology with industry, a new ecologically sensitive industry is proposed for the site on the location where the gas making process has caused the most damage.

The remnants on the particular intervention area on the Gasworks site serve as a base layer on which to respond. The means by which a demolished building's layer is recognised (it's traces) should be informed by the particular identity or phenomenon of the remnant. Commemorating industrial heritage in this way can “give(s) us the chance to reflect on the use, or rather abuse, of our resources”, (Tempel 2014:142) This speaks about place specific meaning, interpretation and response.

Maintaining a palimpsest of an earlier structure can be done in subtle ways such as recognising a form in paving patterns or material finishes in buildings.

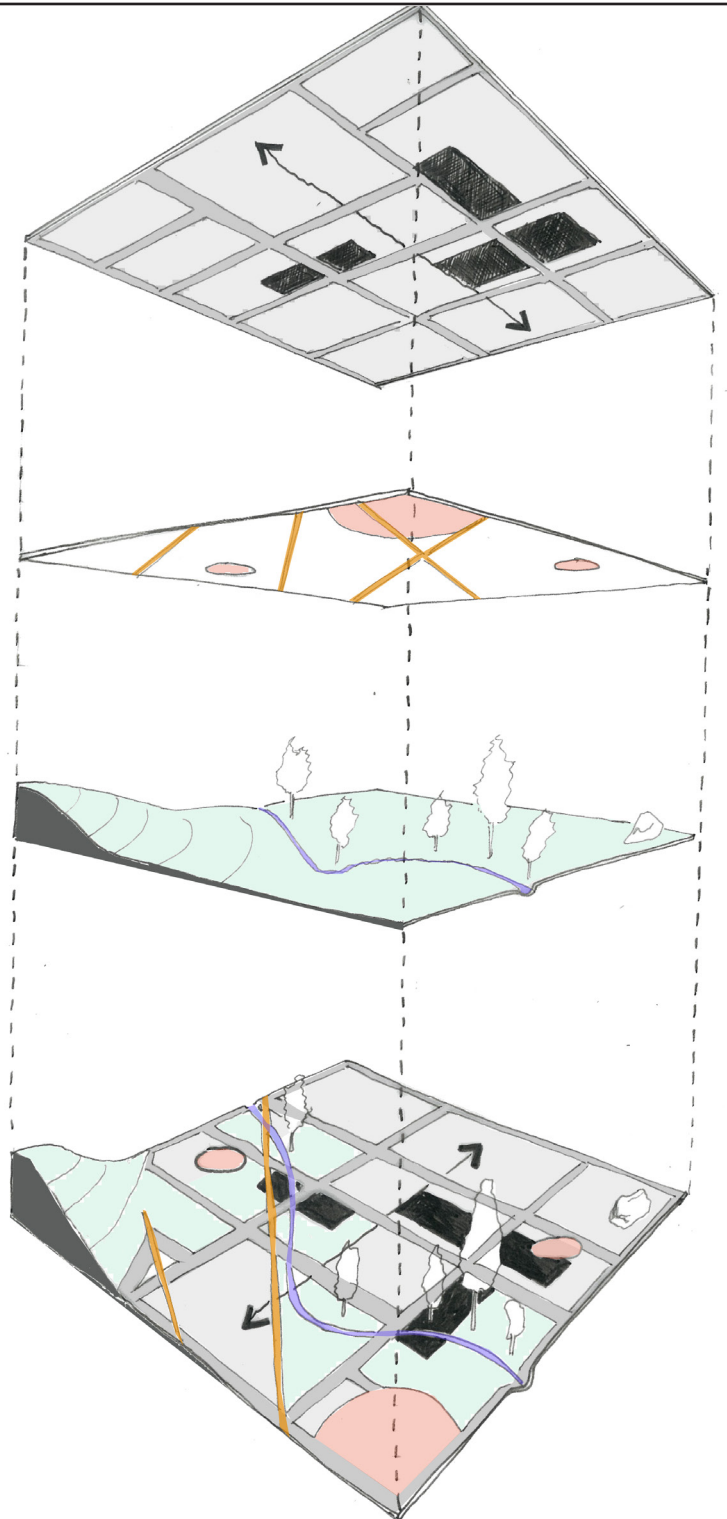


Figure 42 Reading a site as a palimpsest (Author, 2017)
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