



Chapter 8

Conclusion

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Response to the original intentions

The intention of this dissertation was to catalyse the urban regeneration of the old Johannesburg Gasworks through the insertion of an architectural intervention, as well as to challenge the ideas of conservation in an attempt to create a strong dialogue between the existing industrial heritage of the past and the envisioned contemporary architecture of the future.

The issue regarding the disconnection between the natural and built environment inspired a theoretical approach rooted in regenerative design. Through literature studies it became evident that the disconnection between the natural and built environment was as a result of Renaissance and Industrial thinking. This severed relationship between man and nature led to the exploitation of natural systems without considering the long-term effects on the vitality of these systems resulting in the dichotomy between industry and nature.

The repercussions of this dichotomous relationship, in the form of pollution, caused the old Johannesburg Gasworks to become secluded from the rest of the urban fabric and this redundancy endangered the industrial heritage fabric on site.

An understanding of the existing retort house and its dominating relationship with nature inspired the adoption of a new approach to industrial architecture. Through the technical concept of inversion, an approach towards industries and the way in which they interact with the surrounding context was produced. In order to address the dichotomy between industry and nature, the new building makes use of an inverted structure, which provides infrastructure for the growing of plants needed in the dye process thus connecting industry and nature on a physical level, as opposed to the existing retort's structure. The new building also embeds itself in the landscape on the southern edge of the site,

Figure 8.1. Left: Machinery (Author 2017)

which Littman (2009:16) believes creates the opportunity for a building to contribute to the natural balance that exists on site by connecting the users of the space to the land on a more spiritual level. It is this spiritual connection that has the ability to restore the great divide between humans and nature by re-establishing humanity's place as equal shareholders in the well-being of the earth's biosphere.

The heritage was approached from the perspective of preservation through transformation in the form of a philological approach. Through the insertion of a new function, the latent potential of the building was reactivated. Due to the lack of machinery describing the old process, the new systems of movement were inserted between the old and new buildings, which act as spatial manifestations of the industrial memory.

The juxta-positioning of the new and old buildings in stark contrast to one another, provided the opportunity for a strong dialectical relationship to be established and for the old to be understood through the lens of the new building.

The optimisation of the industrial waste in the form of the leaves from the hemp and stinging nettle inspired the development of new social spaces, namely the tea house and a micro-brewery. This, along with the introduction of an urban textile market, re-establishes the city dwellers' place on the old Johannesburg Gasworks site and provides a platform for the restitution of the relationship between man and industry, reconnecting the site to the vibrant socio-economic spaces of the surrounding context.

In conclusion, through the application of the regenerative and transformative resilience theory in conjunction with philological restoration, post-industrial sites like the old Johannesburg Gasworks have the potential to provide a platform for the development of new industrial archetypes capable of remediating the severed relationship between industry and nature instigated by Industrialization. The way in which architecture manifests the mediated relationship between industry and nature provides architects with a myriad of exciting architectural possibilities to be further explored.

Our biggest challenge with post-industrial sites lies in creating architecture that is entirely comprehensive and architecture that is able to deviate from its destructive path and instead inspire remediation of issues arising from the past in order to provide prosperity for the future.

*“We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost’s familiar poem,
they are not equally fair.
The road we have long been traveling is deceptively easy,
a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed,
but at its end lies disaster.
The other fork of the road
— the one less traveled by —
offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures
the preservation of the earth.”*

*- Rachel Carson, Silent Spring -
(Quaratiello 2004:101)*

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