Repurposed Spaces in Berlin and Johannesburg

by

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Repurposed Spaces in Berlin and Johannesburg

Rebecca Kukla

“It was hard to observe borders, to see and unsee only what I should, on my way home. I was hemmed in by people not in my city, walking slowly through areas crowded but not crowded in Besźel. I focused on the stones really around me — cathedrals, bars, the brick flourishes of what had been a school - that I had grown up with. I ignored the rest or tried.” (China Miéville, *The City and the City*, 3)
Chapter 1: Introduction

My primary interest in this thesis is in what I call repurposed cities, and the repurposed spaces within them. A repurposed city is one that was built to support one form of economic, social, and political relations and uses, which has now collapsed, so that the city has to accommodate radically new uses, users, and purposes, and in turn, residents have to find ways of using and adapting a material city built for something quite different. Repurposed spaces are smaller spaces that are being used differently from how they were designed to be used. Repurposed cities are particularly full of repurposed spaces, but repurposed spaces can be found in all sorts of cities. On a small scale, parks intended as middle-class recreation areas may become squatters’ camps if the economic fortunes of a neighborhood change; monuments designed to honor and celebrate a now-fallen dictator may turn into focal points for political protest, play structures for teens, or places to walk dogs; abandoned factories for defunct industries may become art galleries. On a larger scale, as a neighborhood changes in ethnic make-up, its fire escapes may become clothing lines and its alleys may become cooking areas.

Material urban landscapes are often designed (often consciously, sometimes implicitly) to keep some groups of people separate from others, to keep surveillance over some groups, to ‘protect’ some groups from others, and to keep groups of people flowing through the city along specific routes. This is accomplished through highways, fences, plazas, bridges, parks, housing developments, and more. These built features of a city have political, social, and economic purposes. When the socioeconomic order of a city changes, the need for these separations, surveillances, and flows may become obsolete, but the built environment that includes these features is typically mostly left behind. As new ways of using the city develop and demographics shift, these leftover forms and spaces must be abandoned, destroyed, or repurposed. It is this repurposing that interests me here.
In my exploration of repurposed cities, I paid special attention to the spatial politics of inclusion, exclusion, territory, and agency. David Harvey influentially argued that we cannot understand how people are included or excluded from the life of a city, without looking at how urban spaces are arranged and used, and how everyday urban life is spatialized (Harvey 1973). Social justice and injustice and structures of inequality, according to Harvey, are essentially spatially enabled and sustained. Throughout my research, I tried to uncover how urban spaces that were designed to enforce boundaries, divisions, partitions and exclusions can get reworked into shared living spaces such as collectives and squatters’ camps, protest spaces, and other places in which formerly separated and disenfranchised people can have voice and agency. More generally, I set out to see how spaces became inclusive or exclusive and in what ways as they were altered - how they formed into territories and established boundaries. I wanted to know who had authority and agency in these spaces, and how that was negotiated and renegotiated as the spaces themselves, their uses, and their inhabitants all shifted.

My focus here is on Berlin and Johannesburg. The built landscapes of both cities were designed to uphold very specific political, social, and economic orders: Cold War Berlin and Apartheid Johannesburg both required intense surveillance and containment of specific groups, the separation and ‘protection’ of some groups from others, and specific control over the flow of different kinds of people through the city space. Both cities had to manage all this separation, surveillance, and motion tightly, in order to maintain their rigid respective orders. This required propaganda and messaging, legislation, and policing, but also spatial structures and urban planning. In both cases, these social orders ended abruptly at a particular datable moment, leaving the cities with material forms no longer suited to the lives they needed to sustain.

Both Berlin and Johannesburg were divided up officially in 1948, in the direct aftermath of World War II. In both cities, division arose out of an economic crisis and a crisis of white Christian
resentment (directly in the case of Johannesburg, and via the Third Reich in the case of Berlin). The Berlin Wall was brought down in 1989 and Berlin was officially reunited in 1991. After reunification, Berlin quickly shifted from a politically divided city, organized around preventing movement across its border and maintaining surveillance of those in East Berlin in particular, to a progressive and cosmopolitan city, with notably porous borders and a lively culture of informal living arrangements. South African apartheid was legally abolished in 1991 and ended in 1994, and Johannesburg shifted from a city built to sustain official racial segregation, to one that is still marked by race and class divisions, but in which legal equality is celebrated and people flow across former barriers.

For people of my generation, who were children in the 1970s and 1980s, the Soweto Uprising of 1976 and the demise of the Berlin Wall in 1989 were arguably the two most powerful moments of successful resistance against an authoritarian order that helped form our political imagination. Both events were organic uprisings that were driven from the grass roots by local youth, emerging without any explicit centralized planning. Both were directly spatial political interventions, fighting back against the Cold War and against apartheid by resisting the physical division of Berlin and the physical segregation and township system of Johannesburg. Hence it is poignant to return to these two cities several decades later, as a middle-aged adult. I hope that this study and its choice of cities will have emotional resonance for many others who came of age during this era as well.

My goal was to examine how people use space in both cities, now that the Cold War and apartheid are defunct. In the wake of regime change, the existing material structure and urban layout of both cities still reflects an earlier era, and hence residents need to adapt to and tinker with that structure, to find ways to make it work for new forms of life, activities and groupings. These adaptations and new uses are my focus. It helps my project that the both cities had such stark forms of surveillance, separation, and control built into their landscape, and that both changed orders so
abruptly. The comparison between these cities is also temporally elegant, since they were divided during almost exactly the same years and have had almost exactly the same amount of time to be repurposed after reunification. This eliminates a major confounding variable in my study of their built landscapes and the changes in them.

My larger theoretical investment is in a broad claim about how urban spaces and urban dwellers make one another. In particular, I push back against a large class of theories that emphasize what I call *spatial determinism*, which is roughly the view that the material form of a space determines the agency, perceptions, and choices of the people who use it. I push back equally against a contrasting class of theories that emphasize what I call *spatial voluntarism*, which is roughly the view that people’s independent choices based on their values and rationality end up shaping the material form of the spaces they live in.

Spatial determinist stories show up in urban planning and architectural theory, and they have been powerfully illuminating. For instance, Jane Jacobs (1961) argued that built environments enabled and constrained the social interactions and activities that happened in them. She argued that short blocks encouraged varied walks and more interactions with strangers; that windows facing the street discouraged crime and created a shared culture of responsibility; that mixed-use streets that attracted people at all times of day would thrive while those that had flows through them only at the start and end of the work day would die; and so forth. Similarly, William Whyte argued that people’s material environments controlled their choices of how to move and where to stay. Iconically, he argued, “*People tend to sit most where there are places to sit*… The most attractive fountains, the most striking designs, cannot induce people to come and sit if there is no place to sit” (1980, 28). In architectural theory, ‘space syntax’ theorists such as Bill Hillier argue for “architectural determinism,” which is the idea that built spatial form probabilistically determines movements and patterns of use (Hillier 1987). Hillier argues, for instance, that the axial form of city neighborhoods controls how
many encounters people have within them. Indeed, a great deal of spatial theory in different disciplines assumes a fairly direct causal path from a city’s morphology to the forms of life the city contains.

Historically, an important variant on spatial determinism in geography was environmental determinism. This was the view that physical climate and morphology determine human culture and character. In geography, this view is generally traced back most paradigmatically to Sempel (1911) and Huntington (1927), but the idea that landscape is destiny has much longer intellectual roots, going back explicitly at least to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1754) and arguably to Plato. Environmental determinism may be considered a form of spatial determinism, but it is one that treats the space that does the determining as fixed and natural, and likewise takes character and culture to be largely reducible to given naturalistic facts. The spatial determinists with whom I am in conversation, in contrast, are specifically interested in designing spaces in order to promote particular behaviors, social norms, and forms of agency. Theorists like Jacob and Whyte do not naturalize the environment, but see it as a tool for social engineering. Often their goals are driven by social justice concerns, such as making neighborhoods inclusive, vibrant, and safe via urban planning. But, like the environmental determinists, they focus on one direction of causality: from space to agency and social norms.

Spatial voluntarist stories, in contrast, typically presuppose a roughly neoclassical economic ontology, in which it is individual, value-maximizing decisions that determine the form that space takes. Classic theories of urban structure such as the concentric zone and sector models, coming out of the Chicago School and later competitors, are variants on spatial voluntarism; such theories posit that we can predict urban spatial forms from how rational agents in a roughly market-driven setting will make decisions, and these decisions are modeled as though they are unconditioned by anything other than agents’ own preferences and purchasing power.

In contrast to either determinism or voluntarism, I aim to demonstrate that urban spaces
and urban dwellers quite literally make one another. I argue that both these stories are so partial as to miss the basic structure of how urban spaces and urban dwellers are causally related to one another. We do better when we conceptualize urban spaces as niches, in which spaces and dwellers adapt to one another through small adjustments, negotiations, and pressures. The relationship between the concrete form of a space and the agency and perceptions of its dwellers is mutually constitutive. People build territories, boundaries, and place identities by creatively tinkering with spaces and adapting them to their needs, but they are also constrained and shaped by these spaces as they do so. That is to say something stronger than that they just causally or reciprocally influence one another: Rather, I claim that in functional, dynamic urban space, neither the space nor the users can be properly interpreted independently of one another. The character of a concrete space cannot be grasped except with reference to how it is used and how its inhabitants perceive and act within it. Conversely, the actions and practices of its inhabitants can only be understood in relation to the space in which they happen.

To borrow and repurpose an example from David Seamon (2002), consider someone whose job it is to stack the produce in a grocery store, while helping customers. We cannot understand his embodied practice except in relationship to how the space is divided into aisles and sections, and contains objects of specific size, shape, and maintenance needs; it’s not like he could practice his stacking or his customer assistance at home. Conversely, we can’t interpret the space of the store as meaningful unless we see it as having been organized by people who use it. In such cases, the space and its users cannot even be considered independent causal forces. Rather, they form an ecosystem which essentially involves embodied users interacting with each other and with a material space. If this is right, then neither spatial determinism nor spatial voluntarism can give us the tools we need for understanding urban spaces.

In the context of this thesis, I do not directly defend this broad picture. Instead I use
repurposed cities and the repurposed spaces within those cities as lenses through which we can see this mutual constitution in action. I examine how repurposed urban spaces function, and sometimes fail to function, as dynamic, integrated places whose parts are mutually constitutive in the way I have described. My hypotheses going into this project was that repurposed cities would throw these mutually constitutive processes into especially sharp and interesting relief. First, I hypothesized that in cities that were built for one order and set of practices that then abruptly had to accommodate a new order and new practices, there would be a heightened and more dramatic need for people to retool and alter their space. This would make it easier to see the impact of agency on the spatial environment. Second, I hypothesized that because of this same mismatch, the material environment would intrude more than usual in such cities, and hence it would be easier to see the way in which this environment shaped and constrained and gave meaning to new practices. In regular, functional spaces, the match between agents and spaces is typically seamless enough to just recede into the background, and their mutual constitution can be harder to see. I was interested in looking at cities where there would be no such seamless fit—cities in which people would be actively negotiating and working on spaces, and spaces would be visibly imposing themselves on agents.

I distinguish throughout between the top down and bottom up shaping of spaces. Top down spatial design is a matter of governments or developers or someone else with authority coming up with a general plan for a space, and imposing it from above. Top down planning tends to go along with at least some commitment to spatial determinism; governments and developers design spaces so as to control how people use them. However, spatial determinism is a causal theory, while top down spatial production is an activity, so they should not be conflated. Bottom up spatial design involves the users of a space changing it from within, not via a master plan, but rather in accordance with their ad hoc needs. This kind of bottom-up intervention may be a conscious, voluntaristic attempt to alter a space, or it may just happen over time through multiple repeated uses and actions,
without any explicit plan. I am interested in how the users of repurposed urban spaces work on and alter the spaces to suit their needs through small, bottom-up practices. I want to know how people build a usable new place within these spaces that were explicitly built to be a different kind of place with different inhabitants.

I take bottom-up interventions into space to be always themselves deeply conditioned by the space as it is found, and hence these interventions are not voluntaristic choices of the sort presupposed by neoclassical models. Instead, dwellers find ways to creatively tinker with, adapt, strategically misuse, and give new meaning to old spaces. Repeatedly walking through a space, sitting in a spot, sleeping in a corner of it, tagging it with a pen, sticking posters for local events on it—all these small movements and uses accrue and slowly bend the space into new shapes better suited to new users. Conversely, people’s uses of these spaces and their agency and perceptions within them accommodate themselves to the materiality of where they find themselves, even when that materiality is an imperfect or awkward fit. Old scaffolding still shapes the life of a repurposed city.

As Brian Ladd puts it, “Memories often cleave to the physical settings of events” (1997, 1). I wanted to explore how the original organizing features of space—walls, checkpoints, bridges, highways dividing neighborhoods, etc.—shape new activities and identities once that spatial order is defunct.

How do such repurposed cities and urban spaces function as palimpsests, which are shaped by a lost order that leaves traces, while becoming something new? In his classic article, “Axioms for Reading the Landscape,” Pierce Lewis writes,

Most major cultural change does not occur gradually, but instead in great sudden historic leaps, commonly provoked by such great events as wars, depressions, and major inventions. After these leaps, landscape is likely to look very different than it did before. Inevitably, however, a lot of ‘pre-leap’ landscape will be left lying around, even though its reason for being has disappeared. (Lewis 1979, 23)

This sweeping claim about cultural change in general strikes me as too strong. But when there are such abrupt changes, we can ask about the role of this ‘pre-leap’ landscape that is ‘left lying around,
even though its reason for being has disappeared’ in the later forms of the city. Over time, these remnants of the past may end up being recontextualized and taking on completely new significance. For instance, Karina Landman points out that Tiananmen Square was constructed to stand for the power of socialist China, but after the killings of 1989, the square became associated with repression and an irrelevant, aging regime (2006, 2).

Spatial determinists such as Jane Jacobs and William Whyte assume that there has been no radical breach or dramatic spatial “leap,” and hence no abrupt mismatch between a space and its uses. This is part of why they can assume that it’s possible to read how people will act in a space off of the form of that space. Similarly, landscape theorists begin from the assumption that the broad morphology of a city can be ‘read’ to tell you about the forms of life within it, and it’s ‘place personality’ (Arreola and Curtis 1993, 8). Repurposed cities challenge these assumptions. I agree that spatial form can show the careful explorer a great deal about a niche and the forms of life within it—and indeed that is a key premise of my project. But in repurposed cities, by definition, the morphology was created for an earlier form of life and so the causal line from it to its current use is less direct, and requires a more layered and granular reading. Meanwhile, neoclassical voluntarist theories such as those of the Chicago School presume that people can make choices from scratch about how to use space, which will build into predictable forms. They do not take into account that sometimes, a great deal of form is imposed on a city from above, for the purposes of segregation, surveillance, and other forced uses of space. Nor do they take into account the effects that such leftover forms have later on people trying to express their agency in a space. Repurposed cities like Berlin and Johannesburg, with a history of massive top-down imposition of spatial form, do not fit such models.

Typically, landscapes blend into the background. As Martin Murray puts it, “the cultural work of landscapes is to naturalize social relations—that is, to make them appear so ordinary and
banal as to be hardly worth commenting on” (Murray 2011, 313). When they fade into the background in this way, it is difficult to see the role they play in shaping the agency and perceptions of their dwellers, precisely because they appear just naturally how things are. People who have grown up in suburbs arranged in cul-de-sacs will not dwell on the social implications of the fact that they cannot easily choose different paths through the neighborhood, and hence that they will only see the same neighbors over and over again.¹ People who grow up divided from another neighborhood by train tracks or walls will likely not question why they find those on the other side of the tracks unfamiliar and unsettling. In a stable city, dwellers will be used to seeing and orienting themselves around the soaring skyscrapers of downtown, and will take it as a matter of course that they serve as the 'natural' center of financial power; that's just what financial centers look like, it seems.

But, when a city is repurposed, all this taken-for-granted landscape suddenly becomes uncanny and is thrown into sharp relief. For new residents, a random wall that no longer serves a political point is an abrupt impediment to mobility - one must figure out how to use, alter, or work around it. An abandoned government building or factory or checkpoint or office tower may become intimidating, or it may present itself as available for new uses. It may be squatted, or turned into a club or a gallery. In any case, this leftover landscape can no longer be taken for granted, and it will no longer show up as natural. Its repurposing will almost always give it a new meaning that is partial and ‘lumpy’, as David Lowenthal (1979) nicely puts it.

Ali Madanipour (2017) talks about how in rapidly changing cities, there can be a “mismatch” between the space and what is supposed to happen in that space, because spatial forms may not catch up right away. This gives rise to what he calls “temporary urbanism,” or ad hoc, kludged-together solutions to these spatial mismatches between form and function. Repurposed cities are particularly fertile sites for this kind of negotiation of mismatch, which in turn creates a particularly

¹ The point is a riff on Jane Jacobs’ point about the role of short grid-like city blocks (1961).
vivid frame within which to see how spaces and agents make one another. How “temporary” these solutions are varies, but users of repurposed cities and spaces need to work with the fact that their space is at issue rather than seamlessly and invisibly supporting their needs.

One of the main ways in which users repurpose urban spaces is by aesthetically altering them through art and graffiti. Even a simple act of tagging is an intervention into the territorial structure of a space—an act of agency and a performance of a right to a space. Art and graffiti that have representational content can directly infuse meaning into a space, and can give us clues about what sorts of practices and people belong and don’t belong in it. More radically, how a space is decorated with art can shift how our attention works as we move through a space; through art, a formerly unremarkable bit of material form, such as the underside of a bridge or the side of a mailbox, can turn into something that slows us down and grabs our attention, and thereby shifts how we move through a space, and in turn what sort of material place it is, supporting what kinds of actions and perceptions. Berlin graffiti artist Brad Downey thinks of himself as a 'sculptor' of urban spaces through his use of art to shift attention in this way. His experience as a skateboarder was what first made him aware of how different kinds of movement through and attention to a space could shift the kind of place it is. Sometimes altering a space is a matter of changing or adding to its morphology, but sometimes it’s a matter of changing how that morphology is used and experienced. Young argues that graffiti and street art can in effect double a space, giving it (at least) two meanings and structures simultaneously—the underlying morphology and the meaning-rich surface layer.

Advertisements, posters, and signs are also semantically rich aesthetic alterations that can repurpose space. For a powerful example of repurposing urban space through imagery, consider a poster advertisement for a hip line of shoes and clothing marketed to young black men, discussed by

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I base this on Young’s description of Downey at 2013, 14ff.
Sarah Nuttall (2009, 108), which was displayed in Johannesburg in the mid-2000s. The advertisement shows a space that was segregated by race under apartheid, namely a men’s public bathroom. The image keeps the original ‘Whites Only’ signage, but subverts it so that it flags that only those wearing the brand may use the space. It shows two young Black men with ‘natural’ afros, and a racially ambiguous friend, wearing hip clothing and shoes, but in a 1970s (apartheid-era) retro style. They stand tall and pee proudly in the “Whites Only” urinals, while a White man in shabby clothing, who is perhaps somewhat older, bends down low in order to clean their urine for them with his mop. His act and posture are maximally subservient, and their stance is maximally entitled; they own this territory that they are peeing on.

Figure 1: 2004 advertisement for K-Swiss shoes and clothing displayed in Johannesburg. Reproduced from Nuttall 2009.

The poster in effect announces a new segregation of space based on youth and fashion and class, but it uses the still-visible markers of the old segregation system in order to do this. The poster has its power specifically because of the history of segregated bathroom spaces, and the emotional
satisfaction of the inversion; the retro 1970s styles and look remind us of this directly. Nuttall comments,

We might recall that under apartheid the spaces of segregation included macrospaces such as schools, churches, and cemeteries, but also, importantly, microspaces, which functioned as key loci for the staging of humiliation. One such locus was the “whites only” urinal, which a black man could enter under one condition only: to clean it. (Nuttall 2009, 109)

Part of why this image is so perfect for my purposes is that it is small bodily movements—the mundane acts of urinating and cleaning; how each person is standing; what they are wearing; their posture and gaze—that pulls off the repurposing and the inversion of territory.

Any kind of radical regime change raises important questions about what to preserve and what to destroy (Ladd 1997). A repurposed city may take any combination of three broad approaches to managing the traces of its past.

First, it may erase parts of its past as completely as possible; remnants may simply be razed to the ground. In a repurposed city, such erasure is usually at best partial. Even leveling a site will often throw other nearby traces of the past into sharp relief. It is also a slow process. This option is of the least interest to me here. It has also not been an appealing strategy in either Berlin or Johannesburg, both of which recognize the value of keeping their past visible and coming to terms with it rather than erasing it.

Second, a city may actively preserve parts of its past; traces of the past may be frozen and framed, in the form of monuments, museums, heritage sites, and the like. Monuments are, as Daniela Sandler (2011) puts it, essentially ‘stiff.’ They are designed to keep their own significance fixed. This kind of preservation may face a kind of a limit point or a performative contradiction: the goal of preservation is to keep the meaning of the original intact and visible, and yet the very act of framing, freezing, and preserving it changes the meaning of the thing being preserved, especially as the context around it shifts. David Lowenthal notes, “We can scarcely avoid enhancing things we wish to preserve. The very process of preservation—slowing down deterioration or guarding against
accident—changes the look and feel, if not the form and substance, of protected sites or artifacts” (1979, 121). There is no pure preservation. Actively preserved bits of history are also actively prevented from becoming integrated parts of new, repurposed spaces. Lowenthal points out that when we mark a site as historical, we “dissociate it from its surroundings, diminishing its continuity with its milieu” (Ibid, 111).

Third, and most importantly for my purposes, vestiges of the past may be “counterpreserved” rather than preserved, as Sandler puts it. They may be allowed to remain visible, and kept as part of the landscape, but without trying to freeze or frame them. Rather, their meaning may be allowed to change and be open-ended, as they slowly fall into ruin and are contextualized by new material surroundings and practices and meanings. The hacked-up pieces of the Berlin Wall that still stand have meaning not as pristine historical monuments, but as ruins, that help give form and meaning to neighborhoods that encompass them. Many semi-bombed Altbau buildings of Berlin have turned into squats and graffiti palates; the spaces and rubble created by the bombs are part of what enable them to function as they do now, but they also serve as palimpsests of the past. The darkened Apollo lights of Soweto that served to announce curfew and enable nighttime surveillance punctuate and give aesthetic form to the current cityscape, but their meaning is not fixed, although their status as a reminder of the past is inescapable. Such counterpreserved spatial remnants are not labeled, framed, or interpreted for us, but left open-ended to take on new meanings as they change and their relation to the space around them changes. Yet they do not lose their relationship to the visible past. It is this kind of repurposed trace of the past that I was most eager to document for the purposes of this project.

The spatial remnants of the past are absolutely essential to understanding the present in both Berlin and Johannesburg, which are both cities that are extraordinarily aware of the significance of their own spatial history and its demons. From a broad morphological point of view, Berlin
cannot escape the distinctive “extensive and pervasive physicality of the Wall as an urban structure” (Sandler 231), including its pervasive remnants and traces and the rifts in the city it left behind. The mountains of gold debris that were designed to separate the townships from the city are an equally imposing and inescapable material part of the Johannesburg cityscape.

Almost every scholarly description of present-day Berlin refers at some point to the city being “haunted” (Ladd 2008, Young 2013, Vasudevan 2015 and many others). At every turn, the spaces of Berlin are layered with their own multiple pasts. Johannesburg is more commonly referred to as “scarred” rather than haunted. Johannesburg is a chaotic city that is moving towards increased integration and community empowerment, but it is also still structured by informal segregation and protected enclaves. According to Beall, et al (2009), Johannesburg is the paradigmatic exemplar of a divided city, even after the fall of apartheid. Like Berlin, Johannesburg had the “extraordinary opportunity of reinventing itself” (Ibid, 5). Its spatial structure is under enormous contest, and it is still split economically, racially, linguistically, and along other axes (Landman 2006).

Both haunting and scarring are interesting kinds of counterpreservations. A ghost is a voice from the past that speaks to the present, but it shows up as past, as dead. A monument seeks to give the illusion of being timeless and fixed; it is designed to be contained in a space but not of it. In contrast, a ghost inhabits the current landscape; the ghost is not separate from the space. A scar is a different kind of temporal trace. It shows where a wound used to be. Over time, scars change: they may fade but they may also thicken and settle and become a distinctive, integral part of the body they are on. But they don’t lose their connection to the past. They also make the site of the scar tougher than it was before the wound occurred in the first place. These are just metaphors, of course, and it would be a mistake to try to assign them definite scholarly meanings. But it is significant that people are attracted to the language of haunting for Berlin and scarring for Johannesburg. Berlin is in a constant spectral conversation with its past, and Johannesburg is in an
ongoing process of trying to heal from and build something stronger out of its past. Both are ways of capturing each city's complex and defining counterpreservational relationship to its own history, and the way that history infuses each city's present without limiting it or fixing it.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Background and Literature Review

My goal in this thesis is to explore repurposed cities and urban spaces, as vivid case studies to throw into relief my background theoretical commitment to the idea that spaces and dwellers form mutually constitutive niches. I am interested in the processes by which spaces shape the agency, behavior, and perceptions of their users, at the same time as users remake spaces in accordance with their needs; when all goes well, together they form a dynamic, integrated, stable ecosystem that supports a form of life. I claim that this process of mutual constitution is one that performs ontological work: that is to say, people's uses of space and the impact of space on people together create new, concrete, real things that would not exist outside of that ecological context - things like boundaries, territories, public spaces, children's play areas, and more specific local entities. In this chapter, I flesh out this background theoretical picture, and situate it within some of the geographic and philosophical literature on place, place-making, and the relationship between spaces and dwellers.

This project is fundamentally interdisciplinary, drawing on humanistic geography, architectural theory, phenomenology, ethnography, and Marxist materialism, at a minimum. My primary theoretical approach, however, is grounded in the humanistic tradition in geography that seeks to ‘read’ human and cultural phenomena through the lens of spatiality, and in turn takes spatiality to be fundamentally constituted by human place-making. For geographers, human experience and behavior and social patterns are inherently spatially embodied and located, as well as indexed to different scales, and this spatiality is a privileged theoretical tool for understanding them. Within that, for humanistic geographers, these embodied spatial locations and scales are best understood as places, whose identity can only be understood with reference to how they are
experienced and used by their dwellers, and whose character is produced in part by meaningful human activity. Places and spatiality, in this tradition, are infused with interpretable meanings that both shape and are shaped by how their inhabitants use and experience them.

This tradition in geography has long roots, but is grounded especially in thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre and Yi-Fu Tuan, as well as kindred-spirited urban theorists such as David Seamon. My project here is rooted in that approach. First and foremost, I want to understand the living uses and experiences of repurposed cities by understanding them as fundamentally spatial entities, and by looking at small-scale spaces within them. More specifically, my spatial analyses are readings of interpretable, meaningful places, as opposed to, for instance, quantitative analyses of measurable spatial patterns. Unlike most humanistic geographers, however, I am less interested in individual subjective experiences of place, and more interested in the materiality of spaces and in their embodied uses. My goal is to read places within repurposed cities as saturated with meaning, but ‘meaning’ for me is not about individual psychological contents or reactions but rather about how a space functions to support certain kinds of agency, power relations, cultural patterns, and the like. In this sense, my work also has kinship with more materialist and structural approaches to geography, such as Marxist and feminist geographies.

2.1 Bottom-Up Spatial Change

In the Introduction, I introduced a distinction between top-down and bottom-up spatial designing and redesigning. Top-down interventions are those that impose a centralized design plan. Governments and developers typically alter spaces top-down, according to a unified plan. Bottom-up interventions are organic, local interventions that alter a space, typically interventions by users. While users may organize at the community level and create a unified plan that they impose top-down, very often they intervene on a space bit by bit in local ways. When governments and developers impose top-down plans, they almost always do so along with a commitment to some
kind of spatial determinism. They design the space in accordance with the idea that how they design it will shape what kinds of people will use it and how. Bottom-up interventions may not be accompanied by any such theoretical commitment; rather, they may be ad hoc attempts to tweak or alter a space in order to make it more usable or comfortable in the moment, or to meet some other immediate need. When a homeless person uses an overpass as shelter and sets up camp underneath it, or when a gang tags an alley in order to keep an enemy out, or when a group of squatters kludges together an electrical system or fixes a staircase so as to make an abandoned building habitable, these are bottom-up interventions. They may be accompanied by larger commitments concerning how a space should ultimately be shaped and concerning the constitutive impact of spaces on dwellers, but they need not be.

Bottom-up interventions into space of this sort both reaffirm and push back against spatial determinism. When a gang member tags an alley, it shows implicit recognition of the fact that this spatial alteration will in turn shape who enters the space and who stays out, who feels safe and who feels threatened there, and so forth. Squatters recognize that the found character of a space makes it habitable or inhabitable. But conversely, they use their own agency, grounded in their own needs and purposes, to alter space. I am interested in how spaces and their inhabitants mutually constitute and accommodate to one another in just this way. I want to examine the back-and-forth, mutually constitutive process by which space forms subjectivity and practices and practicing subjects form space. Both these directions of causation are reciprocal and partial. Bottom-up interventions on space are, for my purposes, often where this mutually constitutive process shows up in sharpest relief.

My interest in bottom-up spatial interventions is not to be confused with what I called ‘spatial voluntarism’ in the introduction. Spatial voluntarist stories are consumer-side stories about spatial change, in which individuals make unfettered choices based on their personal preferences
about what sorts of spaces they want to create. Such stories, as I said before, are common within neoliberal, neoclassical accounts such as those coming out of the Chicago School and other urban structure theories, all of which presuppose that people’s wills and subjectivity are themselves fully autonomous and independent, and have not already been shaped by their socially saturated spatial environments. Spatial voluntarism is also implicit in all sorts of spatial modeling and mapping that takes itself to be relatively ‘theory-free,’ but which presupposes that one can read people’s free choices and preferences off of spatial patterns, and that market models are always predictive of spatial forms. When I speak about the creative and agential interventions that individuals make in the spaces they inhabit, I am in no way presupposing that they have unfettered, utility-maximizing wills. Quite to the contrary, my central interest is in how spaces and subjects mutually condition, constitute, and accommodate one another. These creative interventions are themselves always spatially conditioned, just as the spaces are themselves constantly being adjusted and reshaped by their users. In the next section, I dig deeper into how this kind of bottom-up spatial adjustment and repurposing works.

2.2 Micronegotiations and Tinkering

Although spaces get repurposed and reshaped in all kinds of ways, my main interest is in repurposing that happens by way of what I call micronegotiations. These are the fleeting, frequently unconscious actions and transactions that make up our day as we move through places in and among other people. In cities, these include making and avoiding eye contact, negotiating personal space, lining up, hailing a cab, greeting the guy who hands out the free paper in front of the subway entrance, and so forth. Below I try to demonstrate that micronegotiations—in contrast to top-down urban planning, or structured, extended intentional action and planning, for instance—are a crucial means by which places shape practices and practices shape places. Micronegotiations are a subset of what David Seamon calls “place interactions”: 
Place interactions include exchanges between users in the place (e.g. waving to an acquaintance or greeting a friend) and exchanges between users and the particular spatiality and physicality of the place (e.g. deciding to sit on a shaded bench because the heat of the day has made one tired). Place interactions range from small, momentary actions (e.g. moving to the edge of the sidewalk because a pedestrian ahead has just spilled his soda) to regular weekday routines that are largely habitual (e.g. having coffee at 9 am each morning in the corner café) to intentional, directed place actions and efforts (e.g. the café’s proprietor refurbishing her storefront or the local planning committee adding more sidewalk seating). Whatever its scale or nature, interaction is important to place because it is the major engine through which users carry out their everyday lives and places gain activity and a sense of environmental presence. (Seamon 2015, 24)

Although he doesn’t use the term, Yi-Fu Tuan in effect argues that micronegotiations are in fact what allow us to experience a place as a place, with directionality, extension, orientation, and a distinctive character, at all. He writes,

Movements such as the simple ability to kick one’s legs and stretch one’s arms are basic to the awareness of space. Space is experienced directly as having room in which to move. Moreover, by shifting from one place to another, a person acquires a sense of direction. Forward, backward, and sideways are experientially differentiated, that is, known subconsciously in the act of motion. Space assumes a rough coordinate frame centered on the mobile and purposive self. (Tuan 1975, 12)

Through repeated, habitual micronegotiations, we not only gain a spatial sense, but we embed ourselves in a place. We come to be able to negotiate it without conscious effort or intention.

The feel of the place gets under our skin in the course of day-to-day contact. The feel of the pavement, the smell of the evening air, and the colour of autumn foliage become, through long acquaintance, extensions of ourselves – not just a stage but supporting actors in the human drama. Repetition is of the essence… The functional pattern of our lives is capable of establishing a sense of place. In carrying out the daily routines we go regularly from one point to another, following established paths, so that in time a web of nodes and their links is imprinted in our perceptual systems and affects our bodily expectations. A ‘habit field’, not necessarily one that we can picture, is thus established: in it we move comfortably with the minimal challenge of choice. (Tuan 1974, 452-3)

The way we move through a space, including how we hold our body and orient our eyes, directly impacts how we experience that space - what can capture our attention and how it shows up for us as having form. Joseph Rouse puts this point nicely: “All living bodies take up postures that allow them to encounter some aspects of their surroundings, partially occlude others, and prepare or block various responses. In this respect, our bodies and those of other organisms do not differ
fundamentally apart from details” (2018, 20). How we experience space depends on how we hold ourselves and move through it, but in turn, we alter our space in accordance with our experiences of it - our experiences of obstruction, comfort, danger, safety, etc. What we see and how we feel in a space impacts what signs and barriers we feel we need, where we put a bench, how we divide up and protect the spaces between us. For instance, in his classic ethnography, *Sidewalk*, Mitchel Duneier (1999) explored how Black men who had precarious housing and economic situations created an urban microworld with its own norms of authority, spatial claims, and economic rules, through reselling magazines on a few blocks in Greenwich Village. These men occupied a particular space and created a distinctive form of life and an alternative economic system. Their micronegotiations settled who gets to claim various choice spots, who gets to talk to customers, and so forth. The spatial form of the blocks and tables both shapes and is shaped by these micronegotiations.

Some but not all of these small motions and actions that are shaped by and shape space are representational. Sometimes we carve our name or a heart in the wall or stick up a poster for our band. Sometimes we talk to another person, and how we talk to them and what we say - including the tone of our voice and the rhythm of our speech, will affect how they experience the space, and what they do back by way of response. Catcalling a passerby will reorganize space and territory in a very specific way; asking for money in a quite different way; asking someone for directions in a different way again. Speaking in a particular language may have significance for how the space is experienced and moved through. For example, in Chapter 5 I discuss the specific space-claiming, reorganizing power of speaking in Afrikaans in Johannesburg. Independent from what is said, the sound of Afrikaans and the material act of speaking it have reorganizational spatial power in that context. These small communicative interactions reorganize how space is used not just in virtue of their semantic or representational content, but in virtue of the kinds of bodily interactions and movements that they involve and shape.
Top-down planning creates spaces designed to shape forms of life—parks for people to engage in family activities; monuments for them to celebrate icons of power; walls and highways to keep groups separated; malls for people to spend money. But people who need space to work differently for them than it is designed to do find small and partial ways to give it new meaning by altering and adding to it (Young 2014). The micronegotiations that reshape space in this way are what, borrowing a term from Botnick and Raja (2012), I term ‘tinkering.’ Not all micronegotiations remake or repurpose space in this way. Often, they just sustain and negotiate it, or gradually build it up and give it form. Tinkering, in contrast, consists of the small ways we play with, change, decorate, or otherwise re-jig space to suit our needs and give it new meanings, so as to build a usable and comfortable place for ourselves—a place that we can access and use, and within which we have a lived sense of belonging and a voice. Often these alterations of space thwart the original intentions of governments and urban planners. Tinkering is the kind of micronegotiation that is key to the repurposing of spaces that is the focus of this thesis.

For instance, Botnick and Raja (2012) explain the notion of tinkering by exploring how hand-painted street signs in Indian cities serve to breach boundaries between public and private space, to claim pieces of public space, and to let people give unexpected meaning and form to spaces that were designed to be orderly and well-bounded. Meanwhile, Jillian Schwedler describes how place has been repurposed in Jordan and Bahrain in the wake of political protests. Protestors “attempted to inscribe new meaning onto the Dakhaliya traffic circle” in Amman, Jordan (Schwedler 2017, 208); meanwhile in Bahrain, the government removed a sculpture in Pearl Roundabout that had become a focal point for protests, but citizens began stenciling the image of the sculpture onto walls and tattooing it onto their bodies, giving it entirely new life even after it was removed (Ibid, 209). A government-sponsored monument in Paris designed to celebrate “La Republique” and centralized authority has been transformed through tinkering into a living memorial to victims of
state-sanctioned racism and a place for communicating about radical political organizing (Figure 2). Oftentimes, tinkering and repurposing is even less planned than this. For instance, the city of Beirut cordoned off the best beaches and turned them into enclaves for the wealthy, with high admissions fees. The result of this is that the small strips of beach alongside of the wall dividing the sea from the highway have become gathering places for distinct groups of less privileged residents. The bits of reclaimed beach space are interestingly divided by gender, religion, and ethnicity, and each has its own local mini-culture.

![La Republique, Paris, 2017. Photo by Eli Kukla.](image)

Kathryn Howell recently conducted a close ethnographic study of the use of space in the Columbia Heights neighborhood of Washington, DC – a highly diverse and quickly gentrifying neighborhood, which stands out for its careful use of urban planning designed to preserve and build an inclusive, mixed-income neighborhood. As planners built structures designed to integrate residents and keep them flowing through shared spaces, long-time residents still got displaced from their traditional spots in parks and on porches and sidewalks, and they ended up occupying new spaces in unplanned ways. A renovated park designed for children became a place for elderly Black men to hang out. A central plaza became a popular sleeping and socializing spot for homeless
residents. The norms and rhythms of the use of the outdoor spaces that bridge the public and the private, such as porches and lawns and alleys, shifted dramatically and sometimes conflictually in unplanned ways (Howell 2016).

In all of these examples, people accommodate themselves to spaces that fit them imperfectly, partly by remaking these spaces through small micronegotiations that emerge and coalesce organically. Sometimes (but not always) they involve coordination among community residents, but such coordination emerges out of situational needs and pressures rather than a plan for a space imposed top-down. Botnick and Raja (2012) call this process an ‘aesthetics of accommodation,’ which produces spaces that are adjusted organically to fit multiple uses and to compromise multiple pressures. This aesthetics of accommodation is a manifestation of what they call an ‘adjustment ethic’: People cannot totally rebuild space or make it mean whatever they please but they can always exercise creative agency to adjust it. I am interested in taking up this phenomenon they articulate. However, while I appreciate their language of ‘accommodation’ and ‘adjustment,’ I am less fond of ‘aesthetics’ and ‘ethic.’ Some of these alterations express an identifiable aesthetic, but others are just functional or involve other kinds of material remaking. And the term ‘ethic’ here arguably suggests a chosen set of principles or a unified set of values. Again, sometimes this is at work in the repurposing of space, but other times the process is too decentralized and organic to be properly described as an implementation of an ethic, I think.

2.3 Niches, Place Ballets, and Place Identity

A different and useful theoretical toolkit comes from evolutionary ecology: We can conceive of tinkering as a form of niche construction. A niche is an ecosystem whose parts and environment are in rich, high-bandwidth interaction with one another, forming a reasonably stable whole with reasonable integrity and reasonably clear boundaries, in which the sedimented effects of countless practices have shaped the environment, and the environment in turn shapes and enables and gives
form to the practices within it. A functional niche will be lively and dynamic; the environment will support dynamic activity and the activities will be well-coordinated with the space. Healthy urban spaces, I claim, are functional niches.

Evolutionary biologists have argued that through countless micronegotiations, organisms don’t just accommodate to their environment; they also accommodate their environment to their needs. In turn, this means that in the next generation, the environment that new organisms must ‘fit’ is different. Thus environments and organisms are literally ‘made for one another’ through slow sedimentation, without any top-down intentions or designs running the show (Odling-Smee, et al 2003, Odling-Smee et al 1996, Rouse 2015). As the founders of niche construction theory put the point, “Organisms, through their metabolism, their activities, and their choices, define, partly create, and partly destroy their own niches ... niche construction ... generates a form of feedback in evolution that is not yet fully appreciated by contemporary evolutionary theory.” (Odling-Smee et al 1996, 641). Animals construct burrows, passages, and other structures that influence further selection. Plants change the temperature and chemistry of the soil in which they live and sometimes even the climate (Ibid 642). Joseph Rouse explains, “Niche construction is the transformation of the developmental, selective environment of an organism and its lineage by ongoing, cumulative interactions of other organisms with that environment” (Rouse 2015, 20). In niches, organisms are, as he puts it, tightly and holistically coupled with their environments. The point here is not one about intentional or conscious redesigning of environments, but of the slow accommodation of organisms to spaces and spaces to organisms through small practices. Thus “Organisms inherit not only cell structures and genes, but also transformed environments. Beavers build dams, worms discompact the soil, humans pass on cities, farms, and much more” (Rouse 2018, 117).

Despite the grandest intentions of city planners, I claim, cities and their dwellers are – when all is going well – co-evolving ecological niches of this sort. I am not interested in literal
multigenerational genetic change, of course, but rather in the adaptation of urban spaces and their inhabitants over time and how this process goes both ways. Cities that have developed slowly and organically have been shaped by the micro-interactions of humans, companion animals, and wild urban animals with each other and with the environment, into specific sorts of spaces supporting specific sorts of agency. In turn residents develop distinctive skills for navigating and living in particular cities. Rouse points out that our postures and gestures develop in response to our environment, while to a dramatic extent, we alter our environment to suit our movements: “Human bodily postures do differ significantly from those of other organisms in that our environments are almost entirely the product of massively iterated niche construction: replete with words and other signs, equipment, purposively reconstructed spaces (e.g., rooms, streetscapes, yards, “playing fields” or reserved and mapped “wilderness”), and the bodily postures of others both geared toward and partially constitutive of those varied settings” (2018). Well-developed niches enjoy a smooth and rich integration of space and movement. Within functional niches, we are at home, and move smoothly and competently, with a sense of embodied belonging and access. Outside our niches, our movements are awkward, and our relationship to the space around us is mediated and to some extent alienated. Cities, as niches, will bear complex and resignified traces of their pasts. Pure preservation is not an option for a living niche, and neither is simply rebuilding it from scratch. Top-down attempts to do either one will almost certainly just end up radically disrupting the ecosystem and failing.

It is important for several reasons to distinguish between understanding cities and smaller urban spaces as niches and understanding them as organisms, which may seem a kindred approach. Many have argued that a great deal of harm has been done using the metaphor of the organism for understanding cities and city spaces, as was popular among Chicago School urban theorists and their 1970s descendants. According to the organism model, cities or neighborhoods should be under
stood as integrated unities with a life cycle. This metaphor has been used in various pernicious ways. Often, affluent residents or capital are treated as ‘nourishment’ for the organism, and poor, typically black residents are seen as ‘infections’ or ‘pathologies.’ As Wilson explains,

In the first stepped-up metaphor, the city was now more than ever a living organism that subsisted on upper income guidance and vision. Here the city was a living thing, an evolving organism, in need of affluent intervention (i.e., upper income investment and upper income visions of urban management) to make all of its sections healthy and functional. In unequivocal language the city was endowed with body parts - heart, spine, eyesores, lesions, hardening arteries - that needed tending to as it advanced inexorably through a life cycle. (Wilson 1996, 9).

Moreover, because organisms by nature die – hence the talk of ‘life cycles’ – serious urban degeneration and suffering is often treated as ‘natural death’ rather than as a pressing policy concern (Wilson 1996, Roberts 1991). More generally and perhaps most perniciously, the biological metaphor or the organism naturalizes the form of a city, treating it as given and ‘just the way things work.’ Since cities are typically fraught with systematic inequalities, these in turn get naturalized, discouraging policy interventions and critique. Roberts comments, “The implications for public policy [of the life cycle model] are problematic. Logically, in a world of natural, inevitable causal processes, policy would be ineffectual. The language of the writers using the city life cycle belies their holism. Words such as ‘inevitable’ and ‘inexorable’ frequently appear and lend reinforcement to the sub-text of determinism” (1991, 47).

Despite both having an origin in the discourse of biology, the organism model and the niche construction model are crucially different in several ways. First off, the city is only metaphorically an organism at best, but I am arguing that well-functioning cities and urban spaces are actually, non-metaphorically niches. Moreover, these are niches that are made through collective human agency. The entire point of introducing the notion of niche construction into biology was to leave behind the determinism of old evolutionary models, that saw environments as fixed. Niche construction theorists specifically emphasize that even ‘biological’ environments are in fact products of the creative
agency of their dwellers, even while at the same time they help constitute those dwellers – in a niche, the environment and its dwellers are *made for and by one another*. Niches are of essence artifices. Hence in reading an urban space as a niche, we are given no grounds for fatalism about its form and development. A good, functional niche is specifically one that enables the integrated agency of its users. Also, crucially, while organisms by nature die, there is no built-in life cycle for a niche. A functional, flourishing niche will continue to adapt and develop. So the model gives us no grounds for accepting any kind of urban degeneration as inevitable or ‘natural.’ Organisms are also unitary entities, and if they have agency, that agency is itself unified. But niches by definition are home to multiple dwellers, each exercising agency. Thus the niche model does not require an implausible reduction of the inherent diversity of urban spaces to some sort of romantic unified self. This lets us better see and address the ways that different urban dwellers have different needs and goals that may well conflict with one another, and unlike the organism model it doesn’t whitewash the power differences that structure urban spaces.

Niches rarely suit all their inhabitants equally well, and – not coincidentally – not everyone who resides in a space has an equal role in forming it or an equal ability to belong to it. Bodies that have not co-evolved with a space often stick out as noticeable - as ‘problems’ – that require extra scrutiny and discipline and attention. Think about how homeless people and disabled people in public space can be jarring, even to those who have no malicious views about them. The power to access, negotiate, and shape a place is not evenly distributed, and places are generally shaped by the activities and needs of their most privileged inhabitants. But this pattern can be interrupted, and intervening on and repurposing a space can be an important tool for restructuring power dynamics and increasing inclusion and enfranchisement. When niches are exclusionary or unintegrated in this way, this is a serious compromise in their flourishing and success as niches. Such a niche needs to be *fixed*, whether through good urban policy or bottom-up activism. The organism model treats such
inequities as ‘natural’ flaws and blames the ‘infecting’ dwellers, whereas the niche construction model treats them as important reasons to fix the niche.

Architectural theorist David Seamon does not use the language of niche construction, but he too explored this idea of a sedimented, mutually constitutive fit between space and movement via his concepts of ‘place ballets’ and ‘place identity’ (Seamon 1980). He uses the term ‘place identity’ to distinguish those spaces that come together as places with a distinctive integrated character from those that are mere chunks of space. Defining ‘place identity’ rigorously is difficult or impossible. In practice, it is relatively easy for us to tell when a place has its own reasonably stable and unified feel to it - when it becomes a distinctive there rather than just some space to travel through or that is left over. Earlier, I talked about street art and its ability to shift attention and experience. One of the powerful potentials of street art is its ability to both create and shift place identity. A highway underpass can turn from a non-place to a place in virtue of street art (see Figure 3). Street art can remake a place, turning it from welcoming to ominous or the reverse, or shifting our sense of whose territory it is, and even shifting the apparent shape of the space by altering our attention.

Figure 3: Maboneng Precinct in Johannesburg, 2018. Photo by author.
According to Seamon, place identity is essentially generated by place ballets, which are sedimento routines and patterns of micronegotiations. He writes,

In a supportive physical environment, time-space routines and body-ballets of the individual may fuse into a larger whole, creating a space-environment dynamic called a place-ballet. The place ballet is a fusion of many time-space routines and body-ballets in terms of place. Its result may be an environmental vitality like that found in the streets of Boston’s North End or New York’s Greenwich Village. It generates a strong sense of place because of its continual and regular human activity. (1980, 159)

In a place ballet, movements flow together in ways essentially supported by and integrated with a place (Seamon 2002). Markets, train stations, and school yards would all be examples of places characterized by distinctive place ballets, and supporting a place identity: kids on a school playground divide themselves up and move in certain ways, with different kids claiming different pieces of space and using it in different ways, for example. Smooth and well-choreographed place ballets produce organic and integrated places. Place interactions within place ballets help determine the “long-time resident’s deep but taken-for-granted involvement with and attachment to place” (Ibid, 25). In my terms, functioning urban ecological niches are good at supporting place ballets, and these place ballets are integral to what gives them their distinctive identity and feel. Spaces that are not functional niches do not support place ballets.

The cities I will be examining were designed for certain sorts of place ballets, which then became irrelevant because of a changed social and economic order. It is then an open question whether they can be repurposed for new place ballets, or whether they will flounder. Seamon makes a kindred point by talking about “place realization”:

The environmental ensemble of the place (its particular physical constitution), coupled with that place’s human activities and meanings, evokes a distinctive place ambience and character that seem as real as the human beings who know, encounter, and appreciate that place – for example, the ‘Paris-ness’ of Paris or the ‘West-End-ness’ of London’s West End. The power of realization as a place process is pointed to in situations where settlements with a strong sense of place, having faced some major destructive event, are able to re-establish themselves – for example, Chicago’s remarkable rebuilding after the 1871 fire; or lower Manhattan’s redevelopment after the Twin Towers were destroyed by terrorists in 2001. Place realization as process undermines place when the ambience of place deteriorates in some
way or is crippled entirely through inappropriate policy, insensitive design, lack of care, or a destructive event like war or natural disaster. The place may devolve into disorder, shabbiness, unpleasantness, hostility, or some other entropic quality that unsettles inhabitants and disrupts place interaction and identity. (Seamon 2015, 26)

Seamon's point here is useful for me, because like me he is interested in how disruptive changes to an integrated place can in turn impact bodily micronegotiations in those spaces. However, he focuses on whether a city can rebuild itself into the same place with the same identity, whereas I am more interested in whether a space can be rebuilt bottom-up into a different or at least a transformed place, supporting new place ballets and new forms of life. When Seamon does talk about how new places get created, he tends to privilege the top-down, intentional work of planners and policy makers. For instance, he writes,

> In place creation, concerned people responsible for a specific place draw on their commitment to and empathetic knowledge of the place to envision and make creative shifts in policy, planning, and design so that place interaction, identity, release, and realization are enhanced in positive ways ... Through thoughtful programming and creative design, laypersons, professionals and civic officials make a place better.” (Seamon 2015, 26)

This top-down focus is not surprising, given how influenced he is by space syntax theorist Bill Hillier, even though he rejects the extremes of Hillier's spatial determinism. More generally, Seamon's notion of a place ballet implicitly takes the place or environment to be basically static except in the details, while the dynamic ballet comes from people's movements through it and interactions with it. This does not allow for stories about how our movements and uses can transform the identity of a place, or about how niches evolve. In effect, Seamon's story is the analogue of a traditional evolutionary story, in which organisms adapt to environments, whereas I want to tell the niche construction story in which organisms and environments adapt to one another, and place ballets transform places rather than just responding to them.

2.4 Living and Dead Spaces

Pulling together the theoretical vocabulary of the last two sections: functional and well-developed niches have place identity. The experience of being in them is distinctive, and relatively
coherent and stable. They allow for constrained creative activity and gradual change in response to new uses. Place ballets are patterns of movement that both express and help to constitute and reinforce their niche.

But not all spaces that are designed to have place identity succeed. In particular, some spaces fail to be places because they are *dead* rather than living niches. Places may die, or they may never succeed in coming to life in the first place. Typically, I think it is vividly clear to us when a place is alive and when it is dead. Here too I doubt the notion can be made perfectly precise, but we are all familiar with the draw and the buzz of living places. Living places are heavily used and dynamic, and they give rise to unexpected and creative interactions. People stay in them rather than just passing through them; this is partly because they sustain a sense of place and have some kind of unity that gives people a reason to be there. Well-adapted niches lend themselves to being living places because they are usable and ecologically unified. Broken, maladapted niches are at risk of death.³

There are multiple ways a place can die. It can die from simply being abandoned, because it ceases to be a functioning niche. It can die even if it is occupied, if it becomes a place merely to pass through, giving passersby no reason to stay. Places may simply be dead because they are unusable and unintegrated into meaningful place ballets, like lawns around office buildings. We all know of parks and walking paths that go unused or become dangerous, and miniature exurban ‘downtowns’ designed in corporate offices that never attract street life. Places can die from falling apart or outliving their usefulness, due to economic or demographic shifts, and never being successfully repurposed.

A subtler and more interesting kind of death can occur even in places in which people

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³ Jane Jacobs argued that a living neighborhood needs a mix of old and new buildings, a relatively coherent scale, different kinds of businesses that attract people at different times of day, a mix of private and public space, and no blockages or awkward gaps; if it is missing these elements, it will become “dead and useless” (1961, 58).
remain, when those spaces are so overplanned and orchestrated that it is difficult or impossible for them to sustain creative or spontaneous actions and interactions. Overly curated spaces may well be too sterile and rigid to come to life and be fluid and usable. Top-down designs that seem well-balanced and harmonized on paper can come off as forced and unappealing in practice. Allison Arieff asks rhetorically, “If we tick every box, do we create something so over-programmed that no one wants to go there?” (2018, 15). Planned spaces can be so regimented and antiseptic that they are not ‘sticky’ enough hold particular identities in place, or to provide the resistance needed to support creative interactions. Talbot Brewer writes,

I began to see that the visual surfaces of the late-twentieth-century suburbs within which I spent so much of my childhood were a kind of temporal Teflon to which the past could not adhere. A strewn memory needs something more distinctive to cling to than an undifferentiated stretch of sidewalk punctuated with an ordered series of address numbers and minor cost-effective variations in lampposts, garage doors, and facades…It is a serious matter whether our lives are set within topographies that can hold our memories fast. (Brewer 2005, 48)

If a space is overplanned, it strangles the room for creative uses, which means that no one has the opportunity to participate with agency in niche-building and place-making. The result is an alienating and sterile space - one that doesn’t feel like home territory to anyone, as none of its users participated in its making.

A closely related phenomenon is what Don Mitchell and others have called the ‘Disneyfication’ of space: “‘Disneyfied’ spaces are landscapes in which each interaction is carefully planned, right down to specifically planning the sorts of ‘surprises’ one is supposed to encounter” (Mitchell 2003, 140). These spaces are designed to guide users through them, determining in advance what sort of experience they will have and how they will traverse the space. Often, they are primarily designed for those who do not actually live in them or use them in any ongoing way; they are designed to be stared at, or consciously appreciated. Tourist attractions and museums are frequently examples. They provide heavily orchestrated experiences, built to allow only the illusion of
spontaneity and contingency at most. At this point they become just ‘experiences’ rather than living spaces. Whole neighborhoods can sometimes be orchestrated in this way—for instance, some city neighborhoods are planned as magnets for suburbanites or visitors who are coming in for a day, or night on the town. (The French Quarter in New Orleans and Baltimore’s Inner Harbor are two examples.) Theorists such as Sennett (1992), Mitchell (2003), and Sorkin (1992) argue that contemporary urban planning is often so inflexible and unresponsive to people’s changing and messy needs that it creates Disneyfied landscapes in place of working urban spaces.

Gentrification, especially when it is planned by investors, can kill a neighborhood through a specific form of top-down planning based on a capitalist fantasy. In the aptly named *How to Kill a City*, Peter Moskowitz argues that top-down gentrification of living neighborhoods disrupts their living ecology and the networks that allow citizens to participate in building them, thereby killing them by way of a massive and destructive influx of capital: “Gentrification is a void ... a trauma, one caused by the influx of massive amounts of capital into a city and the consequent destruction following in its wake” (Moskowitz 2017, 5). The problem with this kind of gentrification is that it redesigns a space, not for the people who are already using it, but for a hypothesized set of users with more money, with the goal of maximizing the ability of the space to attract these rich users and then extract capital from them. Because this profit-maximizing goal has no particular connection or responsiveness to the ecology as it is found, such spatial repurposings with the goal of gentrification often end up killing a place in the act of trying to pretty it up and make it ‘appealing.’

These are all ways in which spaces can fail to sustain life, or fail to be dynamic, well-adapted niches. When the original order of a city becomes defunct, many of its spaces are at clear risk of

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4 There are, of course, other kinds of gentrification. The gentrification process is frequently more organic and gradual than this. While gentrification comes with its own set of ethical and political challenges and downsides, including, almost inevitably, the displacement of the existing population, the death of space is not always one of the results. Here I am speaking only of the kind of top-down, centrally planned gentrification designed to attract new users that are Moskowitz’s main target.
death. One of my goals in my research was to explore which sorts of repurposings are successful in sustaining or resuscitating their life in the face of such dramatic transitions, rather than letting them or helping them die.

2.5 Local Ontologies, Territory, and the Production of Space

One of my key goals in this project is to demonstrate that as places and their users constitute one another, this process involves the production of local *ontologies* – the making-real of kinds of things that could not exist outside of that sort of niche. I mean nothing spooky by this. A school is a real thing, but it is only what it is because we use it as a school. Likewise, spatial entities often exist only because of how we use them. Urban spaces contain neighborhoods, gang turf lines, dog parks, and running paths, and these things are perfectly real and well-bounded, but only because of our uses of them and our movements within them. Rush hours are perfectly real; in fact, they are so real and pressing that we spend all sorts of resources on studying them, planning for and around them, and trying to manage and mitigate them. But clearly there is no such thing as a rush hour independent of our uses of space. Henri Lefebvre is the locus classicus in geography for the idea that space is produced by our practices. He drew an often-cited distinction between spatial practices, which are how space actually gets organized, divided, and used; representations of space, which are how we symbolically capture and understand space (including maps, blueprints, and conventions such as perspective in drawings); and representational spaces, which are inhabitants’ understandings or imaginative visions of the space they are in (Lefebvre 1992). What is important here is that none of these are fixed or given. Rather, spatialized practices create and articulate spatial form. Lefebvre (1996) emphasizes that we don’t just live *inside* cities, but rather make them by using them and dwelling in them. I hope to demonstrate that in order to *produce* a particularized space with its own form, you will also, of necessity, along the way produce things in it, like boundaries, gathering places, and the like. This includes making public spaces and private spaces, territories and boundaries, as
well as other entities in the local ontology of the place.

There are important precedents for this idea. Seamon (2002) argues that ‘urban buzz’ is a real phenomenon that varies in character from city to city, even though it is not measurable or reducible to a particular set of physical phenomena. In *Streetwise*, Elijah Anderson explores the ‘street etiquette’ and ‘street wisdom’ that we become habituated into by living in a specific area and negotiating it. This includes flexible and implicit embodied norms for how to judge and respect personal space, and how to detect and respect the edges and boundaries between different spaces that belong to different groups. As he puts it, cities divide into ‘natural areas’ based on ecosystems sustained by these norms (1990, 48) – these let us grasp when a fence or a park is actually a division between generational space, or when we are walking too close to someone, for instance. But edges and personal space are kinds of things that do not exist outside of these spatialized social practices; our uses of space produce them.

Figure 4 shows the racial demographics on either side of Detroit’s famous 8 Mile Road, with Blacks represented by blue dots and Whites by red dots. Although there is no planned barrier down the middle of the road, it is not hard to perceive the boundary as a real, concrete spatial division. A neighborhood becomes real and bounded from other neighborhoods not when it is designated as a neighborhood by some sort of planning commission or city council, but when it is marked off in practice by a change in police presence, or an underdeveloped dead lot, or a street with an awkward median, and when it develops its own rhythm, street etiquette, smell, and pace. This is a reality that is built through micronegotiations, not imposed from above. I may know not to cross into or out of a particular neighborhood in which I do not belong; indeed, I can perfectly well see the boundary around it, even if that boundary was never explicitly planned but just developed organically. When we look at this map, it’s impossible not to see 8 Mile Rd. as a real, concrete barrier.
In considering the production of local ontologies, I am especially interested, in this project, in how *territory* can be made real and given material shape through micronegotiations. As I am using the term, an individual or group’s territory is the space within which they have authority and agency—that is, they *belong* in the space in a rich sense, and to some extent control entry into it and norms within it. Territory can be established top-down through policies and spatial divisions, but it is also powerfully produced bottom-up through bodily postures, gazes, marking of space, and the like. Territories are spaces in which some people are insiders and others are outsiders, but they are also generally richer than this: a territory includes complex norms for how to act and interact inside it.

Vikas Mehta studied the making of territory on a set of streets in Cambridge, MA (2014, 60-65). He looks at how it is established who belongs on what part of the street, and shows just how skilled we are at recognizing and negotiating territory and its boundaries without even noticing we are doing it: gestures, decorations, stances, seating positions, eye contact, vocal tone and more go into the detailed establishment of territory. While territories might overlap, they often have quite clear spatial
boundaries. Moreover, the establishment of territory within public space, or within someone else’s space, is not only a political act, but also an ontological act.

The repurposing of space is often about the creation and renegotiation of territory, as we will see. The ‘Grey Zone’ in Johannesburg was designed to be a White-only territory, but was taken over by mixed-raced families and groups, and then after apartheid it was repurposed into an African immigrant neighborhood, with complex codes indicating who belongs in there and how the different immigrant groups should interact and respect one another’s space. The area along the Spree in Berlin was designed to be nobody’s territory, as it was serving to divide and surveille rather than to be used, but as and after the Wall came down, this newly open space was the site of complex and highly politicized territorial claims through various occupations.

2.6 Commons, Contact Zones, and the Right to the City

Creating territory and repurposing space are essential political and ontological interventions for people who find themselves in a space that was not built to include them or to grant them territory. Henri Lefebvre (1996) argued that a city was not a static object or a container, but an ongoing work in which citizens participate. This in turn requires that citizens have a substantive ‘right to the city.’ The right to the city is not just a right to be inside of a city without being thrown out; rather, it requires that we have voice and authority within a city; that we be able to participate in tinkering with it and remaking it; and that we belong in it rather than just perching in it. Formal inclusion is not enough for belonging. As Kathryn Howell puts it, “The right to the city is not just a right to stay, as suggested by the focus on mixed-income housing development. Instead, it is the right to be an active part of shaping the community” (2016, 275). Don Mitchell, building on Lefebvre, explains: “The right to housing, the right to inhabit the city, thus demands more than just houses and apartments: it demands the redevelopment of the city in a manner responsive to the needs, desires, and pleasures of its inhabitants, especially its oppressed inhabitants” (2003, 21).
Lefebvre and Mitchell, among others, argue that a necessary condition for enabling an inclusive right to the city is the existence of public urban spaces—spaces that are shared by all residents, and in which all residents belong. Mitchell argues that genuinely public space is not just something created through legislation or zoning, nor is it just a place that people are allowed to enter. Rather, making and keeping a space public is a practice, and public spaces are always achievements that take work. In my terminology, like territories and rush hours, public spaces are local ontological products. As Mitchell puts it, “public space is produced through its use as public space” (2003, 157). Public spaces are distinctively urban achievements. While cities may be built to silo, divide, exclude, and control the flow of their residents in various ways, there is really no suburban or rural equivalent of the public spaces that cities can provide: Spaces of protest; the mingling of strangers; and the messy convergence of different kinds of people simultaneously claiming a place as their shared territory. Public spaces are often contact zones. Contact zones are spaces in which different kinds of people bump up against one another and share space in ways that are not regimented by any one group (Pratt 1991; Borowiak et al 2017). Healthy cities are riddled with contact zones, and this is part of what gives them their life and distinctive dynamism.

When I began this project, I accepted Lefebvre’s and Mitchell’s equation of public space with inclusive space. But as I spent time in various contested, repurposed spaces, my view evolved, and I now think this equation is too simple, as I discuss in my concluding chapter. Public spaces, which are indeed important urban achievements, are spaces of universal access, where maximal co-mingling and encounters with diverse others is possible. Public spaces make great protest spaces because they are highly visible. On the one hand, they can still enact various kinds of exclusions. It’s rare that everyone has equal participatory voice within them. On the other hand, as I discovered, building an inclusive space often requires certain kinds of privacy and access boundaries. Inclusivity, like publicity, is a project. It may in some cases require making access difficult for gentrifiers, or for bigots with
cultural capital, or for people who just want to stare and not participate in place-making, for example.

In my neighborhood in Washington DC, there is a public plaza that is both formally and in practice a public space. It includes people of every race, economic status, and age. In the plaza, we jostle up next to one another, eat frozen yogurt on the benches, and let our dogs and kids interact. On the weekends it hosts a farmers’ market, and it is often used for small protests and festivals. As a public space, it is very successful. However, many of the wealthier neighbors resent the fact that homeless men sleep on benches and on the ground around the plaza. One such neighbor commented to me that he didn’t like having to “step over” homeless people on his way home. It had never occurred to me to step over another human being. I walk around them, not over them, just as I do with everyone else in the plaza. The difference between walking around and stepping over is a difference at the level of the bodily micronegotiations of the space. Stepping over someone is a dramatic way of performing that they have no agency in the space; they do not show up as a person, but as an obstruction. They do not get to claim respect or participate as a person in the space. In this sense, the plaza is still a territory built on exclusion; it makes room for homeless people and enables encounters with them but does not ensure their agency. It is successful as a public space, but not as an inclusive space. So there is no easy equivalency between publicity and inclusivity. Both are important kinds of urban space that must be produced through material work, and cannot just be formally legislated into existence. A robust and universal right to the city requires both.

Among the powerful techniques for building inclusive (though typically not public) space is the building of “commons.” Amanda Huron defines a “commons” as “a space that is saturated with people, competing uses, and financial investment, and it is constituted by the collective work of strangers” (Huron 2015, 63). She sees commoning as a means of collectively managing resources in a way that can create inclusive spaces that, crucially, are not under the control of top-down planners. Huron’s focus is specifically on economic collectivity and independence. I prefer to broaden Huron’s
concept so that it isn’t so tightly tied to the management and investment of capital. A commons, for my purposes, might include a squat or other kind of occupied space, including one trying to opt out of the logic of capital as much as possible, as long as it is trying to build inclusivity and encourage collective place-making and management.

Cities like Berlin and Johannesburg were designed to be made up of relatively homogeneous enclaves or ghettos. There is special power in transforming a space that was specifically built as a zone of exclusion and separation into a contact zone, a public space, an inclusive space, or a commons. A central goal of my research was to explore the extent to which the repurposing of Berlin and Johannesburg has enabled people to forge a genuine right to the city through creating such spaces, given that these were cities explicitly built to sustain exclusion, separation, surveillance, and containment. I am interested in how much the legacy of separation and exclusion limits these repurposed cities, and how and when city dwellers managed to create new places out of old ones in order to overcome this legacy.
Chapter 3: Methodology

My goal was to explore repurposed urban spaces in Berlin and Johannesburg, contrasting how they were designed and used when the cities were divvied with how they are used now. In each case, I sought to uncover how the original materiality of the space constrained its current use, and also how people have remade and marked these spaces in order to use them in new ways, given them new meanings, and establish new territories and boundaries. I approached this by choosing smaller repurposed sites in each city to study in detail. In each site, I sought not only to document changes, but also to examine inclusive or exclusive the spaces are – who gets to use them, and who has formal or informal control over these uses? Whose territory are they, and how is this territory established and maintained? How are boundaries and other ontological features of the spaces established and maintained? I also want to examine how ‘alive’ these spaces are. Do they support a sense of place? Are they dynamic and heavily used, or basically dead and either abandoned or preserved as something to be passively viewed?

My main interest throughout was in bottom-up repurposing of space. In practice, however, I found that almost all sites were shaped by a complex combination of bottom-up and top-down interventions. In practice this was not a neat binary distinction. For instance, sometimes inside users would change a space in accordance with a master plan, and sometimes governments or developers would alter a space on the basis of an ad hoc need without any master plan. Thus the distinction should be taken as a rough one. That said, I paid special attention to bottom-up, insider, ad-hoc retoolings and remakings of space throughout.

I spent two months in Berlin and one month in Johannesburg for the purposes of this
project. For most of that time, I was accompanied by my son, Eli Kukla, who served as my research assistant. He did much of the communicating with locals in German, Arabic, and Zulu, and helped with reading documents in these languages, and he also generally helped with all stages of the research process. My basic methodology was tripartite.

The first part of the field research was finding appropriate repurposed sites to study in both Berlin and Johannesburg. My goal was to find areas small enough that I could really document and analyze how they are used and by whom, and how these spaces had changed. I wanted to find sites that had a specific spatial meaning under division, and that had become defunct and anachronistic after reunification, and which had since been repurposed. I was especially interested in sites that had been repurposed by residents in ways that were independent of or at least exceeded any top-down planning of their use and meaning by governments or developers. My sites ranged from as small as a single building, and as large as a small neighborhood organized around a plaza or a main drag. They had to be small enough to function as high-bandwidth dynamic niches whose boundaries and internal integrity could be visually observed. Thus, while my overarching epistemic goal was to understand the spatial logic of repurposed cities, my method was to do so by understanding various smaller-scale spaces within them in concrete detail.

The second stage of the research was to research the history of these sites, using historical scholarship, museums, and archives. Since my interest was in concrete material spaces and their daily use at the level of bodily micronegotiations, I was especially interested in finding visual images—photographs and videos—of the sites during division. I tried when possible to focus on images from the 1970s and 1980s, during the peak of the Cold War and of apartheid, partly just to ‘control’ for time passed, and partly to document the sites in the middle of their divided use.

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5 My research in both cities was approved by both the CUNY and the Georgetown University Institutional Review Boards.
The third stage was to document the current sites, through photographs and a diary. I spent at least a few stretches of several hours each, at different times of the day and on different days of the week, in each site, doing my best to just ‘hang out’ in each space and not intrude on it. At each site, I documented the material space itself: how is it shaped; how has it been altered; how has it been marked with art, signage, or other symbols; how are remnants or traces of its old uses visible or erased? Equally, and intertwined with the documentation of the space itself, I documented its use: who is in the space; why are they there and what are they doing there; who is not in the space; how do they move their bodies while they are there; how do they direct their gaze; who do they interact with and how? That is, I documented how each site functioned (or failed to function) as a niche, in which users and the built environment co-constituted one another, especially bottom-up. I supplemented and framed my understanding of the sites in their current form with census data, anthropological scholarship, and the like, but my primary focus was on direct visual observation of the sites as living niches. My core method was simply to try observe and document these sites carefully, taking them as vernacular cultural landscapes, while also attending to how they are shaped by traces of their past.

Interviews did not form a part of my methodology, because I was less interested in how people consciously understood or discursively represented the spaces they used, and more interested in actual bodily movements and spatial forms. I do not think that people are consistently skilled at articulating to themselves or others something as subtle and embodied as how they use and experience a place. I was not looking for users’ explicit beliefs or principles, but for their embodied relationship to spaces. Their descriptions would have been less direct and more prone to distortion than my direct observations of how they used the spaces. Not only would locals’ descriptions likely be unreliable, but they would not directly give me the information I want in any case. My interest is in the cultural landscape and behavior within that landscape, understood first
and foremost materially. My project looks at people’s micronegotiations of space and how space gets tinkered with and changed. I care about the actual look and form of a place, and people’s small motions through it and their spatiotemporal relations to it. I care much less about people’s conscious mental attitudes towards these things or their descriptions of them.⁶

Having said that, while I was spending time in these cities and at these sites, it was inevitable that I ended up chatting with local residents about my project or about where we were. Often, locals offered bits of informal history or gossip about the sites that I would not have otherwise been able to access. These were not formal interviews, but it would have been artificial and it would have impoverished my project to bracket this information, and so I drew on these conversations in framing and interpreting what I was seeing. (I have cited them when appropriate as private conversations.)

I resisted the temptation to delve too deep into history of either city, or into any attempts to give large-scale explanations of their spatial structure or their general ideologies and cultures. These questions are too broad, and I am not an historian or a sociologist. Instead, I have mostly just drawn on enough well-known history to frame my spatial analyses. Often, I took folk history and folk understandings of the cities and of specific urban spaces pretty much at face value. Since my main interest was in the relationship between people and spaces, it was more important to me how spaces are perceived, experienced, and used, including how their histories are experienced and understood by users, than it was to track down and interpret a lot of historical details.

The project of finding initial sites was probably the most exciting part of the fieldwork, and also the hardest work. Simply wandering around the cities as a tourist looking for sites was not a

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⁶ I agree with Mendoza and Morén-Alegret (2013) that video can be a powerful method for capturing the way people live in place, because “video is particularly outstanding because it is useful for capturing movement by tracking the fluidity and rhythms of everyday life.” This kind of temporal rhythm is key to what I wanted to track and difficult to capture through descriptions. I used a combination of video and still photography, although for obvious reasons only still photographs are included in this thesis.
great method, because almost by definition, the kinds of sites I was looking for were not going to be advertised as tourist attractions (with the exception of the two sites that I chose specifically for their contrastive top-down character, Checkpoint Charlie and Constitution Hill). I did a lot of reading about the spatial history of the cities and a lot of educated exploration. But the most valuable thing I did in both cities was to sign up for a large number of walking tours that were designed to focus on the alternative and folk culture of the cities. In total, I took ten walking tours of the two cities. I avoided tours run by corporations that focused on tourist attractions or on guiding people to purchasing opportunities, and instead found tours that were run by locals with good connections in the areas and special expertise of one sort or another concerning urban spaces. For the most part, this was very successful. For example, I did street art tours in both cities, run by residents well-connected to local artists. I did an ‘alternative Berlin’ tour focusing on squatting and occupation and progressive underground movements. I did a political history and local culture tour of Soweto. I took multiple tours of inner-city Johannesburg, some of which were run by a non-profit company, Dlala Nje, that tries to build cultural integration of the inner city into the rest of the city and community empowerment through their tours. I only took tours given by locals interested in sharing an inside perspective and who were collaborating directly with other locals, and I avoided tours that adopted an outsider’s perspective and took the local scene as an attraction to be consumed and commodified. Taking this second, voyeuristic type of tour would have been arguably unethical, as it would involve treating the residents of the sites I was studying merely instrumentally. It also would have been unhelpful for research purposes, as it would have given me a curated view designed to be sensationalistic and stare-worthy, rather than a lived understanding of the quotidian functioning and micronegotiation practices of the places.

The tours allowed me to discover sites that I would not have otherwise found. For instance, I devote a lot of time below to my exploration of the very private hauseprojekt, Køpi, which
discourages outside attention. I would not have known it existed were it not for the fact that one of my guides had connections with the residents and brought me there. But even more importantly, on most of the tours, I ended up talking to the guides about why I was in town and about my research project. Many of the guides were fascinated by the project and ended up connecting me with other locals who in turn had good ideas about where I should explore. I ended up communicating with exiled Syrian professors, street artists, and community organizers from the Johannesburg townships, and various other people that helped direct me to sites that I never would have found on my own.

The challenge was not just finding sites, but getting access to them. Some of the sites I was interested in studying turned out to just be practically inaccessible to outsiders, like the Syrian refugee settlement at Tempelhof, and a couple of the squats I was interested in studying in Berlin. Some potential sites in Johannesburg were simply too dangerous to enter and hang out in. In other cases, though, I managed to get access to sites, but only with a lot of extra work. The details are described in the site analyses. But for instance, as I mentioned, Køpi is a very private space. Photographs are strictly forbidden, and people who are just there to gawk are chased away. I had to cultivate quite elaborate relationships with residents before I could get access to the space. A quite different example of a space that I had to work to access was Yeoville, in Johannesburg. This neighborhood is far too dangerous for me to just hang out on the street there, especially as a white woman who looks foreign and relatively wealthy. I had to find locals who were interested in being my guides and companions in order to access the space, which I still could do only very incompletely and imperfectly. Moreover, I needed to find the right kind of guides, who understood my research project and were not trying to give me a curated tour, but were rather in a position to enable me to explore the space in my own way in relative safety.⁷

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⁷ Interestingly, after I left Johannesburg and read a bunch of articles on tourism and activism in the city, I realized that I had found my way on my own to the specific people who are regarded as the most authoritative, knowledgeable, sensitive, and community-centered guides to the city: particularly Jo Buitendach,
I tried to avoid ‘slum tourism’ that would perpetuate stereotypes by presenting poor areas as edgy adventures for outsiders in which locals perform poverty. Fabian Frenzel gives a close reading of the role of tour guides in poor areas of Johannesburg, as part of his larger research project on poverty tourism. He points out that “Tourism operators here [in Johannesburg] are engaging in a kind of artistic work, which aligns with the notion … of tour guides as curators. Artist interventions also characterise early stages of gentrification, albeit that territorial stigma here adds to the lure of the place, rather than simply cheap property prices” (Frenzel 2014, 443). I did my best to avoid tours that colluded with or commodified this ‘allure of territorial stigma,’ and I also tried to compensate for this limitation by taking multiple tours of each space, and by getting to know my guides and discussing my research project with them in depth, so that they understood my goals. Partly because I was using guides who were genuine passionate insider-experts on these spaces, in general I found that it was extremely easy to get them excited about my project and willing to accommodate their guiding to my needs. But there is an extent to which any tourism, no matter how well-intentioned, is going to be an artistic act of curation. Thus it was an unavoidable limit of my project that I needed to rely on guides in order to gain access to some spaces.

Another unavoidable problem I faced was that it was not always clear when people in a space would be uncomfortable being targets of research. In the case of Köpi, where I presented my research plan to the whole collective for discussion and approval, I addressed this problem directly. But some of the sites I picked were relatively precarious and their residents might have all sorts of reasons why they’d be uncomfortable having their lifestyles be objects of research: Ponte City and Yeoville are very poor; Hermannplatz is inhabited by many Syrian refugees; the residents of Teepeeland are mostly indigent and are explicitly trying to build a relatively hidden niche. In

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a trained anthropologist who works with the street art community, and the journalist Nickolaus Bauer and his nonprofit organization Dlala Nje, which focuses on community empowerment in inner city Johannesburg.
Johannesburg, as a North American visitor, it was not necessarily a comfortable dynamic to be taking the inhabitants of Black African spaces as objects of study. I did not take any identifiable photos of people without explicit informed consent. However, I was studying whole neighborhoods and communities, and getting informed consent from everyone would have been completely impracticable. As far as human subject research rules went, I was on safe ground, since I was documenting public activities, but I often felt that I needed to negotiate the ethical and political boundaries of when and how it was acceptable to take people and places as objects of study. I did not try to study spaces that were clearly uncomfortable with outside observers, such as some of the Johannesburg squats and encampments, and some of the Muslim spaces in Berlin. I also tried hard to respect the practices and the integrity of each space and the dignity of its participants. I did not always find my status as an outside observer unconflicted, or easy to think through. I often ended up deleting photographs that would have passed IRB muster, but that felt intrusive. I hope that my judgment about the appropriate limits of this project has been sound in the end.⁸

The second, historical prong of my research involved tracking down records of what my sites looked like and how they were used under division. To a large extent, I relied on museum collections, exhibitions, and visual archives for this work. The Landesarchiv and the archive of the Neukölln Museum were especially helpful in Berlin. In South Africa, the University of Cape Town digital library, the Apartheid Museum, the Hector Pieterse Museum, and Bailey’s Archive were all important resources. I also searched through photography exhibits and collections, and several of the historical photographs I have used are reprinted with the permission of the artists. My goal was to come as close as I could to finding visual documentation of the sites and their everyday uses in the 1970s and 1980s. Ideally, I looked for shots that could be recreated - ideally from the same visual position - with current photographs. My interest was not in formal documentation of official events,

⁸ Many thanks here to Eli Kukla, who helped with these judgments enormously at many turns.
but with candid photographs showing the form and human use of these spaces.

When I studied the sites in their current form, I tried as much as possible to use them as an insider, and to blend into the sites rather than disrupting them with my presence - although there were limits to my ability to do this, as I discuss below. In each case, I stayed for at least a couple of hours per visit, and engaged in structured, guided observation, aimed at developing an interpretation of the space as a repurposed niche. The questions that structured my observations were, at a minimum:

1. Who (i.e. what demographic or political group) was supposed to use the space and who uses it now?
2. Whose territory is the space, or how is the space divided into different territories? How is territory negotiated and made clear? What else is ontologically produced or eliminated by the practices inside the space?
3. What was the space designed for, and what is it used for now?
4. Was it designed to be a public space? Is it functioning as one now?
5. How does the original materiality of the space shape and constrain its current use?
6. What sorts of material tinkering and repurposings (graffiti, adding signage or furniture, rebuilding and re-dividing) have altered it – what did it look like then and what does it look like now?
7. How inclusive is the space? Who gets to use it and who has control (formally and informally) over how it gets used? Who is excluded from it and how? And how does all of this contrast with its original purpose and functioning?
8. How ‘alive’ is the space? Does it support a sense of place? Is it used heavily and is it dynamic? Or is it basically dead and there only to be looked at?

I spent a great deal time more in some spaces than in others. For instance, while in
Johannesburg I lived in Maboneng Precinct, which I also used as a site, so I had days’ worth of observations of it. I also lived near Hermannplatz when I stayed in Berlin. I used Tempelhof Feld for my morning runs. As I mentioned and discuss in detail below, Kopi was a space that required quite a bit of cultivation of relationships before I could access it for research, so I ended up going back for many visits. In contrast, some sites were very difficult to access and I was able to visit them only once or twice. The nightclub Berghain is literally world-famous for how hard it is to get in, so I was lucky to manage it once and didn’t test my luck a second time. Ponte City and Yeoville were dangerous enough that I couldn’t spend time in them except with guides, which were complicated to set up, so I stuck to two visits to each. In between these extremes, I visited most sites between three and six times, for several hours to a half-day at a time.

In the chapters exploring the two cities, I discuss in detail some of the barriers and limitations I faced along the way. However, it seems worth discussing a few methodological challenges and limitations I faced up front.

The most interesting and thorniest issue was trying to make myself ‘at home’ in the various spaces, so as to get an insider’s perspective on their functioning and form, and—most importantly—disturb or change the space minimally by being in it. Indeed, in studying territory and belonging, one of the very first questions I had to ask about each site was, can I belong here, or is this not my territory? If it can be my territory, what should I do in order to belong? In fact, trying to figure out how to fit in myself was one of the best ways of more generally figuring out what the embodied norms of the spaces were, what sorts of territories they formed, and what they included and excluded. Since these were central research questions for me, the process of figuring out just how to be in the various sites so as to observe and interpret them was actually intertwined with the process of answering the questions I was there to ask.

In general, it turns out that Berlin is a strikingly easy place for me to blend in. Functioning as
an insider who blended into a space was remarkably straightforward for me. In Washington DC, where I live, I move through the city as someone not exactly out-of-place, but definitely noticeable and memorable. There are not a lot of extremely short, extremely muscular, gender-noncompliant middle-aged women with brightly colored hair and tattoos walking the streets of DC. But all the same, while I am noticeable in DC, I am also fully comprehensible. People understand how to read me and what I am, even if what I am is uncommon. But in Berlin, for the first time, I experienced what it was like to move about a city and be completely unremarkable. My gender presentation, age, and style were all immediately absorbed into Berlin. Spaces there are strikingly age-inclusive, and gender non-conformity is completely routine. The streets are not dominated by any kind of respectability politics, and professional clothing has no hegemony; pretty much any style looks normal. So it was really seamless for me to blend into spaces and unobtrusively observe and document them.

In Johannesburg, in contrast, this kind of invisibility was impossible; both my son and I were constantly, vividly noticeable as outsiders. There was nothing we could do to blend in. Everywhere we went, we faced questions about where we were from, why we were there, and why we looked the way we did. Flamboyantly colored middle-aged White women and White adolescent boys are not the norm there, and also we stuck out because of our accents. More importantly, most of the sites we were trying to study were places where very few White people ventured at all, so regardless of our style, we were noticeable intruders. Indeed, many people found our presence just incomprehensible; they couldn’t understand why we wouldn’t be in the areas that are understood to be safe, scenic, and appropriate for tourists’ consumption. Moreover, as I discuss later, there is a specific body language and set of spatial negotiation skills distinctive to Johannesburg; one quickly learns how to move and hold one’s hands and gaze so as to stay reasonably safe. On the one hand, this type of bodily skill was exactly what I was interested in studying, so this made my research much richer. But on the
other, we did not have these skills immediately or smoothly, so everything about our posture, gaze, and motion further marked us as outsiders. When we needed to be accompanied by local guides, this made us stand out even more. Our mere presence changed people’s gaze and their body language, and often stopped them from doing whatever they were doing so they could talk to us instead. A major goal for me was to study the formation of territory, and it could not help but be an impediment that I was so clearly not in my own territory in Johannesburg. There was no perfect solution to this problem. I did my best to take into account the effects of my own presence in trying to interpret these spaces. More generally, though, it was theoretically and practically fascinating to note these three completely contrasting ways of being embodied in a city: as noticeable but comprehensible insider; as a ‘natural’ part of the city; and as a jarringly noticeable and confusing outsider.

My research was sharply limited by the fact that I studied only two cities, and at specific times. There is no way that this can allow me to make general claims about how repurposed spaces and cities function. Indeed, these cities are very different from one another, to put it mildly. My goal was to dig deep into case studies of repurposed spaces in their historical and cultural context, not to come up with a set of rules or a general theory of how repurposing works. At a different moment, even the specific sites I studied might function differently. For example, when I was in Berlin, the FIFA World Cup was going on. This had a clear impact on who was out on the streets when, and - directly relevant for me - it made informal local territories come into temporarily into being. German pride was on display during Germany games at German biergartens, whereas German pride and any kind of nationalist sentiment is typically highly subdued in Berlin. Specific parks, restaurants, and bars would become African territory, or French territory, or Middle Eastern territory, as games came and went. So, my sense of how the city territorialized was not independent of when I happened to be there.
Any qualitative, hermeneutic project like this one is limited by epistemic constraints on my ability to confidently interpret what I see. The possibility of misinterpreting and misjudging social meanings, body language, people’s reasons for being where they are, and so forth always exists, but it is heightened by doing field work in countries not my own, and often across a language barrier. There were many occasions on which I figured out how to interpret what I was seeing, in ways that made me acutely aware of how much I must also be misinterpreting or missing. To give just one example, in Johannesburg many buildings have been ‘hijacked’ - that is, abandoned buildings are taken over by gangsters and then squatted, with residents owing money and other favors and forms of loyalty to hijackers. That a building is hijacked is obviously, immediately relevant to what sort of territory it is, who controls it, and who has agency within it. After a few weeks in Johannesburg, I could reliably spot hijacked buildings just from their look, as I discuss later. By the time I left they stuck out vividly for me. But without the local knowledge of how hijacking works plus the daily experience of seeing hijacked buildings, I would not have had this perceptual skill at all, and I would have missed that whole set of relevant meanings to the landscape. Inevitably, there were things I missed or misinterpreted. I mitigated my epistemic limitations as best I could by reading extensively about the cities and sites I was studying; by talking to informally to locals as much as possible about how the cities worked; and, finally, by using my training in the humanities and in qualitative social sciences to try to perceive my surroundings critically and with epistemic humility at all times. I always tried to read my surroundings as a complex text filled with underdetermined and oversaturated meanings. I presumed that critical reflection and an awareness of the likelihood that my perceptions were partial and distorted was required of me at all times, and that nothing could be taken at face value, especially given the multi-layered and often contradictory nature of repurposed spaces.
Chapter 4: The City of Berlin

4.1 Introduction to Berlin

Finding repurposed space in Berlin is so easy that studying it is almost overwhelming and unmanageable. Pretty much everything in Berlin used to be something else, and repurposing is the defining ethos, politics, and aesthetic of the city. Clubs and concert halls occupy abandoned power plants, factories, and train maintenance yards. Parks for children have been built over piles of Nazi corpses. Labor camps and airports have been converted into running trails and parks. Hospitals have become art centers. Old tenement buildings and shopping centers are seized, occupied, and turned into hausprojekts (that is, resident-run communal living quarters, many of which started as squats and found some path to legitimacy or semi-legitimacy). Every tour of the city comments on the city's pervasive repurposing of space, and dwells lovingly on the remaking and resignification of space through street art. Berlin is, as Andreas Huyssen (1997) puts it, a city of voids—underdetermined and emptied spaces left behind by bombing and by the series of abandonments and removals initiated by the end of division. These voids open themselves to bottom-up occupation and various creative and dynamic repurposings of space (Colomb 2012, 239).

Yet for all of Berlin’s creative reuses and resignifications of space, it is impossible not to notice the remains of the past versions of the city. The most bombed city in human history, Berlin was half destroyed in the seventeenth century during the 30 Years War. Hundreds of thousands of homes and buildings were destroyed during World War II, which also saw 125,000 civilian casualties and a 40% loss of population (and thousands of animal deaths) in the city. Berlin was ripped down

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9 Ladd 2008.
the middle and then split among four occupying countries during the Cold War, and then partially and haphazardly cobbled back together from the 1990s on. All these different versions of the city are piled on top of one another in various states of ruin, preservation, and recontextualization, each layer visible at surprising moments and giving meaning to the others.

Figure 5: Greyed out Nazi U-Bahn station (now Südstern) on the boundary between Neukölln and Kreuzberg, 2018. Photo by author.

Berlin is full of ghosts. Its many pasts are always present. Indeed, the pasts of Berlin are its main attraction to outsiders; about 80% of Berlin tourists claim that a primary reason for their visit is their interest in one or more of these past layers: The Weimar Republic era, the Nazi era, or the Cold War era in particular (Colomb 2012, 252). But as I will discuss in detail below, the city takes a distinctive approach to acknowledging these many pasts. For the most part, it neither preserves and frames their traces, nor eliminates them. Instead it pointedly *lets them be* - it lets its past show up without restoration or interpretation, in the midst of the present. Bombed buildings are occupied in their half-destroyed state. Stray underground shelters show up in backyards. Runway lights and labor camp facilities are left standing at the closed down airport, as kids play and adults exercise around and between them. Small, unobtrusive metal markers underfoot on the street trace out the path of
the Berlin Wall (marked “Berliner Mauer 1961-1989”), and register the homes where Jews were killed during the Nazi regime (via ‘stolpersteine,’ or stepping stones, which are small squares built into the pavement with names and dates of birth and death). Old Nazi names for train stations are left visible in the renamed stations, covered by gentle gray screens that do not hide them but mark them as defunct: For instance, Südstern station used to be Hasenheide station, and the old name shows up neither as the defining history of the space nor as a mere anachronistic relic. Instead, the name shows up as a ghost next to the current name, to be interpreted and contextualized as users see fit (see Figure 5). The past is everywhere in the city, but because it is constantly interwoven with and recontextualized by new layers, none of it has any kind of fixed authority or stable meaning.

You can look at the city from indefinitely many perspectives but none of them puts itself forward as the “authentic”, “true” Berlin.

Although it is a metropolis, Berlin has no center. It has been torn apart and put back together and shifted its structure and form too many times for any center to stabilize. The TV Tower at Alexanderplatz, designed to be the center of East Berlin and to mock West Berlin with its visible pretentions of grandeur,\(^{10}\) sticks out above the skyline awkwardly with little lived connection to anything around it. It is the visual center but it has a forced, stranded look about it. Alexanderplatz itself is fairly boring, a starting point for uncreative tourists and a magnet for multinational chains like Starbucks and McDonalds and not much more. Potzdamer Platz, designed to be the center of West Berlin, stopped being at the center of any natural geographical or political or cultural unit once the wall fell, and the city has been trying to figure out what to do with its overbroad streets and empty spaces ever since. Rathaus Schönberg, used as city hall for West Berlin and the site of Kennedy’s iconic “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech, is now used as a yuppie flea market in a semi-suburban neighborhood populated by nesting gay families; only a small plaque marks its

\(^{10}\) https://www.thelocal.de/20150806/when-the-first-stone-was-laid-berlin-tv-tower
former centrality. Most national capitals are organized around the seat of government, but the Reichstag is a complex and ambivalent enough symbol for Berliners that it cannot double as a cultural heart of the city or as an urban point of identification for locals. Indeed, much like Washington DC, Berlin is an odd capital city, in that Berliners define their identity partly in opposition to a national identity, and view the federal government as something like an alien occupying force; Berlin’s primary identity is not as a capital city within a nation, but as an autonomous city-state with a government in it.

Just as it is decentralized, it is similarly lacking in a single top-down organized structure, despite a mostly-failed 1999 master plan to re-rationalize the city as it tried to sew its two sides back together (Vasudevan 2015, 183). It is marked by weird empty spaces in the midst of the city that were destroyed or were too close to the wall, and have yet to be rebuilt. Because the city required two of everything during the cold war—two zoos, two main hospitals, two sets of government buildings—reunification left various sites abandoned when they were no longer needed, while other things remained pointlessly doubled.11 The U-Bahn and S-Bahn commuter train systems lost all rational shape when the system was sliced through the middle by the wall; trains ran through shuttered, heavily guarded “ghost stations” in East Berlin and back into West Berlin without stopping; the system has been reunified but the ghost stations bear physical traces of their disrupted status.12

Although it is no longer literally walled off, the city is oddly isolated from the rest of Europe and even the rest of Germany. It is oddly physically inaccessible. The scars of the occupation and the wall disrupted train lines and other forms of access in ways that have yet to be fully repaired. The Brandenburg airport, which is supposed to finally be the modern airport befitting a giant capital

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11 Explained by multiple local tour guides.
12 This is documented in detail in an ongoing exhibition about the ghost stations at the Nordbahnhof S-Bahn station.
city of a world powerhouse nation, lies unbuilt, its plans repeatedly derailed by corruption, lack of organization, and the poverty of the city; meanwhile the city is served by two exhausted, overcrowded, dilapidated airports—one from the former East Berlin and one from the former West Berlin. Its central, iconic airport, Tempelhof, has been closed and turned into an improvised community garden, refugee camp, and citizen-run playground. Berlin’s status as an autonomous city-state further enhances discontinuity from its surroundings.

These disruptions and this isolation have not rendered Berlin dysfunctional. Rather, they have opened up unregulated, decentralized spaces that are effectively out of reach of top-down control from outside. Berliners have for decades found vibrant ways to occupy and use space that resist control from either top-down planning or capitalist developers and market forces.

Aesthetically, Berlin is a gigantic, city-wide, collective, decentralized, dynamic art work. Despite more art galleries per capita than any other city in the world (Young 2013, 76), Berlin’s main artistic space is the city itself. Covered from top to bottom with graffiti, street art, and political marking and signage, the physical city has been overlaid by a second, ever-changing, spectacularly beautiful city created by its residents. Young points out that “artists in Berlin seem to view any area surface as a potential writing surface and to a much greater extent than in other cities” (Ibid, 75).

The city is a palate, but the art that overlays it is more than aesthetic ornamentation. Berliners have seized upon the indeterminacy and disorganization of the city, and used it as an opening to create a city-wide, constantly ongoing experiment in the bottom-up claiming of space.

4.2 A Brief Spatial History of Berlin

An enormous amount has been written on the history of the city of Berlin, and this is not a work of history. My goal in this section is to trace the broad outlines of the city’s relatively recent history, particularly insofar as it is a history of the space of the city—the history of the material form of the city, and of mobility and divisions within that form—so that as I explore the repurposing of
space in Berlin, it is clear what it is that is being repurposed.

In the years between the first and second world wars, during the Weimar Republic, Berlin took its basic physical and cultural form.\textsuperscript{13} The Greater Berlin Act of 1920 effected a large expansion of the city, in which many of the surrounding areas were annexed, and the basic organization of the city, divided into halves by the Spree river and sprawling outwards, was established at this time. This was also the era in which most of the buildings that give Berlin its distinctive look were built: the giant ‘Altbau’ tenement buildings, each five stories high with tall ceilings and windows, and each reaching far back from the street with a courtyard structure, typically comprised of three blocks surrounding two courtyards, both hidden from the street. Although these were built to provide economical and spatially efficient housing for a relatively poor, working-class city, Berlin’s flat, sprawling landscape allowed the apartments to be quite spacious. Built right up against one another, the Altbau apartments have windows overlooking the street and the courtyards, but not on the sides (Ladd 2011, 101ff). Meanwhile, famously, this Weimar era saw the rise of Berlin’s distinctive and persistent culture of anti-authoritarianism, hedonism, and creativity. Simultaneously both isolationist and inclusive, Weimar Era Berlin embraced sexual self-expression, diversity, and the valuation of art over money, while rejecting the idea that it needed to answer to or forge continuity with the rest of Germany or Europe.

The rise of Nazism and World War II had an immeasurable impact on the city. Berlin became Hitler’s base and the heart of the Third Reich, but at the same time the progressive city had much less sympathy for the regime that had infected it than did the rest of the country. The living city developed a mostly oppositional relationship to the center of power it housed, in ways that have persisted, if less extremely. The war took an enormous toll on the physical city itself. Vast swaths of the city were destroyed by bombing, including enormous amounts of housing, as well as iconic

\textsuperscript{13} The history I cover here is widely documented, but Ladd 2011 offers one good summary.
buildings that defined the landscape. Almost half the residents left or were killed. Berlin remains a
bombed city, as part of its fundamental physical identity. The war also created a new invisible spatial
layer of the city: While the Altbaus hid two thirds of the city’s horizontal space, the war produced
invisible vertical spaces in Berlin in the form of underground bomb shelters.

Berlin went directly from chaotic destruction during the war, to strategic and precise division
by occupying forces in 1948. The triumphant Berlin Airlift of 1948, led by the Americans and
focused at Tempelhof Airport, provided supplies to millions of Berliners at a dizzying rate and kept
it from becoming the sole property of the Soviet Union. Instead, the airlift led to the negotiation
that divided Berlin into four sectors, belonging respectively to France, Britain, the United States, and
the Soviet Union, with the Soviet sector making up East Berlin and the other three comprising West
Berlin.\textsuperscript{14} Thus Berlin became a microcosm within East Germany of the larger occupation and
division of Germany. In 1961, the Berlin Wall was erected around the three sectors of Berlin that
made up West Berlin, in order to further control and police the boundary between East and West
Berlin and to strictly limit motion between them.

The abrupt division of Germany was pointedly insouciant about the ecological effects on
the two halves of the cities. Families with members that happened to be on different sides of the
divide at the moment of division were suddenly torn apart. People were cut off from jobs, friends,
and community ties that happened to lie on opposite sides. Neighborhoods that had been central
became claustrophobic endpoints pressed up against the Wall (Sadler 2016, 232). The transportation
system was ripped in two and both halves were fragmented. Both halves of Berlin struggled
economically, as neither had the integrity, organization, and distribution of services and
opportunities that exist when a city develops through planning or organic growth. Moreover, Berlin
suddenly faced the costly prospect of needing two of everything: two seats of government; two sets

\textsuperscript{14} Tusa and Tusa 2019 provides a comprehensive overview of the Berlin Airlift and its historical significance.
of hospitals; two zoos; two school systems; and so forth.

The division of Berlin had countless spatial effects, but one of the most important for our purposes is that it turned West Berlin into an oddly contradictory landscape: On the one hand, it was more isolated than ever, literally walled off and dramatically separated from the rest of West Germany and Western Europe more generally. Although it was capitalist, it had trouble retaining businesses, which were frustrated by their isolation and limited market. On the other, it became a colonized, occupied space under foreign control, and hence a subjugated space essentially defined by its relations to places other than itself. While those who lived in East Berlin during the Cold War complained of constant surveillance and limited mobility and autonomy, those in West Berlin complained of intense claustrophobia and isolation, overcrowding, a narrowing of economic and other opportunities, and an undervaluing of the arts and creative culture that had defined pre-war Berlin by the capitalist regime (Vasudevan 2011; Sandler 2016).

Neighborhoods on both sides of the Wall radically changed meaning under division, because their place in their respective cities suddenly altered. The formerly-unimportant area around Alexanderplatz became the center of East Berlin. Other formerly lively areas like Kreuzberg became odd endpoints in West Berlin, awkwardly walled off on three sides, while areas like Neukölln became working-class enclaves for West Berliners because they were as far from the center of the city as one could get without hitting the Wall, and hence they were relatively affordable (Vasudevan 2015).

Both West and East Berlin developed active squatting and housing activist scenes during the Cold War. With many buildings unoccupied and semi-destroyed after World War II, there were plenty of places to squat on both sides. The squatting scene was focused in Prenzlauer Berg in East Berlin, and in Kreuzberg in the West (Vasudevan 2015). West Berliners in particular resented high prices and cramped quarters, and the city did not have the financial resources or organization to fix the ruined buildings. East Berliners squatted to avoid the control of daily life that came from living
under the radar of the Stazi and the government, among other reasons.

The Wall was pulled down on November 9, 1989. Although we are used to hearing about the “fall” of the Berlin Wall, it did not fall; it was dismantled by angry citizens who wanted to control their own mobility, and who were insisting on their right of access to the whole city. From a spatial point of view, the removal of the Wall did much more than end the division between East and West Berlin. It set off an enormous rush of movement and repurposing. Neighborhoods quickly emptied and filled: West Berliners who had been squeezed into claustrophobic spaces flooded into East Berlin; East Berliners soured on living in a repressive and heavily surveilled space flooded into West Berlin. West Berliners who had been cramped flooded into abandoned buildings in the East (see Vasudevan 2015, especially Chapter 5). Huge areas that had been useless because they were cut through the middle by the wall or squeezed right up against the surveillance towers and armed guards of the Death Strip suddenly became empty space available for squatting and developing. Infrastructure that had been doubled to accommodate the split city, such as power plants and hospitals, shut down, and then often became occupied by squatters and entrepreneurs and artists looking for cheap or free space.  

Meanwhile, the cost of trying to suture the ripped city back together into a functional whole was enormous, and the city quickly became bankrupt; indeed, Berlin remains a poor city even now, with housing and cost of living prices well below the rest of the country and most of Europe. Berlin is in fact the only national capital in Europe that drags down its country’s GDP rather than pulling it up (Petzinger 2016). Facing an enormous need to rebuild and little money to pay workers to do so, Berlin invited in a huge number of foreign ‘guest workers’ to help with reconstruction for cheap wages, often from Turkey and Lebanon in particular but from all across Europe, Africa, and

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15 For the most part, the East Berlin version of the doubled buildings has ended up being the one that remains in use, because East Berlin buildings tend to be larger.
the Middle East. Thus began Berlin’s strong identity as a diverse city of immigrants. Many of these immigrants settled in areas of former West Berlin such as Wedding and Neukölln (Sandler 2016, 79ff). These had been undesirable, marginal areas during the cold war because of their distance from the center and their proximity to the Wall, but when the Wall came down they became much more central, and they quickly turned into ethnic enclaves that played an important role in defining the character of the reunified city.

In the years right after reunification, the bottom-up occupation of space and conflicts between authorities and squatters become major animators in the city. Immediately after the removal of the Wall, East and West Berliners combined forces and created vibrant squat communities together. Squatters “took advantage of the political power vacuum that accompanied the fall of the Berlin Wall” (Vasudevan 2015, 22). In the early 1990s, conflicts between squatters and authorities were common. Most famously, a set of twenty buildings, each with a different political theme and character, along Mainzerstraße in Friedrichshain, were occupied by squatters in April, 1990, and then violently cleared by the police in November, 1990. But for the most part, the city accepted squatting as part of its fabric. Because squatters often fixed up dilapidated housing, they were actually quite useful to the city, which had more than enough space but not nearly enough money (Vasudevan 2015, 141). Berlin is notable for its strongly tenant-friendly laws, with strict rent control and guaranteed 14-year leases, and this greatly shapes the ability of occupiers and hausprojekts to claim rights over space, and to invest labor and time into building citizen-run spaces, both materially and socially.

The final major historical shift in Berlin’s spatial history is recent: From 2014 onwards, the city has taken in many thousands of refugees, mostly from Syria. This has changed the landscape of the city in various ways, as I will explore below. Many sites have become refugee shelters, including most notably Tempelhof Airport, which houses up to 1500 Syrians in a makeshift village. Many of
the hausprojekts have also taken in refugees. Neighborhoods such as Neukölln have been
transformed by this surge in new residents. Not only has the influx of refugees altered the ethnical
makeup of the city, but it has changed its spatial meaning, by turning it into an urban sanctuary.

4.3 The Current Living Landscape of Berlin

With this history in mind, I now want to give a brief interpretation of the current city of
Berlin, considered as a living landscape that is used by and shapes its dwellers. The city, in its current
form, is a noticeably distinctive lived space in at least four ways. These distinctive features frame and
are iterated within the smaller repurposed spaces I examine in detail in the next chapter.

4.3.1. Occupation, Mobility, Inclusion, and Anti-Capitalism

One legacy of the Cold War in Berlin is an ongoing city-wide interest in mobility,
occupation, and the rejection of borders and divisions. In Berlin, residents are consistently engaged
in fighting for the right to move into urban space, move through it, occupy it, and control its use bottom-up.
Residents push back both aesthetically and politically against the planning and control of space and
its use by the government or by capitalist developers. The city is festooned with anti-gentrification
and anti-capitalist art and slogans (see Figure 6). The terms “Bleibt” (remain, or stay) and
“Besetzen” (occupy) decorate the city. Hausprojekts along Kastinalle in Prenzlauer Berg sport
aesthetically striking facade art translating as “Capitalism normalized kills/destroys;” “Free
movement for all people! Foreclosure and depreciation are lethal!” “Air, Water, Affordable Rent”;
“Free flight paths and safe harbor in arrival countries!” and so forth. It seems natural to read this as
a fairly direct response to the city’s history of surveillance and spatial division, as well as a response
to current creeping gentrification, which has hit Berlin later than most vibrant metropolises but is
now an increasing force in the city. Vasudevan writes, “The recent resurgence of housing-based
activism in Berlin also points to an appetite for building common political spaces of care, cohabitation,
and solidarity that seek to reclaim a right to the city and offer an alternative to an intensifying
revanchism” (2015, 25).

Figure 6: Altbau apartment buildings in Wedding, 2018. Photos by author.

Large property developers such as Media Spree face ongoing organized protest and resistance, both formally and through vandalism and graffiti. Multinational companies perceived as intertwined with neoliberal capitalist technocracy such as Google and Uber meet with particular resistance in Berlin; on September 7, 2018 squatters occupied the new Google offices in
Kreuzberg, and anti-Google graffiti in particular festoons the city. A Subway Sandwiches branch in Kreuzberg was vandalized so many times that it closed down, thereby convincing Starbucks to cancel plans to open a branch in the same neighborhood. The city is in the midst of a wave of closures and threatened closures of leftist institutions, including the anarchist bar Syndikat in Neukölln and the queer feminist collective Leibig 34 in Friedrishshain, at the hands of foreign property developers. These are met with ongoing and vigorous citizen protests, demonstrations, and sit-ins. Citizens effectively blocked efforts to develop Tempelhof Airport after it closed, and claimed it as an environmental sanctuary and citizen-run playground that takes up a huge chunk of the middle of the city (see Chapter 5).

The value of inclusivity and inclusive space-building shows up constantly in Berlin, through signage, seminars and exhibitions, pro-refugee and anti-border rallies, and so forth. Almost every bar, restaurant, and cultural center in central Berlin is visibly marked as a safe space for refugees, and displays posters and art about rejecting borders and creating maximal mobility and inclusive space. Many bars and clubs offer cheap drinks or special nights for refugees, and many have signs discouraging or banning any representations of national flags or other symbols of nationalism. Over the summer, a major exhibit at Bethanien, an abandoned hospital was occupied and has been repurposed as a municipally-run art and cultural center, was entitled “An Atlas of Commoning.” It explored mobility, threats to mobility, and alternative living arrangements such as squats, communes, co-opts and other more esoteric forms of claiming and controlling space around the world. Predominantly White spaces are often decorated with signs in Arabic, as a way of signaling a commitment to inclusivity and mobility, even if no one there can read them. Only those who are

17 Private conversation with squat residents and with alternative tour guide Maria Klechevskaya.
18 Thanks to Eli Kukla for making this point
not supportive of inclusivity and mobility are targeted for exclusion: Signage and graffiti routinely combine messages of inclusivity with bans on Nazis, racists, gentrifiers, homophobes, sexual harassers, and so forth.

In Berlin, when citizens object to something, occupying space is pretty much their first line of attack. The website berlin-besetzt.de gives a history of squatting in the city, as well as an intricate interactive map of past and current squats and their histories, along with news covering current squatting activity. Besetzen.noblogs.org announces new occupations, including the occupation of nine abandoned buildings, mostly in Neukölln and Kreuzberg, on May 20, 2018, just as I was starting my fieldwork. Different hausprojekts and squats network with one another and share collective resources at www.syntikat.org. Citizen-run spaces are built on different models, inspired by different cocktails of anarchist, socialist, communist, feminist, and libertarian principles.

Occupiers often make deals with developers for cheap leases, or they cut deals with the city in exchange for running cultural programs, art galleries, or outreach programs. The city and developers are often willing to compromise with occupiers, for two reasons. First, it is part of the ethic of occupation in Berlin to claim space partly by working on that space, by investing labor in repairing and repurposing it. “Instandbesetzung” (reclaim and repair), a term coined in 1980 (Vasudevan 2015), is a standard ethos in the city. Thus many occupiers make legitimate claims on spaces, which stand up to legal challenge, by adding value to them. Second, the whole cycle of occupation and repurposing is so deeply part of the aesthetic and character of the city that attempts to displace occupiers are deeply unpopular. The city understands that the ethics and aesthetics of bottom-up occupation and anti-capitalist resistance is a key part of what gives Berlin its look and its identity. After various failed centralized development plans, the city for the most part seems to accept that decentralized, bottom-up repurposing is what gives Berlin its place identity.

It is important to remember that a significant portion of the residents of Berlin over the age
of 30 or so grew up under communism. There is simply not a default assumption, among Berliners, that capitalist development and the commodification of space is a good thing. This is not to deny that the city is becoming rapidly gentrified and attracting capitalist investment. But the capitalist goal of commodifying and extracting profit from space is still not a default value for Berliners, and the municipal government’s light hand reflects that.

4.3.2. Rejection of Surveillance Culture

Another apparent legacy of the Cold War is Berlin’s distinctive rejection of surveillance culture and surveillance technology. Despite its cosmopolitanism and its cultural sophistication, Berlin is in some noticeably ways an anti-technological space. Few places take credit cards; clothing stores, repair shops, restaurants, bars and the like typically insist on cash. Even more strikingly, in an age where most urban spaces are constantly documented through streams of selfies and Instagram posts, most indoor spaces in Berlin specify “Kein Photos!” with prominent signs, and taking pictures in public spaces is generally unwelcome and treated as a norm violation. When I asked people about the distrust of photographs and credit cards, I was repeatedly told that Berliners had been tracked and surveilled more than enough during the Cold War; whether or not this is the actual historical reason for these norms, it is the ethos and understanding on the ground. Relatedly, security cameras are all but absent in Berlin. A fascinating exception is outside of synagogues, which by German law require both security cameras and 24-hour live guards.19

In addition to rejecting photographs and credit cards, Berlin is noticeably gentle in its general practices of tracking people as they move through the city. The public transportation system is distinctive in having no turnstiles or other automated ticket checking system; passengers just walk on.

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19 The synagogue law was told to me by several locals and was in a tour pamphlet, although I could not find the specific written law. It is certainly the case that this is the only time you see surveillance cameras in the city. Rather than making the synagogues feel secure, this odd exception made them feel discontinuous from the rest of the city of Berlin to me, in a way that was quite ‘othering’ of the small Jewish population. Other Berliners mentioned having the same reaction.
and off trains and busses at will without any physical obstruction or boundary to cross, keeping their passes or tickets on them. Once in a while, a BVG official in normal clothing will do a random ticket check; I used public transportation multiple times a day, every day, for two months, and saw ticket checks happen twice. At the level of bodily micronegotiations and the experience of place, it’s remarkable how much difference this boundary-free access to transportation makes. Going through a turnstile only takes a few seconds, but the visceral effect of passing a barrier changes the experience of moving around the city. Moving around Berlin was, at least for me, a noticeably unfettered and spontaneous affair in virtue of the fact that I could wander on and off subway platforms without obstruction, changing my mind as to whether I wanted to walk or take the train at a moment’s notice without consequence, for instance. I found myself moving about the city significantly more because of the relaxed fluidity of the motion.

Similarly, it is noticeable how little checking of identification cards goes on in the city. I have come to take for granted that I will show identification to rent a hotel room, to enter a nightclub (even though I am in my 40s), to book a tour, or to board an airplane, but one does not show identification for any of these reasons in Berlin. Indeed, having your ID out is a sure way to be rejected at the door by exclusive nightclubs that curate their clientele, at least according to pervasive local lore. After being in Berlin for a week or so and noticing this difference, I decided to keep track of each time I had to show identification while in the city, but it never happened once—not even when I flew out of Schoenfeld Airport to another country in the European Union, or when I borrowed valuable rare documents from the state archives. My seventeen-year-old son was never once asked for his ID when we visited bars and clubs.

The absence of surveillance and tracking in Berlin makes the city feel accessible and open in a distinctive way; it impacts the lived aesthetics of the city. When I returned from Berlin, I realized that my own bodily habits and perceptions had shifted. For instance, taking constant photographs
now felt rude and invasive to me in a new way. This anti-surveillance culture makes Berlin especially accessible, but also more phenomenologically discontinuous with the rest of the world; it feels noticeably otherworldly relative to the intensely tracked and documented culture of most major contemporary cities. Also, because movement through the city is not tracked and events are not photographed, what happens in Berlin feels distinctively private - it is literally hard to connect the city with the rest of the world because so many of the experiences one has there are undocumented and hence not ‘shared’ in the standard way.

4.3.3. Counterpreservation and Found History

Berlin has a distinctive spatial relationship to its own multilayered history, as I discussed briefly above. Some sites have been preserved in the traditional sense, and turned into objects for observation and formal historical memorializing, like the East Side Gallery, which preserves a long stretch of the Wall along the Spree in the middle of town, and Sachsenhausen concentration camp in the Northern suburbs. Other sites have been completely erased and redeveloped. A few, like Checkpoint Charlie (of which more below) have been turned into kitschy tourist attractions. But all these are exceptions. The dominant approach to material history in the city is to let it remain and stay visible, while also allowing it to be recontextualized by the new layers of the city. That which remains tends to be a visible layer of the past, but not one that is framed for the viewer or protected or refurbished so as to freeze it in time. Instead, the past shows up as a specter alongside the new, giving meaning to what has been added. In Berlin, you don’t go stare at remnants of history. Rather, you live and move amidst them.

Daniela Sandler has dubbed the characteristic Berliner approach to material history “counterpreservation.” She defines counterpreservation as the “intentional use of architectural decay in the spatial, visual, and symbolic configuration of buildings” (2016, 19). She explains, “The counterpreservationist strategy is one of sedimentary accretion and collage without deletion (Ibid.,
106). In other words, Berlin does not preserve its history by preventing decay or ‘restoring’ things to memorialize an earlier moment in history, but rather incorporates its history directly into its present. Berlin uses ruin and decay as part of its aesthetic identity, to present itself as a city with a history. But by incorporating decay into art and into contemporary public and living spaces, it also gives new meaning to this history. We are not seeing the city as it was but rather seeing the city as it is now, which is a way of being shaped by its own past.

Historical markers and monuments are sparse and typically designed to be subtle, to recede into and become part of the newer landscape. Hence Berlin avoids presenting itself as having a single meaning. Each layer of the landscape is polysemic; it is both a trace of multiple pasts and a structuring feature of the present. Berlin never gives the illusion of being able to show you its authentic or univocal history. Rather than putting its history on display, Berlin goes out of its way to let the ghosts of its past remain alive and visible.

4.3.4. Temporary Urbanism and DIY Dynamic Spaces

The material landscape of Berlin is constantly changing, by design. Berliners love to work on and transform space, in ways that are designed to be temporary and dynamic. Interventions into urban space in the city are often bottom-up and decentralized, and proudly display themselves as so. Finn (2014) points out that Berlin is the most common example of a city practicing “DIY urbanism,” temporary urbanism, urban pioneering, and any other kind of local, bottom-up interventions into space that we might name.

The aesthetics of the squats and hausprojekts is pointedly decentralized, with chaotic layers of graffiti, and rough DIY additions and structures, and jigged-together infrastructure. Sandler points out that these projects create spaces in ways that are “bottom up and gradual” (2016, 227). Many of the original famous squats, such as K7, Rigaer 78, and Rauchhaus, have been through multiple, evolving uses (as I discuss in detail in Chapter 5). Some of these spaces are now partnered
with and partially funded by the city, but they maintain the aesthetic of DIY, bottom-up, provisional spaces, with chaotic layers of graffiti and layouts that wind their way through the counterpreserved semi-ruin.

I pointed out above that the city is a giant street art canvas, an ever-shifting and completely decentralized enormous work of art - and moreover, one charged with political meanings, often concerning mobility, occupation, inclusion, and anti-capitalism. It’s fascinating how the architecture of the city combined with its history of destruction has helped this along: Because the Altbau buildings that line almost every street were built to maximize residential density, they were supposed to touch along the sides. Thus the sides do not have windows, and instead the courtyard system allowed side apartments to get light. But because so many of these buildings were bombed, the remaining ones often have giant, blank, windowless, five story high walls exposed. These form perfect canvasses, and artists use them for giant pieces, as well as smaller works and routine tagging. The most famous Berlin street art group, Berlin Kids, specialize in tagging hard to reach spots and thereby extending the canvas of the city. A huge number of these exposed Altbau sides sport Berlin Kids’ distinctive tagging along the top (see Figure 7). (It’s noteworthy that Berlin Kids also exploit and play with Berlin’s anti-surveillance culture, as they go out of their way to tag off-limits and difficult to access spots; this wouldn't be possible in a more policed and monitored city.) In Berlin unlike in some other cities, it is not a norm violation to layer tags and art over other artists’ work, so the painted space of the city is constantly changing. Berlin-based street artist Brad Downy comments, “Berlin is constantly under construction, socially and physically, so nothing ever feels permanent. This impermanence is a big inspiration for my work” (quoted at Young 2013, 76).
Divided Berlin worked, to the extent it did, by tightly and elaborately controlling the flow of
its two sets of residents, and by carefully surveilling and overseeing this flow top-down. Cities that
maintain such elaborate top-down spatial control inevitably produce ‘dead’ spaces: in-between and
useless spaces next to walls, surrounding checkpoints, up against barriers, and so forth. Once the
order that required this spatial machinery of control is gone, these dead spaces remain behind. One
of the powerful effects of Berlin’s street art is that it can instantly fill these dead spaces. Berlin street
artist Jaybo comments, “We had the Wall, which is like very special because just one meter over the
side of it was already the DDR, but then there was this in-between space that was not anything, and
nobody could tell you anything. So we were painting there and we would have the police just come
look at us, and they could do nothing… So everybody tried to do things there” (quoted at Young
2013, 79). Young (Chapter 2, especially 51ff) argues that graffiti can effectively constitute an
alternative city within a city - a city that flips form and content depending on how we direct our attention. In this sense, street art repurposes and in fact doubles city space - it is a powerful form of provisional and easily rewritable place-making. The remnants of the wall and the abandoned factories and so forth become works of art. This focuses our attention on parts of urban space that we would otherwise not have really noticed - it turns non-places into places. In an important sense, then, the graffiti and street art of Berlin dramatically changes the experienced, phenomenological morphology and organization of the space of the city itself. And it does so in a quick and temporary way that can be painted over and altered within hours.

4.4 Barriers to Studying Repurposed Space in Berlin

I have emphasized that repurposing is a defining aesthetic and ethos of the city of Berlin. This ought to have made my research exceptionally easy. There were, however, two rather ironic challenges that I faced.

Berlin is, despite its residents’ very best efforts to fight it, starting to gentrify pretty intensely, and relatedly the city is becoming increasingly appealing to foreigners from around the world, including those from wealthy nations, with 50,000 new residents arriving each year, not counting refugees. Historically an extremely affordable city for rent and real estate purchases, Berlin currently has the fastest rising real estate prices of any city in the world, with a rise of 20.6% in 2017. But part of what attracts people to Berlin in particular is its DIY and counterpreservationist aesthetic, and its progressive, anti-capitalist political culture. The result, ironically and to the distress of many Berliners, is the commodification of this very aesthetic as part of a capitalist move towards gentrification (Colomb 2012, 239). It is often hard to tell, just from looking carefully, when this aesthetic is ‘authentic’ and when it has become really just an aesthetic, overlaying a more

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20 ergbnisse.zensus2011.de
21 Collinson 2018.
conventional capitalist set of goals and arrangements. Clair Colomb writes, “From the early 2000s onward, the creative, unplanned, multifaceted, and dynamic diversity of such ‘temporary uses of space’ was gradually harnessed into urban development policies and city marketing campaigns” (2012, 238). Berlin’s paradox is that in the city’s attempt to support what makes it unique, it almost cannot help but undermine that uniqueness. Festivals and parades designed by residents to be alternative push-backs against commodity culture, like the queer-centered Love Parade, end up showing up in glossy marketing brochures (Colomb 2012, 230). Speaking of changes in the city in the early twenty-first century, Vasudevan points out,

> The city’s redevelopment regime… [meant that] squatters thus faced something of a double bind. Whilst the continued existence of alternative housing projects represented an opportunity to experiment with radical forms of shared living and working, it also reminded squatters that their survival stemmed, in no small part, from the cultural capital they conferred on an increasingly neo-liberal city. (2015, 176)

Another, broader way to put the paradox is this: Berlin is so identified with its own culture of bottom-up repurposing that it is almost impossible for these acts of repurposing to remain subversive and independent. As a result, much of what makes Berlin distinctive is being inexorably coopted by a commodified aesthetic of the subversive and bottom-up. During my fieldwork in the summer of 2018, I often had a frustrating feeling of racing against time, trying to grab onto the quickly disappearing ‘real’ Berlin that matched its own aesthetic. I am of course aware that no historical layer of the city is in fact more real than any other; but I wished I had done this project five years ago, before gentrification had locked its talons into the city.

The second barrier was a literally physical one, although it had theoretical implications that were directly relevant to this project. I mentioned above that the Altbau architecture of Berlin with its courtyard system means that one only sees about a third of the city from the street. The rest is hidden. These courtyards are in between private and public space. It is often hard to tell, if one isn’t

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22 Sandler makes a similar point in different terms at Sandler 2016, 55.
already in the know, which courtyards will contain businesses and facilities open to the public, and which are just residential, and wandering into them always feels a bit like trespassing. Many of Berlin’s spaces—music venues at hausprojekts, art galleries, hidden clubs and restaurants—feel physically intimidating to enter, and this is so even when the spaces brand themselves as inclusive and free of borders and surveillance. This is in large part an effect of the architecture. But the architecture directly helps shape what sorts of lived niches these become, at the level of aesthetics and embodied practices. An odd privacy and unapproachability of the spaces is built out of and into the architecture, as we will see in detail below. This kind of aesthetic functions in Berlin as a way of establishing territory: they are designed to intimidate those with different political sensibilities, and more generally those who are not comfortable with and skilled at the embodied ethos of the city. Moreover, Berliners’ resistance to photography and surveillance further enhances the experience of various places as private, and it also makes them literally harder to find: they are harder to find because there are fewer photos of them online, and indeed huge chunks of Berlin are blacked out or pixelated in Google Streets, which is widely perceived as a hostile surveillance technology. As a researcher, my plan had been to wander around the city in search of research sites. But, for a city obsessed with inclusivity and an end to borders and the right to use space, it was amazing how much time I spent in Berlin feeling nervous about entering a spot, unsure whether I was supposed to be there, or unsure how to find the space I was looking for. I misstepped several times, for instance wandering into a back courtyard that turned out to be a male-only Turkish bathhouse. Several times I had the converse experience, discovering that a club or gallery open to the public was hidden three courtyards back from the street.

In what follows I focus on a series of small sites within Berlin that have been repurposed in

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23 As I discussed above, Berlin’s anti-photography culture also made my research, which was primarily organized around visually documenting spaces with photographs, much harder than I foresaw.
interesting ways. Many of the sites that proved to be fertile grounds for study clustered along the former Berlin Wall. I did not design my research in this way, but the fact that it turned out that way is powerful evidence for the profound impact that the Wall and its removal had on the structuring of space in the city. These sites let us see how the sudden absence of the wall created spatial dynamism in the city. My interest is in how these sites function, or fail to function, as living niches that are shaped by their past but also reshaped by new uses. I focus on how these spaces are structured into territories and reshaped by different kinds of micronegotiations and embodied uses, including marking and other kinds of tinkering. My in-depth exploration of these spaces will hopefully fill out and support the more general claims I have made about the city of Berlin in this chapter, and conversely, I hope that this general overview of the city will let us understand the smaller sites in their proper context.
Figure 8: Map of main research sites in Berlin. The original Berlin Wall is marked in black, and the ‘death strip’ between sides of the wall is marked in red. Map created by author.

5.1 The Banks of the Spree Near Schillingbrücke

An der Schillingbrücke (Schilling Bridge) crosses the Spree River just east of the center of Berlin, joining Kreuzberg to Frederichschain. When the Wall was up, it ran along the west side of the Spree here, and then dipped inland south of the river just to the west of the bridge (see Figure 9). There was a checkpoint on the east side of the bridge. The land on either side of the river here was empty, not only because of the Wall, but because of the “death strip” between the two halves of the wall on the west side. Köpenicker Straße, the street on the west side of the river, was sliced just west
of the bridge by the wall, with the west part in East Berlin and the east part in West Berlin.

Köpenicker Straße in this area was largely dead space; the real estate was highly undesirably because of being squeezed up against the wall, near guards and patrols, and under the glare of the bright surveillance lights of the strip. The north bank of the river near the bridge was dead space for similar reasons, and was largely undeveloped (or more precisely de-developed) to make space for the checkpoint and the East German administrative machinery that accompanied it.

Figure 9: Detail of the area near Schillingbrücke, including landmarks. Map created by author.

Because the Wall was oddly shaped near Schillingbrücke, it produced odd and contested corners under division. A small triangle off of Marianneplatz, just east of the Wall and technically on the West Berlin side of the Wall, officially belonged to East Berlin, but it was inefficient to build the wall to encompass it. It was occupied by a gentleman named Osman Kalin in 1983, who built a “treehouse” there (that still stands), arguing that the land was under nobody’s authority.²⁴ Right up against the corner created by the Wall at its turn inward at the bridge, at the very edge of West Berlin, was Bethanien Hospital, which was abandoned in 1970 and then occupied by squatters in 1971, after the police shooting of the beloved leftist activist Georg von Rauch. The building was

renamed Rauchhaus,\textsuperscript{25} and it remains an important hausprojekt and center for art and culture, although it is now run in partnership with the city. It now forms a part of the busy, touristy, hipster part of Kreuzberg, but in divided Berlin, Rauchhaus was an imposing bastion of occupation and activism in an otherwise desolate corner of the city (see Figure 10).

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 10: Berlin Wall crossing Köpenicker Straße near Schillingbrücke, with Bethanien/Rauchhaus in the background just on the other side, 1983. Photo courtesy of the Landesarchiv.

When the Wall came down, this area around Schillingbrücke on both sides of the Spree was an unused wasteland with an enormous wound through the middle, an ugly remnant of the divided city. Over the course of the 28 years since reunification, this area has been one of the most creatively and intensively repurposed parts of the city. The abandoned factories and power plants here now house the most famous and sought-after nightclubs in the Berlin—the clubs that have made Berlin famous for having the most intense nightlife scene on earth. These include Berghain, sometimes known as the world’s best and most exclusive nightclub, known for its overnight raves and wild drug scene; Kit Kat Club, which is likely the world’s most famous sex club; and Kraftwerk, known for its cutting-edge experimental dance and music. Additionally, “beach clubs” have sprung up on the

\textsuperscript{25} See Vasudevan 2015, 77ff for details about Rauchhaus and its history.
banks of the river, where sand and hammocks and tiki drinks turn the gritty Central European urban landscape into kitschy simulacra of tropical resorts. The area houses some of Berlin’s most elaborate and famous street art, and several iconic squats and hausprojekts. Finally and crucially, Media Spree, a major development company and media conglomerate which is Berlin’s most notorious source of gentrification and the colonization of its urban space, is working to buy up and develop as much of the area around Schillingbrücke as possible, to turn into entertainment venues and (predictably and inexorably) luxury condominiums. This has been resisted mightily by local hausprojekts and community groups, well-known and anonymous artists, and local businesses.

Perhaps most strikingly, the same bank near the bridge that housed the checkpoint and was heavily guarded during division, when it served as a visible border that prevented mobility both literally and symbolically, is now the side of a beach bar and is festooned with graffiti reading “Refugees Welcome!” in giant cheerful letters. These words directly subvert the Cold War meaning of that piece of concrete, turning it from a barrier blocking motion, into a giant welcome mat symbolizing the rejection of borders and the embrace of global mobility (see Figures 11 and 12). The sight of the former entrance to East Berlin transformed into this sort of welcome sign is intensely visually powerful.

All these different new uses of the space have transformed it from a grim, desolate, and even intimidating gash in the middle of the city, into a zone of intense hedonism, art, gentrification, and activism (although big swaths of it are still undeveloped). The clubs in this area are famous for being unfettered temples of creative hedonism that refer back (often explicitly) to Berlin’s Weimar libertine heyday. The beach bars are designed to be escapist pleasure centers. Like almost all Berlin clubs and bars, they are marked heavily with messages of inclusivity, anti-racism, queer positivity, and the like. At the same time, as we will see, there are complex and intense micronegotiations of territory, inclusion, exclusion, and boundaries at these establishments, and these take surprising forms.
In what follows, I do a deep dive into several repurposed micro-spaces clustered around Schillingbrücke, based on field and archival work. I focus in the most depth on Köpi 137, a hauseprojekt on Köpenicker Straße.
5.1.1 Blu’s Murals at Curvystraße

At the end of Curvystraße, where it hits the south bank of the Spree a few blocks east of Schillingbrücke, the celebrated street artist Blu, known for his anti-capitalist, anti-gentrification graffiti, painted two works on the sides of abandoned warehouses in 2007 and 2008: “Shackled by Time” and “Take Off that Mask.” Both quickly became among Berlin’s most iconic works of public art (see Figure 13). The works vividly represent the top-down constraints on autonomy and identity that capitalist institutions demand, and in the top right, the words “RECLAIM YOUR CITY” mark them as a performative act of staking urban territory in support of bottom-up occupation. The work was next to a squatter camp, and the phrase in effect spoke directly to the squatters as well as to passers-by.

Figure 13: “Shackled by Time” and “Take Off That Mask,” Blu, open source photo dated 2012.

In 2014, property next to the artworks was purchased by Media Spree, the most hated of the gentrifying developers, and they had the squatter camp cleared. In a brazen act of forced commodification, the company published brochures for their upcoming condo developments that featured Blu’s art, implying that the view of the iconic works would be one of the selling points of
the new residences. Blu was thus coopted into helping turn the anti-capitalist, bottom-up space-claiming ethos of Berlin into a mere commodified aesthetic that functioned in direct contradiction to the intended meaning of his art. In response, in 2014, with the help of friends, Blu painted over his own artwork in black, leaving behind only the words “YOUR CITY” in the top corner, destroying his work rather than letting its meaning be stolen and subverted.26 One of Blu’s friends who helped with the blacking-out wrote, “Because it needs its artistic brand to remain attractive, [Berlin] tends to artificially reanimate the creativity it has displaced, thus producing an ‘undead city.’”27 The blacked-out site of “Take Off That Mask” has since been festooned with a giant, profane middle finger that points at the construction site. Figure 14 shows the blacked-out artwork in 2018, as well as the Media Spree construction site and a (new, Blu-free) advertisement for the condo development. Notably, the construction hasn’t progressed much in 4 years.

Figure 14: Blacked out art, with ads for the planned condos in view next to the construction site, 2018. Photo by author.

26 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/19/why-we-painted-over-berlin-graffiti-kreuzberg-murals
27 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/19/why-we-painted-over-berlin-graffiti-kreuzberg-murals
The site has thus been repurposed multiple times. It started out as part of the “dead zone” too close to the wall to be useful, and then was occupied by squatters. Blu originally repurposed it by turning that occupation into something specifically on display for the city. His enormous art took what was still basically a non-place, with nothing that specifically attracted visual attention, and turning it into a place, a focal point. It also turned the squatter camp into a public performance of claiming the right to the city and resisting the commodification of space. Media Spree then turned this very feature of the space into a way of intensifying its commodification, and they repurposed it into a construction site. Until it was blacked out, the art remained a visual focal point, but one used to attract potential buyers and capital. Now that the art has been removed, the giant black wall with the profane finger repurposes the meaning of the space yet again, turning it into an active public battleground over the right to the city, and a visual exploration of questions about the limits, if any, of capitalist colonization. Because the art was already famous, his blacking-out did not turn the place back into a non-place, but rather changed its meaning and its territorial claims once again. Blu’s friend writes, “The white - well, in this case black - washing also signifies a rebirth: as a wake-up call to the city and its dwellers, a reminder of the necessity to preserve affordable and lively spaces of possibility, instead of producing undead taxidermies of art” (ibid.).

The site currently stands as a materially enacted, powerful zone of contest over territory—a life-sized diorama contesting the right to the city and the conflict between bottom-up and top-down territorial claims. The act of blacking out the art was itself a way of claiming territory by disrupting a different territorial claim. Media Spree’s use of the image of Blu’s work was a colonization of his meaning, and of the space he was both protecting and trying to create.28 Even the direction the work faces is significant. The original work “spoke” to both the squatters and the city as a whole. The new

28 Interestingly, this use of his image did not legally count as intellectual property theft, precisely because Blu had chosen to mark a public space that already did not belong to him, which was what made possible the colonization of his work by a company quite happy to own space in just the way he rejected.
anti-work is pointed at the construction site itself. The remaining phrase, “YOUR CITY,” is pointedly ambiguous - it could be read as a lamentation aimed at Media Spree and any future residents of the condos, or as a public call to action.

Figure 15: Men urinating on Curvystraße, 2018. Photo by author.

The last important piece of this story is how the space is now used by residents of the city, now that the squatters are gone but without any real signs of the condos being completed. In short, it has become a semi-official urination zone for men who have been enjoying the marijuana-friendly, Bohemian hipster piece of Kreuzberg that surrounds the site (see Figure 15). This is a pretty literal form of territory marking, of course. I have no insight into the intentions of the urinators, but because of the structure of the space, they can only urinate on the construction fence, facing the blackened wall, and not on the former artwork itself. The symbolism of their peeing on Media Spree is too strong for it to matter much if that was their intention. This practice has definitely altered the dynamics of the space, particularly from an olfactory perspective. The smell itself means that no one will linger there too long. Media Spree may technically own the property, but it belongs to the revelers of Kreuzberg now. And more specifically, it belongs to the male-bodied revelers. Female-bodied folks don’t participate in public peeing practices, but beyond that, it’s not really comfortable
for women to get too close to the site now, given the number of exposed penises. It is unlikely that there was any conscious plan to turn this space into male territory, but this aggressive rejection of Media Spree’s property claim, conscious or not, is starkly gendered regardless. I took my pictures and got away as quickly as possible.

5.1.2 YAAM (The Young African Arts Market)

YAAM, or the Young African Arts Market, sits right at the northeast corner of Schillingbrücke along the Spree, and it is probably the most prominent of Berlin’s “beach bars.” It has moved and changed its focus several times, but its current site, which it has occupied since 2015, was until then a desolate bit of the riverbank still left undeveloped after the fall of the Wall. The giant “Refugees Welcome” graffiti on the side of the Spree (see Figure 12 above) runs under YAAM.

YAAM is an urban pleasure resort. The sprawling grounds include a front food court in which trucks and sheds sell foods from different African and Caribbean nations (Gambian, Mauritian, Jamaican, and Ghanan, most prominently). These surround an outdoor bar area. In a nearby shed, a second bar is focused on vintage reggae and dancing, and it sports a foosball table. Near the entrance is a bike rental station. As you wind back along the river, you pass an African craft store, and the main concert hall, which is a large and well-maintained venue with an excellent sound system. It often hosts important international artists, typically with some connection to Africa or diasporic Black culture. Farther back, you get to the ‘beach,’ which consists of a tiki bar, sand, and multiple hammocks and beach chairs overlooking the river, which offers a very un-resort-like urban industrial view. Around the edges of the ‘beach’ there is a volleyball court, a paddleboard table, and various other games, including a playground for kids. Around a final corner is a gallery that showcases local artists, with a focus on youth art and the art of Black immigrants. Entrance to the center is free, although some of the concerts in the main venue cost a small to moderate amount. During the World Cup, YAAM screened games involving African teams for free on giant screens,
both on the ‘beach’ and in the main concert hall. Sometimes YAAM hosts themed market days, such as an art market or a vinyl market.

The entrance booth displays a sign explaining that YAAM disagrees with German laws that criminalize marijuana, and invites you to enjoy a joint undisturbed on the premises, but also warns that any dealing is strictly forbidden and will be punished. And indeed, the entire grounds are infused with marijuana smoke; the reggae bar in particular is so thick with it that it’s unwise to enter unless you’re willing to breath in enough to get high yourself. Other signs, as is typical for Berlin, announce prohibitions against racism, homophobia, sexual harassment, and other forms of discrimination, and emphasize the importance of consent. “My Body is My Own” is painted on the walls in English, German, and Arabic. Most parts of YAAM are prominently marked as wheelchair accessible. A distinctive feature of the space is that it is child-friendly. Unlike other nearby clubs, there is no gatekeeping of who gets to enter, based on age, fashion, or anything else.

Thus YAAM offers a wide array of pleasures, a kind of total hedonistic environment based on radical inclusion. The hedonism of the space is built into its architecture: The beach chairs and hammocks force a relaxed, prone posture, and once you are in them it takes some effort to get up and out of them again. YAAM started out with a more political mission, and originally focused on giving underserved Black youth a forum in which they could make and display art and build community. But over time it has really become just a pleasure center with an emphasis on Black culture. The space, like almost all Berlin spaces, is decorated with art and graffiti from top to bottom. However, other than the messages of inclusion and valuing diversity, the art and symbolism in the space is not especially politically charged, by Berlin standards. The posters for pro-Palestinian rallies and solidarity with anarchist resistance groups and the like that festoon much of the city are absent here, replaced mostly by advertisements for music and art events. Part of what interests me about the insistent hedonism of the space is its subversion of the grimness of the original site,
which was one of surveillance, restriction, and the prevention of any kind of organic use.

YAAM’s emphasis on celebrating Black culture is distinctive in Berlin, and the space does indeed attract a racially diverse clientele. When we look at micronegotiations and spatial patterns of territoriality, however, we find that YAAM is a complex niche and not just a happy inclusive mélange. In the front part of the site, the owners of the food trucks and kiosks, which are arranged around the edge of the space, are overwhelmingly Black. The patrons who are buying food are a mix of White and Black. However, the Black patrons tend to eat at the tables around the edges of the space near the places selling the food, and many seem to be friends of the owners. White people generally occupy the bar at the center, where they do not mix with the vendors. They either eat their food in the center by the bar, or take it back to the ‘beach’ with them. To get from the front area to the ‘beach’, one follows a narrow path between the main building and the river, past the door to the concert venue. The people who hang out along this path are overwhelmingly Black, and mostly male. The path is not really designed to be a site in the same way as the rest, and so hanging out along here gives the impression of loitering and space-claiming rather than patronage. In the back, the ‘beach’ is mostly White. The effect of all this is that Black people line the edges of YAAM, doing business or just hanging out, while White people occupy the center of the space, showing up very much as customers who are there to view, to recreate, and to be served (see Figures 16 and 17). An exception to this spatial arrangement is the small reggae bar in the front, which is an almost exclusively Black space. Significantly, the reggae bar is the part of YAAM that feels by far the most intimate as a space, aimed at regulars rather than occasional visitors. It is small and minimal, and off to one side; I noticed that many revelers pass by it without even noticing it. In effect the space reveals two quite different territorial claims: Black people are at home at YAAM, whereas White people are consumers of what the space has to offer. So it is a segregated space, to an extent, but also and interestingly one that manifests different and overlapping territorial claims, established by how people arrange their
bodies and which parts of the space they use. I don’t want to oversell this story of segregation. Many events at YAAM attract a genuinely racially diverse crowd. We watched the Argentina-Nigeria World Cup game there, and the venue was filled with viewers of every race. We also saw African-American singer Sudan Archives perform, and she also drew a racially diverse audience. But it remains notable that Black people and White people ‘hang out’ according to different spatial patterns at YAAM.

Figure 16: The YAAM ‘beach’ and tiki bar, 2018. Photo by author.

Figure 17: People hanging out along the path from the food court to the ‘beach’ at YAAM, 2018. Photo by author.
YAAM is covered with Africanist art, images of Black idols, flags of African and Caribbean nations, and the like. However, there is no noticeable cultural consistency to the messaging. The Gambian food truck sports photos of Muhammed Ali. Caribbean and African symbolism are mixed together seemingly at random. Especially now that YAAM has morphed away from its origins as an outreach organization, it is hard not to read the racialized symbolism as aesthetically enhancing the hedonistic consumer space, rather than as helping construct a site for meaningful cultural encounters or African empowerment. The racialization of the space marks it as ‘exotic,’ and gives it a sensuous character that distinguishes it from other beach bars and venues in town; this surely helps attract patrons and provides a business model. But this use of Blackness to signal exotic hedonism is uncomfortable, especially given the segregated spatial dynamics and micronegotiations I described above.

5.1.3 Teepeeland

Diagonally across the bridge from YAAM, nestled under the southwest corner of Schillingbrücke along the river, lies one of the most peculiar niches in the city: Teepeeland. Whereas YAAM is brightly visible from anywhere around the bridge, Teepeeland is nearly invisible from the outside, by design. Like YAAM, it is built on a formerly useless strip of land that was too close to the Wall and the checkpoint to have any organic life, and it is buried in the unplanned forest that has sprung up under the shadow of a giant abandoned ice factory on Köpenicker Straße. While YAAM subverts the Cold War meaning of the space by being hedonistic and inclusive instead of a grim site of division and exclusion, Teepeeland subverts it in a different way, turning what was a space of maximal surveillance and top-down control into a space that is completely hidden and run without outside interference.

Teepeeland is a squat of sorts. It consists of a tiny ‘village’ of teepees, yurts, and other informal housing structures. It can be reached only by a path through the woods alongside the river,
which has been formed by foot traffic and does not show up on any maps. The ice factory hides it on one side, and the woods hide it on the other. In a city filled with inclusive housing activism, the original residents of Teepeeland found even the squat scene of Berlin to be too hierarchical, and insufficiently concerned with the needs of genuinely indigent and disenfranchised residents of the city. Founders felt that the squats were run by hipsters who were living in anti-authoritarian spaces by choice, and who had the cultural capital to assert their right to the city in this way, while silencing those who really had no legitimate housing options. Teepeeland was founded by ‘autonomen,’ driven less by a specific vision of occupational justice, and more by a need to be left alone.\(^{29}\)

![Figure 18: Entrance to Teepeeland, 2018. Photo by author.](image)

Teepeeland was founded in 2013 (as best I can tell - there are no consistent sources on this) with 8 teepees and 5 yurts, and it has expanded to about double that size.\(^{30}\) Unlike other prominent hausprojekts in town, they run no events and have no overt political agenda or alternative governance structure. If you find the path that leads to it, you run into a rough hand painted sign at its entrance that reads:


\(^{30}\) Ibid.
Welcome to Teepeeland
Please understand that this is a public and community area!
We ask you to RESPECT the PLACE and PEOPLE.
No sexism - no rassim - no aggression - no homophobic

Teepeeland neither invites outsiders in nor keeps them out, although couch-surfers are welcome to spend a night or two there. It is much less decorated with graffiti and street art than most of the city; it is not really cultivating a public face. It also has no center, no communal area, nothing that can serve as a public square. Anyone can walk through it, and plenty of curious folks do, but when you enter you definitely feel like you are entering a private space. Many tourists walk to the edge and then turn around. Those who continue enter a place that is weird and beautiful and surreal, and a bit spooky.

Residents hang out in small groups of one to three in front of their structures. I saw a few playing “Go,” and others just drinking beer. At least one yurt was occupied by a young mother and a toddler, and there was a stroller and toys out front. There is a communal pigeon coop in the middle, and chickens and dogs roam the grounds. A tiny boat launch marks the end of the ‘village.’ A small community garden is the space that appears the most organized. I am not in a position to know exactly how the residents’ economic situations are organized, but it is clear that the community sustains itself in significant part on dumpster diving, the exchange of free items, and cash from recycled bottles. There is an informal ‘store’ featuring found items and working on a barter system. There is also an informal ‘restaurant,’ which is a small booth offering snacks, beer, and other bottled drinks, although I never saw it open. More than any other space I found in the city, Teepeeland really does seem to exist almost entirely off the capitalist grid.

31 https://www.couchsurfing.com/people/teepeeland
Teepeeland definitely feels like a sharply bounded niche. The ice factory on one side and the river on the other make it a contained and almost cramped space, and the structures are tucked into corners created by trees. Residents look curiously at passers-by but do not engage; their expressions are neither welcoming nor hostile. The space functions as the opposite of a panopticon; from the main path, it is hard to see past the trees to where the residents are hanging out, but they can see you. Several times I was startled when I noticed that there were folks in the woods calmly watching me. I felt comfortable walking through Teepeeland and I did so multiple times, but I did not feel
comfortable stopping and sitting for long; this was not my territory to “hang out” or relax in. In this sense it is the direct inversion of YAAM just across the river from it.

It is refreshing that the city has not bothered the residents of Teepeeland; not only have they let them remain but they have allowed this to be an unregulated space with no formal arrangement in place of any kind, although there are rumors of a vague plan by the borough of Mitte to build a public promenade through the area. Unlike most of the other longstanding community living projects in Berlin, it has no formal relationship with or obligations to any developers or to the city itself.\(^{32}\) Berlin still has lots of empty space; we will see if the city remains as willing to leave places like this one alone as the city fills up. But in the meantime, it does seem that Berlin is painfully aware of its distinctive history of dividing, controlling, surveilling, regulating, and policing space, and it is loath to use a heavy hand when residents try to escape regulation and control.

I have described Teepeeland as an almost invisible space, which is notably successful as a niche protected from the capitalist and governmental structure of the rest of the city. From the other side of the river, Teepeeland is hidden behind the trees and only barely visible if one knows to look for it. Yet remarkably, it looks out across the river to one of the largest, brashest, most vividly gentrified Media Spree developments: a glitzy complex of offices, condos, bars, and entertainment spaces (see Figure 21).

\(^{32}\) https://eiswerk-berlin.com/teepeeland/?lang=en
5.1.4 Berghain

The legendary techno and experimental nightclub, Berghain, occupies an imposing multi-level former power plant in Fredrichschain, a few blocks to the northeast of Schillingbrücke, next to train tracks in former East Berlin. The building is an example of the doubling of infrastructure produced by the division of the city, and the abandonment and then repurposing of much of this infrastructure after reunification. Berghain is routinely referred to in multiple local and international media sources, as the “world’s best nightclub” and the “world’s coolest club.” The *New York Times* called Berghain the ‘best club in the world,’ according to an article that proclaims that “Berlin’s Berghain sits atop the pinnacle of world clubbing.” The club opens at midnight and winds down around 9 am, except on the weekend when the time from midnight on Friday to around 9 am on Monday counts as one continuous time slot; indeed, many people stick it out inside for well over 24 hours.

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In the context of a study of how territory, inclusion, exclusion, and spatial division are negotiated bottom up through micronegotiations and microinteractions, Berghain is an almost too perfect of a test case. The most famous fact about Berghain—one intimately connected to its status as the world’s coolest club—is that it is nearly impossible to get into. Furthermore, there is notoriously no algorithm for getting in; the only way to get in is to master elusive body language and a self-presentation that will get you past the notoriously strict doorman, Sven Marquardt. To say that getting past Sven is part of the Berghain experience and mystique is to radically understate the case. There are countless articles online about how hard it is to get in, most of which offer tips for how to do so. Articles about how Berghain is the world’s ‘most exclusive’ nightclub are even more common than those about how it is the ‘best.’ The 1735 google reviews of Berghain (as of October 14, 2018) are overwhelmingly focused on how to get in, delight at having gotten in, and resentment at not having gotten in.

The standard image of an ‘exclusive’ nightclub with a strict doorman conjures images of young, glamorous, wealthy-looking gender-normative folks wearing the latest fashions. This is not how to get into Berghain. It is not clear at all how to get into Berghain. But among the most standard bits of lore and advice are: Don’t look heterosexual; don’t look boring; don’t look young; don’t look too interested in getting in—maintain a flat and bored expression (so, be uninterested but interesting!); don’t look like you are trying too hard or care much; know who is playing and what is happening at the club that day, so you can say why you want to go in; don’t go in a big group; don’t look like you got dressed up; don’t wear boring clothes; don’t talk English; don’t look drunk or high (although the drug scene inside is legendary); answer Sven’s questions directly without elaboration. This list of directions verges on the self-contradictory and is hopelessly baroque, and following

them is no guarantee of entry anyhow—Sven is famously capricious. But these rules of thumb certainly do not screen for the ‘beautiful people’ who populate other ‘exclusive’ clubs. Berghain’s themed parties include refugee night and scatology night (which requires that you bring your own Tupperware of feces), among other themes that thwart any expectations about what ‘exclusive’ nightclub activities look like.

The art of getting into Berghain, to the extent there is one, is one cultivated at the level of bodily gesture and expression, and the minutiae of self-presentation. Luckily, there is an app to help you practice! The popular online Berghain Trainer (berghaintrainer.com) “needs access to your camera and microphone for analyzing your body language,” as it tells you when you first open it on your screen. It then gives you a first-person, hyper-realist view of walking up to the club and confronting Sven, who asks you three questions. As you interact, your face and voice tone are measured on four scales: “anger,” “sadness,” “amazed,” and “euphory.” Your goal is to maintain as close to a zero (as opposed to positive or negative) score on all four as you can, while also answering the questions to Sven’s satisfaction. At the end, true to life, Sven tells you with a nod or a shake of his head whether you can go in or not, but not why.

Berghain is especially interesting, from the point of view of territory creation and negotiation, because the practice of getting in itself is utterly essential to the kind of space it is. One might reasonably be repelled by this kind of gatekeeping. And yet there is no denying that the elaborate practices of getting access to the space shape what sort of space it is on the inside in interesting ways. This is partly because the whole process of getting past Sven makes the experience feel special and creates success euphoria, but it’s also because Sven really does curate the space. Notoriously, he does not make his decisions one-off, but tries to create a mix of people that he thinks will be interesting and create the right vibe, and this vibe will always be a distinctive one, unlike standard clubs that just take glamorous, young, wealthy, gender-conforming people.
I decided early on in my field research that I should try to visit Berghain, given that it was such an extreme example of territory negotiation through bodily micronegotiations in a repurposed space. I put it off, because I was sure I would not get in. I don’t think of myself as “exclusive club” material. I am pushing 50 and nerdy, and rarely change out of gym clothes. I finally decided to try to get in once my partner - a portly bearded man also in his late 40s and fond of baggy jeans and graphic t-shirts – joined me in Berlin; I reasoned that at least I would have company in my failure. Leading up to my attempt, everyone I knew in Berlin assured me that we would get in, and that we were just the sort Sven loved. I was baffled by this. They insisted that I looked “interesting” and that I did not look straight (true enough!), and that my being older was a plus, which I found hard to believe. We tried on a Sunday afternoon in July, as we had been told the shortest lines were on Sunday, because most people went on Friday or Saturday night and stayed all weekend. After considering our outfits multiple times, we decided not to try to dress up, because we figured we would look like we were in costume and would come off as trying too hard. Without much hope for our chances, we both picked simple jeans that fit well, with a graphic t-shirt for my partner and a very simple, gender-ambiguous grey vintage shirt for me.

Goths and punks milled about the grounds in front of the imposing club. A group of glamorous, thin men in drag sporting elaborate facial jewelry lounged on a bench nearby. There was indeed a very short line, but half of those in front of us were turned away, including the 30-something man dressed in black right in front of us who, as far as I could tell, held his body and his face exactly as the website trained people to do, looking blandly bored and giving short, clear answers. As all the online sources advise, he took the rejection well, smiling slightly and shrugging as he walked away. We were nervous, and my partner looked like a parody of someone trying not to show emotion. We had agreed that he would stay silent unless addressed directly, as he speaks zero German. The doorman asked me why we wanted to get in. I had memorized my answer to this: I
gave the name of two of the bands who would be playing later at the “Panorama Bar” and said that
we planned to meet a couple of friends inside. He asked me in English where I was from, and I had
no choice but to admit that I was American; I thought that would be the end of our chances. He
looked at us for five seconds or so with a half-smile on his face, then waved us in. I still don’t know
why we got in, but Berliners with more sense of the micropolitics of the space were apparently right
that we had the right vibe somehow, and probably right that being older helped (which is so jarring,
given the club culture that fetishizes youth outside of Berlin). I have to admit that once we got past
the door, we unabashedly squealed and were more pleased with ourselves than was seemly; the
whole ritual certainly worked to set the tone of the experience.

Figure 22: Success euphoria at Berghain, selfie July 2018.

The ritual of getting into Berghain, in all its specificity, is fascinating given the history of the
site: In many ways it mirrors crossing through the checkpoint that used to be just down the street
from it. Many of the tips for getting in, such as keeping a flat affect, answering questions directly and
without elaboration, being able to state your purpose inside precisely, and not seeming too
desperate, were also standard norms for getting across the border between East and West Berlin.
Indeed, even the fact that there are no fixed rules for how to get across, leaving would-be crossers at
the mercy of the caprices of the gatekeeper, is familiar from all the stories about trying to cross between the two halves of the city. Given Berlin’s general discomfort at and hyperawareness of its divided past and its restrictions on crossings, this odd mimicry of the original border crossing ritual is striking.

This mimicry is made yet more interesting by what kind of space Berghain is on the inside, once you cross successfully. Whereas East and West Berlin were surveillance states with strict rules, the inside of Berghain is a surveillance-free, libertine zone of maximal hedonism and maximal freedom, with almost no regulations on what you should do once you are in. As you enter, employees cover the camera of your cell phone with black tape. But there is no identification check and no searching, in particular no searching for drugs, which notoriously flow freely inside. Berghain is not officially a sex club per se, but there are no restrictions on nudity and public sex, of which there is plenty, in various gender and numerical configurations. Bathrooms are gender-inclusive (as is typical in Berlin clubs) and open-format. Although there are no official rules about it, one bathroom is informally reserved for those into watersports, and if you use it you need to assume that someone will dive under your urine stream. At one point while I was there, a male bartender affably negotiated a hand job with a male patron and gave it to him on the spot. So the maximally tightly controlled entry is followed by a maximally uncontrolled inner space—one that is designed to be exciting and fun rather than just chaotic and dangerous,36 in virtue of Sven’s curation.

Inside, the multi-leveled space provides different vibes in different areas. A dark dance floor offers pounding music; multiple bars are decorated differently; there are live music venues on the roof and in the courtyard. A smoothie bar keeps the 24-hour-rave crowd hydrated and helps them stave off sugar crashes. There is no clear pattern to the clientele, who represent a wide range of ages,

36 Although an American tourist, a 29-year-old woman, did die of a drug overdose in the club in June, 2017, so the uncontrolled space is not risk-free. http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/silence-surrounds-overdose-death-at-berghain-a-1198980.html
races, body shapes, and styles, but it is true that few people look clearly ‘straight’ or younger than 30, and you see few to no traditional ‘clubbing’ outfits. The club shows off its repurposed history in many ways. Turbines and vaults and machinery are part of the decor. On the roof bar, shipping containers are used as more intimate spaces to hang out for couples and small groups. The fact that no photographs are allowed is indeed freeing. Plenty of signs remind clientele to respect personal space and rules of consent, and I did not detect any inappropriate invasions of space or harassment (although surely it happens).

This is not a work in ethics or political philosophy, but despite my euphoria at getting into Berghain successfully, and despite the fact that it was an intensely fun afternoon and evening, I don’t especially want to return. This kind of gatekeeping ritual of social inclusion and exclusion is surely pernicious. This is so even though the gatekeeping does not recreate or entrench standard lines of privilege and exclusion, such as race, age, body shape, or wealth. (The entrance fee is fifteen Euros, which is on the high end for Berlin, but really quite reasonable by normal club standards.) But there is no denying the power of the rituals of crossing, and there is no denying that the surveillance-free, hedonistic space inside is fascinating and intoxicating. What ultimately interests me most about Berghain is that it raises embodied practices of inclusion and exclusion into an intricate art form in their own right—they become part of the experience, and part of design of the space. Who is in the space, along with how they got there, is a large part of what gives aesthetic form to the space itself. The repurposed site, with its visible material reminders of its prior function, frames the experience as one generated by people who have taken over space for their own hedonistic ends, unfettered by top-down forces dictating how space is supposed to be used. The history of the space, up against the former government-enforced border checkpoint, helps give meaning and context to the crossing ritual, which feels like both a mockery of and an odd homage to the original ritual.
Just to the west of Schillingbrücke, taking up a full block of Köpenicker Straße, on the south bank of the Spree, on the other side of the former wall from Rauchhaus, lies a giant, grey, intimidating building built at the start of the twentieth century. Originally a traditional Altbau, its front quarter along with parts of its sides were bombed during World War II, leaving behind a three-sided building with an open instead of an enclosed courtyard in front. From the front you can see the stumps and outlines of half-bombed apartments that used to be along the sides. The remaining structure is, as Daniela Sandler put it, “monumental… aggressive, uncanny, intimidating” (2016, 65). The last remaining pre-war building on that stretch of Köpenicker Straße, it was built to provide residential apartments for army officers, and briefly housed a French labor camp during the war, after which it was mostly abandoned, although it was briefly used as a sports facility during the cold war, with a bowling alley in the basement (Ibid., 76-7). Not only was the building in semi-ruins and
disrepair, but its location up against the Wall and under the bright lights of border control made it nearly valueless property. Very shortly after the Wall came down, on February 23, 1990, anarchists and ‘autonomen’ from West Berlin crossed the former border, climbed the side of the fenced-off site, rappelled down into the courtyard, and staked their claim on the building by panting an enormous sign on the side reading “Köpi Bleibt” (or, roughly, “Köpi remains”). 37 Thus Köpi 137, the first East Berlin squat occupied collaboratively by East and West Berliners, and arguably the most politically and culturally influential, secretive, and intimidating of the Berlin squats, was born.

Figure 24: Köpi 137 soon after it was occupied, early 1990s. Photo from www.koepi137.net, used by permission of Köpi.

In the 28 years since it was founded, Köpi has had to fight numerous times for its right to exist, as the building has changed hands several times and the residents have struck various deals, of varying stability, with owners and city officials. They have had the help of lawyers friendly to their cause, particularly Moritz Heusinger, a lawyer with close ties to the community. The residents struck a deal with the borough of Mitte in 1991, when the building was slated for demolition. The borough

37 http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/last-stand-for-the-far-left-berlin-commune-fights-the-property-developers-a-525017.html
attempted a forced auction in 1999, which failed because of protests and legal pushback from residents, who argued that they had made the building habitable through their own labor. The building was finally auctioned and sold in 2007 to Besnik Fichtner, a floor tiler from Kosovo, for €835,000, or half its supposed market value. However, Fichtner couldn't get financing to develop the site, due to the reputation of the hauseprojekt in the city, and the 5000 or so protesters who rallied bearing signs reading "Køpi Bleibt" and "Defend Køpi." Moreover, as one resident put it, the city has been loath to support development efforts or to oust the occupiers, due to its recognition that the hauseprojekt serves as a valuable “ornament” for the city. This is in keeping with the city’s general tolerance of the bottom-up occupation and repurposing of space in virtue of its recognition that the aesthetics this occupation and repurposing is an economically important part of the its appeal to tourists (Colomb 2012, 243). In 2008, the combination of protests, economic frustration, legal ingenuity on the part of Heusinger did the trick: The new owner gave up on developing the property, and signed a 30-year lease with the residents for a pittance. Berlin's strong tenancy laws means the hauseprojekt is in effect safe until 2038.\footnote{I pieced this history together from discussions with residents and founders, Sandler (2016), Der Spiegel (2007), Der Spiegel (2008), and the Køpi website at www.koepi137.net. One can view footage of the 2007 protests at https://video.squat.net/tag/berlin/.

Spaces in the hauseprojekt are highly sought-after, and mostly arranged by word of mouth (and so in at least this sense, not publicly or democratically available). At various times there have been children living there, and rumor has it that there are more canine than human residents. In 2015, Køpi invited in thirty Syrian refugees. Residents at this point do pay a tiny rent to live there, and that money is used for basic necessities that keep the place running, but the community tries to rely on money and to participate in the capitalist economy as little as possible. When a community member cannot afford the small rent, the residents meet to decide how to respond, but they are reluctant to evict anyone who is basically getting along with the community and shares its ideals. Bits
of extra money are raised as needed from shows (which generally have a suggested donation of five euros), and VoKü meals, which are cooked by residents, and cost two euros for a refillable plate. (The website reads, “VoKü is when squats open their doors to the community and offer food at affordable prices; it is short for Volksküche, meaning “people's kitchen.”) Beers are sold at the bars for just a few cents above cost. The small amounts of money that the hauseprojekt takes in go to its own maintenance, as well as to specific causes that the community collectively decides to support; they have raised money for political prisoners, refugees, and various anarchist anti-gentrification, pro-mobility and anti-racist resistance groups. A large annual party is the source of much of this charitable fundraising. Groups that want to hold ‘solidarity events’ at Kopi need to submit proposals including a political justification. Bands that want to play there need to convince the community that they will not commodify the space or try to make a profit in it, and that they are operating independently outside the capitalist record label system.

Resistance to gentrification, the capitalist commodification of space, and any sort of borders and barriers to mobility are central to the politics of the hauseprojekt. For years the outside of the building was iconically adorned with the slogan, “There are no borders between peoples, only between the top and the bottom.” Kopi’s engagement in and support for international groups and causes is one way in which they implement this anti-border commitment in their own practices, by globalizing their political engagement. This commitment is part of the aesthetics and visual marking of the space. Banners on the outside fence currently declare support for Russian anarchists, Palestinian liberation, the free mobility of Syrian refugees, and La Zad, a French anarchist anti-gentrification group that occupies proposed development sites (most famously the proposed future airport site at Notre-Dame-des-Landes), for instance. This antinationalism and global solidarity help the reach of the community extend well beyond the space.

The Kopi community takes respect for bodily autonomy and personal space as directly
continuous with a politics of mobility and spatial agency. That is, for them, an essential part of having the right to use and move through a space is being able to do so protected from unwanted intrusions, whether these are gates and walls, or unwanted touch. There are signs on the walls explaining the importance of consent and freedom from unwanted touch in English, German, French, Polish and Spanish. Punk shows have mosh pits, but these are surprisingly controlled and respectful of people’s personal space; as a very small person, I have never felt so safe near a mosh pit before. This general concern for consent and personal space affects the rhythm and pattern of bodily micronegotiations and movements throughout the site in noticeable ways. Even petting friendly dogs without express permission is frowned upon.

Kopi is the most vibrant example I have found of a functional niche in which the material space and the micronegotiations within it are mutually constitutive in dynamic ways. It is a constantly shifting space that is responsive to and also shapes the practices and needs of those within it, in at least three senses.

First, over the years, residents have added layer upon layer of art to the facade and the various inner spaces of the building. Much of the art reflects the politics of the community; the residents keep their art and political messaging current, which means the look of the space is constantly changing, and the space continues to “speak” to current political concerns and engage in current political debate, rather turning into a frozen monument with a leftist aesthetic.

Second, the space contains an ever-changing array of functioning subspaces, depending on the commitments and interests of current residents. The building currently houses the residents as well as several music venues; a movie theater (which is really a screen hooked up to the computer of one resident, on which he plays pirated videos, in a cave-like room filled with abandoned or stolen car and airplane seats); a computer repair workshop in which residents run free trainings to help with community computer literacy; three bars; a common meeting area; a small ‘archive’ (most of
the documents in which have been stolen); and a communal kitchen. At other times it has housed a
rock-climbing facility; a wrestling ring; a gym; a bowling alley; and a halal kitchen for Syrian refugees
separate from the main vegan kitchen. To the side of the building, but within the fence around the
property, is a separate wing of the community, which lives in trailers and other informal structures.
This more fluid part of the community is made up of the less communally minded, more
individualistic “autonomen” who share political ideals with the main community but are looking for
a less communal living experience; the layout of this part of the site changes frequently.

Third, the residents of Køpi have built and continue to maintain all of the infrastructure that
allows the half-ruined building to be habitable and usable. Residents have installed and maintain
plumbing, electricity, and basic structure like doors, stairs, and floors, but also more creative bits of
infrastructure such as my personal favorite, a parachute attached to a small boxing glove that is used
to send the key down to legitimate guests from a fifth-floor window. Everything has a rigged-by-
hand-and-ad-hoc look and feel. Indeed, this *Instandbesetzung* (reclaim and repair) ethos and aesthetic
is central to the politics of occupation at Køpi.

For all these reasons, the space presents itself as one that is living and dynamic, in a constant
process of remaking. And this remaking is thoroughly bottom-up by design, as Køpi is a self-
reflectively anarchist space in which there is a systematic rejection of hierarchical decision making.

The material layout of the site, both as the squatters found it and as they have repurposed it,
is distinctively suited to support the form of life they have built in it, and so their activities and the
space together form a functional niche. The bombing of the face of the building opened up the
courtyard, making it easily usable for public events and communal meals, without visitors needing to
pass through the private parts of the building. This allows the hausprojekt to have an effective
public space and face without compromising their privacy. The ruined facade and infrastructure have
made room for bottom-up repairing and rejigging on the part of the users of the space. The fence
around the property both keeps it hidden and marks off the territory, while also providing a palate
for art and political signaling; this outside presentation both establishes for outsiders what sort of
space this is, and serves to intimidate those who don’t belong. The empty space left over from
bombing to the side of the building created the field for the trailer park, which allowed Köpi to
divide itself into a highly collaborative community with a shared space and a more individualistic
community subdivided into nodes. The solid fence around the whole site marks these two
communities as sharing territory and enables them to form a larger whole as needed.

The ruined site, from both a material and an aesthetic point of view, functions doubly for
the hausprojekt. On the one hand, it enhances the intimidating image of the community, which they
use strategically, and it also gives them lots of leeway to modify and decorate the space and show off
its repurposed character. On the other, it serves as a moving palimpsest, showing off the complex
and multilayered history of the site. The community was founded as a direct reaction against Berlin's
own history and the material damage that fascism and division left behind, so it is appropriate that
the physical space that the community inhabits showcases this damage. Sandler quotes one resident
as saying that the dilapidated facade was a valuable window into Berlin's difficult history: “We believe
that people must live with their own past, and for us this includes even Fascism” (Sandler 2016, 70).
Sandler argues that living intentionally and in conversation with the past, rather than erasing it, is
central to the norms and practices of Köpi, and the material building supports and reflects this.
Hence Köpi is a material place that has been repurposed into a dazzling externalization of the
specific commitments of the community (of which more details below), and in turn which is
perfectly suited to furthering and enabling these commitments. At the same time, as a form of
territory-building, the bottom-up repurposing of the space is exceptionally effective.

While Köpi is committed fighting all forms of discrimination, barriers to mobility, and
demographic exclusion, the look and shape of the space tells you immediately and unequivocally
who is not welcome in the space: racists and right-wingers, but also anyone sympathetic with
capitalism or neoliberalism, and, importantly, anyone who is just there to look. The space is not to be
gawked at; it is there to be used. If you enter, you must be willing and able to participate as an insider,
not just take the space in as a staring outsider. You can come visit friends, or watch a show, or share
a meal, or participate in a meeting, or even just hang out, but you cannot be a passive observer.
Elsewhere in this thesis I talk about spaces that are designed just to be stared at rather than used, but
at Køpi you can't just treat the space as a visual spectacle even if you want to. This is reinforced by
the signs everywhere banning cameras and photographs; Køpi is especially strict in their ban on all
forms of surveillance, as I will discuss below. Although—sadly and frustratingly—there are dozens
of illicit photos of Køpi online, the norms against taking photos and in support of protecting the
privacy of the space are very strong.
The resistance to enabling the space to be merely passively looked at is also reinforced by the
intensity of the political messaging and art, and—even more interestingly for my purposes—by the
body language of the residents and friends. You can enter the space whenever you want, but if you
present as a tourist who is just looking, rather than actually being there to do something (even if that
something is just hanging out comfortably), you are quickly met by stares and hostile body language.
Køpi is such a thoroughly built niche that it doesn't allow anyone to be an outsider in it. To be there
with any comfort is to use the space as it is meant to be used, to embed yourself within it. This is a
way of being both inclusionary and exclusionary: As long as you can find a way of using the space as
an insider, you are welcome, regardless of race, sexual orientation, etc. But you have to be able to
find a way to do this. My son and I both noticed consistently that the community members were
quick to be friendly and welcoming if you demonstrated respect and understanding of the space, and
equally quick to signal exclusion to those who were not properly integrating themselves into the
niche, and this all was communicated at the level of micro-gestures, micro-postures, and micro-
expressions.\textsuperscript{39}

Daniela Sandler also dwells on the hausprojekt’s interesting combination of demographic inclusivity and powerful ability to intimidate and exclude gawkers and those at odds with its political mission:

Carving out a space for alternative living, as much as possible outside of the constraints of capitalism, means that the [sic] Køpi is both a welcoming and free space, and a regulated and exclusive one. The Køpi community is open to Autonomen, sexual minorities, punks, anarchists, musicians’ it offers free culture and entertainment because it is opposed to commercialism and capitalism, and it operates on a democratic and egalitarian structure because of the community’s Socialist and anarchist political views. At the same time, and precisely because it is a space of dissonance and dissent, it excludes by necessity a host of social groups: not only potential developers and authorities, or right-wing groups and individuals, but also anyone directly or indirectly associated with gentrification and commercialism. This might mean tourists, yuppies, hipsters, anyone who is middle class, conventional, or spiessig (bourgeoise) …The exclusion of these groups relies on spatial cues—from the obvious messages printed on plaques and signs to the ostensibly displayed dilapidation of the building to the makeshift aesthetics of the street fence, the trailer park, and the courtyard” (Sandler 2016, 67).

Køpi is intimidating by design. The giant half-ruined building on a barren stretch of the street is inherently imposing, but it is also clear from old photographs that over time, the community has increasingly added layers of fencing, signage, and art that enhance this intimidating look and arrangement; it has become more hidden and more foreboding as time has passed. Many tourists peek into the courtyard, which is never locked, and scurry away in discomfort (although a few oblivious ones do wander in and stare). Even during events, the courtyard and entrance are completely unlit. The space does not invite the public in. Rather, you have to be confident that this is where you are trying to go in order to enter at all. I had to enter it five or six times before I stopped being anxious when I went in. Everything about the space is foreboding. It is also spectacularly beautiful, and uncanny and otherworldly, so when you step in you really feel like you have entered an alternative territory and that you had better either belong there properly, or leave.

\textsuperscript{39} Sandler also notices and comments several times on this interesting combination of inclusive and exclusive signaling at Køpi.
From the outside, a high fence is covered with far-left messages and support for various extreme resistance movements around the world (see Figure 25). The solid fence around the whole site blocks out gawkers, and helps make the space private. The building is mostly occluded from the outside, but the original “Køpi Bleibt” sign and the slogan “ACAB” (All Cops Are Bastards) are visible on the top of the building.

Figure 25: The fence outside of Køpi, 2018. Photos by author.

Walking in through the front gate, which reminds people not to take pictures and to respect
the space, one passes a sign saying,

Dear visitors. We as people who live and work here understand this place as an uncommercial freespace please respect that we live our dayly life here!!! Thats why we don’t like to get pictured, filmed, etc!! We won’t tolerate: Fascism, racism, sexism, homophobia, cops, photos. More about Køpi www.koepi137.net.

Overhead, a red banner reads, “Wenn ihr uns nicht träumen lasst, essen wir euch nicht schlafen”, or “If you do not let us dream, we will not let you sleep” (Figure 26).

![Image of the entrance to Køpi with a sign saying, “Wenn ihr uns nicht träumen lasst, essen wir euch nicht schlafen”](image)

Figure 26: Main entrance to Køpi, 2018. Photo by author.

After passing through the entrance, one emerges into the beautiful, overwhelming, intimidating courtyard, where one’s eye cannot help but go first to the most emblematic work of art on the site, the enormous tiger. Next, one’s eye is drawn to the art and signs around it, including a large banner reading “against police brutality and G20 oppression” (Figure 27).
Kopi’s intimidating image and its resistance to outsiders and gawkers is carefully cultivated as a form of territory-claiming. Notably, almost every popular news piece on Köpi raises the specter of possible and feared violence. Each piece speaks of worries about riots and mayhem if the occupants don’t get their way. For example, a 2008 article in Der Spiegel refers to fears of violent unrest and rioting five separate times in a short article, despite there being no violent events to report on (Berg and Rosenbach 2008). But despite this repeated trope, there is no violence documented; the occupants have managed to present themselves as capable of violence as a political and aesthetic
strategy without ever needing to actually engage in it or even threaten it. Cultivating intimidation has been a key part of Köpi’s survival strategy (Berg and Rosenbach 2007), as is clear from news coverage. In fact, the community has no documented history of violence. Its activist methods are occupation, material support for anarchist and anti-gentrification causes, and the implementation of non-hierarchical decision-making, not violence. Indeed, one resident, Frank, told me a long story about how two residents had gotten into a fist fight six years ago, and one had been expelled (“He punished him right in the face!” Frank said in amazement). This was clearly an exceptional event, remembered years later.

Köpi is engaged in an ongoing struggle to fend off its own aestheticization and commodification. The bottom-up repurposed ‘look’ of layers of graffiti and street art and of leftist political signaling art are the Berlin aesthetic. The more countercultural Köpi looks, the more it exemplifies the distinctive look of Berlin. And it is in fact gorgeous and gripping to look at, so it is very hard for it not to attract viewers, who are primarily interested in it as a glorious example of the aesthetic they came to Berlin to soak up. Many other former squats in town, including Rauchhaus, have been partially or completely converted into gallery spaces and cultural centers. They share the half-ruined, chaotically art-covered aesthetic with Köpi, and much of the same political signaling (albeit less extreme). Sandler points out that these former squats are all now ‘attractions’ for tourists who are not in any way living the lifestyle or taking on the commitments that Köpi is trying to support (Sandler 2016, 127). The city values these spaces as part of its image and as tourist draws, and accordingly it has given them support and freedom that enable them to continue to exist. But to the extent that such spaces are actually beholden to the city and its top-down constraints and support, their bottom-up aesthetic really does become a mere aesthetic. Köpi has resisted this cooption, and refrained from striking any deals with the city. By maintaining its privacy, banning photographs, and discouraging mere lookers, it pushes back against this aestheticization. By keeping
its political activities and markings current, it keeps them from ‘freezing’ and becoming mere art. But
it is difficult for Kopi not to be ‘read’ by tourists as just part of the Berlin aesthetic. It is also hard to
prevent the city from indirectly capitalizing on its atmospheric presence.

When I found Kopi, I was completely compelled by the space. I desperately wanted to use
it as one of my research sites. But I faced a pragmatic paradox. Most straightforwardly, my
methodology was based on taking photographs, and Kopi is a strictly photography-free zone. But
more deeply, given what I said above about this not being a comfortable space to take in as an
outsider, treating the space as an object of research was in tension with the essence of the space, and
would have violated its lived norms; simply observing and documenting it without further ado
would have been both unethical and epistemically impossible. Moreover, the explicitly non-
hierarchical structure of the space meant that there was no ‘manager’ I could ask for permission to
do research there. Thus the site posed special research challenges.

I began by taking the time to learn how to use the space as an insider. The first four or five
times my son and I visited, we did not go as researchers; we focused on learning how to hang out in
the space. We went to a couple of punk shows by underground groups from across Europe, in their
heavily graffitied underground venue with its tiny bar; we went to a few movies in their ‘cinema’; we
hung out at the bars; we showed up for VoKü, the weekly communal vegan meal. We got to know
the dogs that live there, as well as some of the people. Each time we went, we carefully considered
our outfits; we did not want to come off as costumed, or as mimicking the high-punk aesthetic of
most of the residents and visitors, but we also wanted to fit into the space. We waited until we could
tell that we were recognized, and until the body language of the residents signaled acceptance -
waving to us when they saw us, etc. (My son got a friendly punch in the shoulder at one of the bars,

40 Thanks to Maria Klechevskaya.
and that pretty much solidified for us that we had been accepted.

Only after many visits did I approach a resident who I was confident would recognize me. He was out collecting up trash in the courtyard. I told him that I was doing this research project, and asked him how I might go about asking for permission to take some pictures and to otherwise document the space. I was careful to say that I wanted to study Køpi because I supported their politics and I was impressed by the place, and also that I understood that they may well decide not to give me permission. He invited us to come explain our research at a house meeting, and told us when it would be. This was already good progress.

Showing up to the house meeting was intimidating. As far as I can uncover, only one other scholar, Daniela Sandler, has been granted the right to take pictures of Køpi for academic purposes (and her work is quoted extensively here, as many of her observations and thoughts about the hauseprojekt overlapped with my own). I was aware that I was asking for the right to study a space that was almost unstudied, and in my view important and special, and I was also aware that permission was by no means guaranteed. We were invited for the first time into the private inner space of Køpi. We went up a handmade, uneven staircase, and entered a large, comfortable room filled with faded couches and a random assortment of chairs. About twenty residents and close allies of the hauseprojekt sat in a circle, many of them barefoot, some with dogs, most sporting a traditional punk look but a few in simple jeans and t-shirts. It was a gender-diverse group, mostly but not entirely white, and notably age-diverse, ranging from people in their 20s to 60s. Their body language was neither welcoming nor hostile; it came off as neutral. My son noted that the folks at Køpi use their enormous capacity for gestural and facial neutrality, and their ability to signal warmth or exclusion with tiny bodily shifts, as a tool for negotiating territory, inclusion, and exclusion.

We were invited to explain the research project and why we were interested in Køpi in particular. I tried explain the project clearly and succinctly, making sure to emphasize that I was
writing from a place of sympathy with those pursing bottom-up occupations of space and anti-capitalist living arrangements. There were a few seconds of silence. A young man asked me what I thought of Trump. I said that I thought he was a terrifying fascist, and that I and everyone I know found it humiliating to be linked to him by association. Although the exchange was in English, my son followed up each time I spoke by translating into German, just to make sure everyone understood. There were a few seconds more of silence. Someone else asked if I would be willing to share the results with the residents if they gave me permission, and I said I’d be honored to send them a copy. After another pause, someone said that if we did this, they would want someone to supervise me and take responsibility for accompanying and overseeing me, and there were general nods but no one volunteered. At this point, even though I was absolutely dying to stay and watch the meeting, I said that I thought I should leave so that they could discuss our request in private, without feeling pressured by my presence, and get back to me. This finally got smiles out of people, and we agreed. They took my number and said “someone” would let me know.

From the point of view of bodily micronegotiations, the meeting was a fascinating affair. Meeting participants sit in a circle so that everyone can see everyone else and read their reactions. This is no accident: The meeting room is called the Aquarium, we learned, specifically because of this universal visibility by design. The members use silence and temporality strategically. Because there is no meeting chair or group hierarchy, the way they ensure that everyone is heard and included is by being patient about waiting and allowing people the time and space to speak, as well as by keeping a close eye on other members’ facial expressions and body language to read their reactions. All comments were followed by a brief silence, rather than with quick responses that directed the course of the conversation. This was very noticeable in practice, and it made for a really unsettling conversational experience because of its unusual cadence and watchfulness, especially for anyone unfamiliar with anarchist communities. Conversely, because so much is communicated through
expression, expressions were deeply revealing. It was interesting to watch members go from watchful suspicion to cautious acceptance over the course of our discussion. From their body language and my understanding of Køpi’s values, I strongly suspect that it was my offer to leave, out of respect for their privacy and their ability to talk freely that most directly led them to agree to my request. In the case of Køpi, the embodied details of their anarchist decision-making process are details about their uses of space their form of territory establishment and vice-versa: The shape of the room and the furniture, together with the use of bodily timing and gesture, in fact constitute the decision-making process at the hausprojekt.

I left unsure whether they would actually get back to me or when, but mere hours later I received a phone call from Frank, whose bubbly, warm, extroverted manner was completely different from the cultivated reserve I had encountered at the meeting. He told me in somewhat broken but quite clear English that he had volunteered to take responsibility for me, and we arranged a time for me to come meet with him and take pictures. “But it will be like North Korea in there! I will watch your every step!” he said with a laugh. He also said that I could only take pictures of the outer spaces, and not of people. Frank is a wiry, wild-haired man in his 60s who bikes his way around the city. His clothes are not especially punk; he wears jeans and sweatshirts. Frank was one of the original occupants of Køpi, and he cuts such a memorable figure. He is relatively talkative, so it’s unsurprising that he shows up in media articles about the hausprojekt (for instance Berg and Rosenbach 2007). His daughter was born and raised in Køpi. Although he no longer resides there, he is one of its most involved and important associates, and he has remained active in local politics around occupation and poverty. For instance, he and other Køpi associates run Infoladen, an anarchist outreach center for poor and homeless Berliners in Neukölln.41 Frank’s politics are

41 My son and I spend an afternoon at Infoladen at Frank’s invitation, discussing language and politics with local anarchist housing activists over a free meal.
uncompromising, but his demeanor is charming and goofy and welcoming. He makes an excellent public relations face for Køpi, when they are willing to have one.

When I returned to Køpi the following week at the assigned time, with my son in tow to help with communication, Frank met us and brought us into the inside of the building, where we met with him and Gabby, another elder of the hauseprojekt—a casually dressed, smiling woman perhaps in her 50s. Frank and Gabby contrasted sharply with the leather-and-spikes-clad punks with intimidating facial ink and piercings hanging out in the courtyard. I had sort of expected that I would just be allowed to take pictures and then dismissed, but in fact we were offered ice cream sandwiches and coffee. Frank and Gabby explained that if I was going to write about and photo the space I needed to understand it, which led to a two-hour conversation about the history, politics, goals, and ideals of Køpi. I learned a great deal about how Køpi runs during this conversation. For instance, the hauseprojekt keeps a dynamic, Talmud-like written ‘constitution’ that contains no rules, but records all house decisions to be used as precedents in future discussions. They proudly showed off the burned spot in the middle of the Aquarium, from a small fire when the meeting room had been converted into an impromptu kitchen for their Syrian guests. Gabby apologized that the toilet, installed by residents, had to be flushed by pulling on the chain and then hand-replacing the plug.

Much of my reconstructed history of Køpi above is based on this conversation with Frank and Gabby.

Apparently house communication is imperfect because within a couple of minutes, I was startled by a water balloon, which landed with precision six inches in front of me, exploding and splashing me, as a woman shouted “KEIN PHOTOS! NO PHOTOGRAPHS!” at me from a fourth-floor window. Frank rushed over to tell her that I had special permission from the house. She stared at him for a moment, said “OK”, and closed the window without apology. I admit that having been waterbombed at Køpi is one of my proudest moments as a researcher. Given my interest here
in how people use bodily movements to establish territory and exercise agency over space, I could not help but be impressed with the vivid technique of waterbombing me in order to make territorial claims clear, and to establish and enforce the norms for using the space. As with the gatekeeping at Berghain and the urination at Curvystraße, this act of claiming and controlling space did not merely fix its boundaries and rules, but very much contributed to place-making and place identity.

It was hard to select among the many photographs I took, but I’ve tried to include enough to give a sense of both the aesthetics of the space, and the way it uses marking and repurposing to establish territory and create a niche supporting a specific form of life. Frank mentioned to me that my readers would wrongly think that Køpi is a lonely place, because I wasn’t allowed photograph the people there. These pictures give an important but partial picture of the space as a living niche, since in practice it is filled most of the time with residents and visitors hanging out, playing with dogs, drinking a beer, and so forth. The anti-surveillance ethos of the place is both essential to its character and at the same time a barrier to properly documenting and sharing that character.

Figure 28: Entrance to the old gym, which briefly hosted “Queer Wrestling Friday”, as well as to Koma F (one of the main music venues), the archives and information center (which was never actually staffed during any of our visits), and the private common areas of the hausprojekt, including the “Aquarium.” Photo by author, 2018.
Figure 29: Entrance to the underground cinema, which shows free movies twice a week, and the northeast corner of the courtyard, 2018. Photo by author.

Figure 30: Køpi Bleibt. Edge of the west wing of the building, 2018. Photo by author.
As I mentioned, I could not photograph spaces inside the building. I particularly wish I had been able to photograph the beautiful, steampunk main bar, which is packed with a variety of bric-a-brac, including a giant stuffed toy mammoth hanging from the ceiling; a flag for St. Pauli, the beloved Hamburg anarcho-feminist soccer team; a foosball table; and a selection of beer. One of
the beers for sale is a local brew called 1312, which is code for ACAB, or “All Cops Are Bastards;” the Neukölln brewery makes a practice of distributing its beer only to venues with anarchist and anti-capitalist commitments. It’s unclear how many of the decorations are stolen; the official municipal “Köpenicker Straße” street sign adorning the main bar clearly is.

Events at Köpi exemplify the inclusive and non-hierarchical principles of the hausprojekt. Events begin by consensus, when everyone is ready. We attended a free traveling variety show, “Kabaret Kalshinkov”, complete with a contortionist and a strongwoman, that was held in the courtyard, which was filled with people of all types and ages, even including children. Many of the audience members were in High Punk gear, and several were in drag, festooned with rainbows. One small group was made up men with polo shirts and women wearing party dresses and sandals; they looked wildly out of place but no one bothered them. People wandered with plates of food from the VoKü and sat around on the ground and on benches. As the group got ready to start, people brought their dogs under control, and one settled under my feet. At one point during the show, the performers passed out free vodka to everyone, including the children, and at another a performer took a toy machine gun and performed repeatedly shooting God and killing him to make him stop meddling, to roars of appreciation from the crowd.

One of the most challenging dimensions of Köpi for me, from a theoretical point of view, was that it confounded any quick equivalence between inclusivity and publicity. The Köpi community has used this physical site in various ways to build inclusive space, both in the sense that anyone can participate in and use the space, and in the sense that they have devoted themselves to furthering pro-mobility, anti-borders, anti-gentrification causes. I’ve tried to show how the material space itself has been repurposed into one distinctively suited to this kind of inclusivity. At the same time, I have also tried to show that the space is far from public. Its privacy is in fact essential to its being able to

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42 In the months since I started writing this thesis, 1312 has gone out of production, sadly.
function in the way that it does, retaining its commitments to anarchist collaborative processes, and resisting commodification and transformation into an aesthetic product to be looked at. Residents use body language and the space itself in order to enforce this privacy. Publicity requires openness and easy accessibility, and sometimes building genuinely inclusive space requires privacy and the establishment of territory.\textsuperscript{43}

Sandler claims of Køpi that it is ‘not a niche for a segregated subculture’, but rather is ‘integrated into the wider social and cultural life of the city, attracting a diverse public’ (2016, 90). She is right that it is porous, in the sense that its activism is outward-reaching and that it brings people in for events of various sorts. Køpi is not self-isolating, and it is part of the fabric of Berlin. But on the other hand, we have also seen that Køpi uses an array of bottom-up techniques for establishing its territory, negotiating insider and outsider status, maintaining its privacy and marking its borders. The material form of the space, and the ways that residents have marked and tinkered with the space, and their bodily micronegotiations of and within the space, all contribute directly to Køpi’s ability to maintain this almost paradoxical combination of territoriality and inclusivity, privacy and openness.

5.2 Tempelhof Airport and Field

Designed by Albert Speer, the anointed architect of the Nazi party, the imposing Tempelhof airport was built in the middle of the city, to be Hitler's showcase airport—a monument to his power. Construction started in 1936, and the airport was never fully completed. As with many Nazi projects, the airport was grotesquely overbuilt and never fully in use. During the war, in addition to functioning as an airport, it served as an arms production facility, a labor camp, a machine workshop, and a radio tower. Furthermore, the subterranean levels were used as state-of-the-art bomb shelters. The airport sustained no damage during the war; rumor has it that neither side

\textsuperscript{43} I return to this rethinking of public space and its relationship to inclusivity in the concluding chapter.
wanted to damage the strategically important facility.

Figure 33: Tempelhof Field, 1968. Image courtesy of the Landesarchiv, Berlin.

Figure 34: Visiting dignitaries arrive at Tempelhof, 1954. Image courtesy of the Landesarchiv, Berlin.

During the struggle between allied forces over the occupation of Berlin, the airfield was the site of the iconic Berlin Airlift in 1948, ending the Soviet blockade of West Berlin. In a heroic and dramatic act of coordinated support for the very Berliners they had been at war with just a few years earlier, the United States, aided primarily by Britain and France, managed to supply millions of city
residents with necessary food and supplies by landing at Tempelhof in small 'raisin bombers,' at a rate of up to an airplane per minute. This led to the Soviets ceding control of West Berlin, and in turn to the division of Berlin into East Berlin and the three occupied sectors of West Berlin, with Tempelhof in the American sector. Under division, Tempelhof served as the main airport for West Berlin, as well as functioning as a US airbase. It was often the highly public landing point for visiting dignitaries and celebrities.

But when Berlin reunified, it doubled in size and also it ceased to be so isolated from the rest of the world (by way of either the Wall or the Iron Curtain). Thus the airport soon became too small, and in 2008 it shut down.\(^4\) Its location right in the middle of the city made it instantly attractive to developers. However, true to the spirit of the city, local Berliners organized massive protests against development plans, arguing that the site was historically important and that it would be a force for gentrification in the hands of developers. Fortuitously, scientists friendly to their cause discovered that the airfield was in fact a breeding ground for various endangered birds, especially skylarks, and this ensured a win: in a 2014 referendum, the city guaranteed protection of the entire airfield and terminal from development, allowing it to be claimed as genuinely public space for Berliners. Parsloe (2017) comments, “The outcome was considered emblematic of Berlin, where the right to public space triumphed over profit-focused development.” Over the last ten years, the field has developed into a massive, community-run playground for everyone in the city. The terminal itself has been leased by various businesses in parts, but the main areas that formed the working airport have been left in their original condition, open only for guided tours and special events. The latest chapter in Tempelhof’s spatial history began in 2015, when a wing of the terminal was converted into a camp for up to 3000 Syrian refugees, who by 2017 had been moved out of the

\(^{4}\) As I commented in my overview of the city, it is a notable feature of Berlin that it still has nothing resembling an adequate, major airport suited to an important metropolis and capital city of an economic powerhouse.
building and onto a plot of land on the former runways near the terminal. The grounds today host an ad hoc village, made up of white trailers surrounded by bikes and toys and grills, home to a Syrian population of about 1100.

In order to understand the site in its current form, is important to grasp just how many conflicting meanings Tempelhof has had. The airport began as a symbol of German power and domination, and quickly turned into a symbol of American triumphalism and Berlin's dependency and subjugation. From there it turned into a battleground for the fight over the right to the city and resistance to the commodification of space, and finally into a vivid symbol of current Berlin's porous borders and openness to the global community, and its cultivated status as a safe haven in a world fractured by xenophobia.

Elsewhere I have talked about Berlin's distinctive approach to acknowledging its past, not through preservation and showcasing, but simply by leaving it to be polysemic and visible. Tempelhof is perhaps the most vivid example of this. The terminal, with its unmistakable Nazi architecture, stands as an eerie reminder of the Third Reich; structures and signs associated with the old labor camps still remain strewn about the field. A raisin bomber from the Airlift sits on an overgrown patch of grass in the field, and another sits alone near a terminal gate. The runways and aircraft warning signs and guiding lights and control tower from the airport still remain. An American-style baseball diamond emblazoned with an uncomfortably racist image of a Native American chief is left over from the days of US occupation. The visual power of the Syrian refugee camp up against the Nazi terminal is hard to miss. Tempelhof is a multilayered, contradictory space. And what's more, it is distinctively beloved by and open to the residents of Berlin, who use it enthusiastically and in all sorts of ways, almost all of them unconstrained by top-down planning.

Tempelhof divides into three subspaces: The field, the terminal, and the refugee settlement. I will discuss each in turn.
5.2.1 Tempelhof Field

Tempelhof Field is an interestingly distinctive repurposed space for several reasons. It is explicitly claimed by the people of Berlin as a public space free from top-down impositions on its use or form. The city currently helps with some funding and minimal infrastructure, as well as protective legislation, but it is mostly left to the residents to use and design. Some Berliners have shares in cooperatively owned tiny ‘summer homes’ that ring the field, from which they can garden and use the park. It is a genuinely public space. Anyone can wander on and off the field at will. In terms of material form, it is open to the rest of the city at multiple points. In terms of territory-formation, there are no noticeable barriers of any kind as to who is welcome in the space and on what terms. It is filled with runners, bikers, dog walkers, picnickers, gardeners, people playing sports, people enjoying a beer, and people listening to music. They are of all ages, from babies to the very old, and of all races and national backgrounds. On a July afternoon, I heard people speaking German, English, French, Turkish, and several dialects of Arabic. Groups of teens hung out with boom boxes blaring hip hop or Arab pop. Pre-teen girls, many with hijabs, chased each other around, rode bikes, and played with a puppy. A mom-and-baby yoga group practiced under a tree. One afternoon, I ran into Frank from Køpi on his bicycle.

It is distinctive, among the sites I studied, in that it is a niche that actively includes and is shaped around the natural floral and faunal environment. The field is designed to protect and call attention to the local bird population, and a central use of the space is the community garden. The garden is itself a bottom-up space; community members each design their own plot as they see fit, and these are often festooned with little sculptures and play structures and whimsical additions. The whole garden looks like a chaotic Alice-in-Wonderland-like space—the natural analogue to the street art that covers much of the rest of the city. More generally, nature is a formative part of the material space here, especially as woven together with human artifice.
The field is very large. It is hard to take it all in, visually stretching into the distance. It contains facilities for almost every kind of outdoor leisure - a volleyball court, a soccer field, a basketball court, a baseball diamond, an area for outdoor grilling, a handmade playground, a handmade (and half-finished) mini golf course, a dog park, and much more. It also includes the community garden, an environmental learning center, several food kiosks, at and at least two large biergartens. During the World Cup, one biergarten set up a massive outdoor screen, and the games
attracted people of all ethnic backgrounds and ages. There are large approved areas for grilling and barbequing, which is especially significant in Berlin, where conflicts over outdoor barbequing—an activity overwhelmingly associated with Turkish and other Middle Eastern immigrants—has been a source of conflict and a flashpoint for xenophobic resentments and imagery. Outdoor barbequing is generally banned in Berlin, because of its supposed association with ‘pollution’ and ‘garbage’ (Stoetzer 2014). In Tempelhof, not only is it allowed, but I saw people of various races and ethnic backgrounds using this part of the field.

One of the main entrances to the field is through Schillerkiez in Neukölln, which is a little enclave popular with hipster immigrants from all over Europe and elsewhere, and different groups and languages mix randomly in the field. I tried on repeated visits to see if the space divided up into demographic territories, and it really does not seem to (although the people using the grilling area are still predominantly Muslim.) No gatekeeping or territorial limitation on the use of the space that I could detect has developed.

Figure 36: Berliners enjoy the Mexico-Brazil World Cup game at a biergarten in Tempelhof Field, 2018. Photo by author.

Alison Arieff comments that part of what makes Tempelhof Feld so successful is that
remains mostly “undesigned” (2019, 15); the space has minimal internal structure. More precisely, the design of the space, to the extent there is one, is found rather than imposed, as traces of old uses remain. The runways serve as running trails and bike paths, and the runway lights light it at night. The buildings and signage from both the airport and the labor camp still remain. An abandoned raisin bomber lives in a wild patch of overgrown grass. Traces of American occupation remain. Not coincidentally, the field is where the Fourth of July is celebrated with fireworks. And wherever you are on the field, you can see the looming Nazi terminal in the distance, as well as the white trailers of the refugee camp. There are very few historical markers; for the most part these traces have been allowed to just become part of the park.

![Image of Tempelhof Feld]

Figure 37: Tempelhof Feld, 2018. Photo by author.

5.2.2 Tempelhof Airport Terminal

Speer’s imposing airport terminal was the second largest building in the world when it was built—an enormous, 1.2-kilometer-long arc of somber stone and steel. The building itself has changed meanings dramatically several times: It was a symbol of fascism and German domination, then a symbol of occupation and dependence, then a busy welcome-point for the world when West Berlin was otherwise inaccessible, and then finally a symbol of international humanitarian aid.
There is no ignoring that first meaning, however, upon being confronted with the enormous, stark terminal, with its eagle head out front. Most of the wings are abandoned and look creepy and haunted. Spotty random businesses and offices occupy the center of the building. These include a male strip club called “Sixx Paxx,” which adds to the odd retro American aesthetic of the place, along with the many remaining traces of American occupation. But for the most part, the building is unmistakably dead space that has simply let be, with its history showing on its face.

Figure 38: Spooky abandoned wing of the Tempelhof terminal, 2018. Photo by author.

The parts of the terminal that were used as an airport have almost entirely been left as they were the day the airport closed. Bars, lounges, and cafés in the waiting areas remain furnished but empty. The gates still have their seats and signs. This follows the Berlin pattern that I have identified: it retains the past and leaves it visible, but without preserving it or showcasing it. The eeriest part of the terminal lies five levels below the ground. The terminal was designed with state-of-the-art bomb shelters, with an elaborate air filtration system that was cutting-edge at the time. These bunkers remain, unchanged and unlabeled, complete with footprints and other signs of use. The walls are painted with illustrations from stories by a children’s author, Wilhelm Busch. The paintings were designed to sooth and entertain children and make their time there more bearable. They too remain
visible without interpretive framing. I found this humanizing gesture unutterably moving and morally complex. One cannot enter the bunker without feeling haunted by the presence of terrified Nazi children, and adults who loved them.

![Figure 39: Nazi bomb shelter under Tempelhof, with paintings for children on the wall, 2018. Photo by author.](image)

Tempelhof terminal is barely a repurposed space. Despite renting out office space, hosting some events, and recently refugees, it remains for the most part an untouched leftover from a past era. It is so massive and imposing and haunted that these little repurposings did not really succeed in changing its presence. It is a dead space, but one that is inextricably bound up with all sorts of living and hopeful stories that give it context. Its haunted complexity is highlighted all the more by the fact that it flanks the lively, dynamic, open, evolving space of Tempelhof field, which as we saw is quite literally a living and changing ecosystem.

5.2.3 The Refugee Camp

The decision to house Syrian refugees in what is unmistakably a Nazi airport was a pragmatic one, but also a symbolically powerful and confusing one. Restrictions on modifying the historical building made it nearly impossible for the refugees to do much repurposing of the space
(Parsloe 2017), so the interior remained cold and vast and mostly undecorated. The city banned graffiti inside the building, supposedly in part to help keep conflicts between residents from arising. Writing at the time when the residents were still inside the terminal, Parsloe comments, “This has ultimately deprived the residents of one of the few ways they could shape their spaces to a significant extent. In place of the graffiti, stenciled prints of famous Berlin landmarks have been put up by the camp organizers. While they offer elements of color to the sanitized white walls, they do not provide the same self-made cultural familiarity” (Ibid.). In 2017 and 2018, the refugees were moved to the outside trailer park, which allowed for more personalization and much more privacy for residents.

The Syrian families have now been moved to a trailer park between the terminal and the rest of the field. This is an interesting and dramatic repurposing of space. The camp is easily visible from most places in the field. The settlement itself is a minimal but reasonably cheerful space. Trailers are surrounded by bikes and toys, and at least in the summer, families hang out outside and socialize. There is a circus and small amusement park up next to it, designed to be used by children from both the settlement and elsewhere; when I went by, they were advertising a “Freedom of Movement” (“Bewegungsfreiheit”) sports-oriented summer day camp for kids; the double meaning of the name is quite lovely.

The settlement is surrounded by a fence that divides it from the field, which is there to protect the privacy of the residents. It is open to the street at the front, via a broad driveway that curves down off the street. There is no security, and anyone is free to walk in and out as they please. When I was there, there were lots of families and groups of kids coming and going, or hanging around at ease. Large, colorful signs welcome visitors and new refugees, direct them to the information and welcome center, and offer contacts for where to get help. Although I did go down the driveway, I did not walk all the way into the trailer park, as I felt that I would be intruding into
residential space where I did not belong. Since taking photos inside the park would have been culturally and ethically inappropriate, I did not see a strong research payoff to overcoming my inhibitions and entering, especially since I could get a good view of the settlement from inside the field, on the other side of the fence. However, my hesitancy does reflect the spatial establishment of territory and boundaries without need for actual barriers or checkpoints. Had the settlement not been down a long driveway and around a corner, it would have felt more accessible and integrated into the city. Although anyone can enter and leave at will, the settlement is tucked away in such a way that entering feels like invading private space, rather than just wandering a city block. I suspect that this is probably a positive and appropriate form of territory-formation, as it makes sense that residents would want some privacy and a space to call their own, free of gawkers.

The flipside of this privacy is that the settlement is oddly cut off from the city, despite the open gates. Residents can easily see all the activity in Tempelhof field—the picnics and pick-up basketball games and the rest of it—from their windows and stoops. But for them to use the field themselves, they have to walk out the long driveway, up through the front of the terminal, around the outside of the field, down through Neukölln, and into the park from the side. This is about a two-kilometer walk. This is not to say that the refugees in the settlement don’t use Tempelhof field, but rather that the spatial logic of the layout is odd. They look at it daily but have much less immediate access to it than do the residents of Neukölln who live farther away. Similarly, there are several major mosques almost directly next to the settlement, but because of the arrangement of the fencing, they are over a kilometer away by foot. For the most part, the neighborhood that has been adopted by the refugees is in the north of Neukölln, around Hermannplatz, which I discuss in the next section.
Figure 40: Syrian refugee settlement at Tempelhof, with the children's circus behind it, photographed from Tempelhof Airport, summer 2018. Photo by author.

5.3 Hermannplatz

Figure 41: Detail of Hermannplatz and surroundings, including landmarks. Map created by author.
Hermannplatz lies near the top of the neighborhood of Neukölln, at the juncture of several major streets, including Karl Marx Straße, Sonnenallee, Hermannstraße, Urbanstraße, Hasenheide, and Kottbusser Damm. The plaza itself and the blocks right around it form one of the most territorially complex places in Berlin. Although it is a neighborhood, and not the site of any world-historical events, it is also one of the most historically layered spots in the city.

Hermannplatz is anchored by the Hermannplatz U-Bahn station, one of the busiest in the city, which was opened in 1927. It is also flanked by the giant Karstadt department store. In the early twentieth century, the plaza was designed to be a busy, hypermodern hub. The U-Bahn station, when it first opened, was state of the art, and a meeting point for fifteen bus and train lines. The Karstadt was one of the biggest department stores in the world when it opened in 1929. It was a massive and imposing Art Deco structure, but like so many things in Berlin it was overbuilt and never fully utilized. A few years after it opened, the Nazis tried to turn it into a destination shopping and recreation center for glamorous wealthy tourists. A Nazi propaganda video from 1936 shows the Karstadt with a banner for the Berlin Olympic games, and high society Aryans ballroom dancing and drinking wine on the roof overlooking the plaza.

Figure 42: Karstadt during the 1930s. Photo courtesy of the Neukölln Museum.
Figure 43: Still from Nazi tourist video, 1936. Dancers on top of Karstadt department store at Hermannplatz. Video available at https://fotostrasse.com/berlin-in-1936/#.Wyiw9BIzYY0

Figure 44: Crowds talking to visiting reporters near the bombed ruins of the Karstadt in the 1960s. Photo courtesy of the Neukölln Museum.

The fortunes of Hermannplatz changed radically near the end of the war. It was the site of
some of the most destructive bombing during the Battle of Berlin, with a huge percentage of the homes and, most strikingly, the Karstadt, leveled. The cleanup of the neighborhood took many years. Under division, the fortunes and form of the neighborhood changed radically, for a variety of reasons. Neukölln, including Hermannplatz, ended up in West Berlin, but just barely. What had been an open and busy central neighborhood suddenly became a deeply claustrophobic neighborhood cut off by the Wall, and cut at odd angles that left parts of the neighborhood enclosed on three sides (see Figure 41 above). This amputated Hermannplatz from the city, severing many of the transportation lines that ran through it and rendering it a terminus rather than a center point of the others. Not only did the Wall cut off the area from much of the adjoining urban space and hem it in, but the neighborhood went from being central to being at the very edge of the city. The city of West Berlin was organized around a center far to the west of the former center of Berlin, focused on Potsdamer Platz and on the Schönberg Rathaus. Hermannplatz became stranded at the far eastern edge of the city.

Figure 45: Claustrophobic life against the Wall in Neukölln, a few blocks east of Hermannplatz, in the 1970s. Photo courtesy of the Neukölln Museum.
Very little attention was given to how the neighborhood was carved up under division, or to the local ecological disruptions that carving involved. Sandler notes that areas of Neukölln under division were left at the periphery … the presence of the wall and the sense of being at the ‘end’ of the city did not help. The familiar cycle of disinvestment, vacancies, lower revenues, and physical deterioration of buildings and public spaces kept rents affordable, so that these neighborhoods also became centers for new immigrants, such as Turkish workers … The path of the Wall caused further urban changes, especially where it snaked left and right in sharp angles, surrounding neighborhoods on three sides … This sense of seclusion, of being separated from the rest of the urban fabric, further contributed to devaluing these districts. (Sandler 2016, 232)

Furthermore, the noise from the airplanes coming and going from nearby Tempelhof was a constant nuisance. Accordingly, Hermannplatz quickly transformed from a glamorous destination to a working-class neighborhood for those who couldn’t find anything else affordable in West Berlin.

Another post-war development was that the area around Hermannplatz, spreading south down Sonnenallee, became a major center for both foreign workers brought in to help with reconstruction. This was because it had become relatively empty, and real estate was cheap and undesirable, and also because so much of the area was destroyed. Thousands came from Turkey and
other parts of the Middle East. After the fall of the Wall, yet more help was needed with rebuilding, this time not from bombing, but rather from needing to stitch back together the torn city and its destroyed infrastructure. Over time, the area continued to settled by refugees and immigrants from Turkey, Lebanon, Palestine, and other Middle Eastern countries. Neukölln became the most heavily Muslim part of the city, and Arabic and Turkish markets, coffee shops, bodegas and cafés lined the streets. These residents tended to be relatively conservative and assimilationist, and Hermannplatz and its surroundings became a fairly sedate and quiet working-class neighborhood with a large Muslim presence. Goßwald and Scmiedeknecht (2009) document how this part of Neukölln functioned as a diverse but stable working-class niche for many years.

Neukölln developed a reputation for being somewhat sketchy and dangerous. This was likely based on a combination of racism, classism, and reality. As one recent article put it, Hermannplatz for a long time served as a ‘frontier’ of sorts; the common wisdom was that “one” did not venture south of Hermannplatz.45 Notably, despite the generally staid character of the neighborhood, Hermannplatz and Karl Marx Straße remained sites of leftist activism throughout the Cold War, with annual raucous May Day marches in support of socialism and against the economic inequality, neoliberal values, and isolationism that residents of West Berlin blamed on capitalism and the division of the city.

45 https://fotostrasse.com/we-love-neukolln/#.Wyif0SxLzYY0
The latest transformation of the area started only after 2012 or so, and it has come from two sources. First, even Berlin, despite its relative poverty and its ground-level resistance to gentrification, is inexorably gentrifying. This is only to a limited extent the kind of top-down gentrification that is driven by developers and urban planners; instead it is mostly the bottom-up gentrification that is resulting from people with money, education, and creative careers being drawn to the charming and relatively affordable city. While the city has resisted the influence of large developers with moderate and fragile success, it is being flooded with young, leftist hipsters with money, education, and creative careers, who are drawn to the charming and relatively affordable city, and the market is responding to their arrival. Parts of Mitte and all of Prenzlauer Berg are already filled with expensive restaurants, coffee shops, and designer stores. Kreuzberg, just north of Hermannplatz, is not as bourgeois, but it has transformed into a Bohemian mecca for hipsters. This form of gentrification has recently begun to spill out of Kreuzberg and down into formerly unfashionable Neukölln, especially in the north end, from Hermannplatz on up. North of Hermannplatz, whole blocks of fashionable bars, global ethnic restaurants, and coffee shops
catering to a young, cosmopolitan crowd have snaked their way through the Turkish döner stands and markets and downscale department stores. One graduate student resident of the neighborhood told me that if you’re young and queer or an artist or a graduate student, it is almost ‘required’ now that you live in northern Neukölln.

Second, since 2014, the Hermannplatz area has become the main urban neighborhood for the city’s new Syrian refugee and immigrant community. As I discussed above, the Syrian residents at Tempelhof have easier access to northern Neukölln than to any other part of the city, and this has become their de facto neighborhood. Local Syrian restaurants and bakeries have popped up, and local Mosques, community centers, and other services cater to this community. This has substantially changed the makeup and feel of the area, in ways I examine below.

Between the influx of Syrians and the influx of gentrifying hipsters, many from other countries, the area is now dramatically fuller and livelier than it used to be, and housing is getting harder to find and more expensive. The Hermannplatz U-Bahn station has once again become one of the city’s busiest. The Karstadt has been rebuilt as a brutalist but less imposing structure, and the plaza itself has been turned into a busy outdoor market. Thus Hermannplatz has gone from central and desirable, to isolated and undesirable, and back to central and desirable again, albeit with a completely different population and feel than it had before its downfall.
At present, there are a number of distinct groups occupying the blocks around the plaza, and they each make complex territorial claims on the area, all of which are negotiated unofficially,
through bottom-up practices. These territorial claims are not necessarily antagonistic or conflictual, but they all involve different uses of space, some of which overlap. And all come together in Hermannplatz itself, which is actively used as a focal space by all these groups. These groups include:

1. Working class folks of Turkish and Middle Eastern (often Lebanese) descent, many of them from families that have been in Berlin for decades.
2. Working class folks of German descent, mostly older, many of whom have lived in the neighborhood since the war.
3. Hipsters and young immigrants and temporary residents, mostly White and in their 20s and 30s, many of them students or in creative jobs, mostly progressive and often queer.
4. Far-left anarchists who are in or closely connected to the squatting community. They have been a small but consistent presence in the neighborhood since the Cold War. They overlap somewhat with the hipster progressives, but have less money and are suspicious of the latter’s love of the trappings of gentrification – wine bars, expensive coffee shops, upscale ethnic restaurants, etc.
5. Recently arrived refugees and other immigrants from the Middle East, mostly from Syria.

These groups have each carved out different (although sometimes overlapping) parts of the space in different ways. The most visible group in the neighborhood is the longstanding working class Muslim community. The area south of the plaza, along Sonnenallee and Karl Marx Straße, has for decades been known as “Little Beirut”⁴⁶ (which is a somewhat misleading nickname, as many families originated from Lebanon but far more originated from Turkey). Turkish supermarkets, travel agents specializing in flights to the Middle East, Turkish döner shops and Lebanese falafel stands, shisha bars, and coffee shops are especially concentrated along Karl Marx Straße and

⁴⁶ Alkousaa 2018.
Sonnenallee, although they are pervasive throughout this part of Neukölln. Many of these businesses have seating on the sidewalk, and gender-segregated groups hang out at the tables, drinking small espressos. These spaces tend to be male-dominated, especially the shisha bars, some of which are actively unwelcoming to women. The men smoke, and many of the women wear hijabs. Sidewalk seating here takes the form of small tables along the wall, with chairs facing out towards the street.

The working class, older Germans congregate in old-fashioned gasthauses and bars, many of which can be spotted by their old Nazi-era gothic lettering and their advertisements for common, cheap local beers like Berliner Pilsner. They sit inside, at the bar. These have been mostly squeezed out of the area right around Hermannplatz, and tend to be farther south.

The hipsters overwhelmingly frequent establishments to the north of the plaza, along Hasenheide, Urbanstraße, and Kottbusser Damm, and on smaller offshoots of these streets, such as Weserstraße. Here there are entire blocks given over to cute cocktail bars, galleries, fancy coffee shops, bookstores, and the like. The outdoor seating here tends to take the form of proper patios with tables for groups, rather than just small sidewalk tables. People tend to be drinking much larger coffees: lattes, pour-overs, and the like. Part of the way these businesses flag their demographic is by using English (the most common overlap language for White immigrants) on signs, and through queer-friendly, leftist political signs and symbols.

The anarchists have scattered bars and communal kitchens and information centers around the area south of the plaza, as well as several active squats, especially running down and just off of Karl Marx Straße (continuing a decades-old tradition of squatting and occupation along this street). Their political signaling is much more intense, in terms of both visual density and message, than that of the hipster spots. Many of the squats near Hermannplatz are old-school illegal occupations of empty buildings, rather than developed and legitimized hausprojekts, and many are quite new. On
May 20, 2018, during a parade when the police were otherwise occupied, squatters claimed several buildings around Karl Marx Straße, for instance. These newer squats don’t have the layered aesthetic of places like Køpi, but they typically have quickly spray-painted territorial markings (see Figure 50).

Figure 50: A recently squatted building off of Karl Marx Straße, behind the Neukölln Arcaden, south of Hermannplatz, 2018. Photo by author.

Finally, the Syrian businesses and hang-out spots tend to cluster to the east and south of the plaza, down Sonnenallee and off of Kottbusser Damm. To the untrained American eye, they are not easy to distinguish from the spots belonging to the older and more settled Middle Eastern community. The food is similar, and they also are fond of sidewalk seating and small espressos. However, in these spots, there are more mixed-gender groups and families with young kids, and fewer of the women wear hijabs.47

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47 I was only able to start tracking the subtle differences between these two types of territories because Eli was adept at distinguishing dialects of Arabic by ear.
Hohenstaufenplatz park, on Kottbusser Damm just north of Hermannplatz, is an extremely popular playground, well-stocked with top-of-the-line equipment such as zip lines and elaborate play structures, and constantly filled with children and families. Its users are nearly one hundred percent Muslim, and mostly Turkish. Nearly all women and girls past kindergarten age wear hijabs or other Muslim head coverings. The park is anchored by a Palestinian food stand, and flanked by a popular Turkish restaurant, whose patrons are overwhelmingly male. (Discordantly, it is also flanked by a classic old movie theater showing American movies and a seedy strip club; this kind of discord is typical of the neighborhood.) Just a couple blocks away, to the west of Hermannplatz, Hasenheide park is filled instead with young white hipsters rollerblading and smoking pot, while to the south, off Hermannstraße, the graffiti becomes more radical, squatted buildings become more common, and punk anarchist spots like Syndikat, a local bar,\textsuperscript{48} and Infoladen, an anarchist outreach center for

\textsuperscript{48} While I was revising this thesis, Syndikat lost its lease after a battle against a multinational property developer who bought their building and served them with an eviction notice. There have been large public demonstrations in support of the bar. As of March, 2019, Syndikat is still open but operating illegally.
the homeless make their home. There are a couple of large Mosques near the plaza, as well as numerous smaller mosques in the back of courtyards, hidden from the street. These mostly conduct services in Turkish, although some advertise Arabic services as well and have Arabic signage. The call to prayer is illegal in Berlin, and so the small mosques are generally visible only to insiders.

There are some cross-over businesses: SilverFuture is a flagship local queer bar that bans all national flags and offers one-Euro drinks for refugees; it attracts hipsters, anarchists, and Syrians. Refugio is a high-end coffee shop, outreach, and information center run by Syrians and designed to bring together the refugee community with the local community, which in this case mostly means the hipsters. Aldimasqui, which I discuss more below, is a giant restaurant run by a Syrian but employing Lebanese and Turkish waitstaff, that goes out of its way to cater to both the long-standing Middle Eastern community and the newer Syrian community. Many predominantly white spaces are marked with pro-refugee, anti-racist messaging, with posters supporting Syria and Palestine, as a way of establishing their political demographic rather than as an actual successful form of space-sharing.49

Despite such cross-over businesses, for the most part the space is micro-segregated. The different groups cross paths and are cross-stitched into the neighborhood, but interactions between members of different groups, while not generally hostile, are also mostly minimal and thin. This microsegregation was on display particularly vividly during the World Cup, when different groups went to different bars and cafés to watch games. There are, of course, no top down rules segregating people into different parts of the space. But is interesting how easy it mostly is to tell at a glance which group’s turf one is on. Posture, clothing, gender and age sorting, and arrangement on the street all combine to mark out territory, along with more explicit markings such as language and what’s for sale.

49 Thanks to Eli Kukla for making this point.
I have identified five distinct subgroups that establish territory around Hermannplatz. But at a coarser-grained level, this spot feels like the meeting place for two very different Berlins, almost two overlapping but independent cities: A leftist Bohemian Berlin, the city of hipsters, anarchists, and punks, marked by graffiti and a vibrant art and activist scene, and a working class Berlin with an ethnic makeup shaped by the history of the city, in which working class Middle Easterners and Germans have built a solid and sedimented neighborhood off to the side of the main bustle of the city. Like Besėl and Ul Qoma, the two cities that occupy the same location but do not interact in China Miéville’s influential novel, *The City and the City*, these two Berlins are more or less at peace with one another but ‘unsee’ each other, occupying space differently and building different kinds of urban niches right on top of one another. All these different groups come together at Hermannplatz itself, which is, as Melville would say, ‘cross-hatched.’ The daily market features falafel stands and Turkish bakeries next to German currywurst and fish stands and artisanal third-wave coffee stands. The Libyan coffee stall at the market is run by immigrants who have lived in Neukölln since the 1980s. The statue of dancing women that has stood at the center of the plaza since 1979 is sprayed with anarchist graffiti. People shout and banter in English, German, Turkish, several dialects of Arabic, French, Spanish, and various other languages—Neukölln is in fact home to speakers of 160 languages. Market stalls blare American, Latinx, Turkish and Arabic pop.

The plaza is used by different groups for different events, sometimes at the same time. Over the course of the summer of 2018, the square was used for a disability-centered pride parade, an anti-AFD rally, several rallies and fundraisers for Syrian refugees, the start of the Turkish pride parade, a rally against Trump and the US border detentions, an arts festival, and much more. On the day of the disability-centered pride parade, the square was actually split in half, with a rally to

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inaugurate the parade at one end, and a simultaneous festival to support Syrian refugee children, with a “no walls” theme, at the other. Each was anchored by a different entrance to the Hermannplatz U-Bahn station, one at each end of the plaza. The two events occupied spaces next to one another with almost no cross-over participation and indeed no apparent awareness of each other’s existence. On another day, I went to find the Turkish pride parade, and got there just a few minutes too late, its rainbow banners and cheerful Turkish pop music fading in the distance as the parade marched up Kottbusser Damm. I found that the parade had been immediately replaced with a ‘Free Syria’ rally, with a dense mass of Syrian flags, posters accusing Assad of murder and reading “Bashar is an Animal,” and a heavy police presence.

Figure 52: Free Syria rally at Hermannplatz, July 2018. Photo by author.

One of the most interesting contests over territory and embodied use of space around Hermannplatz concerns the relationship between the longstanding working class Muslim community and the new Syrian members of the neighborhood. While the hipsters and the anarchists have explicitly embraced the refugees, there are tensions between this new Muslim group and the older, more settled Muslim residents of the neighborhood. The Syrians who have made it to Berlin are often highly educated and socially progressive, and many of them held high-status professional jobs
in Syria before the country was decimated.\textsuperscript{51} There are many out queer Syrians in the area, and many of the women don’t wear any kind of head covering. Many of the older Muslim residents resent the Syrians and their progressive practices, and also see them as getting free handouts from the government, in contrast to their own experience coming in as foreign workers or as refugees under a less generous regime, decades ago. According to one survey, over half of the longstanding Muslim residents think the new refugees have it too easy (Alkousaa 2018). One report comments, “Older Arab Muslim migrants complain the newcomers are ‘too liberal.’ ... Mohammad Altaweel, a Lebanese migrant who has lived in Berlin for four decades and has a publishing house in its Neukoelln district, [comments] “There are many gays and lesbians among the new arrivals. We didn’t have this in our community before. We wouldn’t even hear of this” (Ibid.).

There are Syrian restaurants south of Hermannplatz that are run by refugees who have settled permanently in Berlin. Many of them, including Shaam and Alagami, go out of their way to hire refugees.\textsuperscript{52} In these, it is often difficult to order and pay in a language other than Arabic. Ammar Kassem, a Syrian who arrived as a refugee in 2015 and now is a permanent resident of Berlin, owns the large restaurant Aldamasqui, just south of Hermannplatz. At first, he was threatened by Arab gangs demanding protection money and harassed by his neighbors. A neighbor said, “it was impossible for newcomers to open a business on Sonnenallee without the unofficial approval of older, established migrants” (Alkousaa 2018). Kassem went into business with a Lebanese friend, and now has devoted himself to making Aldamasqui a shared space and meeting point for different local Muslim groups, old and new. Similarly, Mansour Azzam, an older Palestinian immigrant, has made a point of hiring both Syrians and longer-standing Muslim residents at his bodega. Azzam helped found a whatsapp chat group for local business owners, which meets monthly to provide a

\textsuperscript{51} I am not certain why this is, but it makes sense that it would take resources and cultural capital to make it from Syria to Germany, and it also makes sense that more progressive Syrians would choose a city like Berlin.\textsuperscript{52} www.roughguides.com/special-features/how-syrians-are-keeping-their-culture-alive-in-berlin/
forum for resolving conflicts, while avoiding tense in-person confrontations (Ibid.).

On a Saturday night, Aldamasqui is filled with families, and has a festival-like atmosphere and a big open kitchen. The menu is in Turkish and Arabic, despite the Arabic-speaking co-owners. Most women are bare-headed. There is only one table of White people other than ours. A man with a fez winds through the restaurant giving out free little glasses of Arabic coffee. He also takes donations to help refugee families. The space seems to smoothly bring together different local Muslim groups, but it is the exception rather than the rule; it is an apparently successful experiment in renegotiating and merging territories.

This Saturday was also the first evening of “48 Hours Neukölln,” a massive, multi-site arts fair featuring local artists. When we left Aldamasqui, we passed by a quirky hipster cocktail bar and made our way over to Karl Marx Straße, which was dotted with performance artists and street musicians, and several DJ-ed dance parties. Many of the installations had an anti-gentrification, right-to-the-city theme, but the event, while lots of fun, certainly felt like a gentrifying force. The street events were backgrounded by Middle Eastern bodegas and restaurants and sidewalk cafés. None of the usual users of those businesses were partaking in the street parties. There was no noticeable hostility, but it definitely felt as though the street had been taken over and colonized by the hipsters and artists, many of whom wanted to resist spatial colonization. The events didn’t technically displace anyone, but it was as if they were superimposed onto the streetscape. This complex superimposition of different territories was what was most striking, in general, about the Hermannplatz neighborhood.
5.4 “Checkpoint Charlie”

Figure 53: Checkpoint Charlie, leaving the American sector, 1980. Photo courtesy of the Landesarchiv.

Figure 54: The same view of “Checkpoint Charlie,” 2018. Photo by author.

The title of this section is in quotation marks, because the attraction in Berlin known as “Checkpoint Charlie,” located around the original crossing between the two halves of Berlin known by the same name, is not in fact Checkpoint Charlie at all. This is true most immediately (but not
only) because the original checkpoint booth is in a museum in the suburb of Dahlem, while the one the tourists come to see is a replica. I have chosen to explore this site because it is so very un-Berlin. A space that has been repurposed entirely top-down by capitalist prospectors, it sharply contrasts with the other repurposed spaces in Berlin, and with the ethos of the city as a whole.

![Cosplaying tourists and fake guards at “Checkpoint Charlie,” 2018. Photo by author.](image)

Checkpoint Charlie was the busiest and best-known crossing between East and West Berlin, and an entrance point to the American sector. It has been ‘reconstructed’ as an immersive tourist experience. A replica of the checkpoint booth sits close to the original spot, and men dressed up as American crossing guards, with fake guns, spend the day taking photos with tourists who line up for a turn. Tourists who get to the front of the line are offered props for cosplaying, such as hats and toy guns. Within a block of the “checkpoint,” one can find the Mauermuseum (Wall museum), which is a private attraction; a gift shop; an attraction just called “The Berlin Wall,” which offers a panoramic film of the original Wall; the “Black Box,” which displays objects from the Cold War; a bizarre Checkpoint Charlie ‘beach bar,’ which is basically a corner parking lot filled with sand and lounge chairs selling beer and fast food; several giant chain restaurants designed mostly for tour groups; and, around the corner, the “Currywurst Museum,” adorned with a gigantic hot dog,
celebrating Berlin’s most famous ‘native cuisine’ and clearly hoping to draw spill-over tourists.

The only reason anyone goes to “Checkpoint Charlie” is because they are promised an experience of authenticity of place. What is interesting about the site is specifically what happened in that place. Unlike the other sites I have looked at so far, “Checkpoint Charlie” presents itself as preserving and freezing place in time, and not as repurposing it. But the entire way that “Checkpoint Charlie” generates (or attempts to generate) this experience of preserved place is through a series of displacements. I already mentioned that the original checkpoint has been moved to the suburbs, but this is just one of a large series of such displacements. On the wall of the museum hangs the “Last Kremlin Flag,” and underneath a sign announces, “At this place the ‘Western World’ ended,” but in fact the flag is a replica, and the spot is arbitrarily chosen. A block away from the actual border, the “Berlin Wall” attraction screams in giant letters, “THE BERLIN WALL: SEE IT HERE!” and inside you can be ‘immersed’ in a displaced, projected version of the Wall. The Black Box attraction has collected up bric-a-brac from the Cold War and put it all in a single place. Large hunks of the Wall itself have been moved from their original location and put on display in front of the gift shop; a sign below thanks the Nestle Chocolate Company for paying for “transportation” and installation. Smaller pieces of the Wall have been placed as decorations outside businesses. And the very smallest pieces have been placed in little plastic boxes distributed to all the gift shops and souvenir stands, standing in little rows and columns, for sale so that tourists can take home a little piece of authentic place (see Figure 56). The sign marking the departure from the American sector in English and Russian has been moved several feet for ease of photographing (see Figures 53 and 54 above). But even more strikingly, it has been copied thousands of times, onto fridge magnets, mugs, plates, t-shirts, and teddy bears, all designed to be taken home to other cities, to mark this place ‘authentically’ wherever their owner may be (see Figure 57).
The space is thus a fundamental contradiction: The entire business model is to sell people an ‘authentic’ experience of ‘place,’ but the way in which this experience is designed, commodified, and sold is by way of a series of copies and displacements that are neither authentic nor in-place at all. The visual repetition of the sign and of the pieces of the Wall is an eerie and striking visual reminder of just how replicated the experience is, and of the contradiction built into turning an ‘authentic
place’ into a commodity.\footnote{Daniela Sandler also points out that the attraction was a replica and a reenactment from start to finish, which doesn’t even follow the original path of the Wall (Sandler 223).} Sandler comments, “The whole Checkpoint Charlie area, with actors dressed up as border guards and a fake crossing-point station, now stands as the antithetical model against which the Berlin Wall Foundation set its curatorial goals” (Sandler 2016, 224).

“Checkpoint Charlie” is a contradictory space in at least one other sense. One would expect, given the history of the site, for the attraction to be a celebration of the triumph of capitalism over communism. And in a sense, it is, but not in the way one would expect. For the site consistently—and disconcertingly—commodifies communism itself.\footnote{Thanks to Eli Kukla for putting the point this way first.} It turns the display of communism into a capitalist spectacle, and transforms the symbols of communism into sellable products. The various soundbites and images of communist repression are repackaged here as cute images printed on T-shirts and mugs. Vendors sell Soviet flags and army hats and arm bands. Gift shop windows are lined with Gorbachev bobblehead figures.

Unlike the rest of the city, all the stores and restaurants here are happy to take credit cards, foreign currencies, or any other kind of legal tender one can proffer. The entire space is a festival of capitalism. While most of the rest of Berlin pushes back hard against the capitalist commodification of space, “Checkpoint Charlie” is surrounded by massive, bloated versions of multinational chain restaurants like McDonalds and KFC and Starbucks—especially, ironically, on what used to be the Soviet side. This monument to Soviet gatekeeping and oppression has been turned into a commodified space, where the place itself is a money-maker in its own right, and everything is designed to extract maximal capital.

“Checkpoint Charlie” is a completely artificial, micromanaged space. It is designed and orchestrated to move tourists through it according to tightly managed patterns. The space is designed to be \textit{looked at} rather than used; the only participatory moment is the photo op, and for
that, tourists line up in an organized queue, make it to the front, and then adopt the preordained pose between the two fake soldiers, so that they can receive a photo of themselves, also designed to be looked at. There are large, awkward spaces around the site that have no meaning of their own, but exist merely to accommodate the flow of tour buses and crowds. The restaurants are not designed to engage the palate or senses, nor to encourage lingering, but rather to efficiently provide maximally inoffensive food so that people can spend money and get back to looking. Whereas most of Berlin is quite photo-shy, here everyone has their cameras out, documenting their looking with identical still representations of the space. People are not ‘hanging out’ or interacting with the space or with one another, but shuffling through appropriate lines with their gaze on the attractions. There is very little organic movement of any kind.

There are some simulations of organic movement, however. Tour guides with their small groups, operating in a wide variety of languages, draw ‘impromptu’ sketches of the former occupied sectors of Berlin in chalk on the sidewalk, and this is designed to feel like a spontaneous moment, a small temporary occupation and repurposing of the space; but each tour guide draws exactly the same picture, on cue.

The space itself is sanitized. As one can see in Figure 58, here there is no graffiti on the large Altbau walls. No one uses the street for anything other than its contrived use, which in turn is designed to maximize the generation of capital. The space is repurposed in the sense that all this staring and purchasing is not what it used to be for; but no organic new uses that are responsive to the material space and its possibilities have emerged, unlike in the other sites I studied.

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55 This mere looking, and lack of engagement with the space, is not an essential or necessary feature of tourist attractions that have been designed top-down. We will see an interesting contrast later, when I discuss Constitution Hill in Johannesburg.
Figure 58: The “Berlin Wall”, displaced, re-projected, and commodified.

“Checkpoint Charlie” is what theorists such as Michael Sorkin (1992) and Don Mitchell (2003) would call a ‘Disneyfied’ space—a space that is thoroughly orchestrated to move people through it and control their experience in a specific way, while producing an alternative to a real space that still advertises itself as having the veneer of ‘authenticity;’ the different ‘nations’ in the Epcot Center are the paradigmatic examples. Sorkin calls these ‘analogous’ spaces, which substitute for the original and are entirely top-down, while advertising themselves as providing a version of the experience of the original. It takes no special insight to see “Checkpoint Charlie” as “Disneyfied.” Sandler comments more generally that the weird combination of the manufactured, orchestrated space with the language of authenticity “earned it the predictable criticism of being a Disneyfied version of history” (2016, 224). What is interesting, for my purposes, is how much this attraction is at once all about ‘preserving’ and presenting a place while relying entirely on displacement, and also what a sterile and static space it is, in contrast to the other organic living niches in other repurposed spaces in the city.

Most of Berlin’s visible history, I have argued, has been let be without displacement, framing, or preservation. Most historical sites in Berlin are not striving to perform or spectacularize
authenticity. The past is allowed to show itself bottom-up, rather than imposing itself by way of top-down interpretations and framings.56 This is mostly true even of many of Berlin’s official ‘historical attractions.’ The Topography of Terror, for instance, at the site of the SS headquarters, is a much-discussed example. It preserves the past more than does someplace like Tempelhof, but it does so with minimal framing or disruption of the found traces. “Checkpoint Charlie” is jarringly different. It’s top-down framing and series of displacements has in effect scrubbed the landscape of life and made the space unusable. In doing so it has become like a sanitized reflective surface, showing us nothing. It gives us remarkably and ironically no sense of the original place; it is not haunted. This spot was a crucial place in which people’s movement through space was disciplined, controlled, and surveilled. Now people’s movement through it is disciplined and controlled in a quite different way, in service of capital. But this new dance shows us nothing about the old one. This was the least Berlin-like space I found in all of Berlin. Luckily, the rest of the city provides a rich, historically layered living landscape, as we have seen.

56 The stolpersteine, or stepping stones, quite literally show themselves bottom-up! A local book is cleverly called *Stolpersteine in Neukölln: Erinnerungskulture von Unten*, or Stepping Stones in Neukölln: Memory Culture from Below. See Gößwald 2017
Chapter 6: The City of Johannesburg

6.1 Introduction to Johannesburg

I was taking an Uber to Hillbrow, an inner-city neighborhood of Johannesburg, or Jozi, as the residents affectionately call it (and as I often will too). This ride took me past the city’s striking downtown skyline. The morphology of Jozi is three dimensional: As a town built on gold prospecting, mines still burrow under the city, and as a city based on dense verticality, its skyscrapers give it its visual identity. The Central Business District was almost completely abandoned in the late 1980s as apartheid entered its death throes, amidst white flight and foreign investors’ boycotts and fears of unrest, and as a result it was architecturally frozen in time. But ever-entrepreneurial Jozi sold off the tops of the abandoned skyscrapers to advertisers. So the skyline now looks like it belongs to an alternate timeline, with its brutalist silhouette capped by Blade Runner-like neon.

Figure 59: Jozi’s brutalist skyline seen from the southeast, from the top of a rebuilt industrial warehouse in Maboneng Precinct, 2018. Photo by author.
My Uber driver was Mr. Aubauhudzani from Limpopo. He was about thirty and had lived in Soweto since 2008. He was surprised that I wanted a ride to Hillbrow, where White folks basically never go. “Blacks are now the ones with the freedom in this city,” he volunteered:

Whites here have so much fear that they are imprisoned. Only a tiny part of the city is open to them. Not Soweto, not all these other parts of the city. If they want a night out, they can only go to Taboo in Sandton. We can go anywhere. Taboo is where we go if we have some money to burn, and want to listen to boring music, or we can go anywhere we want to. To Soweto for a cheap night out of dancing and good music, or wherever we want. The white people are trapped by their fear. If they can’t afford Taboo, they stay home. We can move to Sandton but they can’t move to our neighborhoods.\footnote{Private conversation, August 20, 2018. Reproduced with the oral permission of Mr. Aubauhudzani.}

Sandton is a wealthy, racially mixed suburb in the far north of Johannesburg. It is where the Johannesburg Stock Exchange relocated to, after the Central Business District was vacated. It is also the wealthiest square mile in Africa (Murray 2011, 115)—a land of gated mansions and fortified enclaves. Taboo is a high-end nightclub, described in online user reviews as “fun if you can afford it,” “glam,” “lux,” and so forth. It is in one of Sandton’s faceless glass fortress buildings with guards in front, looking out over a completely empty street. The clientele in the online pictures are both Black and White in roughly equal measure. Meanwhile, Hillbrow, as we are pulling into it, is teeming with street activity. Hawkers line the streets; people yell at and laugh with one another in multiple languages; groups of people hang out in the doorways of restaurants and ‘spaza’ shops (little tuck shops or bodegas); music booms out of car windows; women with groceries and wares piled high on their heads jaywalk through the tangle of white minibuses that make up the informal taxi network that is the main transportation system for poor Black residents of the city. One hundred percent of the folks visible are Black. Although I have gotten used to this ride, I by now know better than to open the window or take out my phone to take a picture; it took me less than an hour to get my phone stolen right out of my hand on the first day I visited Hillbrow.
Mr. Aubauhudzani’s description of the ironic inversion of the city of Johannesburg captures a deep truth. After decades in which Black people were confined to specific areas, kept in place through physical terrorization and elaborate spatial and legal mechanisms, it is now White people who hide in small enclaves, barricaded in, moving to other parts of the city only in private cars with the windows up, and then only to other guarded enclaves, never using the street.58 Black folks have the run of the city. White people are kept in place, not top-down through legal mechanisms, but bottom-up through their own fear and through multiple self-segregation mechanisms that they have instituted. The fact that much of Jozi, including Soweto and the inner city, is not for White people was made very clear by the universal frank curiosity that greeted my son’s and my presence in these spaces at every turn.

And yet, Mr. Aubauhudzani’s perspective is partial. It is grounded in his experience as a legally documented resident of South Africa, with a decent job that provides steady work and a living wage, living in stable and relatively safe Soweto. Millions of undocumented African diasporic immigrants are living off of the informal economy in the inner city, most of them in buildings hijacked by gangsters, in neighborhoods riddled by the ravages of the viciously dangerous and addictive street drug “whoonga.” These millions do not have enough money or mobility to go out dancing in Soweto. Martin Murray argues that many of the city’s immigrants are in effect spatial prisoners, afraid of the police if they venture out of specific neighborhoods that have been repurposed as landing points (Murray 2011, 168). In these neighborhoods, residents live with the constant fear of displacement by way of the ‘Red Ants’—men, often themselves with precarious residence statuses, hired to clear the illegal buildings by force—as well as with the threat of gang violence and violence from organized crime.59

58 Beall, et al point out that middle class black people also mostly stay off the street and stay in private cars when they need to move through the city (2014, 179).
59 The Red Ants are a bizarre South African organization that bills itself as providing job training and grass
All the official, top-down messaging in Jozi bills the city as a “post-racial” land of equality and opportunity, in which the speakers of South Africa’s eleven official languages live together in harmony. South Africa is proud to be among the world’s first (and still the only African) country to legalize same-sex marriage. The end of apartheid is celebrated everywhere—appropriately—as one of the great human rights triumphs of history. But on the ground, Jozi is a complex cocktail of freedom and division, creative life and danger. Structural inequalities may no longer be enshrined in law, but they are played out at the level of micronegotiations. Here is a vivid example: One typically hears English, Zulu, Xhosa, and various street pidgins such as Is’Fanaglo, Is’fatmtho, or Tsotsi, as one wanders the streets of inner city Jozi, but never Afrikaans. One day my son and I were walking through Fordsburg, a mostly Muslim inner-city neighborhood, with a White guide who was giving us a food tour. She had spent a great deal of time telling us how comfortable she felt in the inner city, how many friends she had there, and how sorry she felt for Whites who enclaved themselves in the suburbs. As we ate food we had bought from a street vendor and chatted, a ‘colored’ (mixed race) man came and asked us for money. She shooed him away. He tried again and she asked him not to interrupt. When he followed us a few steps and tried again, she turned on him and barked a rebuke in Afrikaans. He scurried away immediately.

Language, power, and spatial territory are inextricably tied together in Jozi. As one moves through the city, one can hear multiple languages and strategic shifts between them. Bantu languages and creoles are used among Black locals in Jozi to create intimacy and comfort. Almost everyone speaks English, and South African Blacks older than about twenty-five went through the Bantu school system and presumably speak Afrikaans as well. But Bantu languages are used to establish

roots community services through farming, food production, and “security, relocation, and eviction services.” They set themselves up in opposition to “multi-national corporations” as a locally-based organization with community roots. In fact they are known for violence and murder, and are widely feared. (See for instance https://red-ants.co.za/ and https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-11-30-red-ants-probed-for-murder/)
and claim territory. English is a more formal, businesslike language of common currency; it comes across as neutral and transactional. Our guide’s blast of Afrikaans burst into the ecological balance of the moment; it functioned as a raw exercise of disruptive power. My son picked up a bit of Zulu within a few days of our arrival. When he would speak it with locals, they would burst into laughter from delight and confusion. One old man told him with emotion that White people lived their whole life in the city amidst people speaking Bantu languages, and managed not to learn or use a single word of them.

Figure 60: Language distribution in Johannesburg. Open source image based on 2011 Statistics South Africa data.

The graphic in Figure 60 shows the territorializing of language in Jozi. Most interesting to me is how much of the city, including the middle, is marked as having no dominant language. It is in these areas in particular that language is used as currency for establishing belonging, relationship, and distance. There are hierarchies of language as well. For instance, Tsonga and Venda are the two Bantu languages that least inter-comprehensible with the others, and they are looked down up. Tsonga in particular is stigmatized by its association with Zimbabwe and Mozambique immigrants.60

In the center of the city, the staking and formation of territory through micronegotiations

60 Multiple private conversations with Xhosa speakers.
and tinkering is sharp, but also nuanced and hard to capture. Blocks go from totally cheerful and safe to terrifying in an instant, based in large part on how people stand, walk, group together, and make or avoid eye contact. The minutia of clothing choices, what car someone is driving, what music they are playing on their car stereo, what they are carrying, how they are carrying it, how fast they are walking, whether they are sitting or standing, whether their gaze is down, up, or out, what language are they speaking, and to whom - all these things are elaborate spatial claims and cues. Are cell phones visible or hidden? Are groceries carried on the head or under the arm? Are people on the street walking with purpose or standing around? Are the streets full of informal taxi minibuses or private cars? All of these are clues as to who belongs on a street and who doesn’t, and they code who is at risk and who is safe. Many of these cues I picked up on quickly. I know that I was surrounded by others without my being able to detect them. For instance, it is apparently immediately clear to residents from the cut of women’s jeans who is from the townships and who is from stylish inner suburban neighborhoods such as Melville (Livermon 2009).

In no place that I have ever seen are the territorial ‘seams’ of a city more abrupt and stark than they are in Jozi. Murray observes, “To people not accustomed to negotiating the spaces of Johannesburg, the boundaries between one commercial or residential cluster and another may seem to be only arbitrary lines on a street map. But for residents, business owners, real estate developers, and local officials, these demarcations represent both cultural and territorial identities” (2011, 214). Moreover, the boundaries between areas, when they are not directly enforced by gates and walls and buzzers, are routinely marked by the presence of ubiquitous private yellow-jacketed guards. As far as I could tell, these guards do little guarding, but serve as effective visual markers of boundaries and transitions. Hauntingly, they all carry the same distinctive nightsticks that were used to beat prisoners in the notorious Section 4 prison in the middle of the city, through which passbook violators and

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61 On the significance of clothing, cars, and music in the city, see for instance Nuttall 2009.
political dissenters passed in huge numbers under apartheid.

6.2 A Brief Spatial History of Johannesburg

As in the case of Berlin in Chapter 4, my goal here is not to give a comprehensive or original history of Johannesburg, but rather to focus selectively on some key historical facts about the city viewed spatially, in order to frame my analysis of its current repurposed form.

Like Berlin, Johannesburg was officially divided up in 1948, and officially reunited in the early 1990s. And also as in the case of Berlin, the actual spatial story of the city is much more complex than one of neat division followed by neat reunification.

Apartheid was a complex form of spatial control that involved much more than enforced segregation; the apartheid regime controlled not only who could be where, but how different groups moved through space; how spaces could be used by different people; who was under surveillance and by what means; what languages people could speak where and to whom; who could own land and businesses; and much more. The South African Land Act of 1913 was the first official move in radically displacing and dispossessing the indigenous Black population, allotting 92% of the land to White colonizers and 8% to “Africans.” Nearly coincident was the 1912 formation of the African National Congress (ANC), which was officially viewed as a terrorist organization for most of the twentieth century. The Urban Areas Act of 1923 specifically targeted urban space, throwing Black people out of the cities and relocating them to townships that were specifically built to be far from the city and from one another, while being open to surveillance. The purported justification for displacing Black urban residents was that they were supposedly spreading ‘disease’ via miscegenation, and needed to be quarantined for ‘health reasons.’

During the Second World War, South Africa still officially belonged to Britain, and so by

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62 My main source for the basic facts about the history of apartheid is the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, corroborated by local guides.
default it fought against the Nazis. However, a substantial portion of the Afrikaans population supported the racial policies of the Nazis. They formed multiple independent parties and groups that were sympathetic with the Nazis, the most influential of which was the South African Gentile National Socialist Movement, whose members were known as “Greyshirts.” Meanwhile, the much more mainstream Nationalist party rose in visibility during and just after the war. In a shocking surprise victory, the party took control of the country after the 1948 election, despite failing to win a majority of the White vote. The new president, D. F. Malan, ran on a platform of racial separation and the protection and promotion of White South Africans, and soon after his election, the official apartheid regime was instituted. This included requiring passbooks for Black and Colored residents who needed to enter White areas to work, and a host of elaborate laws for the top-down management of spatial movements, divisions, and surveillance. Soon after the institution of apartheid, in 1950, came the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, and the Immorality Act, which respectively codified the system of racial classifications, divided people up by neighborhood, and banned interracial relationships. Shortly after that came the Bantu Education Act, which was specifically designed as a tool to keep Blacks in their assigned social place by denying them an education in their native languages. It forced them to be educated in Afrikaans, and implemented a curriculum specifically designed to ensure obedience and low achievement among Blacks.

The apartheid regime was enforced much more strictly and violently after the Sharpville Massacre of 1960, in which police opened fire on a crowd of protestors, killing almost 70 and injuring hundreds more. The British Commonwealth finally expelled South Africa in 1961, and it became the independent Republic of South Africa, leaving it free to enforce apartheid without oversight or external checks.63 Apartheid was driven by racial fear, colonialist aspirations, and white

63 The history in this paragraph is common knowledge, but a good synthetic source is the Apartheid Museum
supremacy, but it was not good for business. The city of Johannesburg, which was the financial heart of the country, had negative economic growth from at least 1970 up to the end of the regime in 1991 (Beall, et al. 2014, 33). In the wake of the Soweto Uprising, international attention turned to the apartheid regime, and the country faced increasing international pressure, including in the form of economic boycotts. Its imprisonment of political leaders such as Mandela also brought negative international attention. The already economically costly regime began to cave, and the Central Business District began to empty out as international companies left. By the late 1980s it was becoming clear that apartheid was likely unsustainable, and White residents and businesses began to vacate the city in anticipation of its collapse. Buildings went dark.64

Throughout apartheid, Jozi was in many ways a center of intellectual and political resistance within South Africa. Much of the political organizing against apartheid took place in the all-Black townships like Soweto, which was home of the Mandelas, Desmond Tutu, and others. The Congress of the People was held in Soweto, and the Freedom Charter was signed there in 1955. It was also, of course, the site of the Soweto Uprising of 1976. In the city of Johannesburg itself, many White residents, including many Jews, actively fought against apartheid and organized with Black and Colored fellow activists, often flouting miscegenation laws and forging connections with the communist party. The University of Witwatersrand served as a hotbed of liberal activism, as did the nearby area of Braamfontein. The adjoining inner-city neighborhoods of Hillbrow, Berea, and especially Yeoville turned into Bohemian hotspots for leftist political culture, arts, and music; during the 1970s and 1980s, these areas were home to legendary music venues, lively cafés, and thriving hipster and activist culture. In these three neighborhoods, mixed-race families brazenly flouted both

64 I learned the details of the history of the grey zone mostly from guides and materials at the nonprofit organization, Dlala Nje, of which more below. Some of this history is also documented in the Apartheid Museum and in the Section 4 and Women’s Gaol exhibits at Constitution Hill.
the Group Areas Act and the Immorality Act. As apartheid began to crumble both economically and socially, these neighborhoods stood out as impossible to control. The government punished them by withdrawing all police presence and city services, thereby creating a “Grey Zone” and leaving the region to its own devices.

The apartheid regime was officially scheduled for termination in 1990 under the presidency of F. W. De Klerk, who also released Mandela that year. It took until 1994 for South Africa to hold racially inclusive elections that installed Mandela as president and the ANC as the ruling party, and to establish a new post-apartheid constitution. As the Berlin Wall was being torn down and Russia was withdrawing from East Germany, South Africa went through its most violent phase yet: More South Africans died from political violence between 1990 and 1994 than in all of 1948-90.65

During this period, White flight from the city intensified. In 1991, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange listed 129 firms headquartered in the Central Business District, and by 2000, there were only 28, of which only 21 were among the original group. In 2000, the stock exchange itself left the Central Business District and relocated to the newly built suburb of Sandton, which was designed to be a secure refuge from the increasingly unstable city center (Murray 2011, 102). Historically, one of the main ways in which apartheid was used as a tool of spatial control and displacement was by preventing Black people from owning businesses and property. This meant that when Whites and their businesses drained out of the Central Business District, this was not just a matter of the wealthier class fleeing, as happened in many American cities. Rather, the only people who could own property and businesses were the ones fleeing. So there was literally nothing left behind upon which to base an economic rebirth. Moreover, the Bantu education system had been successfully designed to prevent most Blacks from having the skillset and resources to leap in and rebuild the city with new businesses.

65 Apartheid Museum.
All these factors combined to turn the Central Business District a ghost town of sorts. Most
dramatic, perhaps, was the closing and darkening of the 50-story brutalist Carlton Center, the tallest
building in all of Africa, built in the 1970s to be a glitzy five-star hotel, office tower, and destination
mall and recreation center. At its pinnacle, it contained an ice rink and a boxing ring. Most of its
services closed in the early 1990s, and it shut down completely in 1998. It has now been reopened in
a piecemeal way, with a much more modest mall on the first few floors and many floors still
barricaded off and dark. The top of the Carlton Center was designed to be an observation deck for
tourists. The deck has now reopened, but whether by design or neglect, the space has been
preserved just as it was when it was abandoned. The ripped-out skeletal remains of a swanky café
and gift shop are still visible, along with old apartheid-era faded photographs on the walls, with
yellowing typed captions about the lives of “Africans” and “Pilgrims.”

Figure 61: The abandoned gift shop on the observation deck on the top floor of the Carlton Center,
2018. Photo by author.

One of Nelson Mandela’s first moves as president was to radically open the borders of
South Africa, led by vision of the country serving as a refuge for all people of Africa. Millions of
immigrants, mostly from the rest of Africa, came to Johannesburg and filled the inner-city
neighborhoods that had been vacated by white flight. The Grey Zone, abandoned by police and the city since the late 1980s, unsurprisingly became incredibly dangerous and chaotic. “Building hijackers,” took over abandoned buildings without fear of reprisal, and new immigrants, who often did not have the money or the social capital to find other housing, were lured into the hijacked buildings in huge numbers, where they were forced to give money and provide services to their self-installed gangster landlords. These Grey Zone neighborhoods changed radically in their demographics, becoming densely populated, poor, dangerous, and Pan-African, while the nearby Central Business District remained empty.

Murray (2011, 102) argues that the built environment of the inner city was not equipped to adapt to the “changing functions” of the city, with far too much office and retail space to use, and not nearly enough maintained, legal, livable residential space. By the late 1990s, the city center was suffering a catastrophic economic and real estate crash. Murray describes the city of Jozi being “turned inside out” as apartheid ended, with the formerly wealthy white core of the city filling with poor black immigrants and former township residents, while wealthy whites relocated themselves to far-flung suburbs often built right next to or on top of townships; the relocation of the stock exchange to Sandton is the signal moment of this inversion (Ibid., 87ff).

Given the economic woes of Johannesburg and end-of-apartheid South Africa, it is no surprise that the Mandela administration brought with it a radically pro-capitalist and pro-business agenda. But there were deeper ideological reasons for this approach as well. Denying Black South Africans the right to own businesses and to purchase property had been a cornerstone of apartheid, so it made sense that giving people maximal access to these rights would be correspondingly understood as a cornerstone of liberation. Jozi, the financial center of South Africa, thus became a radically business-friendly space of nearly unfettered capitalism. There are many traditional banks and other large corporations headquartered in Jozi. But so much of the hypercapitalist
entrepreneurship of the city is lived out at the level of individual vendors, artists, small business owners, and odd service providers. By 1995, a year into the Mandela administration, inner city Johannesburg had 3000-4000 informal street vendors, compared to 855 formal retail outlets (Murray 2011, 103).

Over the course of the 2000s, Johannesburg continued to experience enormous immigration, and as the inner city and townships filled, tensions between various ethnic groups rose — tensions explore in the allegorical Jozi-based science fiction film, *District 9*, for instance. On May 11, 2008, in Alexandra—a crushingly poor Township ironically crushed right up against Sandton, from which it is divided by a highway—riots broke out, in which native Black South Africans attacked other African migrants from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Malawi. The rioting spread, and turned into the city-wide “Xenophobic Riots” of 2008. The Grey Zone was especially hard-hit, and squats and shelters were brutally raided. While racial schisms have shifted since apartheid, the 2008 riots gave the lie to any myth of a ‘post-racial’ Johannesburg freed from violent prejudice.

6.3 The Current Living Landscape of Johannesburg

Jozi is an endlessly complex metropolis. Statistics South Africa lists it as having 4.5 residents in the city proper, and the estimates of the greater area at up to 11 million, but in fact it has so many undocumented immigrants and residents with informal living arrangements that the population is hard to estimate. The wealthiest city in Africa on any respectable measure, unemployment sits at 25% for documented residents. 31.5% of economically active young people (15-35) are unemployed, and almost 17% of households have no income. Only 64.7% of its residents have running water, and many still live without electricity or plumbing.

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66 For instance see [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7396868.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7396868.stm) and [https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/20/world/africa/20safrica.htm](https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/20/world/africa/20safrica.htm)
67 For instance see [https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-10-richest-african-cities.html](https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-10-richest-african-cities.html)
migration in South Africa, with 13% of its residents born outside of the country.\textsuperscript{69}

It is a city filled with creative energy that bubbles up from below—a center for street art and fashion, youth culture, local music, and political activism. People in Jozi dress to be seen, perhaps especially the men. Clothing is sharp and typically blends African colors and themes with American styles. Gender-bending fashion elements are common. The city is “connected”: Businesses aimed at youth, including in poor neighborhoods, typically have developed social media presences; even individuals trying to make ends meet by selling their art or music or fashion on the street will typically have Instagram feeds and the like. Jozi is organized around its distinctive youth culture, known as “Y Culture,” and grounded in the iconic radio station YFM, which has long featured cutting-edge music and political and cultural discussion aimed at city youth. YFM has a spin-off fashion line, Loxion Kultcha,\textsuperscript{70} and it runs a magazine and sponsors events. YFM is committed to at least 80% of its capital being black owned, having at least 50% female staff, and playing at least half South African music. It is the home of Kwaito, the homegrown genre mixing hip hop with traditional South African elements.\textsuperscript{71}

The spatial economics of Jozi form a kind of a donut: The inner city provides jobs and services for the outer townships, which are themselves mostly quite poor and economically underserved. Residents of the middle-class suburbs in between the center of the city and the townships make very little use of the city center. Apartheid ended well over two decades ago, but the large townships like Soweto and Alexandria are still overwhelmingly black, and the wealthy suburbs remain dominantly White, although there are also plenty of middle-class Black residents in these suburbs now. The most radical racial shift is in the center of the city, which used to be reserved almost exclusively for Whites (except for a few hostel enclaves like Jeppestown), and is now

\textsuperscript{69}https://africacheck.org/factsheets/geography-migration/
\textsuperscript{70}Designed to sound like Location Culture, and hence explicitly tied to a Jozi-based sense of place.
\textsuperscript{71}For discussion of the history of YFM and its role in Jozi culture and politics, see Nuttall 2014.
overwhelmingly black. The city is about 75% Black, and the inner city is nearly entirely Black, except for a handful of neighborhoods like Fordsburg, which is a Muslim and Indian enclave (see Figure 62). An interesting feature of the adult Black inner-city population is that virtually none of them grew up in the city. Even those from the area, if they are over twenty-five, grew up of necessity in the Townships, and only moved to the center of the city after the end of apartheid. So almost the entire center city population consists of new residents who arrived after 1994.

Figure 62: Johannesburg population density by race. Red dots indicate black residents, blue dots are whites, yellow dots are “Indians,” and green dots are “colored” residents, as of the 2011 census. Map from https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/map-johannesburg-population-density-race.

Before moving onto my explorations of my specific research sites, I here identify a number of dimensions along which the city of Johannesburg is vividly distinctive in its spatial form and its use of space.

6.3.1 Spatial Secession: Enclaves, Divisions, and Bottom-Up Segregation

While Jozi has ceased to be a legally segregated space, it has turned into a radically divided and segregated space of a different sort. The divisions now emerge bottom-up, driven by fear; tensions between different racial, ethnic, and economic groups; and perhaps above all capitalism, which caters to this fear and commodifies it. Unlike Berlin, Johannesburg has not rejected
segregation, surveillance, and division as tools of city design, but instead just the idea that they should be imposed by the government. The reigning ideology is that government-imposed divisions of space are intolerable, but those driven by personal ‘preferences’ and desires for ‘safety’ are acceptable expressions of individual freedom.\textsuperscript{72} Apartheid was imposed top-down, but the enclaving in current Jozi is built bottom-up, through a combination of people’s self-segregation choices and developers’ eagerness to commodify, amplify, and capitalize on these desires to self-segregate.

Enclosed, securitized living and entertainment spaces are marketed as both safe and desirable in virtue of their aesthetics of exclusivity. According to a 2002 survey, “Two of the three metropolitan municipalities in Gauteng [Province] had the highest numbers of enclosed neighborhoods [in South Africa], … viz., Tshwane with 35 and Johannesburg with roughly 300” (Landman 2006, 6). Beall, et al comment, “Voluntary self-exclusion may be undermining efforts by the city’s new progressive planners to challenge the apartheid legacy of socio-spatial segregation” (2014, 176).\textsuperscript{73}

Sonia Hirt argues in detail that post-Socialist cities, in the wake of regime change, are prone to an explosion of what she calls \textit{spatial secession}, “the willful act of disjoining, disassociating, or carving space for oneself from the urban commons” (Hirt 2012, 49). She examines a series of material mechanisms of spatial secession, including spatial seizure (the appropriation and commodification of public space), spatial seclusion (the dispersion of cities and separation from city space), spatial exclusion (making space inaccessible through price, security checks, and so forth), and spatial enclosure (the literal barricading off of space through walls and gates, among others (Ibid, 49-52 and throughout). Johannesburg underwent extreme spatial secession in many of these forms in the wake of apartheid. One of the most visible is spatial enclosure: Johannesburg is a city of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{72} Almost every scholarly work on post-apartheid Johannesburg makes this point, but see in particular Murray 2011, Landman 2006, and Beall et al 2014.
  \item \textsuperscript{73} In Johannesburg, 80\% of the residents of a community have to vote for gating in order for it to become enclosed. According to Landsman, pressure and coercive tactics are often imposed by neighbors on dissenters (2006, 10).
\end{itemize}
walls, gates, and barriers. These are no longer imposed by the government but rather ‘chosen’ by individuals and provided by the market. Johannesburg is not a post-Socialist city, of course. Unlike Hirt, I don’t think that one needs the collapse of a socialist order per se in order to produce rapid spatial secession; the phenomenon she identifies actually tracks a set of conditions in a repurposed city that often but not always co-travel with the end of socialism. When people live in a political order that relies heavily on surveillance and top-down division as tools of social engineering, the fall of this order will tend to produce an explosion of spatial secession. Trained up on the idea that surveillance and spatial division and control are the norm, people take this process into their own hands and individualize it and marketize it, once it stops being imposed on them from above. This is likely especially so when the end of an order comes with general chaos, distrust of one’s fellow citizens, and an unchecked capitalist market. In this sense, Johannesburg functions more like a classic ‘post-Socialist’ city than Berlin does, which is perhaps not surprising since Berlin rebelled as much against the constraints of capitalist West Berlin as against those of East Berlin.

Jozi is chopped up into gated communities, walled-off homes rimmed by barbed wire, fortress-style building complexes, and locked-down campuses. Even progressive, relatively open neighborhoods feature rows of barbed-wire-topped high walls. It is disorienting at first to walk down residential streets with no visual access to houses or buildings. Private guards police entrances to homes, businesses, and small neighborhoods marketed as ‘secure’ and separate from the rest of the city. Many gated and guarded complexes strive to be total environments, providing their users with stores, recreational activities, and business services, so no one has to leave.74 The city’s segregationist impulses have given rise to a three-dimensional network of overpasses, underpasses, bypasses, controlled elevators, and bridges that let the middle classes float and flow above the streets without making contact with them.

74 This point is made routinely and is easy to observe, but discussed in depth in Murray 2011.
This division, enclaving, and enclosure is driven by private developers who grab land where it is available, rather than by urban planners. Predictably, therefore, many streets and pieces of urban space are carved up haphazardly, becoming experientially irrational and hard to resolve as living places. Many streets are in the shadow of overpasses, or they are cut off from anything resembling ‘eyes on the street’ because they pass between or around gates and fortresses. These leftover areas are often chaotic and dangerous, or simply dead - although as we will see in detail, there are still plenty of parts of Jozi that are full of street life and that form vibrant ecologies. Karina Landman points out that all of these haphazard walls and gates and fences thrown into the city with little planning also seriously impede urban mobility: “These barriers have a major impact on urban traffic and movement patterns, especially where there is a large concentration of enclosed neighborhoods in a sub-metropolitan area. Vehicles are displaced and forced to make use of only the main arterials (that is, the through-routes), which increases traffic congestion and travelling time. Pedestrians and cyclists also have to negotiate these busy arterials, since the lower order streets are closed. This situation does not only increase the vulnerability, but also levels of discomfort and travelling time as they often have to use much longer routes due to road closures” (2006, 6). Thus the enclaves do not only restrict movement by keeping people out, but also by disrupting the city’s larger organization and flow.

The parts of Jozi that are walled off, literally or via guards, are inward-facing and enclosed, leaving no street life behind, and preventing any easy flow of motion from inside to outside or back. Murray points out that the many self-enclosed pedestrian systems that run through the city - overpasses, skywalks, tunnels - help to remove people from the street, and in doing so transform it, killing its vitality. These ‘tubes for the middle class’ interrupt and shut out the “unrestrained vitality of urban street life” and prevent the mingling of different groups, or spontaneous encounters. They “sanitize interactive space… channeling pedestrian movement and compartmentalizing the
respectable classes from the dangerous underclasses” (Murray 2011, 218). It is no surprise that the ‘leftover’ spaces end up unplanned, unwatched, and with little organic character. In turn they will become more dangerous, which will accordingly heighten the perceived need for segregated and enclosed spaces and passages, so a positive feedback loop is to be expected.

The parts of the city that have not been chopped up in these ways are quite the opposite; they lend themselves to an organic flow of street life, and fluid movement between indoor and outdoor space. The small braai shops (barbeque joints) and spaza shops that line the streets are open-fronted, and proprietors and customers hang out on the stoop. Street hawkers line the sidewalks. Squatter camps and shanty neighborhoods draw no sharp distinction between inner and outer space. Space in these area is porous and dynamic. In the enclaved areas, spontaneous uses of space are almost impossible and unexpected interactions with random strangers are rare and tightly controlled. In the other areas, the use of space is constantly improvisational, and bumping up against other people, literally and figuratively, is impossible to avoid.

It's important to note that the self-segregation and territorial division of the city is by no means just a matter of wealthy people (of any race) barricading themselves off from poor people (usually Black), although this is the most discussed and materially abrupt form of segregation. As the 2008 riots showed, and as is clear from moving about the city, there is substantial segregation among different immigrant and ethnic groups. For instance, Zulu enclaves such as Jeppesotown and parts of Soweto are fairly insular. Some groups, like Nigerians in particular, are the target of a great deal of ethnic stereotyping and fear, and are unwelcome in various spaces. While I was in the city, people spontaneously told me that Nigerians were overwhelmingly responsible for crime, theft, street drugs, pimping, and any number of other social ills, and that they were generally untrustworthy. Different groups are sorted into different sectors of the economy: Ethiopians own

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75 These stereotypes also show up in the documentary, Unhinged (2010) as well as at Prabhala 2014, 311.
(or at least are perceived to own) the spaza shops, for instance. Those who speak Tsonga are seen as less educated and sophisticated, according to several locals. The inner-city neighborhood of Yeoville brags about being home to people of every African ethnicity, but this cultivated micro-diversity is rare. One of the central pillars of apartheid was keeping different ethnic groups physically separated from one another, sowing conflict and competition rather than solidarity by spatial means. One cannot help but speculate that current ethnic self-segregation and conflict is at least to some extent a further legacy of apartheid.

6.3.2 Street Danger as an Aesthetic and as an Identity

Johannesburg is notoriously dangerous and crime-ridden, and the city and its residents have incorporated living in a dangerous space deeply into their identity. Once can buy souvenir water jugs that say, “Drink Johannesburg Water. It’s the safest thing you can do in this city?” Multiple articles refer to Johannesburg as the ‘world’s most dangerous city’ or the ‘murder capital of the world,’ although interestingly I could not find any plausible statistics to back up either claim. Whatever the exact statistics, managing danger on the streets is a way of life in Jozi. As I mentioned, private guards are omnipresent. People walk and bike very little, and it is taken as a given that walking after dark is a terrible idea. Car windows are kept rolled up. In many parts of the city, if you take your phone out to check directions or take a photo, someone will inevitably warn you to put it away. Jozi residents are manifestly proud of their skills at managing danger, and their ability to take it in stride. When friends of mine were robbed at gunpoint inside their car as they came to pick us up at our apartment, a passing taxi driver laughed at them and shook his head, and said “Why didn’t you just hit the gas?” This culture of danger and danger management of course goes hand in hand and the terrain of enclaves, gates, walls and enclaves I described above. But the negotiation and even the aesthetic of street danger is complementary to but distinct from its avoidance via enclaving.

76 The documentary Unhinged (2010) focuses centrally on this culture of danger in the city.
At many points during my stay in Jozi, Black locals commented approvingly on my ability to ‘handle’ danger, and my willingness to use the streets; this tolerance was often attributed to my being American. (I am really more Canadian, but I rarely corrected anyone.) White South Africans are seen as sharing with Europeans a general inability to manage danger, whereas Americans of any race are seen as sharing with non-White South Africans a general ability to take danger in stride. The interesting point, for my purposes, is less that Jozi is a high-crime city, and more that an aesthetics and ethos of danger and danger-management skills helps shape Johannesburg’s place identity, and residents’ movements within the city and uses of city spaces.

6.3.3 Spatial Secession: Security and Surveillance Culture

Unsurprisingly, fitting in neatly with both the spatial practices of enclaving and segregation and the city’s embracing of an identity as a dangerous space, Johannesburg also practices spatial secession in the form of widespread surveillance and multiple practices of securitization. Middle class buildings have buzzers and guards. Fingerprint identification is a standardized gatekeeping tool; I needed to use my fingerprint to get into my gym and onto the University of Johannesburg campus, for instance. Security cameras are omnipresent in parking lots, apartment buildings, restaurants, malls, and streets. Cheerful signs warn/reassure folks of the presence of security cameras, and they are embraced as benevolent signs of safety rather than resented (see Figure 63). This all took some adjustment, coming from Berlin; entering the city of Johannesburg can feel like entering a universal space of surveillance, visibility, and tracking. This surveillance culture has a long history; right now it is cast as a response to street crime, but it was official policy under apartheid, when the motions of non-White people were systematically tracked. Instead of rejecting this history as Berlin did, Johannesburg has repurposed it, embracing surveillance and security culture with a vengeance, including its aesthetic.
Murray suggests that often, the “security aesthetic” in Jozi is more about the look and trappings of security and surveillance than it is about actual safety or actual effective control over people’s motion (2011, 289). It is in fact unclear how all the surveillance in Jozi is supposed to ensure safety. The apartment building in which I stayed had a guard who had to buzz me in and out, but he did so without question; as far as I can tell, the only effect of the system was that I was stranded waiting to get in or out sometimes if he had stepped away from his post or was busy. The gym required my fingerprints for entry, but it’s not like they ran a criminal background check; all the print check did was ensure that I was the same person that had originally provided them. These security and surveillance measures do end up recreating demographic prejudices, whether or not these track danger. For instance, Landman writes,

One of the people employed with security who prepared job descriptions of the security guards explained their role: They basically know who they should keep in and who they should keep out. They know who looks suspicious, e.g. any three males in a car, any two or three males. They will actually stop at the gate and go through a questioning process. Any family situation, irrespective of colour, they will never question. Any single person especially a female they will never question, even if that person is a stranger. (Landman 2006, 9)

Whether or not all this security and surveillance does safety work, it certainly does territorial work. It
sorts who belongs where, and who faces barriers to entry. At the same time, large swaths of the city are left out of this surveillance culture. The chopped-up city leaves behind invisible spaces. The Grey Zone, abandoned in the 1980s, remains off of the radar of Jozi’s mainstream security culture. I discuss its alternative culture of bottom-up surveillance and security in a later section.

6.3.4 Hypercapitalism and the Marketization of Space

Jozi is a hypercapitalist space—a space of constant exchange and nearly universal commodification, in which everyone is constantly trying to ‘hustle,’ as locals like to put it. The city was built on gold prospecting—that is, on the game of finding things in the ground and turning them into commodities. Its roots as a prospecting town are strong, both in its explicit self-description and in the culture on the ground. In direct contrast to Berlin, language and imagery glorifying entrepreneurship, and hypercapitalist buzzwords such as ‘development,’ ‘creativity,’ and ‘innovation,’ festoon buildings and promotional materials all over the city. Everything in Jozi is for sale, and everyone is trying to make a sale. Every found item can be turned into something to resell. You can buy watts of electricity and cell phone minutes in little bundles at the spaza shops, or illegally off the street. Cell phones are nabbed constantly but you can also always buy a stolen one on any corner. People approach you constantly to make a pitch for what they can offer you: the CD they cut, their drawings, the clothing they designed. One guy asked us for a ‘capital investment’ of a few Rands, so that he could buy socks off the street in Hillbrow and re-sell them on the street for a profit in much ritzier Maboneng. Large national and multinational corporations pulled out of the city at the end of apartheid, but the culture that replaced them was one of unfettered bottom-up capitalism enacted through individual transactions.

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77 This is, for instance, a running theme in the documentary “Unhinged,” in which the narrator frames the introduction to the city by saying, “I think Johannesburg still works on the same kind of prospecting mentality that started it.”

78 Unhinged (2010) explores this culture of unfettered street selling and street trade, which leaves no object uncommodified, as a distinctive Johannesburg phenomenon.
Virtually all services are privatized and localized. There is no service that money can’t buy and nothing comes for free. Entire neighborhoods are privately owned. Private security guards do most of the policing. Garbage and recycling are collected by guys on wheeled rafts who zoom around the city and trade the recycling for cash. When you park your car, you hire one of the omnipresent security guards or even just someone who is just hanging around on the street to watch over it for the evening, so it doesn’t get stolen. When you need transportation, you use a series of hand signals to flag one of the thousands of private minibuses that cruise the streets, or if you have more money you call an Uber. Gangsters offer housing and protection for money. Neighborhoods depend on “City Improvement Districts” financed by property owners for enhanced security and basic infrastructure. The main historical archive I used was a private, for-profit enterprise.

From an aesthetic point of view, visible marks of the constant ‘hustle’ and the marketization of space cover the city. The city is plastered from top to bottom, on every wall and telephone post and newspaper box, with signs for psychics, cheap abortions, penis extensions, offers to find lost and errant lovers, and the like. The sides of homes are sold off to advertisers who cover them with painted murals, while the tops of buildings are sold to larger companies who light them up with electric logos. The streets are lined with vendors. Street artists incorporate product slogans and images into their art in exchange for money or art space.

A major component of apartheid was the radical restriction of property and business ownership among non-Whites, who were wage laborers of necessity. Unlike in East Berlin, where socialism was not obviously demographically stratified, in apartheid Johannesburg, being shut out of capitalist ownership was a direct tool of racist oppression. Hence the promotion of universal access to capital and business opportunities makes enormous sense as an ANC strategy. The radical neoliberalism of the ANC is one of the primary complaints of the youth-based, far-left competitor

79 http://www.cidforum.co.za/content/about-detail Accessed November 20, 2018
party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), but they a relatively marginal cultural and political force compared to the hegemonic ANC. Furthermore, under apartheid, many non-White communities developed elaborate informal economies, and people became skilled at creating off-the-grid opportunities. This was both a matter of economic need in dire conditions, and an important form of political resistance: It allowed communities such as Soweto to develop a measure of independence from the White city of Johannesburg, and its strict spatial control and low wages. Arguably, the distinction between the formal and informal economy isn’t a particularly stable one in the city, with its culture of individual entrepreneurship and minimal regulation.\(^{80}\) Self-employment and the bottom-up creation of commodities and markets remains a huge value in Jozi, and an integral part of the culture.

The bottom-up enclaving and segregation I discussed above and the hypercapitalism I am discussing here are fundamentally related. As Murray puts it, “As a general rule, city building in Johannesburg has been left to the competitive anarchy of unfettered market forces” (2011, 9). This is what has allowed the city to be chopped so haphazardly into pieces. Murray also points out that allowing ‘the market’ to shape and proliferate the divisions in the city also enables the city to maintain its myth of having overcome race hierarchies; it can interpret its many divisions as just expressions of individual free choices, rather than as imposed racism (Ibid 307).

6.3.5 Material Form, Motion, Mobility

The material form of Jozi is still deeply scarred by apartheid. The city is huge and sprawling by design: it was no accident that the townships were located far from the city, and that travel between them was difficult. The city is surrounded by giant mountains of gold mine debris that were intentionally built up in order to divide the townships from the city. Part of their purpose was to route workers coming into the city from the townships through specific paths and checkpoints.

\(^{80}\) This case is made, for instance, in Fobosi 2013.
The largest of these artificial mountains, which divides Soweto from central Johannesburg, is known by locals as “Soweto’s Berlin Wall.”

The sprawling material form of the city turns transportation and mobility into serious challenges. Residents of the townships who commute into the city spend up to 40% of their income on transportation (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004). The public transportation system is minimal. Tellingly, the relatively new Gauteng Metrorail system does a good job of connecting the business center of Sandton with the government center of Pretoria, but it is basically useless to those living and working inside Jozi or those living in the townships. Poor public transportation, large distances, uncrossable roads, and crime rates that make biking implausible combine to cut poor residents off from job opportunities, through the brute challenges of traversing space.

The challenges in traversing space in the city, produced by a combination of intentional design and neglectful planning, intersect with the hypercapitalist privatization of space I discussed above. For poor residents of Jozi, the primary means of transportation is the “Kombi” system of shared minibuses, and indeed Kombis provide 60% of the transportation in the country (Ibid.). These white minibuses with orange stripes crisscross the city along predetermined routes, and congregate at assigned taxi banks, but they are privately run and only minimally regulated. They provided a major source of employment and economic independence for Black people under apartheid (Fobosi 2013). One of the most interesting examples of embodied micronegotiations of space in Jozi is the elaborate system of hand signals that one uses to hail a Kombi. Mastery of the hand signals is a way of performing insider status, and tourists (and White people) rarely attempt to hail Kombis. These systems are slightly different in the city and in various townships, and include signals for going to the center of the city, moving around the center of the city, going to various numbered districts, and so forth. The minibuses are cheap and almost always full, but they make for a very slow means of travel.
For residents with more money, transportation is generally via Uber or private car. The sprawl and the lack of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure prevent much long-distance walking, as does the risk of street crime. In Jozi, much of the social negotiation that typically happens between walkers and sidewalk users in other cities has been relocated to interactions between drivers in interesting ways. Livermon observes, “The city has been conceptualized as a place of encounters that are structured through walking. A defining feature of Johannesburg is its identity as a city of automobility for the upwardly mobile” (2009, 274). That is, private cars in Jozi are not just means for getting from one point to another, but sites of micronegotiations themselves. What kind of car you drive; when it is safe to stop at a light and when one instead rolls through because of fears of being held up; what music is on the radio; when the windows can safely come down; and the elaborate micropolitics around parking, guarding, and not infrequently hijacking cars are all part of the spatial and identity negotiations that make up daily life in Jozi.82

When I visited Berlin for research, I fell completely and almost undividedly in love with the city. My relationship to Johannesburg is much more complex. Indeed, I have rarely had such emotionally layered and contradictory feelings about a city. This chapter surely paints a picture of a troubled landscape. But the vibrancy, political passion, radical diversity, and endless creativity of the city intoxicated me. Its history as a site of radical resistance moved and inspired me. Because of the very real dangers, I could not go out of my apartment in Johannesburg without at least some amount of background anxiety and a kind of hypervigilance about my surroundings that I found exhausting. I could be out taking notes and being active for sixteen hour stretches in Berlin,

81 I was told repeatedly about the practice of rolling through lights in ‘dangerous’ areas, and thought it sounded hyperbolic until friends of mine were robbed at gunpoint in their car near my apartment, while neighboring drivers teased them for having been foolish enough to come to a complete stop and stay at it as they were approached.

82 Livermon 2009 includes an interesting discussion of the identity politics in the city around what car you drive and what music you let others hear you playing in your car.
crisscrossing the city on foot, on bike, and by train and bus, and I'd end the day energized, whereas an afternoon of fieldwork in Jozi often left me exhausted. From a geographic point of view, the city of Johannesburg makes mobility challenging, in a way that Berlin does not. But the perfectly clean blue skies, the intense no-nonsense brutalism of the architecture, the buzz of life on the streets, the constant dense swirl of people finding creative ways to make new things and open new opportunities—these things were exhilarating. I am not risk averse, and I admit I got seduced by the culture of danger in Jozi. The sense of being in an infant country with a twenty-four-year-old constitution, full of hope and possibility, is palpable. Everywhere, people are dressed in bright colors and edgy fashions; the smell of spice, curry, and grilled meat emanates from the streets; beautiful fruits and vegetables and Afrocentric trinkets and crafts line vendors’ mats along the sidewalks; music that it is hard not to dance to pours out of cars, doorways, and windows. Although the gigantic, sprawling city is troubled in multiple ways, it is also completely compelling and full of life, and I am surprised every day by how viscerally I miss it now.

6.4 Barriers to Studying Repurposed Space in Johannesburg

As in Berlin, once I began my fieldwork in Johannesburg, I encountered unexpected barriers. My planned methodology from the start was heavily dependent on photography and visual documentation. In neither city did this turn out to be nearly as easy as I thought. In Berlin, there was an intense anti-surveillance culture, and cameras were banned in many spaces and seriously discouraged in others. Jozi, on the contrary, embraces surveillance culture and visual documentation. But there were lots of spaces that I wanted to study but couldn't photograph for either of two reasons. First, in many of them it was simply too dangerous to have a camera or phone out. I learned this on my second day of fieldwork, in the Grey Zone neighborhood of Hillbrow; my guide warned me to ‘be careful’ about showing my phone, but despite my trying to be vigilant, it was snatched from my hand within an hour. Over time, I tuned into the micronegotiations and
microsignaling that communicated when it was safe to take out my phone and when it wasn’t. In most of the interesting spaces, it wasn’t. For this reason, my photodocumentation of some of my research sites in Jozi is more minimal than it was in Berlin. Second, because of all the barriers and security in the city, other sites were simply physically inaccessible to me. For instance, it would have made sense to pick one of Jozi’s many gated communities as one of my sites, so I could study how territory is negotiated and space is used within them, but I literally couldn’t go into these spaces. So I have no first-person sense of how these parts of the city function as niches, and they are a key part of the Jozi post-apartheid landscape.

Moreover, some neighborhoods that I wanted to study in depth were not only too dangerous to photograph, but too dangerous to stay in long enough to get a good sense of how they were being used. I had to end up cutting out some sites because there was just no safe way to study them. Most locals of every race were appalled at the idea that I would even visit neighborhoods like Hillbrow and Yeoville; certainly just wandering the streets and hanging out were out of the question. I did manage to study Yeoville, but only by finding local guides who were willing to accompany me and help me move safely through the space. This limited the amount of time I could spend in the neighborhood, which left me with a smaller observational base than I would have liked, and it also made my movements through the space relatively artificial and constrained. Even though our guides understood my research goals, and let me take the lead in deciding what we would see, they were still guides, and this meant that my access to and experience of these spaces was still curated in various ways. Moreover, the reader will notice that almost all of my photographs of Yeoville are taken from upper story balconies, where I could take out my phone safely. This limited my data but it also tells an important story in its own right about space, territory, and bodily micronegotiations in Yeoville.

A quite different kind of barrier to my research came from the fact that I was a White person who was trying to study predominantly Black spaces. Blending in was impossible for me and
my son in Jozi. With our white skin, blue and purple hair, piercings, ink, fairly manifest queerness, and North American accents, we were always noticeable. We found residents to be friendly but constantly curious about us; wherever we went, people immediately asked us why we were there, why our hair was the color it was, whether we were afraid, how we liked the city, and so forth. This meant that we automatically disturbed the ecosystem in any space we were in. Since what I cared about, for purposes of this project, was in large part people’s small bodily gestures and postures, the fact that we quite literally turned heads and raised eyebrows made a profound difference to what I observed and the data I could collect. I have tried my best to incorporate our effect on the spaces into how I interpret them, rather than trying to cancel out or cover up this effect.
Chapter 7: Repurposed Spaces in Johannesburg

Figure 64: Map of main research sites in Johannesburg. Map created by author.

7.1 The Grey Zone

Under the Group Areas Act, almost the whole city of Johannesburg was designated for White residents only, and under the Immorality Act, mixed-race relationships and families were illegal. However, over time, the three inner-city neighborhoods of Hillbrow, Berea, and Yeoville became defiant by tradition. They developed into leftist, racially diverse centers of apartheid resistance, with vibrant activist, art, and nightlife culture, and they became magnets for illegal mixed race couples and families. In 1985, once it became clear that controlling the neighborhoods and maintaining the racial purity of these neighborhoods was impracticable, the government retaliated by designating the entire area a “Grey Zone.” Police presence was withdrawn from the zone, as were most forms of infrastructure support and many city services, and the area was also redlined, making
it difficult to receive financing to buy property or open a business there.\textsuperscript{83}

Predictably, the area began to change, and it was the first part of central Johannesburg to flip from majority White to majority Black. In the late 1980s and early 1990s it became increasingly crime-ridden, and middle-class residents began to leave because of danger and lack of services and opportunities; meanwhile, moving into the neighborhood became unviable for new middle-class residents and businesses. Over time, abandoned buildings were illegally squatted by poor residents looking for a place in the city. In 1985, it was 70\% White (which was much lower than the 100\% it was ‘supposed’ to be), and only 5\% Black. By 1996 it was only 5\% White, and now it is nearly 100\% Black.\textsuperscript{84}

The Grey Zone’s major repurposing came after the 1994 elections, when Mandela opened the borders. Because so much of the area had been abandoned after 1985, it became a useful landing spot for immigrants from all over Africa, who needed a cheap place to stay out of sight from authorities. The demographics of the zone quickly and radically shifted, and it turned into a Pan-African melting pot. Most of the last remaining white residents left; although a small few, including a handful of prominent activists and intellectuals, still have deep attachment to the area and remain.

\textsuperscript{83} Frenzel 2014 provides a nice history of the grey-zoning of these neighborhoods.
\textsuperscript{84} Beall et al 2014, 112, plus South African census data.
Far from abandoned now, it is densely populated, and indeed Hillbrow contains the densest square kilometer of urban space in Africa.\textsuperscript{85} The different parts of the Grey Zone have divided into different ethnic regions. Hillbrow is primarily Zimbabwean and Nigerian, and Berea is heavily Nigerian, while Yeoville is a melting pot, with many Congolese, Cameroonian, and Ethiopian residents in particular; French is a common street language in Yeoville, unlike elsewhere in the city.

Over time, the area has become set up to accommodate new, economically precarious immigrants, through a variety of spatial and cultural mechanisms. Hillbrow, Berea and Yeoville serve as “port of entry neighborhoods” for those first arriving in the city (Winkler 2013). This has happened through slow, bottom-up niche-building rather than top-down planning, especially since there remains almost no top-down oversight of these neighborhoods. A number of large taxi ranks for long-distance Kombis have been set up in the area, so it is quite literally where many new residents arrive; the largest is Wanderers Taxi Rank in Hillbrow. Because of the taxi ranks, there have sprung up what locals call ‘gumtrees’, which are walls across from the taxi ranks upon which people use gum to stick up advertisements for places to stay (see Figure 66). Much more insidiously, the Grey Zone has become an area in which the majority of buildings have been hijacked by gangsters and syndicates, who then offer housing to new residents in exchange for cheap rent and various services. By all estimates, there are hundreds of hijacked buildings in the city core, many of which are massive complexes housing thousands of people. I saw estimates between 60\% and 80\% for how many of the residential buildings in the Grey Zone are hijacked.\textsuperscript{86} The hijacked buildings often advertise available apartments with banners that have a phone number but no website or corporate logo. Since these buildings are off the city radar, their hijackers often cram unsafe numbers of residents into single apartments. The area also offers plentiful informal economic opportunities,

\textsuperscript{85} Multiple sources, including Gevisser 2009, 324.
\textsuperscript{86} Dlala Nje estimates that sixty to seventy percent of the apartment buildings in the Grey Zone are hijacked.
including street hawking, prostitution, and drug sales. The fact that the Grey Zone is minimally policed and basically abandoned by the city means that undocumented residents find some measure of safe haven in them, despite a sky-high crime rate on the streets and inside hijacked buildings and squats; despite occasional raids by the dreaded “Red Ants”; and despite ethnic tensions that sometimes become violent. Some specific institutions, most noticeably the Central Methodist Church in Hillbrow, have served on and off as, in effect, refugee shelters for undocumented immigrants; during the 2008 xenophobic riots, the church played an especially key role in offering safe harbor.

Figure 66: Hillbrow “gumtree” wall across from Wanderers Taxi Rank, 2018. Photo by Eli Kukla.

In sum, the Grey Zone allows new, undocumented residents to find housing and participate in informal economies quickly and off the radar, even if dangerously. Winkler writes, “Decades of capital and White flight from the inner city resulted neither in a depopulation of Hillbrow nor in a vacant, boarded-up landscape. Rather, a prodigious mix of both formal and informal socioeconomic
activities, coupled with a significant and ongoing inward migration of job seekers, continues to transform Hillbrow, since it is in these neighborhoods that newcomers to city tend to first establish themselves… Port-of-entry neighbourhoods typically facilitate some degree of readjustment in a new place. They allow diverse cultural customs to be practised, and they are at times perceived by their residents as a temporary place of abode: A place to ‘land’, find your feet, strengthen your networks and, ultimately, move from” (Winkler 2013). Meanwhile, the area has become a widely recognized ‘no go zone’ for the rest of the residents of Johannesburg, whose fear of crime in the area, awareness of low policing, and xenophobia keep them out. Of Yeoville and Hillbrow, Prabhala writes, “Mainstream Joburg circles have turned both names into abuses” (2009, 207).

Essential to the micropolitics of the Grey Zone is the role of the notorious street drug, whoonga, also known as “nyaope.” Made from a cocktail of heroin, rat poison, cannabis, and antiretroviral drugs, the drug is by all accounts widely made and sold in the Grey Zone, and viciously addictive and dangerous. Multiple locals mentioned to me that they had never seen anyone recover from a whoonga addiction. “Bluetothing” is a standard method of getting high for truly desperate users; this involves having one member of a group take a large amount of the drug, while others extract blood from that member and inject into themselves. The drug directly affects the use of space in the area, in several ways. Abandoned buildings are often used as whoonga labs, and buildings and manhole covers are often stripped for drug money. Addicts end up in hijacked buildings when they cease to be able to afford regular housing. Whoonga users create new street risks, as they are often willing to mug passersby for money and sellable items.

The hijacking-based informal economy of housing and occupation is central to the spatial

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87 Frenzel 2014.
88 Although there is some vague sense among users that the inclusion of antivirals might provide a protective effect against HIV, in fact the using the drug may build immunity to the retrovirals and stimulate the creation of new strands of HIV; Hepatitis C is also spread through shared whoonga needles. Knox 2012 covers many facts about the drug and its use and effects.
politics of central Jozi. The city cannot really afford to repossess the buildings, because fixing them up and making them habitable would be too expensive.\(^8^9\) One downstream result of all the hijacking is that gentrification is nearly impossible in the Grey Zone, since there are no clear owners of buildings for developers to buy out. Once I spent some time in the city, it became fairly easy to spot at least some of the hijacked buildings. They often have spotty or no electricity. Many of them show signs of having been on fire at some point (and a bizarrely large number are literally on fire—it took building fires are common and often simply left to burn, which I found quite shocking at first). Some of the buildings have been stripped for metal and other sellable parts, but are still squatted.

Figure 67: Hijacked buildings in Hillbrow, as seen from Constitution Hill, 2018. The phone number for renting, with no website or logo, is visible on the building to the left, and a stripped building is behind it. Photo by author.

One of the most intense and chilling features of the Grey Zone is what local residents proudly refer to as the “Vimba System.” The system has developed in response to the very low to nonexistent level of police presence in the area, combined with high crime and an uneven but often

\(^{8^9}\) conversations with volunteers and employees at Dlala Nje, August 2018. but there are also endless articles about the hijacked buildings of Jozi.
fierce sense of community. The idea is simple: if anyone sees someone committing a crime, particularly robbery or sexual assault, they yell “Vimba!” as loudly as they can and everyone rushes over and beats the criminal up, killing him if the crime is sufficiently severe. In the case of rapes, punishment sometimes takes the form of burning. What was remarkable to me was how matter of fact and proud everyone who told me about this system was. Locals see it as a way of caring for their community in the face of the city’s explicit abandonment, and as an example of civic unity and good security practices. My guides in Hillbrow and Berea proudly pointed out blocks that were much cleaner and more secure looking than those around them, bragging that the Vimba system was especially strong on those blocks. Zulu groups are especially proud patrollers of their turf and employers of the Vimba system.

The Grey Zone is an endlessly rich and vivid example of repurposed space. Its top-down abandonment has gone hand in hand with bottom-up development of spatial uses, practices, and territory creation. It is occupied by completely different people than those for whom it was designed, and they are living in it in completely different ways, having forged a different economy, different spatial practices of movement and occupation, a different system of control, and different sorts of territorial boundaries. Yet the previous layers of the area are easily visible. Formerly swanky hotels and athletic clubs like the “Summit Club” have been repurposed as brothels and strip clubs, but retained their original fronts. Former luxury apartment buildings have become squats. Many nightclubs and restaurants that catered to the Bohemian leftist mixed-race crowds of the 1970s and

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90 “Vimba” means roughly ‘block’ or ‘prevent’ in Zulu, although for what it’s worth I could not find a use of the term outside of the context of publicly calling out criminals.
91 A well-known form of local vigilante justice in South Africa is “necklacing,” in which a criminal or traitor is killed by having a burning tire placed around his neck. There are many discussions of necklacing in the South African media, but no one directly told me whether necklacing specifically was used as Vimba punishment in the Grey Zone.
92 An app named “Vimba!” was recently rolled out for use in the township of Diepsloot, for women who have been victims of sexual assault who are seeking “support” outside of the formal police and justice system. I don’t know the connection between this app and Vimba practices in the inner city.
1980s still exist under the same name, although their clientele has changed dramatically and they are no longer visited by touring intellectuals and musicians. Much of what gives the area its character and feel is this visual layering of a new culture and set of material practices on top of the old.

There is not much ethnographic scholarship on the Grey Zone. The area is fairly inaccessible to outsiders, for all the reasons I have outlined, and most residents are busy making ends meet rather than conducting and publishing social science research. However, there are people and organizations that have made a serious commitment to protecting, documenting, and sharing the distinctive culture and history of the grey zone. The nonprofit organization, Dlala Nje, based in Berea, conducts guided tours of the area, specifically designed to promote understanding, spatial justice, and reintegration of the Grey Zone into the rest of the city. The email that they send to tour participants afterwards reads in part:

On behalf of our organisation we would truly like to thank you for participating in our inner-city experiences. Your contribution has not only helped our social enterprise along through sustainability, but you've also allowed us to challenge your perception of Johannesburg's inner city. We live in a complex city where even some of our country's inhabitants are fearful of venturing into diverse and misunderstood neighbourhoods.

The tours are designed to avoid 'slum tourism' and the fetishization of poverty. Instead, Dlala Nje uses the tours to increase investment in the neighborhood, both literally and figuratively, and to raise money for community projects. This is a means of bottom-up place building and place repair, which explicitly substitutes for top-down city planning and investment, in the face of the Grey Zone's official abandonment. “Pointing to failed urban planning is a key narrative in all tours offered and points to the political character of the tours,” Fabien Frenzel points out (2014, 443).

Frenzel, who has studied ‘slum tourism’ in South Africa and guided tours in the Grey Zone in depth, writes of the Dlala Nje tours that they are “pursued in order to serve as an urban development and regeneration tool from below. [The tourism project] responds to an absence of action or perceived failure to respond to poverty by urban policy, and its potential lies in particular in
addressing invisibility, overcoming territorial stigma and empowerment of the urban poor” (Ibid. 431). This certainly captures the overt mission of Dlala Nje, and I found the tours extraordinarily informative and respectful. That said, it is hard to see how to completely avoid a dynamic in which the poverty and problems of the neighborhood become a kind of a spectacle for the consumption of the much wealthier people taking the tour. Unavoidably, as Frenzel points out, “poverty is not just a condition in which this tourism takes place, but is the main attraction” (Ibid. 432). The spatial dynamics of having a group of mostly-white people marching through Hillbrow and Berea, moving and looking in ways that are at odds with the embodied norms of the neighborhood, cannot help but be ecologically disruptive. Frenzel comments that an “aspect of the tours is the attention they solicited among residents in the area. With tours predominantly made up of white participants, residents stare at the group, some taking out their phones to take pictures” (Ibid. 440). My goal on the tours was to study how the neighborhoods functioned, and not just to look at or document poverty, but I was acutely aware of the rupture and tension that my presence caused.

Frenzel argues that one of the functions of the tours is to “put these places on the map.” Given my concern here with territory and boundaries, this is an important point. Even without walls or checkpoints, the boundaries around the Grey Zone are highly impermeable. Indeed, as one reaches the edge of the zone, there are often police cars lined up along its boundary. People do not cross in, and residents are afraid to leave. The result is that the area inside functions as a bit of a windowless monad, without continuity or exchange with the rest of the city.93 Inside, there is very little mapping, in the literal sense; most of the businesses and restaurants are too informal or marginal to have a substantial Internet footprint. From many perspectives, these parts of the city are hard to see. This invisibility in turn enhances their economic precarity, since they appear on a map to

93 Although see my discussion of Constitution Hill, below. This new complex is partially designed to create this continuity.
have no ‘destinations’ in them. More generally, they are not well integrated into Jozi residents’ understanding of the city as a place, except as ‘no-go’ zones and mythic sites of fear and danger.

In the following two sections, I give a closer analysis of two smaller and more focused repurposed spaces within the Grey Zone.

7.1.1 Ponte City, Berea

Figure 68: Ponte City Apartments, Berea, 2017. Open source image, courtesy of Dlala Nje.

Ponte City is a concrete, cylindrical, 55-story brutalist skyscraper that visually dominates the east side of the Jozi skyline. It is in Berea, near the edge of Hillbrow, firmly in the midst of the Grey Zone. It was opened in 1976 as a luxury apartment building for wealthy White people. The fifty-second through fifty-fourth floors were super-luxurious three-level penthouse apartments, while the fifty-fifth floor was reserved for domestic workers, and was the only place non-Whites were originally allowed to live. The striking building has been featured in various movies, including the dystopic District 9. A series of photographs by Mikhael Subotzky of the inside and outside of the building won the Börse Photography Prize in 2015.\(^\text{94}\)

\(^{94}\) https://www.thesouthafrican.com/south-african-photographer-mikhael-subotzky-nominated-for-prestigious-award-in-london/
When the Grey Zone was established, White residents of Ponte City left, and the building quickly turned into what was known as the world’s tallest squat, sometimes referred to the “shantytown in the sky.”\textsuperscript{95} It was hijacked by gangs\textsuperscript{96} in 1988, and the hijackers filled the building, which had been built to house 2500 residents, with up to 10,000 people, almost all of them new immigrants. They knocked down the walls on floors eleven through fifteen, and turned these floors into a brothel. Like many other hijacked Grey Zone buildings abandoned by the city, Ponte City lost its electricity and water for years. There was also no garbage collection, and residents began to use the open center of the building as a dump. At its peak, the garbage rose up to the fourteenth floor. When the building was eventually cleaned out, the garbage pile took almost three years to remove.

\textsuperscript{95} Much of my information about the history of the building comes from guides at Dlala Nje. See also Brook 2016 and https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2008/0212/p20s01-woaf.html.

\textsuperscript{96} Many sources refer to this hijacking, including those referenced just above, but there is no information that I could find about who exactly the hijackers were. This makes sense, since the area was not policed at the time and the hijackers surely did not want to be public about their illegal activities.
and the debris contained at least 23 corpses. Filled with residents, but dark except for cooking fires in apartments, the building was a strikingly ominous visual icon in the middle of the city. Parents warned their children that if they misbehaved and ruined their lives, they would end up in Ponte City. The city briefly considered turning the building into a jail, and the joke on the street was that all they would have to do is lock the doors (Prabhala 2009, 207).

The building remained hijacked until 2001, when it was bought by a private developer. It has changed hands several times since then. The lights and water were turned back on in 2003, and working- and middle-class residents began to move into what was then one of the only legitimate residential properties in the area. In 2004, the building was purchased again, with hopes of revitalizing it in advance of the arrival of the FIFA world cup. The new owner was a trucking company with very little vision for the building. It was opened up to foreign investors, who massively over-speculated, attempting to turn Ponte City back into a super-luxurious building, in the midst of troubled Berea. The fancy new apartments didn’t sell, and constant renovations chased out the new residents. The xenophobic riots of 2008 and the concomitant global financial crisis killed any fantasies that the Grey Zone was ready for high-end gentrification. The building was abandoned and went dark again by 2008, and remained dark during the World Cup, except that Vodacom rented the top of the building for 500,000 Rand (about $40,000 US dollars) a month, and lit it up with their logo in bright red neon.

The building changed hands again and reopened a fourth time in 2012, this time purchased by a developer with more realistic ambitions. It now offers legitimate, affordable apartments to working class families, mostly immigrant families. It stands as an odd and mostly hopeful

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97 This is the exact premise of the dystopic biopunk novel, *Zoo City* (Beukes 2010), set in Johannesburg, in which criminals are marked by being bonded to animals, and many end up in an only slightly fictionalized version of hijacked Ponte City, unable to find other housing because of their immediately visible criminal history.
counterpoint to the spatial politics of the rest of the neighborhood. It is fully occupied with a waiting list, and it has a guarded security entrance, functional services, and useful, affordable businesses on the bottom such as a barbershop, a tuck shop, and a diner. The occupants are 98% Black and about 2% Colored and Asian, although twelve white people are among the 3000+ current residents. Over 500 children live in the building; they play in the halls and on the front concrete patio and ride the elevators in packs of friends and siblings. A starry-eyed media report, entitled “Ponte City a Beacon of Hope in Downtown Johannesburg” effuses,

These days, the building is occupied not by criminal gangs and brothels but by ordinary people, South Africans and immigrants, with hopes and dreams of a better future. There is a range of affordable flats to rent – you cannot own property in Ponte. There is a mix of families and single professionals ranging from waiters to administrators. Rentals vary from R2 000 [$140 US dollars] a month for a pad on the 11th floor to R3 700 [$270 US dollars] for a three-bedroom flat on the 34th floor and R4 500 [$325 US dollars] for a two-bedroom penthouse on the 51st floor, complete with marble tiles and modern kitchen with granite countertops. (Jane-Cook 2017)

Other articles also celebrate the ‘regeneration’ of Ponte City, often focusing on its tight security.98 Ponte City’s narrative is indeed a heartening story of responsiveness to community needs and phoenix-like success. These celebratory articles, however, gloss over the real challenges the space still faces. The building is indeed guarded, but the stretch of Lily Street leading up to the security booth is ominous, lined with squats, stripped buildings, and groups of men at loose ends, many of them drugged up. The first time we went, our Uber driver panicked a bit when he figured out where he was taking us, and sat with us tensely in the car with the windows up until our guide came to the car himself to see us in. The second time we went, our first and second Uber drivers refused the ride. Moreover, building itself forms an ominous space clearly marked by its past in tangible ways. The lettering in the parking garage is still in Afrikaans. The traces of the top of the garbage pile at the fourteenth floor are still faintly visible. The rough concrete at the bottom of the

55-story open column in the center is palpably a place where corpses could be hidden.

Crucial to the story of the repurposing of Ponte City is that since 2012 it has also been the home of Dlala Nje, the nonprofit organization that I discussed in the previous section. Dlala Nje—which means “let’s play” in Zulu—occupies a large space on the ground floor of the building, as well as a multi-level penthouse apartment. The penthouse is used as venue for readings, performances, activist meetings, and other events in line with their mission. The first floor serves as their headquarters, and also as an educational and recreational center for children. Brightly lit, clean, and full of books, toys and play equipment, the children’s center is a lively space full of active and social kids between about three and ten years old. The children’s center offers a positive and educational environment for kids, and enables them to be safe while their parents work.

Dlala Nje plays a huge role in supporting and integrating the neighborhood, in ways that the city has abdicated. The organization was founded and is spearheaded by a White reporter with a history of leftist activism and a reputation for iconoclasm and scandal, Nikolas Bauer. He is one of the handful of White people who lives in Ponte City. It was Bauer who greeted our Uber personally when we first visited. He also arranged for our guides to Yeoville, in order to help me with my research. The racial dynamics between Bauer and the rest of the volunteers and staff at Dlala Nje is interesting. Almost all of them are very young Black adults who live in the Grey Zone. They exude neighborhood pride, and a deep love and understanding of this part of the city, and its meaning and history. They are also nearly reverential when it comes to Bauer, who clearly has dramatically more cultural capital, resources, and privilege than they do. It is hard not to notice his status as a ‘White savior’ figure, however little he would want to identify with that role. That said, Bauer is manifestly committed to making the Grey Zone in general, and Ponte City in particular, more livable for residents, and to honoring the ecology and indigenous character and history of the neighborhood. He has been creative about finding ways to help the area regenerate itself and build community
without turning to gentrification or White colonization. Ponte City is at the center of this bottom-up effort to reintegrate and heal the neighborhood while honoring its roots and place identity.

7.1.2 Yeoville’s Rockey and Raleigh Streets

The section of the Grey Zone with perhaps the richest combination of history and current vibrant place identity is the main business stretch of Yeoville, made up of Raleigh Street west of Cavendish Road and Rockey Street east of it. This strip, which runs for just about exactly a mile, was the epicenter of nightlife and social activity during this part of Johannesburg’s heyday in the 1970s and 1980s. It was also the commercial area that served the city’s largest Jewish and Pan-European population, and in its time, it featured kosher delis, polish butchers, and Greek tavernas. It was lined with famous punk and reggae venues, cafés, and bookstores, as well as a popular public swimming pool, park, and recreation center. Old photos show hipster young people and mixed raced families and groups of friends out partying and lining the streets. Collective wisdom has it that Rockey and Raleigh streets were maximally “vibey,” as Jozi residents often put it. The place had buzz and was a lively draw, with its own distinctive and appealing feel.
There is a great deal of discussion, among locals and in the small amount of ethnographic scholarship on the area, about whether Yeoville is still “vibey.” 99 Like the rest of the Grey Zone, the

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99 See for instance Prabhala 2009 as well as Beall, et al 2014, 119. Beall, et al point out just how little scholarship there is on Yeoville, given its rich history and how interesting it is now from an ethnographic perspective.
neighborhood was vacated in the late 1980s and abandoned by the city, and became dangerous and economically precarious. Like the rest of the area, Yeoville became an important landing point for immigrants. In 1999, in response to the changing composition of the neighborhood, the city constructed a covered street market on Rockey St., designed to give some form and legitimacy to the growing street hawker-based economy. The main taxi rank is next to the market, and the gumtree—with signs in French and English—is across from that. For a combination of reasons, the feel on the streets is different than in Hillbrow and Berea. In Hillbrow and Berea, many folks loiter around at loose ends, standing still in groups, and there is a general air of suspicion and tension. While Yeoville is by all reports just as dangerous, the feel on the street is lively and upbeat in a different way. There are all sorts of complicated reasons for the difference, but a visible one is the architecture itself: While Hillbrow and Berea consist mostly of giant, imposing apartment blocks, Yeoville is built lower to the ground and in a more open colonial style, with second floor balconies facing the street, patios in front of buildings, and open storefronts; all this allows the street to be used for socializing, drinking, and hanging out, and mobility is fluid and easy. Although Yeoville has changed radically, there is still music pouring out of window and rows of restaurants and clubs, and people still flow down Rockey Street in particular, in and out of buildings, shouting and bantering across the street at one another. Julia Hornberger notes accurately, “Rockey Street itself seems as busy as its establishments, if not more. Much of the time, the street itself becomes the venue” (2009, 294). The fluidity of inside and outside space distinguishes Yeoville from its neighbors, and makes street space come alive.

\[\text{perspective (2014, 110).} \]
\[\text{100 This backfired to some extent, because there are turf wars over who gets the better spots in the market, and because the indoor parts of the market miss out on the street traffic of the sidewalk (Beall, et al 2014, 115, 117).}\]
Another important spatial feature of Yeoville is common in many of the townships and other parts of the city, but not in the rest of the Grey Zone: Backyard shanties, which make up 18%
of the housing in the neighborhood (Beale, et al, 2014 119). Because Hillbrow and Berea consist of big apartment blocks, they don’t have yards. The streets underneath these buildings are not conducive to relaxed use, as they are squished up against the bottoms of concrete fortresses. But in Yeoville, many people live in “single family” homes with yards, and it is standard to sublease the backyard to another family, who sets up informal housing in it. Among other things, this housing arrangement adds to the porousness and fluidity of the inside/outside distinction, with many families doing much of their living out in their yards, as their indoor space is minimal.

Although many parts of Jozi are made up of diverse mixtures of people from different South African groups and linguistic backgrounds and a variety of immigrant backgrounds, Yeoville is particularly Pan-African, and prides itself on being a melting pot which is less enclaved than the rest of the city; several people referred to the neighborhood proudly as the “United States of Africa.” The most common first language is Zulu, but no first language is spoken by as much as 30% of the population. According to the last census, 96.5% of the residents are Black, and 1.5% are White. This is a more significant White population than in Hillbrow or Berea, which both hover at around 0.5% White.101 While the demographics of Yeoville changed dramatically in the 90s along with the rest of the Grey Zone, the neighborhood retained a special character and appeal that have kept a handful of white intellectuals and activists in the area, despite the changes and the danger.102

The first time I visited Yeoville, I went with my son and my three companions from Dlala Nje, all Black men in their early- to mid-twenties who lived in the neighborhood. We walked from Ponte City up to Raleigh and then Rockey Street. As we crossed Joe Slovo Drive on the north side of Saratoga Ave., at the southern base of the Grey Zone, we saw the lines of police cars that hang out along the border but don’t cross in. We walked up through the park attached to the recreation

102 Jewish anti-apartheid activist Esther Barsel remained in Yeoville until her death in 2008 and raised her family there. A few white professors from University of Witwatersrand make their home here.
center just south of Raleigh, which was filled with children and teens playing. The African National Congress had set up a booth in the park, and was playing loud local hip hop while setting up chairs for a political meeting that would be offering free food. From here, we came out past a few residential blocks of houses with shanty homes in their yards, and then out onto Raleigh St. We took several hours to walk slowly down Raleigh and Rockey Streets, stopping along the way to eat and to explore the street market, and ending by barhopping a bit. We walked past Time Square, a complex that contained multiple popular hipster nightclubs during apartheid. It was still full of clubs, but the front of the complex is now barred off and dilapidated. We also passed several internet cafés that are purportedly full of “Nigerians” who spend the day sending scam emails from their anonymized IP addresses.\textsuperscript{103} We did not see any other White people as we walked. We did not feel uncomfortable walking around, at least while it was still daylight. However, at many points our guides were insistent that we not take out our phones or reach into our pockets. I was hoping to photograph the gumtree across from the market, but our guides pointed out that this is a spot where people are jumping in and out of taxis frequently, and where new, often penniless arrivals are disembarking, so it was a particularly bad spot to have my phone out.

Restaurants and hang-out spots along Raleigh and Rockey Street divide up by ethnicity. We stopped in an Ethiopian restaurant, a Cameroonian restaurant, and a Congolese restaurant. In each, there were local expats hanging out, who clearly considered the place their territory and were settled in for the evening. La Camerounaise was a bare room with simple chairs and tables, and walls plastered with Cameroonian flags. Older men sat around a large table playing cards and talking and laughing loudly in French. The owner and chef, who went by “Maman,” wore traditional African dress and spoke mostly French. Once she figured out that Eli was fluent in French, she invited him

\textsuperscript{103} Prabhala 2014, 312-313. I developed a healthy suspicion while in Jozi of any claims about things that were dominated or run by “Nigerians,” as they seem to be the scapegoats of choice for any and all purposes.
into the kitchen and chatted happily with him as she grilled whole fish for us.

Figure 75: Maman of La Camarounaise in Yeoville, 2018. Photo by author.

Our Ethiopian stop was the iconic and long-standing Kin Malebo, which used to be Congolese but has changed hands. This is a beloved Yeoville institution, which one enters through an archway to which Amharic lettering has been added. It too is a bare room inside, but there is a DJ in the back of the restaurant. The waitress who served us was wearing a sweater that said “Your Banter is Bullshit” in large letters. She clearly knew our guides well. She brought us a giant tower-shaped platter of food to share. I live in Washington, DC where good, authentic Ethiopian food is plentiful, but this was the best I’ve ever had. Halfway through our meal, the waitresses began dancing to the DJ’ed music. As far as I could tell, they were genuinely just goofing around and having fun; no one tipped them, and they broke in and out of dancing to serve food and drinks. Soon after, various men who were customers, including one of our guides, started taking turns
dancing as well. Everyone cheered on the dancers’ efforts, which were, to be frank, intimidatingly excellent. Several people asked to take selfies with us before we left, including one guy who bragged to us about how he was the most important DJ in the city. Inside both La Camarounaise and Kin Malebo, I had no sense that there was any danger, and the atmosphere was spare but entirely upbeat. On the street, especially as the sun set, I returned to guarding myself and avoiding stranger interactions as much as possible.

Figure 76: Rockey Street, Yeoville, 9:00 pm on a Thursday night, 2018. Photo by author.

Our final stop that night was Tandoor, a nightclub that hosted punk and anarchist bands in the 1980s. It is now a reggae bar, and as an official ‘religious establishment,’ marijuana use is legal inside. I bought beers for my guides and we sat at a table where a man was rolling a joint as thick as his thumb. He offered to share, but I didn’t feel comfortable doing so, even though my guides said it would be fine. After this, our guides used local hand signals to flag down a Kombi minibus to take us all back to Ponte City, and we Ubered home from there. Interestingly, for all its vibrant activity, Rockey Street shuts down relatively early. By mid-evening, there were still people out but it had

104 I uploaded a video for those who want to really get the feel of the place here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgMWEtPvtQ8&feature=youtu.be
turned fairly quiet.

I returned to Rockey Street the following week, to attend dinner at the Yeoville Dinner Club, which I heard about through my Dlala Nje guides. The Yeoville Dinner Club is the project of Sanza, a self-taught chef from Swaziland who grew up in Soweto, and moved into Yeoville after apartheid ended. He began as a DJ at YFM, the iconic radio station that promotes local music and trends along with leftist anti-racist politics to Johannesburg millennials and teens. Over time, Sanza became fascinated by the Pan-African food culture of Yeoville, and set out to learn about the cooking traditions and indigenous ingredients of the African countries represented by migrants in the area. He “learned to eat in Yeoville,” as he puts it. Sanza caught the attention of Tony Bourdain, who effused about his cooking, and Sanza considered him a close friend.105 His Dinner Club is really his second-floor apartment on Rockey Street. He has set up his dining room to seat about fifteen guests, and filled it with memorabilia from his meetings with various African chefs and his travels across the continent. For a fixed rate of about $30 USD, you come to his apartment overlooking Rockey Street, he tells stories and talks about food, and he plies you and other guests with uncountably many courses of homemade food, unlimited South African wine and cocktails he has made using African ingredients, and unlimited marijuana in the form of joints passed around between courses and at the end of the night.

Arriving at the Yeoville Dinner Club was an adventure. I got a seat at the table for me and my son by texting Sanza, and since I wouldn’t have my guides, I asked him how best to get to the restaurant. He told me that he would come down and meet me at an Uber personally, and walk me up to the restaurant. The first Uber driver turned me down. The second driver agreed to take me into Yeoville at night only because I assured him that there would be someone protecting us while we stopped. Sanza met us at our car. A few folks from the street approached our car as we were

105 For instance, see Bourdain 2013.
getting out, and he told them to back off in a firm although friendly voice. He ushered us upstairs and inside with a smile, handing us a spiced cocktail. From his apartment, we could go out on the balcony and get a long, relaxed look at Rockey Street by night. The guests filtered in slowly. I was unsure what sort of people would have found this place. It turned out to be almost entirely Black millennials with jobs in the fashion or music industry or other creative sectors, all much more strikingly dressed than we were. Many of them were proudly and openly queer. There was one other White guest, a middle-aged man there with his Black girlfriend. Everyone but us lived in Jozi, but no one lived in Yeoville. All the guests talked about how they were at least a bit nervous about coming to Yeoville. Senza darted up and down the stairs, bringing people in.

One woman drove to the Dinner Club in her own car. As she tried to park it, locals led by a teenaged boy pushed in and started to try to hijack it. I admit I did not witness exactly what happened next, but someone called “Vimba” and people on the street converged to beat up the boy. Sanza authoritatively put a stop to the beating, saying that the boy was too young; when he came back upstairs he told us that the boy was only fourteen and that he knew him from the neighborhood. Unfortunately, the woman who owned the car was too shaken to stay, and she went home. What was clear from the incident and the rest of Sanza’s demeanor throughout the evening was that he was an authoritative figure in the neighborhood. He had the power, through his mere presence and words, to keep people safe, and to control how interactions and negotiations would proceed. This certainly did not come from the threat of brute force or from any kind of traditional male dominance. Sanza is a slender, slightly effeminate, extraordinarily fashionable man who looks much younger than he must in fact be. I don’t know his sexual orientation but he is certainly comfortable in and a magnet for the local queer community. His authority demonstrated something interesting about the logic of Yeoville, which is rough and dangerous, but which values its culture so greatly that someone in the business of curating and improving it (through both his cooking and his
role in YFM) earns the status of a community leader. In the absence of any traditional city oversight in the Grey Zone, it seems to me that there are two different kinds of bottom-up systems in place for controlling and managing the streets. One is the Vimba system. The other is the social power exercised by charismatic community leaders like Sanza and Bauer, who have earned the right to influence how people act and to hold them to norms in virtue of their commitment to the neighborhood.

Figure 77: Chef Sanza at work in his kitchen in the Yeoville Dinner Club, Rockey Street, 2018. Photo by author.

Sanza’s feast was one of the most impressive and improbable meals I have ever had. It was delicious, unusual, and gorgeously and knowledgably presented. By the end of the night, I was buzzed from the alcohol and marijuana, and hopelessly full. As odd as it was to find, in effect, an upscale restaurant run by a celebrity chef on Rockey Street, what compelled me most was how
Yeoville enabled the existence of Sanza and his dinner club. Sanza’s food is inspired by the neighborhood. His persona, and the entire Yeoville Dinner Club experience, are so woven into the neighborhood as to be inextricable from it. It was one of the best examples of niche construction that I found: In the most concrete sense, Yeoville made Sanza, and Sanza helps make Yeoville.

When it came time to go home, Sanza told us that no Uber would be willing to come get us, but that he had a friend with a taxi waiting for us downstairs. He asked us if we had 150 Rand (about ten dollars) in cash to give him. He walked us down and got us situated in the taxi with his friend, telling him in Zulu where to take us. It only occurred to me later that he had inspired enough trust in me over the course of the evening that I didn’t question his plan to place me and my son in a car with a stranger after ensuring we had cash. As we crossed out of the Grey Zone at Saratoga Avenue, one of the police cars that patrol the periphery pulled us over. We couldn’t tell what the issue was, as the conversation was in a local creole we couldn’t understand, but the presence of two White people in the back seat seemed enough to placate the cop, and he let us go on our way.

Julia Hornberger observes, “Yeoville has always been a center of nightlife, but it has mutated and transmogrified substantially over time. Gone are the multiracial bohemian days. It has not evolved as a place of Pan-African, particularly francophone, nightlife” (2009, 292.) Prabhala is right that “whoever told you that Rockey Street was dead is lying” (2009, 310). But Yeoville is an odd kind of ‘center’, since the rest of the city avoids it and often doesn’t even know that it is still ‘vibey.’ I was told outright by several locals, including middle class Black people from Melville, Maboneng, and other neighborhoods, that Yeoville was “dead now” and that there was no point in going there—I would just get mugged and see nothing. Distinctively, compared to the other sites I discuss in this project, Yeoville has been territorialized and bounded from the outside rather than from the inside. Within the neighborhood, different ethnic groups have created microterritories, but everyone seems proud of their peaceable coexistence. This outside perception of Yeoville as a dead space interests
me almost as much as the living space inside of it. I am fascinated by this spatial invisibility—this social boundary around the neighborhood which is so impermeable that outsiders don’t even perceive it as a place that they are shut out from.

7.2 Orlando West, Soweto

The largest of the apartheid-era townships, sprawling Soweto, with over 1.5 million residents, was incorporated into the city of Johannesburg officially in 2002. Soweto feels both connected to the rest of the city and deeply separate, and both urban and non-urban at once.106 One resident comments, “The city is a different place. It is where one goes to make money” (Mbembe et al 242). There are intertwined historical and spatial reasons why Soweto has such a complex and ambiguous relationship to the rest of the city. Soweto was placed far from Johannesburg in order to keep its residents contained, dependent, and under control. The township was intentionally divided from Johannesburg by Soweto’s “Berlin Wall,” as residents call it—a giant mountain created out of gold mining detritus, with surveillance lights and towers on top. Although the point of Soweto was to provide closely controlled residential space for Blacks who worked in Johannesburg, the commute was never designed to be easy, and commuting into the city and back could (and still can) easily take up most of a worker’s waking hours. Even crossing the street to get to the train station is difficult; there are no pedestrian crossings, and people have died crossing Klipspruit Valley Road,107 which separates the business area of the Orlando West district of Soweto from the train station. There has always been a lot of forced movement between Soweto and central Johannesburg, but at the same time there has equally always been a great deal of resistance on both sides to the two communities merging, or to the borders between them evaporating. The legal border between them is gone but the cultural border remains strong. The relationship between Soweto and Johannesburg is at least as

106 This is my observation, but the same point is made by Mbebe 2014, 239.
107 McCool 2013.
antagonistic as it is symbiotic.

Soweto has always found ways to free itself from its planned subjugation to Johannesburg. It developed an elaborate informal economy and a robust communal support network and identity. In Soweto even more than in the rest of Johannesburg, every item and every surface gets used, reused, and capitalized. Backyards are rented out to families, usually newer immigrants, to bring in extra income (Beall, et al 163). The sides of houses function as open-window spaza shops that resell goods from the market. Fences are sold as advertising space. Found objects are repurposed into new objects and resold, or just plain resold.

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 78: The informal economy and the capitalization of space in Orlando West. A middle-class house with a rented-out backyard shack for a second family, and fencing space sold to advertisers, 2018. Photo by author.

In Soweto, oppression and ridiculous working conditions did not lead to an undereducated and pliant subservient class, as the architects of apartheid planned, but rather to a nearly unique flowering of political activism, grass roots self-education, highly developed class consciousness, and creative resistance. Soweto was designed to be a holding pen and a place of ironfisted surveillance.
and control, and the Bantu education system was built specifically to keep township residents undereducated and unreflectively submissive. Instead it became a fiercely independent, vibrant and intense intellectual and political hotbed. In these senses, Soweto has continuously repurposed itself from the very start. The Soweto Uprising, the Congress of the People, and the signing of the Freedom Charter all happened in Soweto. It was the home of Desmond Tutu and Nelson and Winnie Mandela, as well as local political icons such as Robert Sobukwe and James Mpaza.

      The area that is now Soweto was originally set up as a labor camp in 1887. In the early twentieth century, well before apartheid, British colonizers moved Black residents of Johannesburg to Soweto in order to quarantine them. Supposedly, they were going to be let back into the city once the ‘public health crisis’ had been brought under control. But over time, segregation got further ensconced, and the area was set up to house Black people who worked in the city.

      In particular, what is now Orlando East was set up as a kind of racist ‘bedroom community,’ with services and infrastructure beyond what was available in the rest of the area (although Soweto had no electricity until the 1980s) and it quickly became hopelessly overcrowded. On March 20, 1944 local activist James Sofasonke Mpanza set up a squat near Orlando East and demanded livable housing for workers. He forced the building of better housing and infrastructure, and used local labor to do it. At its peak, Mpanza’s squat had 20,000 residents, and it eventually evolved into what is not Orlando West. Mpanza is often called the “father of Soweto,” and there are still photographs of him in local bars. Less than two decades later, on March 21, 1960, Robert Sobukwe led marchers who refused to carry passbooks from Orlando to Johannesburg. This inspired a similar march the same day in Sharpsville, during which police opened fire on marchers and killed 69 people.
Orlando West was the site of the Soweto Uprising on June 16, 1976, when children and teens took to the streets, famously armed only with stones and the tops of garbage cans as shields, to protest the enforced Bantu education system and to demand education in their own language. Police shot and killed 12-year-old protester Hector Pieterson, and the image of his body being carried by 18-year-old Mbuyisa Makhubu, with Hector’s sister at his side, became one of the most iconic images of political oppression and resistance in human history. The protesters framed the uprising in terms of the politics and colonizing force of language. Signs from the protest focus on anti-Afrikaans messages and the right to be learn and take pride in their local languages. The displays at the Pieterson museum make it clear that language was used and perceived as a critical tool in establishing and negotiating territory. (Interestingly, signs from the uprising say things like “To Hell

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108 Hector Pieterson was originally named Zolile Pitgo. Like many Black South Africans, his family changed his name in the hope that he could pass for Colored, as this came with various legal benefits.

109 Tragically, Makhubu, whose image symbolized heroism and community for so many, was wracked by guilt at having failed to save Pieterson. He fled the country, supposedly to Nigeria, and was never heard from again. Many claim that he killed himself.
with Afrikaans,” whereas signs from the sympathetic follow-up protests organized by White students at University of Witwatersrand say “It’s not the language, it’s the system!”, which is a quite different message that arguably undermines the first.) Regardless of the local focus on language, the uprising became the primary symbol of resistance to apartheid more generally.

From the start, the apartheid government feared Soweto, and Orlando West and East in particular, but the more they tried to contain and suppress them, the more they became independent centers for activism and resistance. Their football team, the Orlando Pirates, began as a way of circumventing laws banning political assembly among Blacks; the team was made up of political organizers who would talk while playing.110 Orlando West’s main street, Vilikazi Street, brags about being the only street housing two different Nobel Peace Prizewinners: Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. It is also named after the influential novelist, poet, and scholar, Dr. B. W. Vilikazi.

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110 A lot of the history of Orlando was told to me by Ntsiki Sibusiso Ntombela, a local resident and guide. Most was confirmed by exhibits in the Hector Pieterson museum in Orlando West.
This entire rich political and intellectual history centrally shapes the contemporary identity of Soweto, and Orlando West in particular, which sees itself not as a place of oppression or as a sidekick to Johannesburg but as a proud place of resistance. It is also central to the economic identity of the city, because Vilikazi Street in Orlando West is the closest thing Soweto has to a tourist district: The Mandela home, the Tutu home, and the Pieterson memorial and museum are all on (or just off) Vilikazi St., which is also home to a number of restaurants and shops geared towards tourists. Tour busses bring crowds, mostly white, to Vilikazi Street to take pictures and file through the Mandela house and Pieterson museum and gift shops. More adventurous tourists stay in Orlando West, at the legendary and beloved hostel Lebo’s Backpackers, or one of the several bed and breakfast inns clustered around Vilikazi Street, and do bike tours and the like. The tourist industry here, though modest, has brought in quite a bit of money, and many of the houses off of Vilikazi are fairly large and very well-kept, with ornate stonework and gardens and expensive cars in the driveway. Ntsiki Ntombela, a Xhosa resident who showed us around, referred to the area as the ‘Beverly Hills of Soweto.’ Stores off the main drag aimed at locals feature relatively expensive fashions and jewelry. Beall, et al (2014) point out that much of what started out as government-issue matchbox housing in Orlando West has been upgraded and expanded, and gardens and electric gates and other bells and whistles have been added.

The landscape of Orlando West still displays its apartheid past in multiple visually striking ways. The “Berlin Wall” of Soweto is visible from almost everywhere in the area (as well as from downtown Johannesburg), and it creates a visual barrier that makes Soweto feel like its own separate territory. The tall surveillance lights that were installed in the 1980s after the uprising, called “Apollos,” are still standing, although they are no longer lit at night. These were used for surveillance and also to indicate curfew; when they were lit, the area was so flooded with light that nighttime
darkness didn’t exist.\footnote{Private conversations with locals, as well as Mbembe 2009, 243.} The giant cooling towers from the decommissioned apartheid-era coal-fired power plant are still a prominent visual landmark. These have been repurposed several times; they were covered in local street art in the 1990s once Mandela decommissioned them, then converted into a bungee jumping and paintball attraction for tourists. Now they have been recolonized by the Dutch Heineken corporation, which bought out the local Soweto Gold brewery over the strong objections of residents\footnote{According to our guide, 67 of the 70 people at the meeting about the takeover, including her, walked out in protest.} and covered over the local art with a corporate logo. The museum, memorial, and Mandela house anchor the space in Orlando West, while the giant football stadium, the “Berlin Wall”, and the cooling towers visually mark its periphery. The residential streets of Orlando West are still lined with their original, small, government-issued houses, even though many of these have been improved. As Beall, et al points out, “the backyard residences are almost invariably hidden from view from the street, and they don’t intrude on the clean lines of the streetscape. Front yards are never built on. However, from the vantage point of even a small hill, the densely packed roofs of the backyard shacks are clearly evident” (2014, 168).

Figure 81: Residential street in Orlando West just off Vilikazi St. The Orlando Pirates soccer field, the “Berlin Wall of Soweto,” and an Apollo surveillance light is visible in the background.
Although it may appear racially homogeneous to North American eyes, Orlando West is a highly territorialized space at the micro level. Despite its cultural and economic vibrancy, it has attracted virtually no White migrants since the end of apartheid. According to the 2011 census, Orlando West is 99.5% Black, and home to 28 White residents out of 40,000. The area was designed to be and remains a Zulu stronghold. The remaining hostels are Zulu territory, and are closely guarded by insiders known as “Indunas” in charge of gatekeeping the spaces (Beall, et al 2014 190-2). Zulu and Xhosa families almost always are the ones who own property, as they have been there since apartheid when the land was legally earmarked for them. It is well-recognized by locals that spaza shops are the territory of Ethiopian immigrants. Backyard shanties and sheds belong to immigrants, especially Ethiopians and Somalis. Language continues to be politicized. One hears a variety of local languages on the street, and signs are in English and Zulu. But there is absolutely no Afrikaans spoken or on signage, which is fascinating given that anyone who was born in Soweto and is over the age of 30 or so was educated in Afrikaans under the Bantu Education Act.

The feeling on the street in Orlando West is very different than anywhere in Johannesburg. The streets are more spacious, with houses built low, and with large yards. There is none of the tension on the streets that is pervasive in Johannesburg; people’s postures are open and relaxed, and interactions are warm and unsuspicious. On our first visit, a hill next to a well-kept residential street was covered with bare-chested men in traditional Zulu dress climbing on the rocks; the contrasted sharply with the high urban street fashions of central Johannesburg. Along Vilikazi Street itself, it’s impossible not to get hustled, at least if you’re White; locals try to sell you souvenirs or to show you around or sing to you for money (the last being especially excruciatingly awkward). One man insisted on inviting us into his kiosk to see his ‘art’, which turned out to be random sketches and doodles on a pad, and his ‘fashion clothing,’ which our guide informed us were t-shirts from a brand popular twenty years ago, and likely found or stolen. But once one leaves this strip of Vilikazi Street, the
street life is relaxed and very social, and hustle-free. Here people negotiate the streets by foot, although Kombis also cruise the streets, and women often carry high piles of wares or groceries on their heads. Plenty of young school kids in smart uniforms walk in groups on the sidewalks or hang out by spaza shops.

Figure 82: Vilikazi Street, home of the Mandelas and Desmond Tutu, 2018. Photo by author.

The streets feel safe in Orlando West in a way they do not in Jozi. Some of this is architectural, surely: the layout encourages ‘eyes on the street’ in a way that the brutalist fortresses and enclaving of Jozi actively precludes. Soweto was built specifically for surveillance, and oppressive top-down surveillance has been replaced by supportive communal surveillance. Some of it surely comes from the history of the neighborhood as proudly communal rather than individualistic: Sowetans have built a strong and functional community in the face of active attempts to undermine them for decades.

It is interesting to compare the ecology of Orlando West with the other part of Soweto that houses official tourist attractions, namely Kliptown, home of Walter Sisulu Square, the Freedom Plaza, and the Freedom Charter Museum. The decision to turn Kliptown into a tourist location came from the national government, and the design of the square was imposed top-down. Despite
the attempt to insert a tourist economy into it, Kliptown is still run down and based on a precarious hawker economy. A giant, opulent hotel was built there in advance of the World Cup, to house players and fans. It appears to be all but deserted, and the museum, which is hauntingly effective, was empty when we visited. The huge plaza with the Freedom Monument is mostly empty space. The hotel cuts up the main street oddly, and hawkers have set up shop under and around it. The mismatch between the scale of the hotel and square with that the surrounding area is impossible to miss. One blogger, Liza Lancaster, criticizes Kliptown for its lifeless monuments, their lack of integration into the community. She calls Walter Sisulu Square “soulless” and a “characterless authoritarian space.” She notes, “A lot of planning, money, and resources went into the regeneration of the Square at the expense of the infrastructure in the surrounding area. And furthermore, very sadly, the social fabric, character, human scale, and vibrant atmosphere of the trading hub - the formal and informal trading along Union Street - was destroyed.” The space seemed lively when we were there, but it was definitely awkward and sliced up, and the tourist parts were abandoned. While no one hassled us in Kliptown, several residents came over to ask if we were “ok” or “lost’ and whether anyone was giving us a hard time; the hotel concierge was very concerned about our waiting on the street for an Uber to take us home.

This is all in stark contrast to Orlando West, where the tourist industry developed gradually and from within, as part of and in concert with the larger niche-building activities in the area, in contrast to the “grand plans of urban designers” that governed the attempted vitalization of Kliptown (Lancaster 2017). The scale of Vilikazi street is continuous with and suited to the rest of the neighborhood. The infrastructure of the area has improved along with its economic fortunes, and Orlando West boasts bike lanes and clean streets. 99% of homes in Orlando West have

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113 Lancaster 2017. Bremner 2014 also talks about Kliptown as a dead space.
electricity, which is substantially higher than the rate for the province or city as a whole.\textsuperscript{114}

We spend several days in Orlando West. The first two we spent with local guides, but after that, in contrast to the Grey Zone, we felt quite comfortable going back on our own. On the second day, we ate lunch out of an improvised kiosk built into the side of a house, as is typical for the area. Lunch consisted of ‘kotas,’ which are giant sandwiches containing every cheap and filling ingredient you can think of (hot dogs, eggs, French fries, cheese, salami, etc.), along with atjar, a locally made tart green mango chutney adopted from Malaysian cuisine and common in Soweto. We drank Sorghum beer, which is a low-alcohol, sour pink beer, which is served in a communal clay pot that is passed around the table. Sorghum beer is commonly made by local women in a shebeen, which is an informal, woman-run bar. Under apartheid, one of the most common excuses for imprisoning women, especially those seen as political threats, was their illegal production of beer. This effectively disrupted the food ecology of the area, since brewing and drinking sorghum beer is directly tied to social status and perceived fertility for women. In the shebeen, old local men joked with us about our hair color. Our local guide, who was highly educated and had sophisticated insights and opinions about gender politics, colonialism, urbanization, race theory, the relationship between Black American and Black South African culture, and much more, also told us about how when she visits her extended family in more rural areas they still practice “ulwaluko,” a traditional rite of passage among the Xhosa for young men, as well as virginity testing for girls. She found these traditions sexist and homophobic, but she was not dismissive of their value. She also thought that her personal discomfort with them reflected her urban upbringing. The way her life bridged two intricately intertwined and opposed worlds struck me as typical of the complexity of Soweto.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{115} Private conversations with Ntsiki Sibusiso.
We ended that day at the local brewery, Soweto Gold, where the walls are lined with old photos of local boxers and activists. Heartbreakingly, when Heineken bought out the brewery, they also got rid of the iconic original brewery logo, which featured a muscled Black Power fist and the slogan “Brewed for Millennia; Perfected in Soweto.” They changed the logo to a bland picture of the coal towers, the slogan “Born in Soweto; Brewed for All.” This new slogan and image not only depoliticized the brand, but literally took what was marked as belonging to Soweto and declared that it is now “for all” instead. This colonialist assault is discordant in Soweto, which has for the most part successfully resisted most traditional forms of globalization and colonization.

7.3 Bank City

In Chapter 6, I argued that much of Jozi is organized bottom-up, through disparate, local market forces and small-scale commodification and territory-claiming. However, one cannot understand the landscape of the city without also discussing the several large bank complexes (especially ABSA and Bank City) that take up much of the Central Business District. Martin Murray
has argued convincingly that these huge complexes work to colonize space: “Like other citadel office complexes implanted in the city center, the ABSA precinct [for instance] relates to the surrounding streets as a colonizing agent, remaking them in its own image of safety, security, and commerce” (2011, 228).

These bank complexes are gigantic, and they are very much designed to be total environments, containing retail, doctor’s offices, gyms, and the like, so that employees need not venture out into the streets of the inner city, which are coded as danger zones. Moreover, they are designed to have consistent brand imaging and visual uniformity, so that you are reminded at all terms that you are in a space owned by a specific corporation. Furthermore, they are relentlessly, insistently ‘neutral.’ Murray points out that they “might as well be anywhere” (Ibid, 225). They go out of their way not to cater to any particular race or ethnicity or taste, but just to stick to an aesthetic of “international” middle-class neutrality. The coffee shop in Bank City, for example, offers “Italian” and “Mexican” soup and pre-flavored drinks on laminated menus.

The complexes are powerful at establishing territory and borders, even though they are technically ungated and open to the street. Predictably, for Jozi, they are surrounded by private guards. As I discussed earlier, there are not really any consistent rules for who the guards are supposed to keep out, but their presence indicates a border. Unlike in most of the rest of the city, the coffee shop and many other businesses in the complexes are card-only, cash-free establishments. This is well-known as a way of ensuring that homeless and economically precarious people, including the street vendors who operate just outside of the complex, will not be able to come in and make purchases. The rule helps to establish territory through controlling local economic transactions. Furthermore, as Murray points out, the bank complexes make heavy use of “siege architecture” closed off to the street, with overpasses and tunnels between buildings, in order to keep the users of the complexes and the life of the street from mixing with one another (Ibid,
Moreover, because of the extreme uniformity and branding of their architecture, it is visually clear exactly where the complexes start and stop.

These complexes are *colonizers* of inner-city space in several senses. First, quite literally, they are growing and expanding, and displacing the more organic and place-specific street life that used to be there. Second, they serve to radically disrupt the ecology of the Central Business District, and its ability to sustain place and engage in normal niche-building. Inside the complexes, normal place-making is nearly impossible, because the environment is tightly controlled top-down, organized by the goals of corporate branding and the maximization of profit and efficiency. These are palpably dead spaces, killed off by over-orchestration and planned neutrality. The bland and branded fountains and courtyards and pedestrian paths through the complexes make it visually manifest that while they may be *in* the city, in a Euclidean sense, they are not *part of* the city or continuous with it, nor are they *for* the inner-city residents around them.

![Figure 84: “Bank City” shops, near Jeppes and Simmonds Streets, 2018. Photo by author.](image)

Outside the complexes, what is left behind is chopped-up, oddly shaped street spaces that are up against enormous faceless walls and under overpasses. With the middle classes actively streamed out of them and the people ‘left over’ forced into them, they are nearly impossible to
repurpose into new sorts of lively spaces. They are awkward, ugly, unappealing, and cut off from easy flow in and out of them and from any kind of ‘eyes on the street’ culture that might help keep them safe. Just a few blocks away is the ‘Fashion District,’ with its lively hawker culture; this district poor and somewhat dangerous but economically and socially vibrant. But between and under the bank complexes, there are only homeless people asleep and a few nervous looking folks hurrying through to the other side (although from above, looking down from the top of the Carlton Center, one can see that there are small squatting complexes hidden in crannies between the giant buildings). As the complexes grow, they kill the space both inside and around them. They co-opt the meaning of the space on the inside, and leave the space on the outside to die, by sucking up or destroying all the place-making resources.

7.4 Maboneng Precinct

Maboneng Precinct, which is where I lived during my field work in Johannesburg, is a small neighborhood—if that is the right term—in the middle of the city, carved out of what used to be the edge of Jeppestown, east of the Central Business District and south of the Grey Zone. The neighborhood did not exist at all until 2009, and it really started functioning around 2012. The precinct was entirely conceived by a private developer, Perpetuity, run by Jonathan Liebmann and his family, and until this year it was privately owned by Perpetuity as well. The precinct combines housing, gallery and studio space, office space for creative small businesses, a food market showcasing local chefs, a culinary school, an independent movie theater, a gym, outdoor artwork, and multiple cafés, restaurants, bars, and nightclubs, all packed close together. Maboneng—which means “place of light” in Sotho—consistently wins awards and mentions for being among the ‘hippest neighborhoods’ in the world, the best ‘urban regeneration project,’ and so forth, especially from neoliberal media such as Forbes Magazine and the like. Liebmann’s vision was to create an oasis in the inner city that would support and showcase the arts, and that would attract a diverse
crowd of residents and users, including in particular middle-class Northern Johannesburg suburbanites (of all races) who would normally avoid the inner city (Bahmann and Frankle 2012).

The precinct is unusual in being guided by the vision of a single private company. The space has been designed and curated top-down with extreme precision, but, almost paradoxically, with the specific goal of encouraging the growth of bottom-up street life, creative and unpredictable uses of space, and local entrepreneurship. To date this has been surprisingly successful. It is a bizarre, hypercapitalist venture that has tentatively succeeded in putting conditions in place that allow for creative and interesting niche-building. This odd combination of control and spontaneity is striking in Maboneng; it does not feel comparable to any other neighborhood I have seen in any city.

While it is tempting to read Maboneng Precinct as a gentrified space, in fact Perpetuity was careful to repurpose only abandoned commercial and light industrial buildings, such as warehouses and small factories, at the edge of Jeppestown. The developers scrupulously avoided displacing any local residents. Arts on Main, the first building Perpetuity repurposed, was built as a liquor warehouse in 1911 and had been abandoned for decades. Jeppestown, even under apartheid, was a Zulu neighborhood, consisting largely of hostels for workers, mostly men. The men worked in the nearby warehouses and factories, including the diamond trading precinct, which still remains at the terminus of Maboneng, and is heavily fortressed and guarded. Because there was no White flight from Jeppestown at the end of apartheid, and because the Zulu community is notably unfriendly towards outsiders, the neighborhood has retained a consistent feel and demographic more than almost anywhere else. It has remained mostly Zulu, with large numbers of men’s hostels. It is a poor area, and in many ways almost as intimidating to walk through as the Grey Zone neighborhoods. It is certainly less friendly than Yeoville. Despite its poverty, Jeppestown has always been a proud and insistently fashionable neighborhood (see Figure 77). Indeed, even now, several of the men’s clothing stores with the most cache in Jozi are discordantly tucked in among the spaza shops and
spare parts stores of Jeppestown.\textsuperscript{116}

Figure 85: Jeppestown, 1950s, on the edge of what is now Maboneng Precinct on Main Street. Photo courtesy of Bailey’s Archive.

As the economic vitality of central Johannesburg crashed in the 1980s and 1990s, many of the places that employed the men of Jeppestown were abandoned, and unemployment skyrocketed. The commercial stretch that is now Maboneng was desolate and mostly abandoned as recently as 2011. At that point, Fox Street, which is Maboneng’s main drag, was home to Maboneng’s new Main Street Life and Arts on Main apartment and art studio complexes and basically nothing else (see Figure 78). The abandoned buildings of Maboneng were not really usable as residential space, so they were immune to hijacking, which is part of what made their use by Perpetuity plausible.

\textsuperscript{116} The most important example is City Outfitters, which sells expensive and fashionable men’s clothing and is considered a symbol of fashion and coolness among black men in the city. See Nuttall (2009) for an interesting discussion of its role in men’s aesthetics and identity in Johannesburg.
As of 2018, Maboneng Precinct has been developed into a dense jumble of modern and airy post-industrial spaces, almost all of which open out onto the street. The area is concentrated along a few blocks of Fox Street but also spreads north and south of there a bit. The entire area is covered with street art, both commissioned uncommissioned; painting on walls and other surfaces is actively encouraged by the city. Street vendors line Fox Street on weekends. Whereas street vendors in the rest of the inner city sell mostly food and household supplies, in Maboneng they mostly sell jewelry, clothing, and various African-themed crafts. The area is conspicuously picturesque. While in most parts of central Jozi, phones and other electronics are carefully hidden, in Maboneng people are constantly documenting the space: Groups of friends take selfies and snapshots, and professional photographers do shoots with models all over the streets. One goes to Maboneng not only to take in a spectacle, but to be a spectacle; the area is designed to be photographed. Restaurants have small signs encouraging patrons to Instagram their food.
The Jozi ethic of hypercapitalism is on full display in Maboneng. One typical article in a local magazine enthuses, “A creative hub, a place to do business, a destination for visitors and a safe, integrated community for residents. Maboneng has not only undergone a holistic revival but has also become a shining example of strength in Africa’s most economically prosperous city, Johannesburg” (Moloto 2018). The website for the Sunday Market reads,

Market on Main was started by design entrepreneurs Jacques van der Watt of fashion label Black Coffee and Bradley Kirshenbaum of Love Jozi, with the vision to give top food and design entrepreneurs a beautiful space to trade weekly. Our goal is to encourage inner city lifestyle, and to provide a relaxed and creative space for makers to trade, and for locals and visitors to spent their weekend leisure time. (http://www.marketonmain.co.za)

The language of entrepreneurship, capitalism, and creativity is insistently reiterated here. The whole space is marked with the iconography and messaging of entrepreneurship and romantic capitalism. Main Street Life, the largest and most central of the Maboneng residential and commercial complexes and one of the two original buildings, has “I Love Your Work” painted in
giant letters on the side of the building, as a paean to the local ethic of entrepreneurial creativity. The streets of Maboneng are full of high-end ‘hustle.’ In a typical Maboneng encounter, one man tried to sell us download codes for his songs, which indeed turned out to have hundreds of thousands of downloads each, just as he had bragged. The language of ‘creative class’ capitalism is everywhere in Maboneng.

Figure 88: Maboneng streetscape combining old and new, with shipping container condos and a Winnie Mandela commissioned mural, 2018. Photo by author.

The streetscape of Maboneng has a distinctive creative-reuse aesthetic. For instance, shipping containers, which are cheap and plentiful, are repurposed into trendy cafés, or stacked and turned into modernist apartment buildings (see Figure 88). In addition to its collection of converted and post-industrial buildings, which have their own look, the traces of the old uses of buildings are still visible. For instance, Bahmann and Frankel write,

Arts on Main … [retains] the traces and palimpsest of previous uses. The old DF Corlett signage, the disused sliding door at the entrance and old machinery are indications of the previous history. Thus, instead of over-writing the history, it adds additional layers to the palimpsest. By maintaining the existing exterior shell, it retains its architectural relationship with its context – both in terms of style as well as patina. As such, it acknowledges its context as valuable, which is a rare notion in the city of Johannesburg that is generally marked by a series of erasures. (2012, 22)
The neighborhood makes distinctive uses of outdoor space, in sharp contrast to the typical Johannesburg pattern of hurrying the middle classes via automobiles and overpasses from indoor space to indoor space. There are art-lined outdoor passages and interactive graffiti walls. The presence of the sidewalk vendors encourages lingering on the street. There is an outdoor boxing gym woven into a playground and exercise gym, where men (only men) punch the bags and boys do serious training classes (see Figure 89).

Figure 89: Outdoor boxing gym on Beacon Street in Maboneng Precinct (with Kombis in the background), 2018. Photo by author.

Maboneng Precinct has succeeded admirably in its goal of drawing middle-class residents (and tourists) into the area. It has succeeded less well at real racial integration. The residents of Maboneng are mostly black, although not quite as uniformly as in the rest of the center of the city. Bars, DJ’ed dance clubs, and mid-range restaurants are also mostly black, and I never saw anyone who wasn’t Black at the gym, over the course of at least fifteen visits. The independent movie theater, in contrast, attracts an almost exclusively White clientele, and the Sunday market is predominantly White. Generally, destinations providing entertainment and involving short visits tend
to attract Whites, while the businesses and residences aimed at daily living attract Blacks. Pata Pata, an upscale swanky jazz club and restaurant, attracted a genuinely mixed crowd, which makes sense, as it falls in between these two categories.

Despite racial segregation, an interesting feature of Maboneng is its economic integration. Almost everywhere else I went in Jozi was clearly and exclusively marked as a middle-class, upper-class, working-class, or economically precarious space. Street hawkers in Yeoville or Hillbrow sell cheap goods to other residents, not to middle-class people, and in middle-class neighborhoods there is almost no one on the street. But Maboneng provides economic opportunities to poor and working-class city residents, through higher-priced street hawking and owning small businesses, and middle-class folks spend time on the streets. One street hawker got to know me by talking about how he would buy cheap goods in Hillbrow, and sell them marked up in Maboneng. He started a habit of picking out things he thought I would like and finding me on the street to try to sell them to me (which was sometimes successful). Bottle collectors are allowed on the streets here. Moreover, kids from the city who do not live right in Maboneng and are presumably too poor to do so come to use the boxing gym. Real estate prices in Maboneng itself are out of reach for many city residents but not sky-high. Maboneng is thus one of the only parts of the city where people end up interacting on the street across class lines. More generally, it makes spontaneous encounters possible, in just the way that much of the city is designed to preclude. This is part of what gives the neighborhood its successful dynamism and place-character despite its top-down, micromanaged design. Bahmann and Frankel connect this point to territory nicely:

It is unclear who ‘owns the street’ in Maboneng. The ideological dominance of the district, particularly of Fox Street, is ambiguous. Other spaces in the city and suburbs, even where there is a diversity of users, have a clear dominant ideology. In Parkhurst or Parkview there is a clear social distinction between who the space is intended for (shoppers) and who is there to support their usage (car guards). In Maboneng there is no such clarity—the urban poor belong on the street as much as the middle- and upper-class white suburbanites do. As such, there is ambivalence in terms of the rules of engagement. Thus, there is a constant re-negotiation of how people engage and interact with each other. (2012, 34)
At the same time, though, the interactions across class and other lines are not completely uncontrolled. The private guards who roam the streets and the gentrified feel of the streetscape and businesses keep people on their ‘best behavior,’ delineated roughly in terms of the norms of middle-class respectability. Street vendors and hustlers are less persistent here; people asking for money don’t follow you; kids stay out of adults’ way. Poorer users of the space who break these unspoken rules quickly get yelled at by shop and restaurant owners, who can see them because of the open store fronts. Unlike in poor areas of the city, no one sits on the ground in Maboneng, including street hawkers, who have stools. Because sitting on the street is socially unacceptable, homeless people do not congregate in Maboneng.

Thus Maboneng presents itself as a free and spontaneous space, but it has reasonably strict street norms, and their violations stand out. Poor folks are not the only potential transgressors. One night we were eating in an Ethiopian restaurant fairly late, when it was quiet. Two White guys with heavy South African accents walked into the open-fronted restaurant off the street and started loudly and aggressively talking about how the servings were gigantic and looked weird. They clearly had no intention of eating there. The Ethiopian waitress kept her gaze averted and downwards and did not acknowledge them in any way. Although they did not say anything overtly racist, their entire bodily presence, the volume of their voice, their critical tone, and, most strikingly, their public performance of their entitlement to simply enter the space for entertainment and voyeurism, all made vivid that this was a territory incursion. White people are invited to Maboneng, but it is not theirs. Transitions between indoor and outdoor space in Maboneng may be porous, but they are not non-existent, and their crossing into indoor space for the wrong reason was a power play. This was especially vivid given that their accents flagged them as native South Africans, who were old enough to have had legal dominance over Black spaces in their lifetimes. Their proprietary body language was uncomfortably out of step, and came off as aggressive and intimidating. There were a couple of
other times in which White people in Maboneng aggressively used space in ways that stuck out as jarring, but they were jarring precisely because they were rare.

I’ve mentioned several times that that much of Maboneng is open to the street, and that the distinction between indoor and outdoor space is fluid. There are multiple courtyards, open-fronted restaurants, sidewalk cafés, buildings that used to be warehouses with giant open fronts that were for trucks, and so forth. People pass fluidly from inside to outside and back, and linger in between. Until one spends time in Jozi, it’s hard to understand how much this openness sets Maboneng off spatially from the areas that surround it, with their closed faces and fortifications and cut-off streets. Under apartheid, Black people were not allowed into bars in Jozi, although they were allowed to purchase alcohol in stores, so public drinking was a key element of the recreational culture, and Maboneng helps restore this. As I discussed above, Yeoville is in some ways similarly open and porous, but it makes a big difference that one cannot comfortably hang out in the street in Yeoville because of street risks, especially if one sticks out as not belonging. Maboneng was explicitly modeled on this kind of porous neighborhood, which has almost been lost in Jozi, but it is a much wealthier, safer, more inclusive version. Maboneng’s creator, Johnathan Liebmann, said a few years ago, “The plan for phase five is to open Arts on Main onto the street. It was the right call in the beginning [to create a closed enclave] because there was no street culture. But now we can open onto the street and engage with the street culture that we helped to create” (Bahmann and Frankel 2012, 29, interview with Liebmann). Bahmann and Frankel point out, strikingly, that when Arts on Main and Main Street Life first opened as Maboneng was launched, the two-block walk between them was one of the few urban walks that middle-class Jozi residents took, and so the opening up of this little bit of mobility was a launching point for the creation of street life. The next Maboneng

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117 One article points out that a nearby bar at which there have been multiple grisly grimes—the Zebra Inn—is often taken to be part of Maboneng, but isn’t, and that you can tell that if you notice its closed-off front. 
https://www.forbesafrica.com/focus/2017/08/17/boom-come-fighting/
business to open was Uncle Merv’s, which is a coffee shop and bakery in a kiosk, whose little seats are all on a patio on the sidewalk, facing out to the street. Uncle Merv’s is located right in between Main Street Life and Arts on Main, which meant that it gave people a place to stop and hang out on their little walk; this helped the neighborhood progress from one with a walking culture to one with a street hang-out culture. It is clear from Bahmann and Frankel’s research and the (short) history of the precinct that Liebmann had a multi-step vision for how to use top-down planning to create a niche with bottom-up life of a specific sort.

Not only is Maboneng designed to be internally open and fluid, but steps have been taken to integrate the neighborhood into the city. There are no gates or buzzers or walls surrounding the precinct, although there is a heavy presence of security guards on the streets. Visually, the area is designed to give views of the surrounding city, so that one experiences oneself phenomenologically as in the city, rather than as protected from it, as one does in Sandton and other wealthy suburbs. One of the most popular spots in the neighborhood is the rooftop of Main Street Life, which turns into a DJ’ed bar with a set of food stalls every Saturday. From here, you can see directly how Maboneng is planted in the central city with all its complexity and messiness. Bahmann and Frankel insightfully observe that: “The rooftop bar is positioned in such a way to obstruct the iconic view of the skyline and rather focuses attention on the more subtle and nuanced experience of the local context” (2012, 30). This has the effect of anchoring the spot in the living city rather than giving it a static, monumental view. At the same time, though, it gives visual access the squats and dilapidated blocks that would be too dangerous to walk in, which cannot help but come off as a bit voyeuristic. It is definitely part of the allure and romance of Maboneng, for better or for worse, that it is surrounded by and technically open to neighborhoods that are so dangerous. As I discussed in

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118 When I was on the rooftop, I kept trying to photograph the skyline and getting frustrated, not understanding the significance of what I was seeing, which I feel sheepish about now.
Chapter 6, danger is part of the aesthetic and identity of the city, and Maboneng capitalizes on this aesthetic. Bahmann and Frankel note that unlike other middle class, enclaved areas of the city, “Part of Maboneng’s character is its relationship to everyday city uses such as hawking, commuting, etc. As such, it forms a discursive relationship with its surrounding environment and … serve[s] as an incubator that encourages increased social interaction across boundaries” (Ibid., 4).

Figure 90: Official map of Maboneng Precinct, 2018, produced by Propertuity.

The boundaries of Maboneng are not officially marked or enforced; there are no walls or gates or security checkpoints around it. And yet, Maboneng in effect has some of the starkest boundaries and the clearest territory that I have seen. Part of this comes from the abrupt architectural and obvious economic transitions from the surrounding areas. Part comes from the official, branded Maboneng maps that Propertuity has installed all over the precinct, which vividly mark it as a privately-owned space, and which quite literally show you constantly where it begins and ends, and how you are supposed to move through it (Figure 90). Part comes from the sudden appearance of the private, orange-vested security guards, whose mere presence signals that this is a space deserving of guarding, unlike surrounding Jeppestown. The guards on the street and the guards at building entrances visually display that Maboneng is a space in which you will be watched.
and in which certain standards of street behavior will be enforced.

Indeed, street behavior transitions immediately once one enters or leaves Maboneng; the change in bodily movement and use of space is striking and unmissable. Inside Maboneng, the crowd on the street includes both men and women, looking up and around and making casual eye contact, often with their phones out. The instant one crosses Main Street to the south or Commissioner Street to the north, no one is on their phone. The few women who are out hurry by rather than linger. Men stand or in doorways or sit on the ground. Often they avoid eye contact, or if they make it, it comes off as a mild challenge or as territory guarding. There is much more audible street conversation in Maboneng, and no one sits on the ground, as I mentioned.

On our first night in Maboneng, we hopped from Pata Pata, the high-end jazz restaurant, to a bar down the street, Social Club, that played DJ’ed American hip hop and South African hip hop and Kwaito. The crowd at Social Club was entirely black, and people were dancing or chatting out on the patio or at the bar. As usual we were a bit of a curiosity, and several folks talked to us, often asking questions about my research or chatting about American politics. We did not yet have any sense of Maboneng being different from other parts of the city. We decided to get a nightcap at a highly rated cocktail bar just three blocks away. We unknowingly chose a route that took us north across Commissioner Street, out of Maboneng, and then back in again. The moment we crossed Commissioner, just one block north, the street life ended completely abruptly. Concrete storefronts were closed off or barred over, and the lighting on the street quit, as did the guard presence. No one was walking, although a few men sat or stood in groups. Within one minute, a very drunk man stumbled towards us, barked something out, and fell on his face and did not get up. We scurried back into the precinct, sufficiently intimidated to give up on our cocktail bar plan altogether.

Thus the boundaries of Maboneng are enforced through bodily gesture, positioning, and interactions, and architecture and the layout of the streets, as well as visual markers of danger and
safety. The result is stark enough that even though Maboneng was specifically designed to be part of and integrated with the city as well as open to it, in fact it functions as its own kind of bounded enclave, albeit one that is diverse, functional, and lively on the inside. Although Maboneng is designed for walking, no one really walks into or out of Maboneng. Friends of ours who were coming to pick us up in Maboneng one evening got robbed at gunpoint inside their car, on Commissioner Street, on the northern edge of the precinct. I spoke to many locals, including Black middle-class locals, who were wary of making the trip to Maboneng because of its location, and said they would never live there because they would feel trapped inside it. There were days in Johannesburg where neither my son nor I had the energy to leave Maboneng, and its boundaries felt very stark and constraining on those days. (This was especially so since Maboneng is well stocked with entertainment, but is missing basic necessities like a functional grocery store or pharmacy.)

Figure 91: Michael’s ‘mind map’ of Maboneng, from Bahmann and Frankel 2012.
Bahmann and Frankel asked Jozi residents to draw ‘mind maps’ of the neighborhood from memory, which marked how they felt in different parts of it. The one they reproduce is by Michael (Figure 91). What was striking for me was that I could ‘read’ this map, down to the exact block and building, despite its sketchiness, and despite the fact that it is several years out of date. In fact, I could trace the paths that my son and I used to navigate the neighborhood in order to feel safe. When I showed it to my son, he and I independently agreed on exactly how to place our apartment building, our favorite bar, our favorite coffee shop, and the paths we took between them that kept us on ‘comfortable’ rather than ‘uneasy’ streets. On the one hand, these are emotional reactions to uncodified, complex perceptions. On the other, different users of the neighborhood apparently at least sometimes converge pretty tightly in these reactions. This seems to indicate powerfully that Maboneng, as experienced by its users, has a distinctive territorial form, boundaries, and place character, and these emerge out of its use rather than being officially imposed.

The use of art to constitute place identity and to mark space and territory in Maboneng is a rich topic in its own right. Almost all of Maboneng is covered in murals, graffiti, stenciling, and tagging. Most of the art shares a general perspective: It is pro-African, anti-violence, and rife with the symbols of post-apartheid South Africa. Unlike Berlin’s anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist street art, the art in Maboneng almost universally celebrates the current regime and African culture. Images of the Mandelas, especially Winnie, are common. This is not to say that all the art is lacking in ‘edge’; some pieces address street violence and colonialism in creative and powerful ways. A piece on the base of an overpass, by Julie Lovelace, is a collage made up of china plates; it is deceptively cute until you read the text on its central plate: “Little Kali got a gun he got from the rebels To kill the infidels and American devils A bomb on his waist Prays five times a day And listens to Heavy Metal” (see Figure 92). One of Jozi’s most influential street artists, a middle-aged filmmaker who goes by Afrika 47, focuses his art on street weapons. One of his pieces, on a different overpass base, depicts
a gun made of bills from different African currencies, including radically devalued Zimbabwean bills (see Figure 93). This is a sharp critique of the roots of violence, but it does not come off as a criticism of the South African government. Rather, it targets the colonialist destabilization of Africa more broadly. Other works struggle to come to terms with the nation’s troubled past.

Hannalie Coetzee, a White Afrikaans woman, carved an image her family into the side of a Maboneng building, using negative space, and thereby portraying them as permanently present in their absence.  

A rare work in Afrikaans on the side of a wall on Fox Street reads, “Toeris in jou gebeur teland?” Or, “tourist in your own land?” and is accompanied by pictures of Black activists who had been excluded from the city. All of these works have sharp political edge, but they are not

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119 These interpretations are my own, but I had enormous help understanding the art I saw from a skilled guide, anthropologist Jo Buitendach, owner of P.A.S.T. experiences, which supports and explores local street art in the city.
critical of the current ANC regime. The generally pro-South African tone contrasts with areas like Braamfontein, where the student-oriented culture gives rise to anti-establishment protest graffiti of various sorts.\textsuperscript{120}

The art in Maboneng is visually organized so that the precinct presents itself almost as a continuous palate. Unlike similarly art-rich areas of Berlin, in Maboneng the street art generally appears quite organized, and does not overlap. The art also visually marks out Maboneng as a distinctive territory, and as a terrain of creativity. This ‘branding’ as a creative zone is enforced by several spots in which passersby are encouraged to add their own words or images to the landscape. Even small corners are stenciled with art, turning the space into one saturated by various kinds of intimate social encounters (see Figure 94). These intimate works, many of which are very small, discourage moving quickly through the streets. They draw you in, and thereby contribute to building Maboneng into a niche in which the streets are heavily used. Because Maboneng is so art-friendly, visible, and photographable, Jozi’s most prominent street artists want to have a visual presence in the neighborhood. Artists like TapZ, Tyke, and Mars, whose work covers the city, have huge panels here. There have been turf wars; for instance, a female artist, Karabo Poppy, was chased out of Maboneng by other artists because she was seen as claiming entitlement to the space she hadn’t earned.\textsuperscript{121} So art here is also often a form of territory-claiming.

\textsuperscript{120} Jo Buitendach, private conversation.
\textsuperscript{121} Jo Buitendach, private conversation.
Figure 94: Intimate stenciling in Maboneng. Photo by author, 2018.

Figure 95: Wall between Maboneng and the diamond precinct, photo by author, 2018.
The western boundary of Maboneng, where Fox Street runs into the heavily fortified and surveilled wall of the diamond precinct, functions as an especially large palate which in effect marks the edge of the neighborhood (see Figure 95). But the other borders of Maboneng have no walls. And at these borders, the art has spilled out past them, encroaching into Jeppestown and the Fashion District. The art stretches out of the precinct proper, and onto the fences and walls and shacks at its periphery. This makes the boundaries of Maboneng less defined than they would be otherwise, and it creates a visual continuity with the rest of the city that pushes against the stark discontinuity I described above. Moreover, the street art is not owned by Perpetuity, so it pushes against the corporatization of the space. Art thus serves as a kind of place-making activity that challenges the bounded character of Maboneng, if only in a limited way. For instance, one visually striking, long fence that begins just on the edge of Main Street has sequential works by top Jozi artists TapZ, Mars, and Tyke. These murals have the Maboneng ‘look,’ when it comes to their detail and scope, even though the triptych stretches past the borders and into Jeppestown. After these comes a slightly rougher work by another beloved artist, Rasty, who is also a tattoo artist and the owner of an important local graffiti supply store. His rougher work seems to provide a more gradual visual transition out of Maboneng. This series functions as a collaborative project of extending and claiming space, and creating continuity with the city (see Figures 96 and 97).

122 Past a certain point, however, the art stops. Jeppestown is for the most part too dangerous to linger in long enough to do large pieces, and the art along the edges between Maboneng and Jeppestown tends to be throw-ups rather than elaborate murals. While we were there, a street artist trying to do a mural in Jeppestown was stabbed while working.
Is Maboneng a force for gentrification? In a certain obvious sense, it certainly appears to be one: Private capital has been invested in fancy loft condos, high-end coffee shops, art galleries, and all the standard trappings of gentrification, in the midst of urban poverty. It is surrounded by a population that cannot afford to buy its goods, and for whom the norms and practices of the precinct are quite alien. It has been explicitly interpreted as a force for gentrification and displacement by the local Zulu residents of Jeppestown. In 2015, a series of evictions in Jeppestown on the border of the precinct were falsely blamed on Maboneng and Propertuity by residents, which
led to protests and looting (see Figure 98). Zulu residents marched and chanted “We want to eat sushi in Maboneng!”\textsuperscript{123} Of course they can, in principle, eat sushi in Maboneng (which I wouldn’t recommend). The chant powerfully reflects the Jeppestown residents’ sense that what goes on a few blocks from them is not for them, that they do not belong there.

Figure 98: 2015 looting and protesting of Maboneng in Jeppestown by Zulu residents. Photo from the Daily Maverick.

In fact, the evictions were because of dilapidated building conditions and had nothing directly to do with Maboneng. Maboneng has not displaced anyone directly, because it was built entirely out of abandoned space. Moreover, because the buildings it used were commercial, there was no direct possibility of using them as low-income housing. Indeed, as I discussed above, Maboneng has in fact provided money making opportunities for poorer inner-city residents, and found ways of including them in the space, although they can’t afford to live there.

Spokespeople for Propertuity have been quick to dismiss charges of gentrification, for these reasons. But they have clung to a fairly narrow and literal definition of gentrification, without

\textsuperscript{123} https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-03-20-during-violent-protests-maboneng-is-a-symbol-and-a-scapegoat/, https://2summers.net/2015/05/03/my-maboneng-story/
attention to the broader effects that Maboneng is likely to have on the surrounding neighborhoods over time. For instance, Propertuity marketing manager Nyiko Chauke comments, “Gentrification is developing the space and chasing away the people to make room for the middle income. And there is a misunderstanding of what we are doing. We are building the neighborhood without chasing away people. And secondly, we cater for the middle class and also blue-collar workers.” However, taking a broader viewpoint, it seems inevitable that other businesses catering to Maboneng’s middle class residents and customers will be attracted to the area, and begin to buy out and take over the blocks around the periphery, and spread from there. Likewise, it seems likely that as this happens, middle class people seeking a more urban and less enclaved life than the suburbs offer, will become interested in the currently cheap housing around Maboneng. So far none of this has happened, because the boundaries of the precinct are, as I argued, very stark. But this gentrifying pattern does seem to be at least a substantial risk as Maboneng grows and flourishes. Meanwhile, users of Maboneng are certainly not wandering into poor parts of Jeppestown and spending their money there, and benefiting that community. Jeppestown has its own ecosystem separate from Maboneng’s, which may in various ways be intimidating or troubled, but which has a historically sedimented character. Introducing a completely different kind of space with completely different lived norms right in the midst of it seems certain to impact that ecosystem in unpredictable and potentially disruptive ways. The mere fact that the residents of Jeppestown are resentful of the sushi-eating ways of the neighborhood next to theirs already changes their ecosystem. Whether or not this counts as a form of gentrification in the strict sense, it is certainly a disruption which cannot be assumed to be inert or benign. It seems disingenuous or tunnel-visioned of Propertuity to absolve themselves of any role in predictable gentrification patterns.

It is interesting to compare Maboneng to Bank City. Both are privately owned spaces in the

middle of the city, which have been designed top-down in ways discontinuous with their surroundings. Both are designed to provide multiple services, so that users can engage in a wide range of activities without leaving. In the previous section, I accepted Martin Murray’s argument that Bank City and similar complexes function as colonizing spaces in Jozi. Is Maboneng a colonizing space as well? I don’t think there is an easy answer to this question.

On the one hand, unlike First National Bank, which owns Bank City, Maboneng’s owners are committed to avoiding displacement. So the space that it is taking up was not strictly anyone else’s. Furthermore, as we have seen, Maboneng’s design is specifically organized around creating spontaneous and sustained street life, and it does this quite successfully. In this way Maboneng contrasts sharply with the cold, dead space of Bank City, which is thoroughly organized around brand consistency and the death of spontaneity. Moreover, however partial its success, Maboneng is designed to draw people into the life of the inner city, rather than to replace it. Inner city neighborhoods like Yeoville have in many ways been rendered unusable by revanchist top-down planning and abandonment. The fact that the design of Maboneng is an homage to such neighborhoods seems like a decolonizing move: a restoration of the city rather than a cooption of it.

Fabian Frenzel (2014) argues that the development of Maboneng is in some ways similar, in its goals, to the tours of the Grey Zone run by Dlala Nje, in that both are designed to put parts of central Jozi that have become invisible back on the map—to make them visible again. This also feels like a decolonizing project—one of amplifying space rather than co-opting it or stealing it.

And yet, Bahmann and Frankel (who come down tentatively and warily on the side of Maboneng being a good project for the city overall), worry that the busy diversity of Maboneng is to some extent a commodified, profitable aesthetic—one that masks real exclusions that still underlie it. These include the exclusion of the extremely poor, who make up most of the surrounding area. The emphasis on art and design cultivates an atmosphere of creative vibrancy and hedonism, and while
this is not fake, it is never far from the surface that the whole space is a for-profit enterprise, curated and sculpted in accordance with corporate goals, even if those goals are in many ways laudable.

Ultimately, the whole idea of a private company owning and controlling an entire piece of the city has a colonialist core: Propertuity took a chunk of the city that they found, and claimed it, transforming it in accordance with their vision and giving it over to new people. It has also put original residents to work in service positions relative to wealthier users of the space. Even though these jobs were very needed, there are colonizing meanings and risks here too. This may be aesthetically appealing colonialism with a benign face, but it doesn’t escape colonizing logic.

Moreover, I suggested above that Maboneng’s aesthetic and lived niche are likely to spread and start displacing other forms of life, even if Propertuity is committed to containing the official project. If this happens, a more straightforward kind of colonization of space will occur.

I cannot condemn Maboneng or wholeheartedly embrace it. It gives a great deal to the city of Johannesburg, but it also makes me wary. But in the context of hypercapitalist Jozi and the challenges it faces, I am not sure I can suggest an alternative, less problematic model for how to make functional, vibrant niches in the middle of the city. Rand Merchant Bank bought 34% of the shares in Maboneng in 2016, and as of 2018, Liebmann is said to be moving on from making this his primary project. It remains to be seen whether Maboneng will retain its strengths in the wake of this transition.

7.5 Constitution Hill

One of the most dramatic repurposings of urban space in Johannesburg is the transformation of the site of the dreaded Section Four prison and women’s prison in the middle of the city into a complex that includes Constitution Hall (the equivalent of the Supreme Court) as well as prison museums, event venues, and offices for nonprofits and for organizations affiliated with nearby University of the Witwatersrand. This is a space that has been carefully repurposed top-
down. It was designed with the specific goal of retaining and leaving visible past meanings, while recontextualizing them and building a new space with new meanings and uses amidst the old ones.

Constitution Hill was built in, around, over, and out of a notorious multi-part prison block. Originally built as a fort in 1893, the prison was already a repurposed space, and it was supposed to be temporary, although it functioned from the early twentieth century until 1987. It was composed of a women’s prison, a small prison for White men, an ‘awaiting-trial block,’ and the notorious Section 4, which was the jail for Black and Colored men. Section 4 housed political prisoners such as Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi; passbook violators (both those who were making a political statement and those who were simply caught without proper paperwork); and also murderers and gang leaders, including Nongoloza Mathebula, the notorious founder of the ‘Numbers Gangs’ who run South African prisons. The women’s prison housed political prisoners, including Winnie Mandela and various well-known white activists, along with passbook violators and women charged with beer production. The women’s prison also housed violators of the Immorality Act, which is to say women in mixed-race relationships.

Conditions at the prison were horrific. Men in Section 4 were barely fed, and were allowed only limited, very public access to toilets and showers. Cells were overcrowded to the point of immobilizing. Beatings were common. The Numbers Gang members controlled access to resources and space through violence, including sexual violence. Men were forced to dance naked in maximally humiliating positions, purportedly in order to enable visual inspection of their anuses for hidden objects.\footnote{This dance was called the “tausa,” and we have records of it because a photographer in a nearby high-rise illicitly filmed it in the courtyard. All these details are documented at the Constitution Hill prison museum.} Solitary confinement, in nearly lightless cells almost too small to lie down in, was common. One especially fortified solitary confinement cell was reserved for those who had gone mad from the experience. From inside the prison, it is visually clear just how isolated prisoners were;
one can see the tops of Johannesburg’s towers over the high, thick walls, but nothing more.

After the end of apartheid, plans began to convert the complex into the site of the new Constitutional Court, as well as a space for showcasing and celebrating the new democratic South Africa. The complex opened in 2004. Section 4 was maintained in almost its exact original state. Although signage and exhibits have been added, entering the area gives an extraordinarily direct sense of the living conditions in the prison. A particularly brutal touch is that the solitary confinement cells have not been cleaned in any way. One can see the graffiti that was carved into the walls and doors on the inside—sometimes mundane, sometimes desperate, and sometimes terrifying, as in the case of one cell festooned with swastikas. One can also see red footprints and boot prints on every door, from where guards kicked the doors, presumably to intimidate occupants.

In contrast, the women’s prison has been substantially modified and turned into more of a standard museum. This is because it had already been converted into offices after the closing of the prison and before the conversion into Constitution Hill. Mark Gevisser writes, “Because the fort and the Women’s Gaol were reused, they were repainted. Which means that we lost, forever, the most potent prison records available: The graffiti … the story from below” (2009, 324). Former prisoners from the women’s prison were unhappy with the transformation of the space, and argued that their story had been quite literally been erased (Ibid.). The awaiting-trial blocks were mostly dismantled, and their bricks were incorporated into the walls of Constitution Hall itself.
Geographically, Constitution Hill is fascinating. It is smack in the middle of the city, opening out directly into Hillbrow and Berea to the east and southeast, and just as directly into the semi-gentrified neighborhood of Braamfontein and the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand to the west. It is no surprise that it was chosen for a fort; from the top of its ramparts you can see the entire city and all of its major landmarks. Despite this central location, and for reasons that no one could explain to me, apparently almost no one knew that the prison was there, even when it was fully functioning. The prison was notorious, but its location was nearly a secret. It is true that from the outside, the complex merely looks like a discrete hill, although I am mystified as to how most residents of the center of the city can have avoided knowing what was happening inside the hill. In addition to this mysterious invisibility, its current location as an anchor point between the organized and controlled, academic neighborhood of Braamfontein, on one side, and the Grey Zone on the other, gives it a distinctive spatial meaning. The designers of Constitution Hill took maximal
advantage of this central location and its sight lines, and actively transformed what had been a closed off, hidden space cut off from the city, into a space specifically designed to create connections and openings to the city. The edges of the complex are lined with university offices and the offices of nonprofits; these open both into the complex and out onto the street, spatially. Institutionally and culturally, they also serve as bridges between the complex and the community.

There are multiple paths in and out of the complex. Most notably, the “Great African Staircase” runs down the hill between the old walls of the prison on the one side and the gleaming new walls of Constitution Hall on the other, directly into Hillbrow. The complex is thus designed in multiple ways to be porously bounded and open to the city, rather than a monument that is separate from it.

This is also one of the only safe vantage points from which to see and photograph Hillbrow. From here, you can see the line of police cars along the edge of the Grey Zone, and the hijacked buildings and squats, all of which are too dangerous to explore on foot. This spatial openness to the city is a materialization of the plan behind all of Constitution Hill, which was to design a non-territorialized space open to and used by all South Africans, which would be dynamic and integral to the city (Gevisser 2009). In many ways, as I discuss just below, this has succeeded. But the material openness of the space has not in fact eliminated the territorial boundaries around it in practice. It remains far too dangerous to walk all the way down the stairs and into Hillbrow, and tour guides remind visitors not to do this as they dip towards the bottom of the staircase with their groups. Attempts to spread the cultural resources of the complex down into Hillbrow have met with dubious success. For example, just east of Constitution Hill, the Hillbrow Theater, run as a foundation and designed to offer resources to local kids, was the site of a retaliatory mass shooting in the middle of a performance in 2017. Because one cannot actually access Hillbrow from the hill despite the stairs, the view of the area takes on a voyeuristic feel of sorts. On the other side of the

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complex, it looks like a trivial, short walk to the university campus and the gentrified stretch along Jorissen and De Kourt streets in Braamfontein. But although we tried multiple walking routes, there was just no way of making the very short walk without first hitting street encampments that were clearly too dangerous to cross through, or highways that we uncrossable by foot. We gave up after an hour of trying to find a workaround. In practice, the complex is still a monad that can be easily be entered or exited only by car. Visually, however, the openness is breathtaking.

Figure 100: Great African Staircase at Constitution Hill, 2018. Photo by author.

The current layout of Constitution Hill is masterfully micromanaged. The stairs are designed to be a spatial meeting point between the memory of the old order and the hope of the new one, and to create continuity between the city and this symbol of democracy and memory. One side represents oppression and lack of mobility, and the other represents inclusion and equality. The intertwining and juxtaposition of old and new is visually striking. The courtyard in the middle of the complex is inviting and open, and traditional music is amplified from the stumps of the former awaiting-trial blocks at all times. The front of the new hall is festooned with the words “Constitutional Court” in all eleven official languages, in rainbow lettering—a shout-out to South Africa being the first and still only African nation to legalize same-sex marriage and constitutionally
protect its queer citizens.¹²⁷ The vivid modernity of the building is quite intentional, but unlike the brutalism of much of the cityscape, the building is inviting. Inside, the halls are lined with art, and not the kind of stiff monumental art typically found in government buildings, but instead colorful, aesthetically innovative art inspired by folk themes. Signage inside rotates between the eleven languages and American Sign Language, and the twenty-seven articles of the constitution are used as a theme for artistic riffs and iterations. The tour guides point out the prominent photos of disabled and openly gay justices of the constitutional court.

![Figure 101: Entrance to Constitution Hall, 2018. Photo by author.](image)

The courtroom itself is carefully constructed to be non-hierarchical and inviting; it is filled with bright colors and soft materials, with the judges sitting below rather than above the observation seats; public observers are welcome at any time. The design scheme of the room is based on imagery of a tree with eleven branches—eleven for the number of national languages and the (not coincidentally) eleven judges of the constitutional court, and a tree to represent the trees under which hearings were held in traditional Bantu justice systems. The windows of the courtyard are

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¹²⁷ The Johannesburg Pride Parade begins at Constitution Hall each year.
wide, short rectangles, designed to show the torsos of all the people walking through the courtyard and down the Great African Staircase, but not their more immediately racialized faces.\textsuperscript{128}

Everything in the complex is unobtrusively disability accessible, with elegant ramps and sign language translations. There are dedicated times for children with autism and sensory challenges to enjoy the space in a low-noise, low-stimulation environment. There is no gift shop and no swag of any kind, in contrast for instance to Robben Island in Cape Town, in which Mandela’s cell has been turned into a commodified tourist trap, or Checkpoint Charlie, which I explored in Chapter 5. Given the hypercapitalism of most of the city, this careful absence of commodification is notable.

I did not see Black or “Colored” people on the tours of the prison, except for children who were with school groups. In contrast, Constitution Hall was filled with people of all races each time I visited, and it was lively, with people chatting and laughing and kids playing in the space. On one of my visits, court was in session, and the courtroom was full to capacity with observers, mostly Black. The case being heard concerned freedom of assembly, and the courtyard was filled with peaceable protesters. On a different day when court was not in session, children clambered on the judges’ seats. I visited on International Women’s Day, and the women’s prison was filled with related events, which were so heavily attended that I couldn’t squeeze into the building that day. Having lived in three national capital cities, I have never before seen an important government complex as porous and open to the public, not merely formally but in practice, as this one is. This is especially striking in Johannesburg, given the surveillance culture, siege architecture, and spatial exclusion that are characteristic of most of the city.

The narrative constructed by the space is unambiguously one that celebrates a purported unidirectional progression from oppression and misery to democracy and flourishing; it is not self-critical about the current regime. It is also is rather shocking, to North American eyes, in its

\textsuperscript{128} This was how the courtroom was explained to me by the official tour guide.
willingness to showcase the horrors of the past in unvarnished and graphic ways. A large triptych in the hall outside the court represents apartheid-era South Africa, the struggle to end apartheid and the transition to democracy, and the new democratic order. The first panel includes images of a naked black man with his genitals fully exposed being electrocuted and protestors being dragged by dogs, among other horrors (see Figure 102). The final panel openly celebrates the neoliberal, hypercapitalist current order, with lots of images of brand and company logos representing the return of businesses to the country after the end of international boycotting.

![Figure 102: The first of a three-part series in Constitution Hall, this one representing South Africa under apartheid. Photo by author, 2018.](image)

Considered as a space of memory and preservation, Constitution Hill is unusual and effective. The minimal interventions into the prison space combined with detailed signage really do serve to give the visitor the sense of seeing how the prison functioned as a living space. This is enhanced by simple but powerful video exhibits at many points, featuring former prisoners who face
directly at the viewer and talk about their experiences in detail. The angles and positions of the recordings powerfully draw the viewer into second-personal conversation with the prisoners, almost involuntarily at times. The space feels still inhabited by its past. There are numerous places in which visitors are asked to respond in writing to what they are seeing and answer reflection questions. This is not a dead space for merely looking, as many museums and historical sites are. In this way it contrasts sharply with Checkpoint Charlie, for instance.

The historically preserved spaces at Constitution Hill are intertwined with Constitution Hall and the other parts of the complex, which are not spaces of preservation at all, but rather spaces that are in heavy current use. Constitution Hall celebrates—even romanticizes—contemporary South Africa. But it does so not through monumentalizing it. Instead, the space is very much in use, most obviously because of the court itself, but also because of the various offices, spaces for events and for protests, restaurant, and so forth. Thus Constitution Hill preserves the past, but celebrates and displays the present, by being a living, useful space, rather than a museum or a place for passively looking and learning. Constitution Hill is the product of top down design, down to the smallest detail, but it is an exceptionally successful produced space. It is visibly living and usable, as well as inviting. It is a successful healthy niche, albeit one that is not as porous and open to the city as it was designed to be.
Chapter 8: Comparisons and Conclusions

Both Berlin and Johannesburg were officially carved up in 1948, in the wake of the second world war. These divides were instituted in order to keep different groups of residents separated from one another, flowing in specific ways through space, and properly surveilled. In both cases, this division was not merely legal but concrete and morphological, implemented through walls and other physical barriers, checkpoints, surveillance lights and guards, and the like, in addition to institutional tools for navigating space such as passbooks. Moreover, both systems of division ended in the early 1990s, brought down largely by bottom-up political activism and resistance, combined with international pressure and heavy economic costs that attached to staying divided. Both cities have undergone dramatic repurposing since the early 1990s, not only because their former political order collapsed, but because the people using them and living in them now, post-unification, are very different kinds of people, living different lives, with different spatial needs and values, than those who occupied the divided cities. Both are cities with a large recent immigrant population, and both have undergone major shifts in economic structure and culture. Both cities continue to grapple with a past that was dramatically shaped by lethal racism, eugenic ideologies, and a culture of radical surveillance and control. Both cities are currently shaped by their recognition of their moral duty to memorialize and grapple with this ugly past, while also trying to transcend it. For all these reasons, the comparison between the two cities is an elegant one.

Indeed, we have seen that the parallels between the cities have given rise to some striking similarities in their current spatial culture. Both cities are obsessed with mobility and people’s right to occupy space. It is no accident that both have become cities with huge squatting cultures. Moreover, both cities still have quite a bit of unused space. This is for at least two reasons. First, reunification
opened up various bits and pieces of formerly unusable land. Second, the troubled past of both cities resulted in various parts of the city being abandoned or underused in the recent past. It helps that both cities are also large and sprawling. Because of all the available space, both cities are at least somewhat inoculated against the worst excesses of rapid gentrification, especially compared to other equally culturally and politically important metropolises. Both cities are also, unsurprisingly, extraordinarily sensitized to issues of inclusion and exclusion; both are thoroughly marked with symbols of inclusivity. In Johannesburg, the lines of the Freedom Charter and the Constitution are written on the sides of buildings and incorporated into street art. The (misleading) terms ‘nonracial’ and ‘postracial’ are used repeatedly as proud pointers to the post-apartheid order. In Berlin, anti-borders, anti-bigotry, pro-refugee signage and graffiti decorates the city. At the level of policy, both cities rebounded from their exclusionary pasts by opening their borders radically, and welcoming a huge influx of immigrants and refugees.

Despite these parallels and similarities, we have seen some stark contrasts between the kind of repurposed cities that Berlin and Johannesburg have become. In assessing why the cities turned out differently, I think it’s helpful to remember that Berlin was an occupied city while Johannesburg was a colonized city. Although the Europeans in South Africa were originally occupiers, by the mid-twentieth-century, the people instituting apartheid were insiders who had co-opted the country and seized cultural power. Accordingly, after reunification, the occupying forces in Berlin withdrew and left altogether, whereas the colonizing forces in Jozi remained, and indeed they continued to disproportionately control resources and own property. Crucially, the colonizers did not lose their colonialist interests or attitudes just because government-sponsored apartheid ended. It is not surprising that how a space gets repurposed after regime collapse will depend, in part, on whether the architects of that regime have left or whether they are still there.

So for example, as we saw, Berlin has strongly rejected the surveillance culture of its past,
whereas Johannesburg has intensified it. Although surveillance has become decentralized and privatized in Johannesburg, it is still embraced as a central tool for keeping the city safe and orderly, while Berlin swung in the opposite direction, with its rejection of photos, cameras, identification checks, and even credit cards. In making an educated guess why there might be this difference, it is helpful to remember that while both cities were divided and surveilled, it makes sense that Berliners would resent being surveilled and controlled by outsiders, and when those outsiders left, they would be reluctant to use the tools of oppression that had been wielded against them. In contrast, White Johannesburg residents continued to experience themselves as under threat from Black and Colored residents. Although the South African government is no longer in the top-down surveillance business, it makes sense that they used their personal resources to institute bottom-up surveillance, which is now part of the broader culture of the city, even among non-Whites.

There is a sharp difference between contemporary Berlin and contemporary Johannesburg in their respective relationships to capitalism in general, and to outside investment in the city specifically. As we have seen, Johannesburg is a hypercapitalist space in which marketization and entrepreneurship are glorified, everything is for sale, and the visual landscape is marked everywhere with capitalist messaging. Virtually all physical surfaces in Jozi count as palates for advertising. Berlin’s identity as a city is bound up with its rejection of capitalism, and especially with resistance to the commodification and marketization of space itself. The landscape is saturated with anti-capitalist and anti-gentrification messaging. Berliners are devoted to finding creative ways of occupying space outside of traditional capitalist constraints. Berlin is fundamentally hostile to outside investors, whereas Johannesburg explicitly celebrates the return of outside investment in the city.

People have long come to Johannesburg in order to make money, often through ‘hustling.’ The city identifies strongly with its goldmining and prospecting roots, and as the richest city in Africa, its economic possibilities are a major draw. In contrast, even though it attracts tons of
immigrants—especially refugees and young progressives attracted to its lifestyle—basically no one comes to Berlin to get rich. Berlin is happy to embrace its “poor but sexy” identity.¹²⁹ Whereas Johannesburg is an economic powerhouse within the poor continent of Africa, Berlin is a notorious economic drain within the wealthy continent of Europe. Perhaps surprisingly, while Berlin has a higher per capita GDP than Johannesburg, they are not orders of magnitude different: Berlin’s 2017 per capita GDP was around $43,000 USD, while Johannesburg’s was $25,700 USD in 2014.¹³⁰ Given their different economic surroundings, with Berlin serving as an economic drain on Germany and the EU, and Johannesburg functioning as the economic powerhouse of South Africa and the continent, these numbers make Berlin effectively much poorer than Jozi, from the point of view of capitalist gravitas. However, my point is not just about their actual economic situations, but rather about their ideological attitudes towards capital. Berlin’s identity as a city run bottom-up by its citizens with minimal reliance on the mechanisms of capital run deep. It embraces outsiders in need, but is hostile to outsiders symbolizing foreign investment and gentrification. Jozi, in contrast, is built on capitalist dreams and organized around attracting business. Indeed, foreign attention and the trappings of high capitalism are a source of self-esteem for the city.

This is not a history or an economics thesis, so anything like a full explanation of these differences is way beyond my scope here. But it is interesting to think about how the divided past of the two cities might be influencing their presents. Under apartheid, denying the right to own property to non-Whites was a crucial means of enforcing the regime and sustaining racial subjugation. So it makes sense that the right to own property and businesses matters is an important marker of dignity and freedom for post-apartheid South Africans. Moreover, international boycotts

of South Africa were not only economically devastating, but tracked the global judgment that the old order was unforgivably immoral, so welcoming foreign investors back in is a form of moral restitution and affirmation now. Berliners were in a quite different position. During the Cold War, foreign economic forces occupied and controlled the city. While foreign investors were fleeing Johannesburg in the 1980s, everyone wanted a piece of Berlin. East Berliners faced major restrictions in their rights to engage in capitalist enterprises, but these were not demographically stratified, so the restrictions were not linked with racism or other axes of identity-based oppression. Moreover, there is nothing like a consensus on the ground among Berliners that capitalist-occupied West Berlin was unilaterally better off than communist occupied East Berlin. Berliners do not fetishize capitalism as a clear economic good, nor do they associate it with anti-racism or other forms of inclusion and freedom. Indeed, “Ostalgie,” or romantic nostalgia for East Berlin, is a well-recognized cultural phenomenon in current Berlin. Both halves of Berlin suffered from reduced mobility, surveillance, and curtailed economic opportunity. If anything, the experiences of economic and cultural isolation, claustrophobia, unaffordable housing, and lack of mobility were more intense in West Berlin, because of its being quite literally surrounded by the Wall and cut off from its allies. Although the brutality of the Stazi and the border crossings is legendary, the backwards-looking resentment in Berlin is against the authoritarianism, surveillance, and violence of the East Berlin regime, and not against communism per se. Instead, both halves are unified in resenting foreign occupation and control, rather than one economic order and ideology or the other.

Another noticeable contrast between the two repurposed cities is in how they enable or disable mobility. Under division, barriers to mobility were major tools for enforcing the top-down social order. These included the obvious systems such as passbooks, walls, checkpoints, floodlights, guards, and so forth in both cities, but they also included the structural barriers to mobility that I’ve explored here: The ripping apart of the U-Bahn in Berlin, for instance, and the building of
uncrossable roads and hills in Johannesburg. In the wake of reunification, Berlin has thrown resources into maximizing mobility. The public transportation system in the city is not only extremely comprehensive and functional, but maximally barrier-free; you needn’t even go through a turnstile to get on it. The city is also easy and safe for walking and biking. As I mentioned earlier, when we were in Berlin, we found ourselves with nearly limitless energy for doing things and exploring, just because the city was so easy to move through. Johannesburg, in contrast, has continued to use mobility barriers as tools of social control, although these have become privatized. The city removed its top-down reinforcement of mobility constraints, but allowed the culture of these constraints to proliferate bottom-up. Although it is easy to take a train from Sandton, where the Johannesburg stock exchange now is, up to Pretoria, where the government is, the rest of the city is pretty much left without usable public transportation. As we saw, enclaves, barriers, gates, and other tools of ‘spatial secession’ have mushroomed. Roads and hills remain uncrossable, and streets are either not designed for walking or are too dangerous to walk. Motion through the city generally requires a private vehicle, whether this is a personal car, an Uber, or a Kombi. Moreover, even within private vehicles, the risk of carjacking and smash-and-grabs at lights remains high, so moving through the city this way is still not easy or relaxing. Distances between different parts of the sprawling city are often vast, especially since the townships are still located far from the city center, as part of the legacy of apartheid. In short, Berlin rebelled against the restricted mobility of its past, and devoted itself to enabling maximally frictionless mobility, whereas mobility in Johannesburg faces a great deal of friction, and is often exhausting.

This study encompassed only two cities, and so I cannot draw generalized conclusions about how repurposed cities and the spaces within them work. However, after looking in detail at a series of repurposed spaces in the context of repurposed cities, we can reflect theoretically on what these rich empirical examples suggest the interpretation of urban space. We can draw some lessons about
how to identify and analyze the ontologies, territorial negotiations, and processes of place-making that go on in repurposed cities.

The theoretical hypothesis governing this project was that urban spaces and users of these spaces mutually constitute one another through a reciprocal process of niche-building. In particular, I cast suspicion on purely top-down stories that proceeded as though subjects’ agency was determined by the spaces they were in. I also rejected voluntaristic, bottom-up stories that proceeded as though individual decisions were pure acts of free choice that aggregated to shape spaces. In contrast, I hypothesized that one could not understand either lived, concrete spaces or the agency exercised within them without understanding them as mutually shaping one another. People’s agency is always materially located, and shaped and constrained by the spaces they negotiate; conversely, through their activities and spatial uses, people are constantly tinkering with and reshaping these spaces to suit their needs. I also hypothesized that repurposed cities would be especially good at vividly showing off both directions of causality. Because the city spaces I studied were built for different spatial needs and different lives from those for which they must now be used, I figured they would show off the ways in which people work on space and remake it by living in it. But conversely, I figured that because of this mismatch, the constraints of found space would especially protrude and be visible in repurposed cities and their sites; we would be able to see the ways in which the remnants of the past limit and shape the current uses and meaning of spaces.

My explorations of particular repurposed sites have born these hopes out, I believe. Geographic theorists often talk about the ‘production of space.’ In this thesis we have seen the production of space in the most literal and prosaic form: We have seen in detail how people have creatively fixed, altered, painted, fenced off, labeled, torn apart, and rebuilt various spaces in order to put them to new uses, given them new place identities, established new territories and boundaries within and around them, and developed them into new niches. But repeatedly, we have also seen
spaces whose morphology, left over from an earlier era, shapes the limits and possibilities for these new uses—from the bombed out Altbau and courtyard at Köpi, to the open and unstructured space of Tempelhof, to the balconies and open storefronts of Yeoville, to the physically isolation of Soweto. Very few of the spaces I found have been repurposed purely bottom-up, completely free from top-down planning and design; Köpi and Teepee Village, and perhaps Yeoville, are the closest things to pure examples that I found. But in almost all of the spaces I examined, bottom-up repurposing played a huge role in giving them their current form and meaning.131

One-directional stories, in which morphology and space control agency, are easier to maintain, I think, in cities that have not been radically repurposed, but have instead slowly evolved without dramatic breaks or redirections. For example, landscape theorists, who tend towards such morphological determinism, take it as basic that we can read the form of life of a space off of its morphology. They take it that we can assume, for instance, that a plaza will be a hub of commerce, and an important place of spectacle—a “theater of public rituals”, as Arreola and Curtis (1993, 45) put it. Similarly, Jane Jacobs (1961) would assure us that a street with windows facing outwards will have more lived community and less crime. But in repurposed cities, these large-scale features of the landscape precisely cannot be assumed to have this kind of direct relationship to what happens in them. Spatial determinists usually assume that a city starts with a core skeletal form, which tracks how the space is used, and then over time, this form gets elaborated and layers are superimposed (for instance see Arreola and Curtis 1993 and Hillier 1987). But in a repurposed city, the skeleton of the city can mislead.

What is distinctive about such cities, as I have defined them, is that these morphologies were built for a different form of life and different uses altogether. Consider Potzdamer Platz in Berlin,

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131 Checkpoint Charlie and Constitution Hill were chosen to be exceptions; these were spaces that were intentionally repurposed top-down according to a centralized plan.
which was designed to be the gravitational center of West Berlin, but has ended up as a characterless shopping area off to the side of the city. We saw how Hermannplatz changed its effective location in the city and its meaning several times. The Central Business District of Johannesburg, with its soaring brutalist towers, was clearly designed to be the daytime center of economic activity, but this has now moved to Sandton, and the hawker life that has taken over is quite different from what the architectural form suggests. Consider, for instance, how many times Tempelhof changed meaning, and how little we can tell about its current use and significance just by noticing that it is an airfield in the middle of the city. Thus in a repurposed city, we can't use basic morphology and syntax as direct guides to reading the landscape. Instead, in order to understand a repurposed urban space, we need to read the materiality of the space in layers, and situate it in its current context, with attention to the agency and practices of its current inhabitants. Reading the landscape in a repurposed city takes a different kind of work, which is finer-grained and can rely on fewer fixed rules and assumptions. This is the kind of interpretive work I have tried to carry out in this project.

Meanwhile, neoliberal and neoclassical urban theorists try to explain urban form as evolving out of predictable individual human choices. But this model is also unsustainable in repurposed cities. Such models always begin by assuming an idealized ‘neutral’ starting landscape, perhaps organized around a natural feature such as a river, port, or an oil deposit. They try to explain urban spatial forms in terms of the decision-theoretic choices that individuals make about how to use and develop space from this neutral beginning. But repurposed cities do not begin from such a neutral starting point; their residents, by definition, have to organize themselves around found and left-over urban forms. Thus concentric zone models, sector models and the like that presuppose an idealized neutral original terrain will not be helpful. For instance, as formerly unusable spaces along the edges of walls and next to checkpoints open up, such theories will not tell us anything about what new inhabitants of the city will do with these spaces.
One of my goals at the start of this project was to look at how micronegotiations of space could create and shift local ontologies, making new entities real and dismantling others; in particular, I was interested in how micronegotiations created territory. We’ve seen multiple examples of the creation of territory and boundaries in our particular examples. Martin Murray writes, “Put precisely, the conjoined processes of spatial separation and exclusion are the concatenated result of countless decisions—some large with significant outcomes, others small with miniscule consequences—that; taken together, have not only reinforced preexisting class and racial divisions but also created new ones” (2011, 21). My study has revealed these processes at work. I would add, though, that it is not just countless small decisions that built territory and boundaries in these ways; rather, they are often built out our pre-reflective habits and involuntary bodily responses. For instance, we saw how the use of private guards on the streets of Maboneng carves out a territory, not so much by policing who goes in and out, but by marking and making visible the boundaries around space with different street norms, in which specific people belong and don’t belong. At Kopi, the slow, sedimented layers of art and graffiti, combined with the constant tinkering with and repairing of the building, have marked out a specific kind of political territory. Around Hermannplatz, different groups create territories right up next to one another and sometimes overlapping with one another, mostly peaceably, through the arrangement of chairs, visual iconography, posture, and more. At YAAM, different racial groups territorialized different parts of the space, again through posture, use of furniture, and so forth. The establishment of territories and boundaries is not the only kind of ontological work that is accomplished through bodily micronegotiations of repurposed spaces. For instance, through micronegotiations, some spaces are produced as danger zones, or as protected zones. The ‘vibeyness’ of Yeoville is also a real feature of the space that is produced through micronegotiations. Here again, repurposed spaces have proved especially revealing, because there is often a great deal of work to be done in order for new users with new needs to establish territorial
claims on a space and to make it usable; in contrast, in typical cities, this process is usually slower and more incremental.

We have seen throughout how repurposed spaces can congeal or fail to congeal into functioning niches. A well-built niche is a tight-bandwidth, interactive product of a material space and the uses of it. Consider how Teepee Village is intertwined with the forest that hides it, or how Køpi is built into the bombed-out Altbau and its courtyard, or how the balconies and storefronts of Yeoville allow fluid street life. Territory and niches go together; to be in one's own territory is to be an integrated and agential part of a niche, and conversely, only niches can support ontologically robust territories. In contrast, Checkpoint Charlie fails to be this kind of coherent, usable niche. Checkpoint Charlie takes up space, but it is not a territory for anyone.

It is important to distinguish territory from property. Within a neoliberal framework, it is easy to conflate the two, since that framework models all human relations as market relations. From perspective, drenched in the ideology of home ownership as a marker of dignity and success, it is yet easier to think of one's spatial territory as what one owns, at least metaphorically. In Berlin, on the other hand, occupation is heavily contested. But occupation is not equated with owning, even metaphorically; indeed, Berliners resist the idea that that space is the kind of thing that should be owned. Their occupation models include various forms of squatting, repairing, leasing, and partnering with other organizations, but owning property is not a goal, and those who come into the city and seek to own chunks of it are received as spatial enemies. Johannesburg, as we have seen, is much readier to impose a capitalist conceptual framework, but even here, the emphasis is not on ownership of space. Squatting is ubiquitous. Control over space through hijacking does not track formal ownership. Owned property in Johannesburg is leased out and given away in bits and pieces: backyards are for shanties, fences and tops of buildings are for advertising, and so forth. Here, as in Berlin, trying to own a piece of the city is not really the central territorial goal.
I went into this project with an interest in how residents of repurposed cities build public spaces. Influenced by writers such as Don Mitchell (2003) and Henri Lefebvre (1996), I took seriously the idea that public spaces are products of labor. According to a roughly Lefebvrean account, a mere lack of formal exclusions does not suffice to make a space public. Instead, publicity requires genuine inclusivity, and this has to be built. An inclusive public space, as they describe it, must be available for anyone’s use and not be territorialized. Although I agree with these theorists that public space is has to be produced, my studies of Berlin and Johannesburg challenged my understanding of publicity, and revealed some limitations of the Lefebvrean picture with which I had begun. In these cities, publicity cannot be easily identified with inclusivity, because the project of building inclusive spaces is one that often involves various kinds of non-publicity. In Maboneng, for instance, privatization was a precondition for building one of the city’s most inclusive spaces. Køpi works hard to build inclusion, but they do so specifically by also building and maintaining a great deal of privacy. Remember that Køpi is technically a gated community! Køpi builds inclusivity and a space for genuine spatial agency and participation in part by employing what we saw Hirt (2012) call methods of spatial secession. Indeed, in Berlin, various forms of spatial secession are central tools in the project of keeping parts of the city inclusive and economically accessible. Mitchell emphasizes that “public space is always an achievement,” and not just the absence of barriers to entry (2003, 11). My explorations of particular spaces certainly do reaffirm that both publicity and the right to the city must be actively built and maintained, but not that these are interchangeable achievements. The public accessibility of a space—it’s being open to anyone and not territorialized—is not the same as the inclusivity of a space, in the sense of being a space in which diverse kinds of people can have a voice and participate in place-making.

Indeed, in retrospect, this is not a surprising discovery. After all, Soviet cities were known for their extensive and heavy-handed top-down use of public space. Public spaces, under communism,
were not especially spaces of bottom-up, inclusive agency and place-making, but rather spaces in which shared civic and nationalist identity were staged. It makes sense that in a city like Berlin, the work of inclusive, agential place-making would come apart from the work of creating universally accessible public spaces.

I now suspect that theorists like Lefebvre and Mitchell, even though they are critics of capitalism, build in some fundamentally capitalist assumptions about how the public/private distinction works and which other distinctions it tracks. Neoliberal capitalism presupposes a dualistic dichotomy between ‘public’ and ‘private,’ in which private space is individually owned and controlled, commodified space, and public space is the opposite of that. Within this dichotomy, various kinds of aspirational spatial features—including unrestricted access, participatory agency, inclusivity, and communal investment—will show up as incompatible with private space, and hence by default as ideals for public space. But in fact these aspirations don’t go well together, as we have seen. The unrestricted access that is the hallmark of public space does not provide the kind of structure and constraints needed to enable full participatory agency, the curation of inclusivity, or a communal sense of investment in the space. Other models of how to use space include commoning, co-ops, and reclaiming-and-repairing (Instandbesetzung. These may be better able to support these aspirations, and the right to the city. These do not fit the neoliberal model of either privacy or publicity. Such spaces are not commodified or traditionally individually owned. But nor are they public or universally accessible. Indeed, they function by giving specific people a substantive shared concern in place-making, and keeping out other people who do not share the values and ideals of the place.

Often, in Berlin, American understandings of the distinction between private and public space are confounded. Daniela Sandler points out that the Altbau courtyard structure of most buildings physically challenges this distinction, as courtyards are neither clearly public nor clearly
private (2016, 56). Institutionally, whereas Americans are used to a fairly clean distinction between privately owned property and publicly owned land, in Berlin, many hausprojekts, cultural centers, and the like do not neatly fit this distinction. They are neither privately nor publicly owned, but represent various kinds of collaborations and occupations. The formerly dead spaces near walls and checkpoints also often inhabit a netherworld between private and public. In Johannesburg as well, the distinction is not a neat one. Hijacked buildings don’t fit the distinction at all. In a technical sense they belong to the city, but they are certainly nothing like public or inclusive spaces. Plots of residential land do double duty as owned private homes and sites of backyard rentals. Abandoned buildings are squatted, and open spaces are often home to informal encampments. None of these constitute inclusive or accessible spaces. Tempelhof is probably the space I found where publicity and inclusivity most closely come together, but this is just one model for building inclusive space among many, as we have seen.

Sandler paraphrases Lefebvre’s notion of the right to the city as “the right of socially, economically, and culturally diverse groups and individuals to use urban space for everyday life, personal and social development, and dialogue” (2016, 21). I would add that a proper right to the city is not just a matter of having this kind of access to a space, but also having spatial agency, which includes not just the ability to use a space, but also the capacity and the authority to act on space, to tinker with it and help establish its meaning and uses and form. Of course the right to the city is never absolute - no one can use all places in a city this way. But a healthy city provides plenty of spaces of this sort, and it also enables people to claim and build new such spaces. In writers such as Lefebvre and Mitchell, the right to the city is directly linked to public space; the publicity of urban space is the key to enabling the right to the city. Indeed, Mitchell at one point defines the “right to the city” as a “practice of public space” (2003, 4). But I think the way that privacy—which can encompass seclusion, economic privacy, hiddenness, territorialization, and selective control—can be
a powerful and even a necessary tool for building inclusive spaces in some contexts. This stands as a serious challenge to much theorizing about public space and the right to the city.

Who successfully claims the right to the city? Our explorations of different forms of occupation and territorial establishment have revealed that this is a complex question that doesn’t reduce to mere economics or other obvious vectors of power. Sandler points out that students, artists, intellectuals, and others with “cultural cachet” (2016, 84) often have the cultural capital to occupy and claim agency in spaces, even when they don’t have buying power. Occupation and space-claiming by people seen as adding character to a city will typically be tolerated, even when occupations and space-claiming by truly marginalized or destitute people with few other options will not. We saw that residents of Køpi get by on almost no money, and they do not seek to own their space, but they are also not generally people who are occupying out of desperation. Rather, they are articulate activists and artists with culturally valued skill sets. The dynamic at Køpi could not be more different than in the hijacked squats full of undocumented immigrants in the institutionally abandoned areas of Johannesburg. The residents of Køpi have carefully built a niche in which they have maximal agency within their space; the squatters in Johannesburg have virtually no spatial agency. Places like Køpi and Maboneng have a developed aesthetic of inclusivity and diversity, but you need quite a bit of cultural credit to get in, in fact. While there are no formal barriers to entry, both spaces make visible how they are the territory of people with a certain level of cultural ‘cool.’

The residents of Soweto found strategies for building independent cultural capital, in order to put themselves in a position to effectively and agentially occupy the space to which they had been forcibly relegated. This is a powerful and inspiring example of a creative and mostly successful approach to claiming a right to the city, but it depended on the residents of Soweto laboriously building economic and spatial independence from the rest of Johannesburg.

It makes sense that the right to the city would be under active contest in repurposed cities.
These cities by definition are characterized by a lack of fit between the material space and the forms of life it now needs to support, so new users need to find ways of remaking spaces. Who has the agency and authority to do this will need to be negotiated at every turn. Moreover, as we saw, when an urban order collapses, it leaves behind underdetermined spaces: abandoned and damaged buildings, formerly unusable stretches of land, and so forth. The way in which these underdetermined spaces get territorialized and occupied will help shape the new, repurposed city. These spaces may be privately purchased and developed; turned into public spaces such as plazas, parks, or community centers; or occupied bottom-up. Countless negotiations, decisions, and movements go into how these spaces sediment into something new, how they territorialize, how they include and exclude, and who has agency within them.

I end by returning to the past. I have focused on how repurposed cities are turned into something new, even while they are constrained by the past. But both Berlin and Johannesburg are also cities that are constantly negotiating their own memories. Both cities need to live with the enormous, world-historic mistakes they made in the past. The past is not just a constraint on the present, in these cities. Rather, memory, as it is built into the landscape, is valuable and ethically important. I’ve argued that in both cities, memorializing tends to be interestingly fluid. Both cities have mostly chosen to keep memories alive and to hold themselves accountable to their pasts by allowing the past to remain visible and be incorporated into the present, rather than through forced memorializing. Apollo lights still line the streets of Soweto; labor camp buildings and bomb shelters are still scattered across Berlin. People live with and amidst these traces. In both cities, that is, the past becomes part of the usable space, rather than being set off from usable space to be stared at and passively absorbed. This approach fits into what we saw Daniela Sandler dub counterpreservation: a form of memory work that “requires active and critical participation from the inhabitants, users, and designers of buildings, and from potentially every city dweller, visitor, or passerby” (2016, 243).
Counterpreserved traces of the past are partially constituted by their users, rather than fixed, and hence they become part of the larger, dynamic process of place making and niche building. Sandler argues that such traces are genuine palimpsests, rather than just pieces of the past. She writes, “A palimpsest is not simply about layering—a palimpsest is neither a collage nor a sedimentary rock. The palimpsest is defined precisely by the constant pressure of erasure and rewriting, scraping and reinscription. In the palimpsest, the sense of destruction, of loss and forgetting, is as important as the sense of endurance” (Ibid, 105).

Unlike Apollo lights and bombed buildings, human lives cannot remain visible unless they are memorialized somehow; we can’t leave bodies lying around. Both Berlin and Johannesburg have a great deal of unjust death on their hands, and they know it. Erecting monuments that have no organic integration into the rest of a niche is neither city’s style. Both cities have found ways of building this memorialization of the human lives lost into the lived material environment, and indeed, into the ground itself (Figures 103 and 104).

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