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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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Abstract

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary study of the Rex Trueform garment manufacturing factory in Salt River, Cape Town. It follows the narrative of the site from the date of completion of the first factory in 1938 up until conversion of the site into an office park in 2013. Architecturally, the buildings are key works by pioneer modernist architects, Policansky, Andrews and Niegemann. The analysis of the form and the space of the buildings is interlocked with an analysis of the conditions within which these distinct buildings were conceived and built. As 20th century industrial buildings in Cape Town, they are representative of a particular kind of modernity, one that is entangled with constructions of race, class and gender. The dissertation looks at how particular notions of race, class and gender were constructed, materialised and inscribed in the architectural form and space. The buildings are a primary archival source, but conversational interviews with ex-workers begin to give a glimpse of what it was like to work for Rex Trueform, considered as a significant company in the clothing manufacturing industry.

Visual material, drawings and film footage, tracks the architectural development of the site, linking it with key moments in the political life of South Africa. This raises questions around the relationship between the apartheid state-endorsed white capital and disenfranchised black labour. Race and identity is a key theme, questioning the role that industry, sociology and apartheid played in the constructions and stabilising thereof with the Cape factory as a primary site. The buildings, situated both in the historical time as well as in the contemporary postapartheid framework, offer multiple readings of how space and architecture contributed towards ascribing identities onto people and how these ascribed identities were and are being contested and disrupted. The dissertation thus raises questions of how the modern city of Cape Town was produced by looking at some of the socio-political conditions under which Rex Trueform, a major industrial site, was developed.
Introduction

The name ‘Rex Trueform’ triggers multiple social imaginaries in Cape Town depending on who you talk to, when you talk to them and in what context. For some, the name is linked to a smart brand of men’s suits. Others reference scenes of masses of workers waiting for buses along Main Road, after a day of sewing, cutting and pressing garments in the Salt River factory. Some have personal stories of falling in love on their way to work at ‘Rex’, others remember planning strikes for better wages. There are some who mix their sense of pride they felt after landing a job there, with a sense of bitterness over the mass retrenchment of workers in the early 2000s. In many of these varied responses to the name Rex Trueform, the buildings in Salt River are central as a physical reference to their stories.

This dissertation is a study of these buildings as a site of modern architecture as well as a site of multiple narratives, imaginaries and constructions of identity.\(^1\) It follows the life of the company, the workers and the buildings they inhabited, with the view of raising questions around the production of modern Cape Town.\(^2\) How did the construction of modern industrial space contribute towards a specific version of the modern city of Cape Town? What were the particularities of this modernity? How were ideas on race and gender inscribed onto ideas of modern industrial space in particular? What was the relationship between apartheid state-endorsed white capital and disenfranchised black labour? What is the nature of the spaces that this relationship produced and how did this relationship translate into the form that the city took on? What is the nature of these spaces when viewed from a postapartheid perspective, considering the ongoing postapartheid national project of reconciliation, economic development, land reform and new identity formations?\(^3\)

The life of the company spans nearly eighty years. After closing down its manufacturing section in 2005\(^4\), it now operates as an administration hub for the importation of global goods and employs about one hundred people. The nature and scale of the business today, is vastly different from its original form, when it employed thousands of workers operating the most modern machinery for the production of sought after clothing. The buildings were

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\(^1\) Orhan Pamuk’s book, *Istanbul, memories of a city*, is an example of the study of a city as a narrative, personal account, written from the disciplinary field of literary studies. My approach was inspired in part by Pamuk’s narrative methodology. Pamuk: 2005


\(^3\) Robins: 2005; Salo: 2005; Steinberg: 2002 & 2005

\(^4\) IOL news: 2005
specially designed for this purpose. It reached a high-point in the 1960s, employing nearly five thousand workers in various factories and warehouses all over Cape Town, including one in Scotland. The textile manufacturing industry employed thousands of Capetonians and Rex Trueform, one of the largest companies in the industry, was the main source of income for many households.

Since its closure in 2005 I have always been drawn to the buildings with a desire to uncover their meaning. My architectural work and practice since, has circled around this site in interesting ways. In 2011 I organised regular tours of the buildings for the public and then later for individuals who were interested in the key work of the architects involved: Policansky, Andrews and Niegeman. I blogged about these events and also produced information brochures which were made available at the tours and as free downloads on the blog. The buildings resonated with me for two reasons. Firstly, as an architect, I had developed an appreciation for the quirky aesthetic of South African modern architecture. These buildings, in their semi-abandoned state, evoked a sense of nostalgia in me for the heroism of the utopian social programme of South African modernism that I learnt about during my architecture studies at UCT. Secondly, and folded into my disciplinary appreciation for the buildings, I grew up with stories of ‘shift work’ and ‘over time’ work as told by my aunts, uncles, and grandparents’ who worked in various textile factories in Cape Town, including Rex Trueform. I remember too, long worried discussions around my grandparents’ kitchen table in Grassy Park, about ‘early retirement packages’ and ‘retrenchments’ amidst the rapid closure and restructuring of various manufacturing plants in the Western Cape. The textile industry in Cape Town was the foundation upon which many families like mine constructed a world of middle class respectability, whilst recognizing the limits of what that world could be when living under conditions where you were racially ascribed as ‘coloured’.

Like many others, I believe that the reading of the socio-body political conditions around which creative work is produced enriches the reading and understanding of the disciplinary contribution of the work of art, literature or architecture. A narrow and traditional disciplinary focus may continue to disavow violent epistemic practices of the past. In this dissertation, I have chosen to write from my discipline as an architectural scholar but I have also chosen to explore the archive in a variety of humanities based disciplinary practices such as

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8 Spivak: 1988
historiography, sociology, philosophy, and visual art. This allowed me to explore themes such as politics, gender, identity, and race with the concern for the spatial implications it had on architecture, the city at large, and vice versa. In 2012, I was jointly awarded a formal commission by the Rex Trueform Company to survey the site and compile a heritage report for submission to Heritage Western Cape, a requirement by law prior to the development of all buildings, such as Rex Trueform, which were older than sixty years. I learned during this process that Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs), the reports compiled by heritage professionals, are produced largely for the purposes of defining developmental rights. The work for this dissertation runs parallel to the compilation of a professional heritage report and what I found was that a numinous, yet productive force is released between the twin systems of practice.

Both sets of knowledge production - the dissertation (set within the framework as described above), and the professional heritage report - are concerned with the genesis and historic trajectory of the Rex Trueform buildings. However, where the report deals with the how, where and what of the buildings, this dissertation deals more broadly with the how, where and what of the conditions within which the structures were conceived and built. Where the report is situated within a singular disciplinary realm, primarily dictated by heritage legislation, this dissertation is an inquiry based on interdisciplinary practice, with its roots in decolonial theory as an unfixed, and unsettled pursuit of a reflexive architectural practice.

This double exploration was, therefore, an opportunity to reflect on the episteme of ‘heritage’ in two ways: firstly, heritage as a ‘resource’ to be managed and secured by the state, and secondly, heritage as a discourse and a ‘primary site for negotiating issues of culture, identity and citizenship in the postcolony’. The latter resonates with the themes of this dissertation.

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10 South African National Heritage Resources Act of 1999
11 APHP (2012) [Online]
Following the archive

‘To define is to understand, to describe is to merely observe’

In studying Rex Trueform, I do not have a desire to construct a grand narrative of apartheid as it pertains to labour practices in Cape Town. Nor do I have a desire, based on observations in the selected archive, to come to a definite understanding of the postapartheid condition. However I hope to do enough work in order to define some of the key questions that emerge from a reading or a following of the archive and come to a resolute understanding of some of the conditions that allowed these questions to emerge. It is for this reason that I consulted a wide range of archival sources. I conducted interviews with current and ex-workers, with family members of the architect, Max Policansky, and retired partners of the Andrews and Niegeman architectural firm. I was fortunate in that a large amount of visual material was available in order to give a sense of the factory buildings as it operated prior to its closure. This includes architectural drawings from the UCT Policansky collection, promotional brochures and newspaper articles of the factory dating from 1938 until 1993 and a 2004 documentary film. The most important archival source is, of course, the buildings themselves. I had the site professionally photographed and documented its current condition. Countless walks through the building to look at the walls, to observe the nature of the space and to chat to some of the users, made me realize the simultaneously historical and contemporary nature of the Rex Trueform archive.

Chapter outlines

The dissertation consists of four chapters. Chapter one looks at the urban character of Salt River prior to the construction of the first factory in 1938. The site of the new factory was a vacant property amidst a nascent industrial neighbourhood. Rex Trueform was viewed as one of the pioneering modern industries in the area and a key building in the oeuvre of Max Policansky, regarded as an important modernist South African architect. The biographies of the factory owners, both Jewish Lithuanian immigrants, are discussed, in order to raise questions about white industrial settlement and its relationship with conditions of coloniality.

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13 Ndebele: 1991, 158
14 Coetzee: 1991
15 Maldonado-Torres: 2007
that existed in Cape Town at the time. These conditions include racial segregation and colonial modernizing\textsuperscript{16} of African land through modern industry.

Chapter two continues a close reading of the site beginning with 1948, the date of completion of the second factory. It looks at how the architecture hardened some of the segregation policies, still under discussion prior to 1948. It overlays the spatial development of the site, with important moments in the political life of South Africa in order to contemplate the effects of the apartheid state – white capital – black labour relationship. Mandela’s release in 1991 meant enfranchisement for black South Africans on the one hand but also job insecurity for Rex Trueform workers, on the other. In order to cope with the loss of economic protection from the state as well as the introduction of neo-liberal economic policies by the new democratically elected government, the clothing industry as a whole succumbed to the easy profits to be made with the sale of global imports. The result was the closure of the manufacturing side of the company, the shift from manufacturing to retail and thus, in 2005, the resultant job losses. With the buildings currently empty, the chapter will describe some of the contemporary visions for the site.

‘Is she coloured?’ is the main title of chapter three. This chapter considers questions of the construction of Cape identities, using the previous architectural analysis as a substrate. It follows the family histories of the architect Max Policansky and political activist Cissie Gool, in order to understand how Anglo-white Jewish identities were constructed and how colouredness was ascribed and stabilized in modern Cape Town. Rex Trueform, as an employer of thousands of people classified as ‘coloured’, became a site where identity constructions were performed and spatially ascribed. Gender and notions of beauty were also actively constructed and contested, through the factory’s participation in the annual Spring Queen beauty pageant. Interviews with ex-workers and an ex-beauty pageant coordinator bring these contestations into sharp relief.

Finally, chapter four, is a pragmatic description of how the factory operated: the break down of the clothing production line, its regimented schedule of hourly production targets and clocking in card system. The chapter addresses how these regimens of time and production played a role in the production of model workers, model employers and model citizens. During the 1930s and 1940s the factories were prime sites for sociological studies of the conditions surrounding poverty and race. The disciplines of social work and sociology (which at the time were emerging as accredited disciplines) lead the interest in the field and were

\textsuperscript{16} Avermaete, Karakayali & von Osten: 2010
instrumental in linking studies of poverty and industrialization, to studies of race and gender. The chapter looks at how certain imposed identities were ascribed and contested.
Chapter 1

Building settler modernity: the Rex Trueform factory 1937-1944

This chapter is an architectural analysis of the first factory of the Rex Trueform manufacturing plant, built in Salt River in 1938. Visual material show that the 1938 building is illustrative of an important rupture in the aesthetic of the city and a radical move from a fairly consistent Victorian/Edwardian/Neoclassicist inspired built environment towards the adoption of architectural modernism. However, parallel with the adoption of a modern architectural language, local architects were required to creatively respond to certain conditions of coloniality 17 that existed at the Cape. The conditions of coloniality I highlight in this chapter are: the perception of African space as primarily a space of settler prospect and the desire for racial segregation. The architecture that emerged from these conditions was particular, while it simultaneously espoused the spatial universal principles of modernism. The purpose of this chapter is to set out exactly how the design of the buildings achieved this simultaneity.

Figure 1
An aerial view indicating the two sites currently occupied by Rex True form. The area in light red is the focus of this chapter.

Source: Google Earth (2011), own annotations.
Figure 2
An areal view indicating orientation and the development of the site.
Source: Google earth (2011), own annotations.
Towards a new architecture for Salt River

The Rex Trueform factories currently occupy two city blocks in one of Cape Town’s early industrial cores, Salt River. (Fig. 1) The area is five kilometers outside of Cape Town’s historic center and takes its name from an estuary that once physically dominated the settlement. From about the middle of the 18th century through to the beginning of the 19th century, the area was typified by the small number of farms and residential estates that were plotted on the slopes of Devils Peak. The Salt River estuary mostly disappeared from the imagination of Capetonians, when it was reclaimed to make way for the railway lines and station in 1862. The mobility that the railway lines introduced sped up urban development and by 1928 the area was a densely urbanised part of Cape Town. The neighbourhood, although a consequence of modern industrial development, was at odds with the dominant modernist discourse of the time. In 1923 the Franco-Swiss architect and key figure of the Modern Movement, Le Corbusier, called for a radical purification and abstraction and urged architects to mimic the pure forms generated by the pragmatism of engineers. His proclamations extended to the urban realm. His belief, shared by many other architects, was that architectural form could initiate social well-being. They lamented the overcrowded, dark and unsanitary conditions of large European industrial towns such as London and Paris:

It is time that we repudiate the existing lay-out of our towns, in which the congestion of buildings grows greater, interlaced by narrow streets full of noise, petrol fumes and dust; and where on each storey the windows open wide on to this foul confusion.

Where order reigns, well-being begins

This was a view that Frampton called ‘dandified’ and ‘bourgeois, but radically new nonetheless’. There was a strong belief that architecture could propose social change.

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18 19th Century landscape painter, Thomas Bowler, produced paintings of the Salt River circa 1855 where the estuary is depicted as a mixture between an indigenous and untouched ‘vlei’ with its local bird and plant life and a bucolic European landscape dotted with windmills, oxen and a foot bridge. Bradlow: 1955
19 See Fig. 5, a map dating from 1882.
20 Pama: 1977
21 See Fig. 4. Photo by Arthur Elliot, Groote Schuur Hospital Collection, South African National Archives.
22 Le Corbusier: 1923 (1989 Eng. trans), 9-20
23 1890s homes by Frank Lloyd Wright in Pennsylvania and Louis Sullivan’s 1895 commercial buildings in Buffalo, USA. See also Roth: 1927
24 Le Corbusier: 1923 (1989 Eng. trans), 57
25 Ibid
Like early industrial London and Paris, Salt River’s urban character of the late 1920s was piecemeal and reactionary. The neighbourhood was densely populated because of its close proximity to major industries and the railway. There was a perception that the area was unsanitary, a perception in part influenced by the fatal 1918 influenza epidemic. The neighbourhood was dominated by residential housing built in the highly decorative Victorian/Edwardian architectural style. In 1930, the architectural highlights in the area were the new campus for the University of Cape Town, designed by JM Solomon in a Neoclassical style. Designed with classical Greco-Roman columns and pediments, decorative doors and windows, it was elevated acropolis-style on the slopes of Devil’s Peak and accessed from an urban scale staircase. (Fig. 3) Groote Schuur Hospital, designed by Sir Herbert Baker, was another architectural landmark and also followed a Neoclassical architectural tradition with attention to symmetry, classical detailing and elevated positioning. (Fig. 4)

Figure 3
UCT in 1930 with its Neoclassical design and elevated positioning.  

26 Frampton: 2002,12  
27 Todeschini & Japha: 1986, 28  
28 South African Cement works was one of the first industrial concerns in Salt River, Todeschini & Japha: 1986  
29 Howard: 1990  
30 Todeschini & Japha: 1986, 42
Vacant Land

In the center of Salt River, was a distinct triangle of space, bounded by three roads: Salt River Road to the west, Durham Avenue to the east and Victoria Road\(^\text{31}\) to the south. The typology of buildings in this zone was a mix of vacant property and light industry.\(^\text{32}\) In 1937 Judge Clothing Manufacturers (Pty) Ltd (as Rex Trueform was formerly known) acquired five lots of ‘vacant land’\(^\text{33}\) from a construction company called AA Hoheisen just outside the dedicated industrial triangle and fronting onto Main Road. In the same year the adjacent site was transferred to L&H Policansky, the older brothers of Max Policansky, one of South Africa’s leading modernist architects.\(^\text{34}\) Policansky was the architect of both developments that would later occupy the land and these two buildings mark the beginnings of his notable architectural career. The architect and new owners of these sites were members of a

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\(^{31}\) Victoria Road is commonly known as Main Road and I will make use of its common name in this dissertation.

\(^{32}\) Cape Times Peninsula Street Directory: 1933-1974

\(^{33}\) Described as such in the Deed of Transfer records for erven 13715-13725.

\(^{34}\) Herbert: 1975; Righini: 1977
network of Lithuanian Jewish immigrants who moved to the Cape between 1887 and 1912. Chapter three will track the family history of Policansky to discuss constructions of identity together with constructions of race and class in early Cape Town. For this chapter, I would like to dwell on the biographies of Bernard Shub and Philip Dibowitz, the owners of Rex Trueform, in order to reflect on the arrival of Eastern European Jewish immigrants and their encounter with early Cape society.

Figure 5
Map of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa dated 18th December 1882. It shows the Salt River estuary to the north and the distinct triangle of unoccupied land onto which the factory would later be built.
Source: National Archives of South Africa
Figure 6
Portion of Cape Peninsula map dated 1934 showing the extent of development just prior to the construction of Rex Trueform’s first factory. Note the extent to which the Salt River estuary has been reclaimed for the purposes of the railway line.

Source: Survey and Mapping, Mowbray, Cape Town.
Dibowitz was born in 1909 in Birz, Lithuania, which at the time was an annex of Russia. He was a child victim of the Russian Revolution, surviving hunger by scavenging for food and supplies from the dead corpses in the streets of war-torn Moscow. During one of these raids Dibowitz, nine years old at the time, was separated from his parents and taken to a hostel. There he was put to work and acquired tailoring skills, which later served as a basis for formal training in Paris. He remembers:

We had teaching as well; we had Russian language and so on. But there were tailors, boot makers, carpenters – and I was the unfortunate one they pushed into tailoring.

After surviving the Russian Revolution and reuniting with his family he moved to London 'turning over suits' a custom of taking worn suits apart and re-stitching it with the worn side on the inside. In 1927 he moved to Cape Town, settling in District Six, to escape continued Jewish persecution in Europe. He failed to persuade other family members to emigrate to Cape Town where he ran a small tailoring factory with Mannie Abrahams, 'a Malay boy' in Hanover Street, District Six. He lost fourteen relatives in the Holocaust. Of his first commission in District Six he says:

I worked day and night. I had a little Malay man to help, and I made the six suits. For this I received 30 pounds. Of course I gave the Malay some ... but here I had money!
Shub was a luckier man than Dibowitz. He escaped Lithuania at the age of three and grew up poor but within the sheltered surrounds of Mayfair, Johannesburg⁴⁰. He signed up for the army at sixteen and returned with an urge to provide for his family. He discovered his talent for selling and proceeded to becoming a traveling salesman during the 1920s, accompanied by Michael:

> a remarkable Zulu who subsequently became a legend in South Africa. Almost every storekeeper got to know him. He helped me with my samples and he helped me with my selling. He understood me completely – he knew me backwards, and he knew and understood the customers. I venture to suppose that if he had been a white man, he could have been a good a salesman as any... Michael was my assistant, my chauffeur and my valet. He took care of me. He was my constant companion... When he died, I felt I had lost a friend. Michael lived to see the start of what was to become Rex Trueform.⁴¹

Dibowitz’s and Shub’s paths crossed in District Six when in 1932, they literally started Rex Trueform on a simple handshake.⁴² They nonchalantly named their new enterprise by flipping a coin. Shub was keen to use the name ‘Trueform’, a name he liked and picked up on his many travels. But it was associated with an English shoe brand and thus could not be

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⁴⁰ Shain & Mendelsohn: 2008, 114-115
⁴¹ Kaplan: 1986, 242
⁴² Kaplan: 1986, 243
used. At a loss, Shub took out a coin from his pocket, which read King George V. They translated it to its Latin term ‘Rex’ and combined it with ‘Trueform’, Shub’s preference. The two immediately recognized the strength of the name and adopted it as their brand.43

The company’s first premises was in Plein Street, Cape Town, which they outgrew and moved to a bigger space in Woodlands Road, Salt River44. These premises also became too small and in 1937, they contracted the services of architect Max Policansky for the design of a large factory in Main Road, Salt River.

Shub and Dibowitz’s narrative of poor persecuted Jewish refugees becomes the dominant narrative in *South African Jewry 1977*. Here early Eastern European Jews in general found themselves in a ‘foreign, uncivilized land’. As the preface states, they:

…had found a home here, after the trials and tribulations which were the lot of various communities whom fate had placed in a part of the world that was lagging behind in the march of civilization.45

They were portrayed as ‘pioneers’ who:

…in their new setting … played a major role in transforming a raw, undeveloped land into a dynamic economy, the like of which has not been seen on the African continent.46

In 1993, Frankental and Shain reflect on the historic position of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, many of whom arrived at the same time as Dibowitz and Shub.47 They remark that these arrivals, although escapees of Jewish persecution, suddenly found themselves in a privileged position in South Africa, initially because of their skin color.48 Later in the 1930s their position would be under threat with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism as some of the Afrikaner intelligentsia shared and studied Hitler’s views on anti-Semitism49. Anti-Semitism was also proclaimed in the mainstream media with cartoons caricaturing Jews as money-

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43 Rosenthal: 1976
44 Shorten: 1963, 221
45 Feldberg: 1976, 5
46 Ibid.
47 Brenner: 1990
48 Shain & Frankental: 1993: 5
49 Shain & Frankental:1993; Coetzee,1991
hungry and ruthless capitalists.\textsuperscript{50} However, despite such anti-Semitic threats, Frankental and Shain argue that the conditions of South Africa’s ‘highly stratified colonial setting’\textsuperscript{51} made it easy to forget their past suffering of exploitation and injustice and be assimilated into the mainly white Anglicized, upper middle-class urban life. Gustav Saron points out that the Jews from Eastern Europe, chose induction into English speaking culture rather than Afrikaner culture, because they, like the English, were urban.\textsuperscript{52} However, it could be argued that in Cape Town, their preference of Anglo allegiances was also made for reasons of economic survival and social mobility.

It is useful to reflect on Dibowitz and Shub’s stories, in light of their simultaneously undoubtedly higher social position relative to the black population, as well as their more dubious position relative to settlers in South Africa. Theirs was a narrative of firstly accepting their racial rank in superiority, (here, I think about Shub’s statements about his black assistant Michael in particular) and then striving for allegiance with ruling Anglicized whites. Naming their company after a fictitious English gentleman, Rex Trueform, is the beginning of their negotiation for Jewish-Anglo identity and acceptance. Finally the conception of their enterprise as a venture not only in accumulating private wealth and financial independence, but also as a prospect of modernizing African land, points to a particular kind of settler imagination, that of prospect and control.

\textit{A façade of functionalism, a taxonomy of race}

The building that Policansky designed for Rex Trueform, was interested with giving a formal expression grounded in a pure functionalist dictum: the form of the building should follow directly from the function. Thus, being a space for clothing manufacturing, situated in Cape Town in 1938, resulted in a building that is curious because of its specificity.

The original factory is published in the \textit{Architect and Builder} in July 1938. (Fig. 8 & 9) In the photograph, the façade is covered with ladders, scaffolding, some piles of building sand on the pavement and workmen busily trying to complete the building. It has a flat roof and an elongated façade punctuated by a series of windows, some rectangular but most of them round porthole windows. There are two balconies. The one is jutting out onto Main Road and the other is just visible on the right-hand margin of the photograph, a view extending out onto Queenspark Avenue. The façade culminates at the corner of Main Road and

\textsuperscript{50} Du Pisani: 2002, 584-601.
\textsuperscript{51} Shain & Frankental: 1993, 6
\textsuperscript{52} Saron: 1976; Saron: 1965
Queenspark Avenue with a dramatic glass enclosed curved stair. The rhythm in which the various types of windows are arranged along the Main Road façade is peculiar, erratic even. I imagine a musical score emerging from the façade with its pauses between openings, the small porthole openings for short sharp beats and the bigger, wider rectangular openings offering longer, lingering tones. The large balcony fronting Main Road becomes a unique variation in my imagined musical piece before continuing and ending in the dramatic crescendo, the glass enclosed curved stair. “Fun!”, I think. It is very uncharacteristic of the ornate but controlled Victorian/Edwardian architecture that immediately surrounds it. Indeed an anomaly to be so loose and free with the façade, particularly the one facing Main Road. It is only after examining the drawings of the building that the true unyielding functionalism of the façade emerges. The drawings expunge all thoughts of playful whimsicality and it is not a fun, playful condition from which it draws its character.

Figure 8
An image of the factory prior to its opening in 1938. Note the various window types and amount of windows depicting the spaces behind which were separated according to race and gender. Also note the balcony on the right hand side of the factory, which was not rebuilt after the fire in 1944 even though it is drawn on the 1944 council drawings.

*Source: Architect & Builder (1938)*
Figure 9
An axonometric drawing of section of the factory, showing the planning of the administrative and public side of the building on Ground floor.

Source: Architect & Builder (1938)

The 1937 architectural drawings (Fig. 12-14)\(^{53}\) show two entrances. The first begins on Main Road, at the bottom of a narrow stair. This entrance is marked on the plans as “Entrance to Offices” and is accessible from the three private parking bays nearby. The narrow stair winds its way up and eventually delivers the visitor onto a generous, chic and modern balcony. (Figs. 10 & 11) The walls of this balcony are lined with glossy black tiles and the window frames of the entrance to the offices are made of the slimmest chrome-plated steel. Once inside one can either turn to the right and make one’s way through the hallway towards the general offices and a modest set of toilets, or to the left towards the two executive offices and sample room.

\(^{53}\) City of Cape Town Council submission drawings approved on 12 April 1937 consists mainly of two floor plans (ground and first floors), two street elevations (Main Road and Queenspark Avenue) and two sections (cross section B-B and longitudinal section A-A).
Figure 10
The interior of the Sample Room behind the balcony echoes the modernist principles of modern materials - no ornamentation and uninterrupted spatial flow.
*Source: Dr Eitan Karol*

Figure 11
The Main Road balcony as designed by Policansky. The materials and design are in strict accordance with the minimalist approach to design. This was a key principle of modernist architecture.
*Source: Dr Eitan Karol*
The sequence of movement that originates from the second entrance, the “Entrance to the Factory” begins on Queenspark Avenue side. Upon entry at the bottom of the large curved stair, one would be confronted with the doorway placed directly opposite a small glass enclosed one-man room labelled “Control”. Once inside the throat of the stairwell, you make your way up winding past the glass wall, ending up on the ground floor where you have to pass the “General Office”. You would then move up one more level before you arrive on the first floor landing of the curved stair. It is down the corridor now facing you, with the rooms flanking it on your left, where the Main Road façade begins to reveal its strange logic. There are two rooms of equal size labelled “Change Rooms for European Women” and “Change Rooms for European Men”. Further down the corridor there is a room labelled “Change Rooms for Non-European Men” and it is given a dimension that is two thirds bigger than its predecessors along the corridor. Finally one reaches the last and biggest room along the corridor, labelled “Change Rooms for Non-European Women”, three times bigger than the cloakrooms and toilets fitted for ‘European Men’ and ‘European Women’. (Fig. 13)

It is clear, from the reading of the plans that the design of the façade – its length, its number and size of openings, its height - is dictated by a bizarre doubling: a need for separation and therefore multiplication of services on the basis of race and gender. The Main Road window arrangement tellingly exposes the spatial priority given to workers of a particular demographic, the ‘Non-European Woman’, which in turn highlights the general nature of the workforce of the clothing manufacturing industry in 1938. The council drawings of April 1937 do not entirely match up with the photographs published in January 1939. In the photograph, one bay of side hung pivot windows were replaced with four more porthole windows at the section labelled “Non-European Women”. This means that the size of that particular slice of the workforce was rapidly growing or perhaps underestimated in the design, or perhaps both. More interestingly, what this mismatch reveals is that the nature of the workforce was kinetic, unable to remain static long enough for the photographed end product to fully replicate the original intentions of the architect and his client.
Figure 12

Ground floor plan, 1937, Office of Max Policansky.

Source: Max Policansky Collection, UCT Manuscripts and Archives.
Figure 13
First floor plan, 1937, Office of Max Policansky.
Source: Max Policansky Collection, UCT Manuscripts and Archives.
Figure 14
Sections and elevations, 1937, Office of Max Policansky.
Source: Max Policansky Collection, UCT Manuscripts and Archives.
A four page feature in the *Cape Argus* of Friday 7th of January 1938, gives us a further glimpse into the life of the building. The headline is ‘Model factory conditions for 260 workers’ and the tone of the article is explicitly promotional, pointing out the various advances the company, together with their architects, contractors and suppliers have made in the construction of the industrial space. The building is described in glowing terms:

attractive design\(^{54}\)

… pleasurable shock that we discover… that the architects have devised ways and means – with the use of modern building materials and methods – of making them attractive.\(^{55}\)

The use of the word ‘modern’ is a key word in the article and is used liberally throughout. In the description of the exterior, the writer enthusiastically highlights the fact that there was no use of ‘superfluous ornamentation’\(^{56}\) except for wall finishes, ‘textured stucco, with softly-hued Hogines tiles’\(^{57}\) and ‘brilliant surfaced black tiles’\(^{58}\). Efficiency in the use of materials, so impresses the writer of the article that s/he praises its new (modern) aesthetic:

(We) are indebted to the modern school of architectural design for showing us that the strictly utilitarian type of building such as this very successful factory building must be, and can be beautiful and interesting as well as highly efficient.\(^{59}\)

When describing the manufacturing area on the first floor, the article links the design of the space to the owners’ ‘extraordinary’ consideration for their workers. The saw-tooth roof, allowing light into the space is a testament to their commitment to provide the ‘most comfortable glareless and shadowless illumination’\(^{60}\). It also points out the lengthy span of the trusses as a first-ever engineering feat, allowing the ceiling to be unusually uncluttered:

Interesting method of joining the steel members of the roof feature, employed here for the first time...\(^{61}\)

\(^{54}\) Cape Argus, 07 January 1938, 22  
\(^{55}\) ibid  
\(^{56}\) ibid  
\(^{57}\) ibid  
\(^{58}\) ibid  
\(^{59}\) ibid  
\(^{60}\) Cape Argus, 07 January 1938, 24  
\(^{61}\) ibid
The workers' comfort is emphasized with the description of the 'mess rooms' fronting Queenspark Avenue. The article notes 'three mess rooms' (although only two are indicated on the council plans – one for 'non-European; another for 'European') and are equipped with specially designed tables and chairs placed near a wide wind sheltered balcony overlooking Queenspark Avenue. Furthermore:

Specially designed tea-wagons, each capable of carrying 100 cups of tea, have been provided to facilitate service and to ensure that each gets his tea fresh and hot.⁶²

According to the article the new factory is 'the most modern, as to building and equipment, plant of its kind in the world'⁶³. But what were the terms in which ‘modernness’ was measured? From the article it would seem that to be modern means to be efficient. Therefore the building is conceived to ensure efficiency on a number of levels: of structure (the large spans of the structural grid); of the movement of materials along the production line (large uncluttered spaces), of form (no ornamentation); and of the workers' rest time (specially designed tea-wagons). From the celebratory tone of the article, it would also seem that the level of efficiency is a measure of the level of how modern the factory building is and by extension, its owners, the designers and the workers.

Figure 15
Artist rendering of the 1938 factory.
Source: Cape Argus (1938), Rex Trueform Company archives.

⁶² ibid
⁶³ Cape Argus, 07 January 1938, 21
Figure 16
Artist rendering of the first floor of the 1938 factory. Cape Argus, 07th January 1938. Note the slogan ‘Take pride in your work’ written on the beams of the saw-tooth roof.
Source: Cape Argus (1938), Rex Trueform Company archives.

Figure 17
Left, view of waiting room, right view of sample room.
Source: Cape Argus (1938), Rex Trueform Company archives.
The Factories Act and racial segregation

At the time of the first factory, late 1930s to early 1940s, racial segregation was a normalised practice in Cape Town\textsuperscript{64}, but there were few spaces that formalized and materialized segregation. Industrial work places like factories became a special concern for a society in which race dictated much of one’s identity and existence in the world. Legislation regulating the operation of factories was first passed in 1918 as the Factories Act No. 28.\textsuperscript{65} In this act no mention is made about the separation of workers along racial lines. The act was amended in 1931 and a consideration of the separation of workers is made, although the wording was ambiguous. It said that segregation is required:

\ldots when in the opinion of an inspector conditions exist in a factory which lead to undesirable contact between persons of different races or sexes.\textsuperscript{66}

In 1941 this ambiguity led to a lengthy debate and call for more explicit regulations around the issue of racial segregation in the factories. It was punt as an urgent necessity to ensure the survival of the white race:

We cannot maintain our white civilization if the present bad conditions continue in our factories. We are pleading with the Minister to reconsider these serious questions…White South Africa demands it.\textsuperscript{67}

Racial mixing in the factories was seen as unsanitary and humiliating for white female workers as was pointed out by Revd SW Naude:

\ldots is it not a disgrace that our daughters have to work cheek by jowl with the coloured people and the natives?\textsuperscript{68}

\ldots Most of these coloureds, we are told, are suffering from venereal disease.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{65} Vd Horst: 1976
\textsuperscript{66} 1941 parliamentary debates around the amendment of the 1931 Factory Act no 26, Government Publications of the Union of South Africa.
\textsuperscript{67} 1941 parliamentary debates around the amendment of the 1931 Factory Act no 26, Government Publications of the Union of South Africa, 4115
\textsuperscript{68} 1941 parliamentary debates around the amendment of the 1931 Factory Act no 26, Government Publications of the Union of South Africa, 4197
\textsuperscript{69} ibid
Counter arguments were made stating that such racial segregation was based on emotional subjectivity and that it would be impractical to maintain. Due to the duplication of amenities and space it would be expensive for factory owners to implement and would mean a rise in ‘the cost of the industry’. Mrs. Ballinger, a Labour Party member from the Eastern Cape said:

…you cannot run a policy of segregation of black and white in factories without doing two things. One of them is that you must raise the costs of industry… and the other is that you displace people who are already in the industrial field.  

segregation is an emotional appeal with very dangerous social and economic implications…we will fight tooth and nail against.

The debates concluded with the amendment made but compromised. The new Factories, Machinery and Building Work Act, No. 22 of 1941 called for separate staff amenities and entrances to be provided in all factories. What is evident from the chronology of Rex Trueform is that while the debates regarding the formalization of racial segregation was still under discussion and hotly debated in parliament, Rex Trueform had already materialized this ideology through the design of their factory. However, possibly in light of formal adoption of legislation on the issue, the factory’s new transformation after a fire in 1944 shows a hardened implementation of lawful segregation.

Factory rebuilt in 1944

In 1944 the factory underwent significant changes following a fire that destroyed most of the building on 21 July 1944 (Fig. 18). The fire occurred three months after plans for the extension of the factory were designed and approved by the city of Cape Town. Part of the new extension was already under construction at the time of the fire. In 1941, Max Policansky closed his office and worked as a city architect for the Cape Town Municipality until 1947. It could be for this reason that Rex Trueform contracted the service of Henk

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70 1941 parliamentary debates around the amendment of the 1931 Factory Act no 26, Government Publications of the Union of South Africa, 4202
71 1941 parliamentary debates around the amendment of the 1931 Factory Act no 26, Government Publications of the Union of South Africa, 4205
72 Also referred to as the Madeley’s Factories Act, Simons & Simons:1969, 533
73 Vd Horst: 1976, 156-7
74 Cape Times: 1944, SANL.
75 Council submissions drawings dated April 1944 and the newspaper article Cape Times 24th July 1944, pg. 7, reporting on the July fire states that the ‘fire destroyed everything except an annex in course of erection behind the building.’
76 Van Graan: 2012, 135
Niegeman, a Dutch-trained architect and immigrant to Cape Town, whom they have already had dealings with when he worked in Policansky’s office on their first factory. Henk Niegeman left Holland soon after graduation in 1926 aged 21. While his older brother Johan remained in Holland and eventually established an illustrious career as an architect and architectural scholar, Henk chose to explore the world working in various countries in Europe, United States of America and Mexico. He also worked in Russia and was a consultant in China and Afghanistan. Niegeman is photographed in the Belgain Congo, his last stop before settling in Cape Town in 1934/5. (Fig. 19)

Figure 18
Image of the factory after the fire in 1944.
Source: Cape Times (1944), SANL

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77 Council submission drawings in the UCT Manuscripts and archives, Policansky collection, dated 1937 are signed by Niegeman.
78 Netherlands Architecture Institute (date unknown) [Online], Kunstbus: 2006 [Online]
79 Niegeman: 1938
Figure 19
Henk Niegeman and four other men in the Congo circa 1934.
Source: Dr. Eitan Karol.

Shortly after the completion of the 1938 factory, he teamed up with local architect Douglas E. Andrews, to establish the firm Andrews and Niegeman in 1939/40. The 1944 alterations were extensive. The saw-tooth roof pattern was extended right up to Main Road. The roof extension reflected the internal extension of the manufacturing floor, which now occupied the entire first floor level. The worker toilets, cloakrooms and mess rooms were consolidated into a new four-storey wing at the back of the site, fronting Factory Road. Workers were separated vertically from each other: ground floor was the cloak rooms for ‘non-European Women and Men’, a mezzanine floor was the cloak rooms for ‘European Women and Men’, the first floor was rest rooms for ‘non-European Women and Men’ and the second floor was the restroom for ‘European Women and Men’. The new staff block was also the new entrance for workers, whereas the entrance to the offices was now more directly off ground floor, and not up the stair and through the wide balcony as before. The relocation of the staff amenities to the rear of the site had a great impact on the character of the building on Main

80 Artefacts (date unknown) Andrews & Niegeman [Online]
81 The Council submission drawings dated 1944 indicates that the first floor was the rest rooms for both Europeans on the north side and non-Europeans on the south side, the second floor as an open terrace. However the 1947 brochure shows an enclosed top color and refers to ‘four teabars’ indicating that the original intention of the Council drawings was not strictly followed.
Road. The windows to the segregated cloak rooms and toilets were bricked up, solidifying the façade. (Fig. 20)

Figure 20
View of the altered factory showing the bricking up of windows on Main Road, the new staff amenities in the rear, the new altered balcony on Main Road and the demolished balcony on Queenspark Avenue. Source: Supplement to The Buyer (1947), Rex Trueform Company Archives.

While the worker balcony on Queenspark Avenue was completely demolished the Main Road balcony underwent major alterations. The simple, masonry balustrade was replaced with the decorative, Neoclassical steel balustrade that one sees there today. The thin steel-framed doors and windows of the balcony were replaced with chunkier, rather inelegant timber windows and doorframes. (Fig. 21) The functional changes to the building are easily explained by the fact that Rex Trueform was experiencing a huge turnover as the clothing demands of troops serving in World War II \(^{82}\) necessitated an increase in production space. The aesthetic alteration to the balcony, however, remains curious as it is out of character with a rationalist agenda of form following function. It also refers to a classical architecture of the past, which is at odds with the modernist aesthetic eagerly sought by their earlier

\(^{82}\) Supplement to the Buyer: 1947
modernist architect, Policansky. It seems that the fire not only presented the owners with an opportunity to rethink space in a functionalist way but also in an ideological way by making a nostalgic reference to an imagined past\textsuperscript{83}. As Mbembe writes referring to Johannesburg:

That the city started as a tabula rasa did not mean that the new could be inscribed upon it without reference to a past. \textsuperscript{84}

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\textsuperscript{83} Boym: 2001
\textsuperscript{84} Mbembe: 2004: 375-4
Rex Trueform mural art as an expression of hybridized identity

A large mural (Figs. 22-25) was installed at the new entrance. It depicted a landscape of peaked mountains nearby a body of water with rolling green hills and blue skies in the background. The style of the painting is naïve – bright colours, almost cartoonish, but reminiscent of the more sophisticated socialist murals done by the Mexican artist Diego Rivera in the late 1920s and 1930s. There are several figures in the foreground – an old woman sitting at a spinning wheel with a younger woman standing behind her. The younger woman’s arms are spread out to hold out a large piece of material. There are also three male figures in the mural. In the far background, an old man is bending down to shear a sheep. Next, in the middle ground, another old man is holding out a big stretch of cloth and watching the third figure, in the foreground, a young man with his back turned away from the viewer, tending to a weaving loom. The figures are composed in such a way that the young man forms an apex of a symmetrical picture and therefore the focus of the painting. There is one building in the painting. It is a long house with three doors on the front façade with each door flanked on either side by simple square windows. It has a simple double-pitched roof and at first glance it does not look too dissimilar to the simple rural dwellings one would find in the Cape farmlands. However, the placement of chimneys, the colour of the plaster and the placement and decoration of doors and windows seem closer to typical features of Lithuanian vernacular architecture. (Fig. 25) The caption in the 1947 brochure refers to the painting as depicting the Scottish Hebrides, the source of much of Rex Trueform’s raw material.85 Could the mural signal a moment whereby the owners are nostalgically reflecting on their imagined past?86 It is perhaps referencing an idealized version of their homeland conflated with reflection on the technological progress of their industry. It is depicting a hybrid, imagined landscape referencing symbols that could be read as European, Lithuanian and Cape simultaneously.

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85 Rex Trueform: 1947
86 Boym: 2001
Figure 22
Full view of the mural in the entrance hall as it is today.

Source: Chantal van Staden

Figure 23
A contemporary view of the entrance off Main Road. It is a low volume and the mural is a key feature in the space.

Source: Chantal van Staden
Figure 24
A view of the entrance hall in 1947, with the new mural as a centrepiece. Note also the staircase on the side which has since been enclosed/demolished.

*Source: Supplement to the Buyer (1947), Rex Trueform Company Archives*

Figure 25
Typical traditional Lithuanian residential dwellings

*Source: Danko, (2007) [Online]*
The mural is the work of Phay Hutton, an artist who worked in Cape Town during the late 1930s and 1940s.\textsuperscript{87} She belonged to the ‘New Group’, an influential countercultural art movement started in 1937 and whose early protagonists, included Gregoire Bonzaaier, Lippy Lipshitz and Walter Battiss.\textsuperscript{88} The second floor canteen in the 1944 extension is peppered with Hutton’s murals, depicting dancing men and women in traditional Lithuanian dress. (Fig. 26 & 27) The murals appear cheerful and innocent but upon deeper analysis together with the 1944 architectural drawings, a few observations are made that complicates a simple reading. Hutton carefully considered the placement and depiction of the figures. The figures with darker hair and skin tone are placed on the northern side, across the entrances of the rest rooms for ‘European women and men’. Figures with lighter skin and hair are placed on the southern side, opposite the entrances of the restrooms of ‘non-European women and men’. On the walls of the uppermost canteen is a depiction of six fishermen. (Fig. 27) All the figures in the mural are dark skinned and it is placed at the entrance of the rest rooms for European staff.\textsuperscript{89} One of the men is in a small boat called ‘Totchka’. He looks on as the rest control a large catch in their net. Many of the fish in the net are bright red, perhaps the ‘Red Roman’, a fish species particular to the Cape coast. A quick Google search of the term ‘Totchka’ offered multiple\textsuperscript{90} meanings: from the name of a Russian missile, to a type of Russian music as well as one entry referring to it as a KGB spy camera. Google Scholar lead me to an article in Jewish Quarterly, referring to ‘Totchka’ (which means ‘the point’ in Russian) as a socialist kibbutz that was established in Palestine by a group of ‘pioneering’ Jewish women in late 1920s.\textsuperscript{91}

Considering the subversive placement of the figures and its references to Russian socialism, the murals could begin to refer to a multilayered set of ideas. It could be a visual art representation of hybradised Cape identities and landscape (dark skinned ‘Cape’ Russian-Lithuanian traditional dancers; socialist red mixed with the red of a Cape fish species). It could be an early form of resistance art\textsuperscript{92} (the placement of black figures in front of white spaces thus disrupting the racial taxonomies set up by the architecture). It could also be a subversive depiction of Russian socialism (the naming of the fishermen’s boat ‘Totchka’).

\textsuperscript{87} Berman: 1983, 114  
\textsuperscript{88} Berman: 1983, 307  
\textsuperscript{89} See note 64.  
\textsuperscript{90} 85 000 hits  
\textsuperscript{91} Frensdorff: 2001  
\textsuperscript{92} Williamson: 2010
Figure 26
Murals of dancing figures dressed in traditional Lithuanian clothes are painted in the new cloakrooms of the 1944 extension. This mural was placed in front of the entrance for the rest rooms for ‘European men and women.’
Source: Chantal van Staden

Figures 27 & 28 (below)
Depictions of dancing people dressed in traditional Lithuanian clothes painted on the walls of the new cloakrooms of the 1944 extension. The figures have blonde hair and are light skinned. These two murals were placed in front of the entrances for the rest rooms for ‘non-European men and women.’
Source: Chantal van Staden
On the walls of the new top floor worker canteen is a mural of fishermen. The mural, placed at the entrance of rest rooms for Europeans depicts a fishing boat named ‘Totcka’ meaning ‘the point’ in Russian. The use of the colour red is striking in this mural.

Source: Chantal van Staden
Figure 30
The original layout of the 1944 extension. It depicts the planning of the staff amenities to be separated along racial and gender lines. The Hutton murals were placed to subvert these separations.
Source: City of Cape Town (1944)
The building of the 1938 factory signalled a shift in the urban and architectural character of its surrounding neighbourhood, Salt River. Prior to the construction of the factory the architectural styles that dominated were Victorian-Edwardian for residential buildings and Neoclassicism for important public buildings. The owners of the Rex Trueform Company acquired unoccupied land within this aesthetically ‘pre-modern’ neighbourhood with the intention to develop an enterprise. They did so also with the prospect of modernizing a space in Africa through industry. Policansky, the architect whom they contracted for the design of the factory was heavily influenced by his modern architectural training and proposed a building that promoted key tenets of the modern movement: solid massing, no ornamentation and form strictly dictated by its use. Some of these modern ideas continued, with their new architect Henk Niegeman, when the building underwent a major transformation after a fire destroyed most of its fabric in 1944.

The significant aesthetic changes were only made to spaces where power resides like the new entrance off Main Road and the balcony, flanked by Shub and Dibowitz’s offices. This is where they:

… used to start the day together at 6.00 a.m… with a cup of tea, a smoke and a chat.  

It does not take a huge leap of the imagination to say that the new 1944 balcony, with all its trimmings reminiscent of European opulence, was a space of prospect designated for them to enjoy, contemplate and gaze out from their successful enterprise. In contrast, the modernist factory behind, stripped of decoration, functionalist and bare, would be the realm of the raw material, the production and the worker. With the new extension for staff amenities, the building gained more wall surface in front and became an opportunity for the company to brand and re-style the building with corporate signage. Ideologically, the move also signalled a move to invisibilise factory workers. The walls of the new staff amenities, moved to the back of the building, were decorated with curious murals depicting dancing figures and fishermen. I have argued that the murals could be read as a form of resistance art.

The 1938 building represents a complex folding of ‘universal’ modern movement ideas within the stratified colonial context such as Cape Town. Whilst promoting modernist ideals of

93 Kaplan: 1986: 246
efficiency, colonial attitudes of segregation were being fiercely materialized within the design of the façades and the spatial arrangement of the factory. The fire in 1944 was an opportunity for Rex Trueform not only to expand efficiently but also to materialize and preempt strategies of racial segregation, strategies that were then still under discussion in parliamentary debates. The 1938 factory was a modern moment for Salt River, with the construction of ‘the most modern factory in the world’⁹⁴, it was a decisive moment in which two immigrant Eastern European Jews could perform their own modern identity and it was a spacio-political act in which modern ideas on social engineering were definitively inscribed onto the fabric of the city.

⁹⁴ Cape Argus: 1938, 22
Chapter 2

Building apartheid modernity: the Rex Trueform factory 1948 – 2009

This chapter will continue an architectural reading of the sites. There will be a focus on the second factory completed in 1948 but also on the political connections that Rex Trueform formed and maintained during its expansion and occupation of the site. What I try to draw out is the fact that state and private enterprise did not work within autonomous modes but are entangled in the production of the apartheid modern city. The question that I would like to pose here is: can we read the story of Rex Trueform as a parable? If so, in which ways does it show up the entanglements of the production of space and state-endorsed enterprise, with the construction of race, the expression of national identity and the forming of local subjectivities?

Figure 31
An aerial view of the 1948 factory, its various buildings and stages of development.
Source: Google Earth (2012), own annotation.
A space to produce, a space to administer

Rex Trueform built its second factory across the road from the first one in 1948, this time employing the architectural office of Andrews and Niegeman, the office responsible for the transformation of the 1938 factory after the 1944 fire. Dutch architect, Henk Niegeman was, by most accounts, the lead designer of this new factory. With large profits made during World War II, Rex Trueform was in a financial position to indulge in the formal expression of their new venture. The second building thus stood out in Main Road for its bold architectural expression and sheer size. (Fig. 34) The new factory was a six-storey building and comprised of two masses, one solid, one translucent. The two sections formed a ‘T’ and a circulation core locked the two distinct sections together. The long part of the T - a solid brick plastered section - was parallel to Manrose Street, the side street to Main, and runs the entire length of Manrose. The short part of the ‘T’, a glazed, transparent section, was significantly set back from Main Road and fronted Aubrey Street at the back facing, Devil’s Peak on one side and the Cape Flats on the other. A low barrel vaulted building, offices for the Department of Native Affairs, occupied the site in front of the new manufacturing halls. In 1962/3 Rex Trueform acquired this piece of land:

…after lengthy Government negotiations...

1946 council approved drawings set out the organization of the building. It shows that the translucent section of the factory was where the manufacturing halls were placed and the solid section was dedicated to non-production and support activities such as administration and staff amenities. The factory operated only during day and thus the maximum penetration of natural light was a major requirement for the machinists to be able to operate. This requirement was in conflict with the large amount of heat the factory would gain and thus the design prompted a creative solution from the architects. The long sides of the manufacturing halls are fully glazed. (Fig. 32) The treatment of the glazing on each facade is different, dependent on the orientation: glass sun-screens hanging freely off the Aubrey Street facade, and a newly invented system of heat absorbing glass placed in a zig-zag pattern on the Main Road facade.

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95 City of Cape Town Council Drawings: 1944
96 Tavill and Shapiro: 2012 [Interviews], 1946 council drawings are signed by Niegeman.
97 Rex Trueform: 1953, 7; Shorten: 1963, 221
98 Architect & Builder: 1965, 2
99 CoCT Council drawings:1946/7. Drawings include a set of plans: ground floor to sixth floor, all the street elevations, a typical cross-section, service and engineering drawings. There is also a series of drawings for the Main Road entrance canopy.
100 Supplement to the Buyer: 1947, 25
Figure 32
This is a drawing by Jack Barnett showing the intended design of the new building. The two distinct parts are clearly visible here with the solid form on the left programmed for administration and the textured glass part designated for manufacturing.
Source: Supplement to the Buyer (1947)

Figure 33
Current view of the manufacturing halls with the structure set just over one metre away from the zig-zag patterned glass wall on the left.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2012)
Figure 34
These two photographs illustrate the building’s bold aesthetic. The one on the left, taken circa 1951, is a view from Main Road and shows the low Department of Native Affairs’ administration building in front. The one on the right, taken from Aubrey Road, shows the location and the architectural character of the building within the context of the old 1938 factory and Main Road.

Source: (left) Cape Town Guide (1951), (right) Supplement to the Buyer (1947)
Figure 35
(Top) View from Aubrey Street showing the glass facade with a second layer of glass screening hanging off canopies above the windows. (Bottom) View of the zig-zag patterned glass façade onto Main Road.
Source: (top) Dr Eitan Karol, (bottom) Supplement to the Buyer (1953)
The two parts had the same structural order of reinforced concrete floor slabs supported by reinforced concrete columns and beams. (Fig. 36) While the same structural system was used throughout, the size, division and spacing of the columns and beams differed in the two sections. The reinforced concrete floor of the service wing is supported by a system of reinforced concrete beams on columns placed on a seven by nine metre structural grid. The grid consists of ten structural modules and this, together with its relatively long spans in the long direction, results in a long narrow tube-like form. The columns are set back one and a half metres away from the solid sidewalls, and the walls are punctured with high-level strip windows on most floor levels.

Figure 36
A second floor engineer’s plan shows the general construction of the building. The manufacturing wing (top right) has longer spans resulting in bigger spaces. In comparison the service wing (to the left the drawing) is much more densely spaced.

Source: Cape Town City Council (1946)
Figure 37
A contemporary view of the manufacturing halls. The large spans are ideal space for uninterrupted production.

Source: Chantal van Staden (2012)

The structure of the manufacturing wing comprises six structural modules on a twelve by sixteen metre grid. The columns here are larger as the span of the beams are significantly longer than those in the service wing. The columns are placed quite close - less than a metre - to the glazed window walls on the long sides of the rectangular space. The longer spans and the absence of solid walls is the reason for its large open expanse of space, the glass window walls adding to the perception of spatial limitlessness. (Figs. 37 & 38)
Figure 38

A view of the factory floor in 1953. Note the overhead reinforced concrete beams resting on columns spanning long lengths to allow for uninterrupted space for manufacturing.

*Source: Supplement to the Buyer (1953)*

Figure 39

View of the general office, part of the service wing.

*Source: Supplement to the Buyer (1953)*
A double stair, a double entrance

The structural system described previously forms the spatial order within which the functions of the factory are organized. An entrance labelled ‘Hall’ is indicated on the ground floor plan\textsuperscript{101} (Fig. 43) of the service wing and is situated off Manrose Street. From the outside the entrance doors consist of seven fairly standard full-height glass doors under a canopy and accessed via a flight of steps descending into the entrance space.\textsuperscript{102} Upon entry, the height of the entrance hall measures just over two and a half metres, but it is generous in floor area and occupies two out of the ten structural modules. The entrance hall opens into two identical stairwells, with the stairs wide enough for three, maybe four persons to walk abreast. The entrance stairwell is placed mid-way between the warehouse below and the manufacturing floor above. The two stairwells are separated by a lift lobby. In the 1946 plans, the staircase on the left of the lift is labelled ‘Men’ and the one on the right is labelled ‘Women’. The generously proportioned, twin stairwell is a hint of the masses of people that it had to accommodate. The staircases are a special moment in the factory, curious because of the duplication along gender lines. The design of the stairs is also of a high aesthetic order and a testament to the designer’s talent. Dennis Tavill, a retired partner at the firm Andrews and Niegeman said of the stair:

..you will see the staircases for instance, the freestanding staircases, which we used in many cases. That was also a signature of Niegeman.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{101} City of Cape Town: 1946
\textsuperscript{102} ibid
\textsuperscript{103} Tavill: 2012 [Interview]
Figure 40
View of the double stair from the Manrose Street entrance.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2012)

Figure 41
Manrose Street entrance hall and detail of the double stair.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2012)
To the left of the entrance hall, occupying two structural modules, are two sets of rooms. The one set is labelled ‘Waiting’ and ‘Surgery Men’ and the second set is labelled ‘Waiting’ and ‘Surgery Women’. To the right of the entrance lobby is the ‘Wage Office’ (one module) and ‘Lunch and Recreation Room for Office Staff’ (two modules). Modules eight and nine are taken up by a stair lobby with stores and cloak rooms on either side. The final and tenth module is a boardroom. The boardroom, lunch and recreation room for office staff and potentially the wage office, are accessed from a separate flight of stairs (in modules eight and nine) that are linked to a separate entrance off Main Road.

Figure 42
Detail of the double stair. It is separated from the sidewalls to allow in light. It is supported by a middle beam from which the treads cantilever off from either side.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2012)
Figure 43
The ground floor plan showing the entrance hall, the double stair, the administration section and part of the manufacturing halls on the right.

*Source: City of Cape Town (1946)*
The first floor (Fig. 47) of the service wing is organized as follows: off Main Road is a generous entrance space, taking up two structural modules. The boardroom, which floats above the entrance, forms a canopy under which to enter. Entry is through glass doors into a circular shaped room labelled ‘Enquires’ with an area for waiting further into the space. One is then faced with a narrow stair placed in the middle of the space. This entrance to the factory leads to a set of offices: the director’s office (one module), a secretary office (one module), and a general office (three modules) (Fig. 39). There is a note over the offices for the secretary and director, which says:

These two offices are soundproof and air-conditioned\(^\text{104}\).

The walkway to the Main Road entrance lobby of the building was covered with a nine metre long canopy, elaborate in its design and choice of materials. The structure (demolished circa 1963) was a stainless steel roof curved inwards for collecting rainwater. The roof of the canopy was supported by a series of columns detailed in a very specific way. The note on the construction drawings says:

polished stainless steel wire tightly wound over … stainless steel pipe\(^\text{105}\).

Stainless steel, at the time was a brand-new invention and is still today a high-end product to use in a building. The design of the canopy is technically innovative and it is clear, because of the use of a luxury material like stainless steel, that it was conceived as a crown piece for the entrance. (Figs. 44-46)

\(^{104}\) City of Cape Town: 1946

\(^{105}\) ibid
Figure 44
Drawing for Main Road entrance canopy showing the construction details and materials. The drawing shows that the construction of the canopy includes the use of 'polished stainless steel', which is a luxury building material.

Source: City of Cape Town (1947)
Figure 45
3-D drawing of entrance canopy drawn by G Skacel for A&N.
Source: City of Cape Town (1947)

Figure 46
A photo of a model leaning against one of the columns of the new Main Road entrance canopy.
Source: Supplement to the Buyer (1953)
Figure 47

First Floor plan showing the administration section, entered from the specially designed canopy off Main Road.

Source: City of Cape Town (1946)
Change rooms for one thousand workers

On the manufacturing side of the building is the first level dedicated to production. The architects did not draw the entire space and indicates on the plans that the layout should be repeated for the second, third, fourth and fifth floors. The sixth floor of the manufacturing side of the factory was for the storage of raw materials and here the walls are solid, punctured by mid-level square windows. The plans of the manufacturing side generally lack detail and annotation.

The second and third floors of the service wing (Fig. 48) are entirely dedicated to change rooms and toilets. On each of these levels seven structural modules that lead off from the women’s staircase are set aside for ‘Change Rooms for 350 Women’. Women would enter the change rooms into a space filled with lockers (four modules), then move through a wide corridor space situated between two sets of fire escape stairs. The last two modules are toilets with large circular water fountains in the middle of the space, rather than wall-hung washbasins. The men’s section is planned the same way but on a much smaller scale, taking up three of the ten modules. From the annotations in the plans we can see the number of people that the change rooms and toilets catered for: 350 women on two floors and 150 men on two floors, therefore 700 women and 300 men, a total of one thousand workers. The number of workers are referred to in the 1947 brochure by the Minister of Economic Development, Sidney Waterson, where he points out that the current premises accommodates one thousand workers ‘and this one thousand is soon to be increased to two thousand.’

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106 Supplement to the Buyer, 1947: 3
Figure 48a

Second and Third floors of the service wings are entirely dedicated to toilets and change-rooms for workers.

*Source: City of Cape Town (1946)*
Figure 48b
Contemporary view of the Second and Third floors toilets and change-rooms. The space has since been cleared of internal walls and sanitary fittings in anticipation of future development.

*Source: Chantal van Staden (2012)*

The fourth floor, a large industrial scale kitchen and cold storage room, is a narrow space. (Figs. 49 & 50) The architects chose to de-articulate the structural grid by building the walls in between the columns, thus the width of the space coincides with the cross-span of the beams above columns (seven metres). Functionally its purpose was to serve a ‘hot meal at a nominal charge to some two thousand workers’\(^{107}\). Its place in the section of the building should be pointed out. It is above four structurally identical floors and right below the top floor of the building, the ‘Mess Room’. Its position, distinct narrow form and deviation from the structural order is a strategy to indicate an important moment of transition in the building, a move from the body of the building to the head of the structure, thus the kitchen is the ‘throat’ of the building, completing the anthropomorphic character of the factory. (Fig. 51)

\(^{107}\) As described by the Minister of Social Welfare, Harry Lawrence in the 1947 Supplement to the Buyer, p. 4. P. 25 refers to the kitchen serving meals to between 1600-1800 workers.
Figure 49
View of the industrial size kitchen on the fourth floor.
Source: Supplement to the Buyer (1953)

Figure 50
Contemporary view of the kitchen.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2012)
Figure 51
A section cutting through the manufacturing halls on the left and the service wing on the right. Note the anthropomorphic quality of the service wing, with the ‘mess room’ right at the top.

*Source: City of Cape Town (1946)*

The structure of the ‘Mess Room’ on the sixth floor is autonomous from the rest of the building. The reinforced concrete floor slab is supported by the columnar grid from below but the walls are built using a system of steel H-columns. The columns support the roof structure, a system of curved laminated timber beams giving the roof its distinctive curved line. The plans reveal little of the organization of the space and a single line is written over the plan:

Seating to be fixed and to comply with Reg. 960 in all respects. ¹⁰⁸

A photograph of the mess room illustrates the organization of the seating, against full height glazing, thus taking advantage of the spectacular views of the surrounding neighbourhood. Tea cups are placed in a large tea-wagon, which would rotate for the quick distribution of coffee and tea. A screen separates women from men. (Fig. 52)

¹⁰⁸ City of Cape Town: 1946
Figure 52
View of the ‘mess rooms’. Note the screen separating men from women on the right and the tea-wagon on the left of the image.
Source: Supplement to the Buyer (1953)

Figure 53
Contemporary view of the ‘Mess Rooms’. The H-Columns (now cladded) support curved laminated beams above. This is a cost effective method of achieving a curved line usually done with concrete.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2012)
Labelling space, ascribing race

The design of the 1948 factory was conceived strictly centered around a notion of dual separation. This was pragmatically carried through on all levels: activities around productivity were separated from those of administration, the structural system was separated from the system of enclosure, solar heat gain was separated from ultra-violet light, men were separated from women and black workers were separated from white workers. The architecture that emerged from this steadfast separation-driven agenda was a multi-storeyed building in two parts: the one, solid, for the purposes of housing administrative support services, the other, skeletal and clad in a cloak of complex and layered glass.

The sequence of spaces, the arrangement of circulation and the labelling of spaces on the drawings, choreograph a very specific movement of people. It is a sequence of movement that reveals a desire to control and to separate by ascribing and inscribing class, race, and gender onto all who inhabit the building. Manrose Street was the side from which factory workers enter the building, greeted with an entrance hall that was of modest architectural significance, low in volume but large enough in area to accommodate the masses of workers that would enter and exit there. The wage office and surgeries that flank the entrance hall, meet the needs of the factory worker but also become the barrier between the entry for factory staff and the entry for office and executive staff. Factory workers were funnelled straight through the entrance hall towards the lobby with its double staircase. This munificent double stair becomes not only the link between the service wing and the manufacturing halls but also an important philosophical moment of transition. Workers have already been ascribed their race and class at the entrance but here they are also ascribed their gender. Once they moved through the cloakrooms above to shed off their city clothes and put on their work overalls, they clock in and enter the manufacturing halls as ‘non-European men’ or ‘non-European women’, all operators on the Rex Trueform production line. Workers enter Rex Trueform as complex individuals and, through the factory architecture, get ascribed simplified, grouped identities based on race, class and gender.

The entrance off Main Road with its specially designed stainless steel canopy physically and ideologically reflects back as a mirror to the inequality of the Manrose Street entrance. Here persons are not ascribed their gender and no form of separation occurs in the space. Instead the space is large, sparsely populated, air-conditioned and soundproof. Thus, the location of entrances, specific and curious spatial planning within a neutral and ultra-modern structural system was able to materialize certain aspects of Cape apartheid modernity: the inscribing of class, race and gender onto bodies through separate entrances and staff.
amenities; the invisibilising of black workers through the visual concealment of entrances from prominent public view and the soundproofing of offices against the sound of production through their labour.

The new factory is on the right. Smaller building on the left is the old factory.

In 1953, the company’s twentieth anniversary, Rex Trueform claims its status as the ‘6th largest clothing organization in the world’ and that the ‘firm is making the name known throughout the continent of Africa’ with shops in ‘the Belgian Congo [and] Nairobi’\textsuperscript{109} Ten years after, in 1963, Rex Trueform expanded again, this time to nearly double its production capacity. The January 1965 issue of \textit{Architect and Builder} opens with the new extension to the 1948 factory as a featured article. The caption to the front-page photograph is ‘View from the Main Road. The new factory is on the right. Smaller building on the left is the old factory. Aluminium louvres protect the main façade from the sun. Sculpture is in anodized aluminium.’\textsuperscript{110} The new architect is Hillel Turok and unlike Policansky, Andrews and Niegeman, was relatively unknown and did not participate in the life of the profession.

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\textsuperscript{109} Supplement to the Buyer: 1953, 5.
\textsuperscript{110} Architect & Builder: 1965
With the 1963 extension, the Main Road façade was partly demolished. Sadly, only the last two out of the five structural modules survive intact with its peculiar, zig-zag windows. The elaborate Main Road entrance canopy was also removed. The first floor plan (Fig. 56) shows the entrance from Main Road, and the insertion of a new stairwell leading off the entrance towards the manufacturing wing extension. It also shows the internal layout of the new extension, which on the first floor is entirely dedicated to administration. The space is carved up into cellular offices, with functions such as ‘Accounts Department’, ‘Production Planning Department’, ‘Costing Department’ and ‘Sales Administration Department’ (the largest room). A corridor divides the spaces down the middle and lightweight walls separate the rooms from another. This is described in the article ‘to allow for flexible sub-division of internal spaces at will.’\textsuperscript{111} The service wing on this level has undergone significant changes. Where earlier the space was organized to accommodate the entire administrative side of Rex Trueform, the service wing now accommodates five directors’ offices along a corridor with a sales office at the end.

\textsuperscript{111} Architect & Builder: 1965, 2
The first floor plan of the 1963 extension showing the planning of the administrative floor and new directors offices. On this level the clean split between service and production is lost. 

*Source: Architect & Builder (1965)*

The second floor plan (Fig. 57) merely shows the factory floor and its extension as an empty shell. On the service wing of the factory, the toilet block has been reconfigured. The lockers have been replaced with toilet cubicles, fifteen on the one side and twenty-five on the other side. The space is annotated ‘Non-European Women’s Toilets.’ It now occupies five rather than four out of ten structural modules. In the new plan the space can be accessed from either the old double stair off Manrose or the new stairwell link to the new extension.
Figure 57
The second floor plan showing the newly reconfigured toilet block in the service wing

Source: Architect & Builder (1965)

The main feature of the new extension is the façade with its prominent position right on Main Road. Though not as elegant and technically innovative as its zig-zag glass predecessor, it displays a practical and workable solution to wind exposure and controlling south-western sun penetration with the use of vertical louvres and dropped perimeter beams. The article describes it as such:

To shield the factory from these two elements we introduced aluminium louvres which overcome this difficulty [and] interesting architectural modulation on the main
façade which is purely functional and at the same time produces a very bold character.¹¹²

The rest of the six-page article is a visual essay of the new extension. It highlights the entrance hall and the directors’ offices, interiors that are plush, tasteful and comfortable. It is not overly modern as the old-fashioned curtains and clock in the offices indicate, but sympathetic to contemporary trends as the Eames lounger in the corner of the managing director’s office illustrates. The new boardroom is curiously decorated. The walls and ceilings are made up of the ultra modern modular and interchangeable panels but the lighting is a selection of old-fashioned, overly decorative chandeliers. On the walls are paintings framed in a decorative style.

Figure 58
New boardroom on the left and view of one of the typical director’s offices on the right.
Source: Architect & Builder (1965)

The ‘new factory of 1963’ as the plans show, was a major extension to the current premises, and although not entirely a new building, the extension changed the character of the site in such a way that it read as a ‘new’ bigger building adjacent to a ‘smaller’ older building. To emphasise this newness even more, a specially commissioned two-storey high sculpture¹¹³, by Cynthia Stanford¹¹⁴, was installed on the side of the new extension.

¹¹² Architect & Builder: 1965,4
¹¹³ The sculpture disappeared from the building with scant information as to the circumstance of its disappearance. Heinrich Wolff and I photographed the building in 2010 with the sculpture still in place.
¹¹⁴ About Cynthia Stanford, not much is recorded in the official publications of art history except that she was born in 1918, worked as a professional artist and participated in important group exhibitions.
Confidence in the future of South Africa

The integration of the new extension into the existing fabric was crude and showed a casual disregard for the aesthetic achievements of the building that it was adding to.\textsuperscript{115} Despite this it was bold and ‘kragdadig’\textsuperscript{116} and was hailed as an expression of the confidence that business enterprises in general had in the future of the South African apartheid government. It features in Shorten’s *The Golden Jubilee of Greater Cape Town 1963, Cape Town: a record of the mother city from the earliest days to the present*,\textsuperscript{117} which is a review of Cape Town’s economic progress between 1485, when the Europeans first circumvented the Cape and 1963, the date of the publication. Here, with an artist’s rendering displayed at the top to introduce the six-page article on Rex Trueform, (Fig. 60) the new extension is praised even before its completion:

\textit{Source: Architect & Builder (1964)}

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\textsuperscript{115} I am referring to particularly the zig-zag façade, expressed as a significant architectural feature in the heritage report that I compiled with A.Lillie in 2012.

\textsuperscript{116} ‘forceful’ translated as such by Lipton: 1986

\textsuperscript{117} Shorten: 1963
‘Rex Trueform – an outstanding industrial asset to South Africa.’

Figure 60

Extract from The Golden Jubilee of Greater Cape Town in which Rex Trueform features.

Source: Shorten (1963)

The article traces the company’s growth up till then, and a final stamp of approval is given by Prime Minister HF Verwoerd saying that he appreciated Rex Trueform’s ‘confidence in the future’ and that it is ‘important for all who share this belief to follow the lead given by Rex Trueform so as to strengthen the desirable climate for economic upsurge’. In the local press, Rex Trueform advertised their expansion as a bold outlook to the future of the country. (Fig. 61) The headline of a promotional article in 1963 read:

‘We look ahead with confidence in the future of our Country.’

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118 Shorten: 1963, 220
119 Shorten: 1963, 225
120 Cape Times: 1963
Why this public dialogue between Rex Trueform and the apartheid government about national economic confidence? There are several events in and around the time of the 1963 extension that could suggest that the apartheid government was in a vulnerable position and was working in a focused way to reverse its situation. The Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March 1960, being one of these key historical moments, is widely argued as being a watershed moment for South Africa.¹²¹ The event is explained in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reports as follows:

On 21 March 1960, 69 people died when police opened fire on unarmed marchers protesting against the Pass laws at Sharpeville, Tvl. The march formed part of an anti-Pass campaign organized by the PAC. That same day, a similar march took place in Langa, Cape Town, resulting in three deaths from police shootings. A

¹²¹ Lodge: 2011; Frankel: 2001; Legassick & Saunders: 2004
national state of emergency was declared on 24 March, lasting until 31 August. Nearly 12 000 people were detained. Just over a fortnight after the massacre, the ANC and PAC were banned.122

The consequences of this tragic event is multiple and layered. Firstly, the event signalled for the first time that the apartheid state was vulnerable to civil unrest and thus, shortly after the Sharpeville Massacre white South Africans showed a lack of confidence in the stability of the social order of South Africa.123 Prime Minister HF Verwoerd, resisted such perceptions, calming down anxieties of the white population with his speeches shortly after Sharpeville124 and in turn put in place a number of laws meant to repress black resistance even more forcefully125.

We shall fight for our existence and we shall survive…126

were the words of Verwoerd on 9th April 1960, minutes before he was shot in an attempted assassination. Sharpeville revealed the vulnerability of the apartheid state, made black suffering shockingly obvious and immediate to white South Africans127, and internationalized the brutality of the apartheid system128. The ANC and the PAC were banned and the result of the Rivonia trial, saw eight defendants129 sentenced to life imprisonment for treason in 1964. The Sharpeville Massacre heralded a new wave of forceful clamping down of resistance movements.

However, Sharpeville also preceded an unprecedented national economic boom, lasting until the mid-1970s130. Government strengthened their policies about import substitution, therefore stimulating local production and manufacturing in particular, with countries like Britain being key importers and investors of South African products.131 The financial crisis shortly after Sharpeville was completely reversed by 1962 with an impressive growth rate of

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122 SABC: 2014 [Online]
123 Lodge: 2011, 169
124 Venter: 1999, 428
125 These include General Law amendment Act No 37 of 1963 which gave more powers to police, and allowed officers to detain suspects without a warrant for ninety days law (police without access to lawyers, the Sabotage Act of 1962 which meant the torture of suspects, and the No trial Act of 1962. Lodge: 2011, 177
126 Kennedy: 1980
127 In 1963 Byers Naude broke with the Broederbond and his church, the Dutch Reformed Church. His views were based on the injustices of Sharpeville. Harris & Billheimer: 1987 [Online]
128 Time Magazine: 1960 [Online]
129 Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Dennis Goldberg, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Matsoaledi, Mlangeni, and Ahmed Kathrada
130 Habib: 1997, 57
131 Nwati: 2007; Lodge: 2011, 177
9 percent per annum in 1963, a growth rate that Chipkin calls an ‘economic miracle’.\textsuperscript{132} The national mood of fear amongst the white population was thus quickly reversed. But this ‘period of triumphalism’\textsuperscript{133} had an immediate impact on the nature of South African cities and saw for instance the annexing of Braamfontein to the CBD of Johannesburg for the purposes of establishing a ‘city of towers’\textsuperscript{134} in 1961.\textsuperscript{135} In Cape Town, The Group Areas Act of 1950 proclaimed the Peninsula’s Southern Suburbs as a ‘white area’ in 1961,\textsuperscript{136} and areas like Woodstock/Salt River were earmarked for white settlement and economic development. (Fig. 62) We see then in the 1960s era, particularly after Sharpeville, not only the confluence of white capital (especially the manufacturing industry) and apartheid policies\textsuperscript{137} but also its effects on the production of the city. Rex Trueform’s new extension was built on the site of where the offices for the Department of Native Affairs once stood\textsuperscript{138}, thus its foundations is not only literally embedded in the history of violent racialising and subjugation of black people in South Africa but its expansion in 1963 is as a direct consequence of these three forces at play.

It is a formal expression of the state-driven political and economic will that was prevailing on a national level at the time. It is a typical example of the architectural language that was in vogue during the nation-wide building boom of the 1960s – 1970s.\textsuperscript{139} It heralded a new era in modern Cape Town, where the effects of fifteen years of apartheid legislation were beginning to bear economic fruits. It was an era of ‘high apartheid’, of unbounded certainty and power manifesting itself in spatial practice.

\textsuperscript{132} Chipkin: 1999, 250
\textsuperscript{133} ibid
\textsuperscript{134} Chipkin, 1999, 251
\textsuperscript{135} Prinsloo, 2000:75
\textsuperscript{136} Taliep: 2001
\textsuperscript{137} Lipton: 1985, 6
\textsuperscript{138} Architect & Builder: 1963, 2
\textsuperscript{139} Robinson: 1992, Peters: 2004
Figure 62
The erf diagram of the two factory sites with the annotation *Blanke Groepsgebeid* [White Group Area] – proclaimed in 1968.

*Source: Deeds office, Maps Department, Cape Town (2012)*
The Nelson Touch

Between 1960 and 1975 Rex Trueform proceeded to grow and expand despite workers strikes erupting nationally at the beginning of the 1970s. The Durban strikes of 1973 are considered influential in the formation of liberalised trade unions.\textsuperscript{140} Despite this, Rex Trueform remained stable and production was unaffected during this period.\textsuperscript{141} By 1975 it owned and occupied two entire city blocks in Salt River to the north and the south of Main Road including the ‘Cavalla Cigarette Factory’ previously the ‘L&H Policansky Cigarette Factory’\textsuperscript{142}. In 1980 Rex Trueform also built a new factory in Atlantis, an area on the West Coast of Cape Town and a designated neighbourhood for ‘coloured’ people. The area was part of a national programme of creating self-sustaining racially-designated neighbourhoods. Tax incentives were offered to companies like Rex Trueform to expand there and in that way employ masses of people re-classified as coloured and who were forcibly moved there from areas declared as ‘white group areas’.\textsuperscript{143} In the mid 1980’s the stability of Rex Trueform was shattered with a strike in 1984\textsuperscript{144} as well as a ‘sit-in’ in 1988\textsuperscript{145}.

It is ironic that on 11 February 1990, as Nelson Mandela walked out of Victor Verster prison, wearing a Rex Trueform suit\textsuperscript{146}, (Fig. 63) marking freedom from apartheid, that that moment would also mark a moment of dramatic change for the company and the workers. During this time Rex Trueform began its rapid transition from large scale manufacturing towards large scale retail\textsuperscript{147}. This restructuring was done as the new democratically elected government of 1994 implemented GEAR - Growth Employment and Redistribution - in 1995, which aimed for the reintroduction of South Africa into the global economy. This meant that the South African textile industry was no longer supported by state-endorsed export tariffs and importing for resell became the attractive business model overall.\textsuperscript{148}\textsuperscript{}Nwati, in his thesis, \textit{Rex Trueform in the age of globalization}, writes that Rex Trueform’s restructuring, coupled with postapartheid global trade agreements with countries such as China, which sought to relax import tariffs, caused the closure of many production plants and loss of jobs. The dawn of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Habib: 1997
\item Mellon: 2006
\item Rex Trueform took transfer of the adjacent Policansky properties (Erven 13718, 13719, 13720, 1372313724, & 13725) on 30 September 1974 as per deed of transfer registers T32761/1974.
\item Nel & Meston: 1996; Oldfield: 2004; Legget: 2004; Western: 1996
\item SACTWU: 2009; Mellon: 2006
\item Hoedemaker: 2011 [Interview], Smith: 1988
\item Business Live: 2011 [Online]
\item Rex Trueform opened its first retail shop, Queenspark, in the V&A Waterfront in 1991, with merchandise mainly imported goods. Nwati: 2007
\item Nwati: 2007
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
democracy brought about enfranchisement for all, but also a rapid decline in the manufacturing side of the clothing industry generally.

Figure 63
Nelson Mandela leaves Victor Verster Prison, wearing a Rex Trueform suit on 11 February 1990 after 27 years of incarceration. This moment heralded a triumphant time for South African freedom democrats but an uneasy period of transition for the South African economy, particularly the clothing industry.

Source: Nelson Mandela Foundation (2014) [Online]

Parallel to the establishment of 1990s neoliberal economic policies such as GEAR, was the process of gathering votes for the first democratic election in 1994. Ethnic alliances were being contested and the Western Cape (perceived as a predominantly coloured constituency) together with Kwazulu-Natal (perceived as a as a predominantly Zulu constituency) were identified as weak points for the ANC (perceived as an ethnically Xhosa-aligned political party) and headed by Nelson Mandela.149 Rex Trueform has always held a close relationship with the political power structures of the day, illustrated with the various heads of state and MP’s endorsing every new endeavor by the company. Minister of

149 Eldridge & Seekings: 1996
Commerce and Industries, Senator Fourie, opened the factory in 1938, Minister Waterson and Member of Parliament H Lawreence paid tributes in 1948 and so did Prime Minister H.F Verwoerd in 1963. This continued during the 1990s. Nelson Mandela’s visit to the factory on 8th September 1993 is particularly significant because for the first time a politician addressed workers rather than factory owners. According to Mark Donough\textsuperscript{150}, an ex-worker and main organizer of the annual Spring Queen beauty pageant, Mandela addressed workers in the ‘Nicholson’s’ building, a neighbouring building that the company acquired in 1973\textsuperscript{151}. An article in \textit{The Argus} titled ‘The Nelson Touch – what Mandela told the factory workers’ although selective\textsuperscript{152}, (Fig. 64) gives some details of the address by Mandela.

Mandela begins with humor saying that he wished to address them in Afrikaans but would refrain from doing so because:

\begin{quote}
My pronunciation is poor. Someone once told me my accent was similar to that of a tokolosh.\textsuperscript{153}
\end{quote}

The rest of the speech had a definite serious tone, and dealt with many issues including racial identity, affirmative action and job security:

\begin{quote}
We have a slight problem among our people classified as coloured because there are some who want to be called coloured and who resent being called so-called coloureds. There are some who don't like to be called blacks at all.\textsuperscript{154}
\end{quote}

Mandela’s speech was a careful play between destabilizing apartheid racial categorization whilst at the same time affirming racial identity for the purposes of illustrating an ethnically inclusive new dispensation:

\begin{quote}
Insofar as the ANC is concerned affirmative action means those who have been denied the opportunity, irrespective of the national group to which they belong whether they are coloureds or so-called coloureds, Indians or Africans, should enjoy equal opportunity.\textsuperscript{155}
\end{quote}

The article continues to report that:

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{150} Donough: 2013 [Interview]  \\
\textsuperscript{151} Deed of transfer for erf 15384.  \\
\textsuperscript{152} Mark Donough remembers other details of Mandela’s speech that is not recorded in the article.  \\
\textsuperscript{153} Cruywagen: 1993  \\
\textsuperscript{154} ibid  \\
\textsuperscript{155} ibid
\end{flushleft}
He named prominent coloureds in the ANC.\textsuperscript{156}
Much has been written about the 1994 elections, particularly regarding the reforming or reaffirming of ethnic allegiances and national identity. The outcome of the Western Cape as a National Party support base during the 1994 elections was surprising and raised key questions around postapartheid perceptions of identity and nationhood and the so-called ‘coloured vote’. Chapter three will look more closely at Rex Trueform and racial identity, its construction pre and during apartheid and the process of its deconstruction and repurposing during the moments up to its closure in 2006. Here, I would like to stress Rex Trueform as a key space during this time of political contestation, at a time of major political transition. As Clive Nolte’s, a retrenched Rex Trueform worker, remembers:

In those early days I was still a National Party member. There were actually lots of NP supporters at Rex. There were also lots of ANC supporters there. In the early 1990s we used to have members of parliament come to the factory to campaign for votes. It would be people like Peter Marais and Marthinus van Schalkwyk who came to talk to us.

Rex Trueform office park, modern offices in an iconic building

The freedom and enfranchisement for all that South Africa’s transition signalled in 1994, also had an impact on the fabric of the city. Lack of importation protectionism meant that companies like Rex Trueform, with its large manufacturing halls, would become obsolete as the workers that would occupy it were being retrenched. The move towards importation meant that the work of the thousands of machinists, cutters and pressers would be redundant, so too the machinery that they would operate. Rex Trueform finally closed its main manufacturing plants in 2006 with the resultant job losses. (Fig. 65) The fate of the 1938 building is still uncertain but the 1948 factory is currently undergoing renovations designed in 2011 by architect Frank Bohm. His small architectural and furniture design studio is housed on Rex Trueform’s premises in the Nicholson’s building. The idea is to convert the large manufacturing halls into rentable office space, with each floor provided with a new toilet block. The service wing would eventually be converted as an administrative hub for Rex Trueform’s retail section, ‘Queenspark’. Between the 1963 extension and the old ‘Nicholson’ building next door, is imagined a central and grand entrance for use by tenants.

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157 Elridge & Seekings: 1996
158 Erasmus & Pieterse: 1999
159 SACTWU: 2009, 50-15
161 ibid
162 Wolff & Lillie: 2012, appendix, See also Future Cape Town: 2012 [Online]
The Nicholson’s building has already been converted into an upmarket shoe store, with interiors carefully designed by local interior designer Haldane Martin\textsuperscript{163}. The new shoe store, with its upmarket interiors and name ‘Tokyo’ references the global aspirations far beyond the neighbourhood character of present-day Salt River. The marketing booklet with its architectural 3-D renders and ‘Rex Trueform Office Park, modern offices in an iconic building’ as a tag line, acknowledges the building’s material presence in the area whilst simultaneously speaking to some of the postapartheid desires for secure parking, posh interiors and visible security. (Fig. 67 & 68)

At present, the 1948 site is sparsely occupied. Rex Trueform uses the entire first floor as the offices for the retail brand ‘Queenspark’ and ‘J Crew’. From Main Road, a large billboard, advertising ‘A-Grade’ office space, hangs in the place of Stanford’s Russian-Constructivist inspired 1960s sculpture. I visited a recently occupied floor with Gordon Bradley, a Rex Trueform executive staff in charge of the redevelopment of the building. The space is being rented to a call-centre for a furniture importation company and is filled with cubicles for the few hundred operators selling or tending to enquiries about their product. In the middle of the space is a large kitchen surrounded by a counter and barstools. I noticed many people drinking coffee and eating snacks and sandwiches. There are also a few tables and chairs where some were conducting meetings and discussions. The interior design of the space is trendy and fresh, filled with the call-centre’s trademark funky furniture. The atmosphere seems fitting for the well-dressed, youthful men and women operating the call-centre.

Bradley says to me that a major challenge for the new development is parking. Working with an urban site, he says, restricts the amount of parking you can offer and limits the kinds of tenants that you could attract. A call centre, like this one, he noted, is convenient because most of the staff, travel by public or company-arranged transport. Bradley also commented that the call-centre industry has generally replaced the garment industry, filling a much-needed gap in employment opportunities\textsuperscript{164}. From the sun-screened 1963 façade, Devil’s Peak, Main Road and the 1938 factory is highly visible and serves as a reminder of the new call-centre’s past life as a busy clothing manufacturing hall. It was a different time, with a different purpose and different conditions on personal freedom. One wonders how much has translated in the present even though so little has remained of its interior architecture.

\textsuperscript{163} Martin: 2012 [Online]  
\textsuperscript{164} Bradley: 2013 [Interview]
Figure 65
Extract from web based news article regarding the closure of Rex Trueform's manufacturing section. *Source: IOL news (2005) [Online]*

Figure 66
This image is taken from the architect Frank Bohm’s 'mood-board' and precedent study, giving an indication of how the new interiors are imagined.
*Source: Wolff & Lillie (2012)*
Figure 67 (above) & 68 (below)
Extracts from the marketing brochure produced by Maxigroup as part of marketing the space for up-market tenants. Below is a rendering of the new entrance between the 1963 extension and the Nicholson’s building, for use by prospective tenants.

*Source: Maxigroup (date unknown) [Online]*
Chapter 3

‘Is she coloured?’ Rex Trueform and the construction of Cape identities

The entire wall in the foyer of the Groote Schuur Hospital’s Heart Transplant Museum is covered with the image of the 1938 Rex Trueform factory. In the right hand corner of the image, dated 04 December 1967, is a white cross. (Fig. 69) To me the cross is so distinctive in the image that it feels like a marker of a story, and indeed it is the marker of a fatal crossing of paths. The white cross marks the spot where Denise Darvall and her mother were killed following a collision with a speeding car. Denise was not killed instantly, like her mother, and she was taken to Woodstock Hospital. However, a doctor soon realized that she could not be saved and consulted with Denise’s father about the potential of her heart being donated to a project to complete the world’s first heart transplant procedure. Her father conceded to this unusual request and the doctor telephoned Dr Chris Barnard about the potential donor opportunity. Barnard considered the situation but before formally accepting the offer, proceeded to ask this question:

‘Is she coloured?’

There are various reasons why Barnard could have asked this question. It could be that at the time, the Population Registration Act of 1950 was fully established in South Africa. This, coupled with other regulations such as the Group Areas Act of 1954 and the Coloured Labour Preference area policy, meant that one’s race was a plausible signifier of where one lived or worked, a crude bureaucratic way of establishing personhood. It could also be that the potential recipient of the heart was Louis Washkansky, a Lithuanian born white Jewish man, and that the chief cardiologist at Groote Schuur Hospital advised Barnard on previous occasions against interracial organ transplanting, wary of the controversy that such a procedure would ensue in the racially divided Republic of South Africa. It was a controversy that Barnard agreed should be avoided. His question could also have stemmed from the fact that Denise Darvall was struck down in front of the Rex Trueform Clothing Company’s manufacturing plant, a building which, because of the nature of its workforce at the time, housed possibly the largest amount of ‘coloured’ women in one space in Salt River. It was probable to Barnard that she, the potential donor for the world’s first heart transplant, could be ‘coloured’.

165 Twidle: 2012 [Online]
166 Bishop: 1983
As it turned out, Denise Darvall was the ideal candidate for the pioneer procedure led by Dr Chris Barnard. Her dying body was that of a healthy and ‘white’ young woman and the heart transplant operation was hailed as a success. Critics and praises streamed in and Dr Chris Barnard, a boytjie from the outpost Karoo town of Beaufort West, became an international celebrity.\(^{168}\) (Fig. 70) However, Chris Barnard is quoted in saying that for him the significant part of the operation was not the actual organ transplantation procedure. It was the moment before the new heart was to be placed into the recipient and he realised that that was the first time that he witnessed an empty chest cavity in a living breathing person. It was a lonely and brief moment, as if he was walking on the moon without anybody to share the news.\(^{169}\)

Perhaps the current emptiness of Rex Trueform is such a moment for us. How did it come to be that a set of buildings, occupying two city blocks and which at one point accommodated 5000 people\(^{170}\), is now, almost completely vacant? In the previous chapters I have explored what the Rex Trueform story reveals about the relationships between state and enterprise, architectural space and capitalism particularly when set within conditions of Cape coloniality.

This chapter will track the genealogy of the construction of Cape identity and the categorisation of apartheid publics. In this way I hope to consider some important questions that the buildings raise within the discourses of identity, race and gender. It will describe how the early period of the building is entangled with the life trajectories of mainly three families: the Policanskys, of which the architect Max Policansky is the youngest son; the Abduraghmans, of which the famous politician Dr Abdullah Abduraghman was its patriarch, and finally, the Gools. Dr Abdullah Abduraghman’s daughter, Cissie Gool, a prominent political figure in South African history, married Dr A.H Gool, the son of the Indian immigrant and merchant Yusuf Gool, and the two families connected in this way. These three families played both a direct and indirect part in the physical and social construction of early 20\(^{th}\) century Cape Town. Then, by looking at the stories of ex-workers, the second part of this chapter will track how Rex Trueform complied with, destabilized or formed local and particular notions of identity, race and gender.

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\(^{168}\) Time Magazine: 1960 [Online]

\(^{169}\) This story of the heart transplant procedure is from ‘A moment in History’ a brochure available at the Groote Schuur Heart Transplant Museum. See also: Heart of Cape Town Museum: 2011.

\(^{170}\) Mellon: 2006
Figure 69
Image on the wall of the foyer of the Groote Schuur Heart Transplant Museum, the x marking the spot where Denise Darvall and her mother was killed.
Source: Hedley: 2012 [Online]

Figure 70
(Left) Dr Chris Barnard shot to international fame when he successfully transplanted Denise Darvall’s (right) heart over into Louis Washkansky. Darvall was killed in a car collision in front of the Rex Trueform factory in 1967.
Source: (right) Time 1967 [Online], (left) Heart of Cape Town Museum (2011)
The Policanskys

I received an unexpected email from Manu Herbstein, novelist and nephew of Max Policansky. He got wind of my activities for the Open House in September 2011¹⁷¹, which was dedicated to the study of Policansky’s oeuvre, and wanted me to take him around a few of his late uncle’s buildings. Not much is written about Policansky¹⁷² and I therefore jumped at the opportunity to meet Manu hoping he would share some insights into Policansky, considered to be Cape Town’s pioneer modernist architect.¹⁷³ We visited the Cavalla and Rex Trueform factories, the Jordon shoe factory in Elsies River, the Club Shirts factory in Ndabeni and a shopping precinct in Wynberg. What emerged out of my discussion with Manu is that at the time that Policanksy produced the core projects of his practice, a period spanning roughly from 1935-1960, the production of modern architecture in Cape Town, was inextricably linked to industry, economy and capitalism. The Modern industrialisation in Cape Town, together with state-endorsement, spawned buildings that would ultimately become functionalist testimonies to the manner in which white capital and black labour shaped the social fabric of the city.¹⁷⁴

But what were the particularities of the modern industrialization of Cape Town? More specifically what were the particularities of the social fabric of the city, particularities that gave rise to very distinctive versions of modernist architecture? I left Manu, not only with this gift of realization but was also rewarded with a file containing a detailed and illustrated, personal biography, written by Manu’s sister Nina Selbst. The gift was a valuable addition to the small archive on Policansky and his work.

Nina’s biography reads as follows. Max Policansky was the youngest of six children of Philip and Rachel Policansky. By the time that Max was born in 1909, the family had acquired enough wealth to move from ‘their life in District Six, a poor but effervescent community next to the harbour,’ to ‘living in Tandem, a mansion, in the prosperous neighbourhood of Oranjezicht.’¹⁷⁵ Philip Policansky, was born in 1867, in Vilna, a Jewish Ghetto which was once part of an independent Lithuania and which became an annex to Russia. Before his

¹⁷¹ Open House Architecture: 2011 [Online]
¹⁷² Righini compiled Policansky’s work in an article published in 1977. This remains the only comprehensive monograph on his work. Of Policansky’s personal life there is, to my knowledge, nothing published in the public domain. Righini: 1977
¹⁷³ Herbert: 1975
¹⁷⁴ Mbembe: 2004
¹⁷⁵ Selbst: 2003
barmitzvah, Philip started working to support his mother and earned money working in the numerous tobacco workshops. In Vilna, the ‘centre of the tobacco industry’\(^ {176}\), he worked:

long hours at a single monotonous task: cutting up tobacco leaves with a sharp knife as his only tool. \(^ {177}\)

Philip, soon realised his ambition to move out of Vilna and sought his fortune by following his older sister, Fanny, to London. He found London difficult to negotiate, because ‘Jewish immigrants, … were as crowded together in the East End of London as they had been in the ghettos from which they had escaped.’\(^ {178}\) He stayed in London for six years enduring hardships and working in a bakery because no-one valued his single skill: slicing tobacco leaves. Berhard Baron, who he met on a ship and who became a mentor to him, introduced him to ideas such as industrialising the tobacco manufacturing process as well as valuable skills in cigarette rolling. These ideas and skills Philip eventually implemented when he set up one of the largest cigarette factories in Cape Town at the turn on the 20\(^{th}\) century\(^ {179}\). (Fig. 71)

The story of Rachel Weinstein, Max’s mother, as told by Nina, is not too dissimilar to that of her husband. She too was born in Vilna, the eldest of three children. Her mother died while Rachel was still in her teens and she thus took up the role of caregiver for her two younger siblings. At the age of 18 she became a seamstress and left home to settle in London. Here, she met and got engaged to Philip. In 1899 Philip was able to secure a relatively stable lifestyle in Cape Town to send for his fiancé. The two married and set up a modest existence in District Six.

Figure 71
An advertisement for the cigarette brand started by Philip Policansky with an illustration of the factory in Plein Street, Cape Town. 
Source: Selbst (2003)

\(^ {176}\) ibid
\(^ {177}\) ibid
\(^ {178}\) Selbst: 2003
\(^ {179}\) The South African News: 1906
Nina’s narrative of her grandparent’s life stories starts with Philip Policansky as an impoverished, oppressed Jewish child worker and ends with him as a global entrepreneur settling in Cape Town. Here he starts a successful cigarette manufacturing business and settles with his large family in a posh suburban mansion. Rachel, though painted as tough and politically active, awaits rescue from Philip in gritty London while he is hard at work to establish an economic base in Cape Town, strong enough to support the big family he imagines he would have with Rachel. In this way the biography is gendered and centers around the idea of ‘a self-made (Jewish) man’, a trajectory argued by Robins and others as a singularly heroic trajectory typical of any emerging bourgeoisie. This particular line of biographical thought is not unique in retelling Jewish history as is illustrated with the life history of Bernard Shub and Philip Dibowitz in chapter one. Robins observes that by choosing this particular biographical narrative framework, certain important silences are produced and here I concur with Robins when looking at Nina’s retelling of her grandparent’s history. In Nina’s text, there are no details of the texture of the conditions in which her grandparents came to immerse themselves, conditions which found themselves and other Eastern European Jewish immigrants in a privileged position relative to others in early 20th century Cape Town, a privilege purely based on their adoptive whiteness.

Figure 72
Philip and Rachel Policansky

Source: Selbst (2003)

180 Robins, 1995, 6; Lejeune, 1989; Pascal, 1960; Krog: 2005
181 There is no mention of the kind of factory that Philip Policansky established, a factory in Cape Town which became central to a number of key labour strikes and worker uprisings. "Cigarette makers Strike' in The South African News: 1906 and Mantzaris: 1995. The employment of children in the factories were a common practice in tobacco factories, employed for their nimble fingers. See Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden: 1999.
The story of the Policanskys is not only a narrative of immigrants triumphing in their newly adopted land. The images that accompany Nina’s text also tell a story of the shaping of identity. For instance there is a collaged image of the eldest child, Betty as an infant, placed in the centre of various perspectives of District Six, the young Policansky family’s initial foothold in Cape Town. The images are a haphazard mix that include crowded streets and a gabled end with the Star of David motif. The busyness, and downtown gritty urban quality of these images contrast with the stillness and stature of the image of Tandem, the Policansky’s family home in Oranjezicht. (Fig. 73)

Figure 73
(Left) a collage of various views of District Six with Bettie, the eldest child of the Policansky family, inserted in the middle. Bettie was born in District Six. (Right) is a picture of ‘Tandem’, the Oranjezicht home of the now affluent Policansky family.

*Source: Selbst (2003)*

There are also images of the Policansky family engaging in various leisure activities from consuming Cape Town’s natural landscape, to rowing, playing tennis and hockey. There are images of a grand tour captioned ‘Annie and Rosie travelled north to Rhodesia,
visited….and paid respects to Cecil John Rhodes. And sampled a taste of Black Africa.\textsuperscript{183} The images and the text in Nina’s biography is part of an active construction of identity. Here the Policanskys, new arrivals in a land, they find themselves not persecuted Jews but in fact beneficiaries of conditions of coloniality. The family archive, these ‘intimate documents of life’\textsuperscript{184} through its visuals and narrative are illustrative of the choice to participate in the white-Anglo world that was on offer in early 20\textsuperscript{th} century Cape Town.\textsuperscript{185} The Policanskys actively constructed an identity, through their choice of architecture, styling and leisure activities that would allow them to assimilate effortlessly into the white ruling class at the time.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{policansky_family_snaps.jpg}
\caption{Figure 74}
\end{figure}

Above, various family snaps of the Policansky family enjoying the ‘The pleasures of the Cape Peninsula’, ‘Table Mountain’, ‘Beach at Muizenberg’ and playing tennis and hockey.

\textit{Source: Selbst (2003)}

\textsuperscript{183} O’Connell: 2013
\textsuperscript{184} ibid.
\textsuperscript{185} Marks & Trapido: 1987
The Policansky sisters embarked on a ‘grand tour’ through parts of Africa. The tour included a trip to ‘Rhodesia’ where they visited the grave of Cecil John Rhodes and where they ‘sampled a taste of black Africa.’

*Source: Selbst (2003)*
Figure 16
Formal family portraits of the Policanskys taken circa 1914 (above) and circa 1923 (below).
Source: Selbst (2003)
The Gools and the Abduraghmans

While trawling through the drawings from the Policansky studio, with its accompanied lists of completed and abandoned projects, I came across one intriguing detail. In 1937, the year Policansky opened his architectural practice in Cape Town, a project is listed alongside the Rex Trueform factory and the L&H Policanksy cigarette factory.\textsuperscript{186} It is a ‘block of flats for Dr A.H. Gool in Buitenkant Street’, a project that was not built.\textsuperscript{187} The entry struck me for two reasons. Firstly, Dr A.H Gool, son of an Indian immigrant and a member of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century Cape affluent merchant class, was married to the famous mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century political activist Zainunnessa “Cissie” Gool, formerly Abduragman. Secondly, it revealed a connection between the Gool and the Policansky families based on a business proposition and pointed to a version of Cape Town where affluent families connected despite race and lineage. The family histories of the Gools and Abduraghmans are captured in ‘The truth is on the walls’, the autobiographical writings of Naz Gool-Ebrahim. I have used the biographical information therein, to try and see what more the commissioning of two projects from the studio of Policansky could reveal about early 20\textsuperscript{th} century race and class relations in Cape Town. After all, the one project is a residential complex on the edge of the City, for an affluent and elite ‘non-European’\textsuperscript{186} family, the Gools, and the other one for a clothing manufacturing factory, for Jewish industrialists looking to employ thousands of mostly ‘non-European’ female workers.

Gool-Ebrahim writes that Yusuf Gool, arrived at Table Bay in 1888 at the age of 19 years. It was his second arrival after having persuaded his uncle, for whom he worked in Mauritius, to allow him to return to Cape Town. The uncle reluctantly conceded to the request on condition that he returns five years later to his home town, Rander in India, to consummate his marriage to his bride, Beebe, a girl whom he married three years earlier when she was 11 years old. Yusuf agreed and proceeded to establish an import-export business in partnership with an American, Mr Wilson, specialising in sugar, spices and rice from Mauritius, India, Zanzibar and Mombasa\textsuperscript{189}. However, the five years turned into twelve years because Yusuf, during this time, married a local woman, Wagheda T’Al, a descendent of Malay slaves. Abdul Hamid Gool was their eldest son. In 1899 Yusuf left his business in the hands of his partner, and with his Cape family, sailed to Arabia on a religious pilgrimage for one year. On the Red Sea, he parted ways, temporarily with Wagheda and the children.

\textsuperscript{186} These include the Rex Trueform factory and the Cavalla cigarette factory.
\textsuperscript{187} UCT Manuscripts and Archives, Policansky Collection.
\textsuperscript{188} In 1937-38, the terms ‘coloured’, ‘cape-coloured’ ‘cape malay’, were not the official terms to describe indigenous people, or mix-race people. The term ‘non-European’ was chosen as term to describe people of mixed race. The 1950 Populations Act legislated the categorisation of people. See Posel: 2001
\textsuperscript{189} Gool-Ebrahim: 2011, 11
Wagheda sailed back to the Cape from Jeddah and Yusuf continued his journey to sail to Bombay and reunite with Beebe. During the two years that they journeyed back to Cape Town, Beebe gave birth to two children, a daughter and a son. Upon his return, Yusuf found that Mr Wilson had kept the business thriving, and he could continue on his upward trajectory of successful merchant and ‘forerunner of the country’s Indian merchant class’.

Yusuf and his wives, Wagheda, ‘who hosted many famous personalities at their residence, Buitensingel House, an eighteenth century mansion with a gabled façade…a hallmark of Cape Dutch architecture’; and Beebe, ‘who’s elegant home was above her husband’s store in Castle Street’ mingled with other prominent families like the Abdurahmans.

Figure 77
Yusuf Gool and Beebe and their family.
Source: Gool-Ebrahim (2011)
Dr Abdullah Abdurahman (Fig. 78) is a famous historical figure and details of his life can be found in almost every publication which focuses on the political history of South Africa. Gool-Ebrahim, refers to him primarily in relation to his daughter, Cissie Gool. (Fig. 79) The importance of Dr Abdullah’s life is reflected in the account of his funeral, which occurred on 20th February 1940. His death prompted an enormous procession funeral with people filling the streets to carry his body from his home in Kloof Street, past the Rex Trueform factory, to the Muslim Cemetery in Mowbray. The procession caused the city to come to a standstill for a day:

Hordes of Capetonians went to the street … firms found their staffs decimated without warning’.193

The facts about this man, whose death almost equalled his life in importance, is told by many. He was born in Wellington 1872, the eldest of nine children. He was a descendent of slaves who had bought their freedom and his own parents were relatively well-to-do ‘Muslim Cape Malays’. He went to mission school and Marist Brothers College. Later he became the first ever Cape Muslim to attend SA College and then went off to Scotland to graduate in medicine from the University of Glasgow in 1893. In Scotland he met and later married Helen (Nellie) Potter James, who was ‘an émigré Christian Scots suffragette’. (Fig. 78) The couple spent two years in London and then returned to Cape Town where Dr Abdurahman established a busy medical practice, mostly tending to the city’s ‘non-European’ population.

In 1913 Dr Abdurahman and Dr Abdul Hamid Gool, Yusuf and Wagheda’s eldest son, who also went abroad to be educated, at London’s Guy’s Hospital, joined forces to establish the Rahmaniyeh Institute. Six years later, Dr Abdul Hamid Gool married his good friend’s daughter, the 21 year old Zainunnessa ‘Cissie’ Abdurahman, joining the two families securely through marriage. However, it is undisputedly Dr Abdurahman’s political career that prompted the surge of more than 30 000 people to stop what they were doing and join his funeral procession. Between 1904 and 1940 he served on local government and was the first ‘non-European’ to be elected city councillor, the highest political position that a ‘non-

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192 Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden: 1999, Gillomhee and Mbenga: 2010
193 Steenkamp: 1979, 89
194 Ajam: 1990; Davids: 2012; Raynard: 2002
195 Davids: 2012; Davids: 2008
196 Gool-Ebrahim: 2011, 12
197 It was later renamed Schotsche Kloof Primary School, Ajam: 1990
European’ could attain. Dr Abdurahman’s political inclinations were complex and often criticized but they were fundamentally about fighting for the enfranchising of the ‘non-European’. Playwright Nadia Davids, wrote a paper which theorises creative work she produced on the life of his daughter, Cissie Gool. In it she offers us, through her description of an Abdurahman family portrait, a small glimpse into the domestic sphere of this public figure:

Her mother stands to her left, in a short-sleeved floral dress, scarfless despite her conversion to Islam. Her father is in a suit, sporting a tall fez, bending slightly, offering something to a small ecstatic dog. These then, are the famous parents, who played host to Olive Schreiner and Mahatma Ghandi, whose marriage (which transgressed racial and religious boundaries) was celebrated by some and denounced by others.

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198 The Act of Union of 1910, which stated that ‘Coloured persons could not be elected to parliament, but was allowed to serve on local council bodies’. Gool-Ebrahim: 2011, 35

199 In 1909 he, together with WP Schreiner, went to London to protest against the impending act mentioned above, barring Coloured people from being elected onto national government parliamentary bodies. He became the president of the African Political Organisation in 1905, a political movement that Bickford-Smith, Van Heiningen and Worden dismisses as ‘not populist’ as ‘they failed to mobilise the masses of the coloured poor in Cape Town’. Bickford-Smith et al:1999 In 1927 he organised, with Professor D.D Tengo Jabavu, the first of four mass conferences of coloured, Indian and African organisations. Lastly, in 1934, he accepted the invitation to join the Wilcocks commission a ‘commission of inquiry in to the social and economic aspects of Cape coloured’ life where Dr Abdullah was the only man of colour on this commission. Raynard: 2002

200 Davids: 2008; Davids: 2012

201 ibid
Figure 78
(Left) Dr Abdullah Abduraghman and his first wife Helen (Nellie) Abdurahnan (nee Potter James)
Source: Gool-Ebrahim

Figure 79
A portrait of Cissie Gool.
Cissie Gool, Max Policansky and competing versions of modernity

The family histories of Max Policansky and Cissie Gool give certain insights into the conditions within which the Rex Trueform factory developed. Max, the youngest son of an affluent family was left free to pursue occupations never before pursued in the history of his family and he chose architecture. Finding the architecture department at UCT embryonic he went to Liverpool, England and attained his degree there in 1933. Armed with an internationally-recognised degree in architecture, Policansky travelled widely to places such as Egypt, Palestine, Germany, France and Switzerland. After a year in Johannesburg he settled in Cape Town where he found the ground fertile for him, aged 26, to start an architectural practice, secure in the knowledge that he will receive enough commissions through decades of business connections built up by his father and two elder brothers.

Figure 80
Portrait of Max Policansky, probably at the time that he designed the 1938 Rex Trueform factory and the Cavalla Cigarette factory.

Source: Manu Herbstein (2011)

In 1938, several months after the opening of the Rex Trueform factory, Gool was elected the first ‘non-European’ woman to City Council. This is the same year that she chose to leave her husband, Dr A.H Gool, for the Jewish political activist, Sam Khan. Khan was 13 years Gool’s junior and later became an MP for the South African Communist Party. Gool was born into and married into an educated, affluent and politically conscious Cape Town family.

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202 Van Graan: 2012
203 Ibid
204 Davids: 2012
She would later create, with her education, personal courage and with, Sam Kahn, her lover of fifteen years, by her side, (Fig. 83) her own public profile, independent from her family. Davids, who has spent nearly twenty years researching the life of Gool, says she ‘was probably the most politically powerful woman of colour in Cape Town, yet her history remains largely unknown’. According to Davids, she was born in Cape Town in 1897 and spent her childhood privately educated by a governess with Olive Schreiner and Mahatma Ghandi occasionally as tutors. She attended the Trafalgar Public School that was founded by her father and Dr A.H Gool. She continued her education throughout her life, receiving her secondary education via correspondence through London University. She was the first ‘non-European’ female to attend the University of Cape Town and to graduate with a masters degree in Psychology in 1933. A year before her death in 1962, she graduated with a law degree from UCT and was called to the Cape Bar. She lived in District Six, and in Vredehoek, with family holidays spent at the family cottage in Camps Bay. She established the Anti-Fascist League in 1935, the National Liberation League in 1936 and in 1938 was elected the president of the Non-European United Front. That same year she was elected as city councillor for District Six. Her political beliefs are illustrated in a 1938 Campaign poster (Fig. 81) where a portrait of her appears. I quote Davids’ thoughtful analysis of the poster to evoke more about Cissie’s character:

A municipal election flyer of 1938 describes Gool as ‘The People’s Own Candidate’. Under a portrait photograph in which her brows are perfectly tweezed and her gaze is level and serious is the caption, ‘Mrs. Z Gool. M.A. (The President of the Liberation League of S.A)’. I use this image to think about Gool’s life on the Cape Town City Council, to consider the ways in which she styled herself for public consumption – as a wife, a politician, an educated woman – to look at the list of things she said she ‘stood for’, among them ‘Decent Housing and Sanitation’, More Creches and Clinics for the Poor’, ‘Open Spaces for Children’ and (in caps lock), ‘NO RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION’. 

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205 Davids: 2012, 253
206 Davids: 2012, 266
MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
Sept. 5th 1938 (Ward 7)

PUBLIC MEETING
OF CITIZENS & RATEPAYERS
IN THE
COSMOPOLITAN HALL
PONTAC STREET,
ON
WEDNESDAY, 27th JULY
AT 8 PM

IN SUPPORT OF
"THE PEOPLE'S OWN CANDIDATE"

Mrs. Z. GOOL M.A.
(President, National Liberation League of S.A.)

Unsweared: J. A. LA GUMA.

SPEAKERS:
MRS. Z. GOOL, M.A.
DR. A. ABDULRAHMAN, M.D.C.
MR. A. E. WATLINGTON.

Supported by the PROGRESSIVE LEADERSHIP of the People, including

DR. & MRS. G. H. GOOL.
MR. C. PETIESSEN.
MR. A. H. GOOL.
MR. MOSELEY TURNER.
MR. LAABSEN.
MR. J. FAULSEN.

MR. AHMED ISMAIL.
MR. M. INCE.
MR. OCTOBER.
MR. LAWRENCE.
MR. ADAMS.
And many others.

This United Demonstration is in Favour of:—
(1) DIRECT REPRESENTATION FOR WARD 7.
(2) EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL CITIZENS IRRESPECTIVE OF COLOUR.
(3) BETTER HOUSING AND CLEANER WARDS.
(4) HIGHER WAGES FOR MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES.
(5) THE ABOLITION OF BLIMPS AND THE REFORM PARTY.
(6) NO EVictions WITHOUT ADEQUATE ACCOMMODATION.
(7) MORE OPEN SPACES FOR CHILDREN.
(8) MORE CRÈCHES AND CRèCHES.
(9) EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF COLOURED PEOPLE IN THE COUNCIL.
(10) NO RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION.

Vote for Mrs. Z. GOOL, M.A.
The Courageous and Brilliant Fighter for the Rights of the People.

Issued by the National Liberation League of S.A. and printed by the Stewart Printing Co. (Pty.) M2 30 80, Cape Town.

Source: Davids (2012)
Two incidents link Gool’s life and political career, directly to the story of Rex Trueform. The first takes place in 1939, during a tour of the Union of South Africa that she undertakes to gather national political support. It involves a correspondence between Gool and General Smuts, the then prime minister of the Union of South Africa. At the time she was severely outraged by racist comments by H.L Corder, a prominent magistrate in Cape Town at the time. In a letter to General Smuts she alerted him to recent comments Corder made publicly when passing a judgment on a white man who was found guilty of committing incest. Corder publicly proclaimed that he found such behaviour abhorrent and ‘the sort of behaviour to be expected only of animals and Coloureds’. Gool’s letter to Smuts was unambiguous in that she appealed to the government to publicly distance themselves from Corder’s comments as she felt that such racist language could only spread hateful, racial tension. Unfortunately nothing was evidently done in response to Gool’s appeal. Corder went on to serve uninterruptedly his term as Magistrate at the Cape, until 1947, when he joined the board of directors at Rex Trueform. (Fig. 82)

The second incident occurred in 1943, when Gool became very involved in efforts to prevent the establishment of a Coloured Affairs Department. C.A.D. was a government body that was promoted by the then Minister of Social Welfare and Development, Harry Lawrence. Lawrence, himself, was following an illustrious political career as a member of the United Party, eventually to become an important South African politician in his own right. Gool and Lawrence’s paths do not cross many times, but in 1943, Lawrence, the councillor for the Salt River constituency, referred to the anti-C.A.D. movement that Gool was mobilising as ‘Mrs Gool’s Travelling Circus’. Again, Gool’s attempts at preventing C.A.D. from coming into existence failed and in 1947, the Government of South Africa Union created this department, with objectives such as organizing schools along racial lines. Upon hearing that the bill had been passed, she organised a march from District Six to the Houses of Parliament to protest against the decision.

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207 Gool-Ebrahim: 2011
208 Corder: 1946
209 Gool-Ebrahim: 2011
210 Goldin: 1980, 73
211 His work and life is faithfully recorded by his son, Jeremy Lawrence, and published in 1978. Lawrence: 1978
212 Lawrence: 1978, 153
213 Gool-Ebrahim: 2011
At the same time, the executives of Rex Trueform invited Harry Lawrence, Minister of Social Welfare, to open the new factory and endorse the facility on grounds of what it has achieved to provide only the best working conditions for their workers.\textsuperscript{214}

Figure 82
Mr H.L Corder served on the 1947 Rex Trueform board of directors. Prior to this he was a public figure who publicly made racial slurs against Coloured people. Gool challenged him on a particular statement and asked for a public apology, with no success.

\textit{Source: Supplement to the Buyer} (1947)

The two projects listed during the inception of Policansky’s architectural practice in 1937 ‘Block of flats for Dr A.H Gool, Buiten Kant Street (project)’ and ‘Rex Trueform factory in Salt River’ provide a point of departure for a twin reading of the conditions that allowed for the conception and the imagining of both spaces, imaginings that are rooted in two worlds: one world where the city is produced under strict ideologies of racial separation; the other where class overrides race and one’s status in society allowed for a much more open relationship to space in the city. Gool’s political work tries to conserve the latter position. However, by

\footnote{\textsuperscript{214} Rex Trueform has certainly set a high standard for employers generally. And, in publicly proclaiming this tribute to its farsighted and wise policy, I couple with my own appreciation the congratulations and thanks of the Union Government. \textit{Supplement to the Buyer}: 1947}
1947, the freedom to construct one’s own social position based on class rather than race rapidly began to disappear. In 1948 the Nationalist Party, elected by a white minority, came into power together with laws that strictly dictated the division of space along racial lines.

Even though the project for Dr A.H Gool, did not go ahead, its narrative is telling of the unfixed nature of social class entanglements that existed prior to 1948. In early twentieth century Cape Town, a similar version of modernity was on offer to both Cissie Gool, Max Policansky and their families. The families negotiated their status either by achieving high levels of education, acquiring wealth, political activism or service to society. However Gool realized that the version of modernity was being limited for her and her family as race became the more important factor in claiming a stake in the world. This reading of the archive presents us with an obverse perspective to Rex Trueform. As discussed in chapter one, the 1938 factory, with its segregated facilities, highly visible on its front façade, was designed to prefigure a segregationist version of modernity, a version which dictated your level of freedom to construct your position in the world, based on your race. This segregationist attitude hardened in 1944, with a fire, and an opportunity to transform the building presented itself. Workers were invisibilised by moving their restrooms to the back of the building. The idea of racial segregation was also better planned by placing the areas above each other and not along a common corridor as in 1938, thus producing a more modern version of spatial planning along racially segregated lines. This was the version of modernity that Gool, with her political work, fought against unsuccessfully.
Rex Trueform glamour girls and localised senses of beauty

I met with Irene Murray in the first floor canteen of the Rex Trueform factory. She is currently an employee$^{215}$ of Rex Trueform and she has been working there for 50 years. Her description of how she acquired the position as a trainee machinist at Rex Trueform, reveals important features of the socio-political landscape of race, gender and labour in the early 1960s in Cape Town.

I started working here in 1961 on the 3rd of March. I was only 16. And I am 66 now. You know in the old times you only went as far as standard 8.

I asked her how she got the job at Rex Trueform and whether she had a contact in the factory.

$^{215}$At the time of the interview in 2011, Irene was employed at Rex Trueform but has since left the company.
No. I walked. I left school. I was the eldest. I had to find a job. Those years you had to walk and find a job door to door.

At the time that Irene started working, the labour force of the clothing industry was dominated by women classified as ‘coloured’.\textsuperscript{216} In the Western Cape, by the 1960s, the industry was gendered and feminized in this way, largely by policies such as the Coloured Labour Preference Area Policy as well as the identification of the coloured female as a large and marginalized sector of society. The low prospects of upward mobility through education or job opportunity made the ‘coloured female group’ an appealing group to target for low wage industrial work. At the height of apartheid’s most bil ligerent period, the ‘coloured female’ industrial worker suffered what Alegi calls a ‘triple oppression’ - that of a person of colour, a worker and a woman.\textsuperscript{217} Irene’s story reveals further unofficial permutations of this policy by employers, like Rex Trueform, who preferred coloured women with a slim physique, light skin tone and straightened hair. The dark-skinned Irene speaks of her father’s surprise that despite her looks she still managed to get the job at Rex Trueform:

\begin{quote}
Because I can remember my father still said to me when I got home to say that I got a job at Rex Trueform. He said it can't be. He said it can’t be. Because that time it was like Rex Trueform was all the model people. And the girls was all… and because my father then when they work on that factory before it was the cutting room it used to be the Cavalla Factory and the young men there always used to eye the Rex Trueform girls because they were glamour girls. But we had a … what you call them… the guys who take you on? The personnel guy – all just whites. And they would only take people with long hair en wit…[and white] but that was their scene here.\textsuperscript{218}
\end{quote}

Not surprisingly racial discrimination entered into the sealed envelopes containing weekly wages. Irene discovered in 1974 that after having worked there for 13 years, a white 16-year old fellow colleague was being paid more than her:

\begin{quote}
And I said to them you know you’ve actually proved to me that that girl didn’t have a better education than me, number one, that she also left at standard 8, she is not
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{216}Berger: 1989,153; Goldin: 1980,73  
\textsuperscript{217}Alegi: 2008, 34  
\textsuperscript{218}Murray: 2011 [Interview]
better equipped than me in any form. And I have been here so long and...so what you paying her for? You paying her for her colour. 219

Three years after Irene Murray got a position as a machinist at Rex Trueform she attended a secretarial course and soon got a position as a typist in the then white dominated office of the design department. She still worked there at the time of our conversation. Irene spent 47 of her 50 years within the confines of the 'office', a space that up to the 1980s was predominantly assigned to white workers. Her story is thus a valuable and complex account of the racial and class dynamics at Rex Trueform from 1961 up to around 1980.

Sheila Johnson and I met in her home in Bishops Street, Grassy Park. She worked at Rex Trueform for 20 years from 1953 to 1973. We started the conversation casually at first, with the establishment of the fact that she knew my late grandmother very well, Eileen Oliver, a factory worker at Park Avenue, Diep River and later at House of Monatic, Wynberg. The two, as it turned out were friends, bonds formed at the Good Shepherd Anglican church in Grassy Park where they both worshipped. She told me that she enjoyed her time working there.

The people were nice. I was the machinist there. I was thirteen when I started working in a dressmaking factory in town.220

I began to carefully enquire about the racial dynamics at Rex Trueform. After all, during the time that Sheila worked there, the mechanisms of state-endorsed racism was just being implemented. She started five years after the National Party won the general elections in 1948, the Population Registration Act of 1950 was just passed and finally the Group Areas Act of 1950 was also freshly drafted and approved. Surely this would have infiltrated into the work place?

Repeatedly she said that 'she liked working there, the girls were nice.'

I decided to shift the conversation and shared with her what I had learnt about Rex Trueform’s reputation for preferring to employ ‘glamour girls’. By, using Irene’s words, I was implying beauty and sophistication and not necessarily race. Sheila, confirmed the practice and then added that at the time that she was working at Rex Trueform, there were no Africans working there but only Muslims and Coloureds. At first, I was puzzled that she

219 ibid
220 Johnson: 2011 [Interview]
equated my question about beauty to that of skin colour and ethnicity, although it did reveal to me the disturbing intertwining of race and senses of beauty. Her remarks reminded me of the fact that beauty is always a political and racial construct and would have been even more so during the 1950s and 60s racially-segregated South Africa.  

**Let it be, set it free**

Following his suggestion, Mark Donough and I met at Burger King, the latest fast food chain outlet that the City of Cape Town endorsed with its opening by mayor Patricia De Lille. The stainless steel plaque at the entrance of the outlet dates the occasion: 9 May 2013. Mark is the organizer of Mr Gay Western Cape, an event that consumes most of his time during the year up until the opening night at the Baxter Theatre in October. We met a week after the 2013 event and I met a relaxed man, in running shorts and a track shirt, still visibly glowing from the success of the evening. Mark is well-known, a reputation which he cultivated as early as 1984 when he started working at Rex Trueform. He was careful not to reveal his age but I guessed that he started at the age of 16, a guess which he neither denied nor confirmed. He rapidly moved up in the ranks of the company, from general worker, to factory clerk, supervisor, line manager and eventually to clothing technician, a position he held until 2006 when the company closed down its manufacturing plant. It was the invitation to act as vice-chair of the Benevolent Fund, a worker organized charity foundation, that introduced Mark into the world of pageantry. As vice-chair he was tasked with organizing all social events for the company such as picnics, end of year lunches and beach outings. These events, however, dwarfed in significance compared to the main event of the year: the annual Spring Queen Beauty Pageant.

Mark tells me that the Spring Queen pageant always brought much excitement, particularly in the second half of the year. Typically, pageant preparations would begin in earnest shortly after mid year wage negotiations between July and September. In November, the overall Spring Queen is crowned at a gala event at the Good Hope Centre. Before this, every participating factory would host an in-house competition and choose a ‘girl’ to represent the factory in the semi-finals at the Union Hall, Salt River, the headquarters of the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU). SACTWU was formed in 1989, as an negotiated and democratized trade union, a major transformation from its former wholly white-controlled and unrepresentative trade union, the Garment Worker’s Union of the

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221 Barnard: 2000, 345; Erasmus: 2000
222 He has an astounding 2653 friends on facebook
223 Alegi: 2008, 38
Western Cape (GAWU). It was GAWU that launched the first Spring Queen Pageant in 1979, significantly amidst a new wave of political and labour unrests that began in the early 1970s. With the establishment of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC, a renewed and militarized resistance movement emerged as a reaction against the apartheid government’s draconian repression following Sharpeville and other violent attacks of disenfranchised black people. Then, workers were staging protests nationally and political and labour-related violence was erupting everywhere. The Soweto student uprisings in 1976, was again a major turning point for apartheid South Africa. It was in this context that the Spring Queen pageant was introduced as a device to passify the largely ‘coloured’ female work force in the Western Cape. The idea was to divert attention away from political unrest, low wages and factory owners’ continued exploitative labour practices. I asked Mark about this context and he responded by iterating the fun and excitement that the pageant conjured.

It was vibrant, everybody’s at work, its excited. Everybody can’t wait and its rehearsals downstairs in the first floor space and it was just… on fire…

Indeed it would seem that the strategy of GAWU was successful. Factory workers embraced the pageant as an outlet of escapism, a way of imagining and, in fact briefly manufacturing spectacular dreams of glamour and beauty. It was in a sense a cruel mirror of their reality of work overalls, menial labour and repressive apartheid conditions. Paul Johnson criticized the pageant saying that ‘… it functioned as a recurring and tenacious hegemonic behaviour cult in the clothing industry, drawing tens of thousands of women into a voluntarist manufacturing process…’ However Alegi reminds us that it is perhaps productive to view the pageant not within strict notions of the adoption of a ‘false conciousness’ or even the unproblematised notions of the imaginations of a ‘glittering proletariat’. Instead we could seek ‘multiple ways to reconfigure the script as an ongoing quest to humanize … lives under apartheid.’

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224 Nicol: 1983; Witz: 1988  
225 Alegi: 2008  
226 Alegi: 2008, 35 ‘manufacturing docility’  
227 Donough: 2013 [Interview]  
228 Voice of the Cape: 2012  
229 Johnson: 1993, 33  
230 Johnson: 1993  
231 O’Connell: 2012
Significant attention has been given to the Spring Queen Pageant recently\(^{232}\), which is on the one hand a particular cultural production of the Western Cape, but on the other hand not unlike other forms of popular culture that emerged out of repressive regimes, globally.\(^{233}\) Jane Kennedy’s film ‘Cinderella of the Cape Flats’ is particularly important for the study of Rex Trueform because the factory operates as the primary mise-en-scène for the film. Beverly Julius, an attractive, outspoken and engaging individual features as the main character and is also mentioned in the official synopsis of the film.\(^{234}\) She would eventually be crowned the Rex Trueform factory Queen, though she misses out as the overall winner in the finals held at the Good Hope Centre. The film consists of scenes of women working on the production lines, interviews of women in the smoke-filled canteens on the fifth floor and workers entering the factory on the Manrose Street entrance. Indeed the entire factory is captured when Beverly promenades with her winning gown and crown up the double stair and makes her way through to the manufacturing halls and even the administration centre on second floor. Mark features in the film with scenes of him directing and disciplining contestants in the correct manner to walk, pose and conduct themselves on the modeling ramp. From an architectural point of view the documentary captures the contemporary use of the building, and reveals that in 2003, some of the spatial hierarchies of power, like the separate entrances, have endured despite the lawful erasure of unconstitutional racial laws.

The documentary also tells the story of two other contestants known only as ‘Micheala’ and ‘Gafsa’. These two contestants cause some controversy because they have entered the competition as transgendered individuals. The documentary portrays an acceptance of Micheala and Gafsa by fellow workers, who consider them as ‘girls’. In an intimate and revealing scene Micheala’s male partner, expressed his love and support for her and shares that he did not know that Micheala was physically male when he met her and declares that it made no difference for his love for her when found out, in fact it deepend his love for her. During one of the rehearsal scenes Mark explains to the rest of the contestants that Micheala and Gafsa have entered with the understanding that they could only ever reach first princess and, because of their gender, may not be crowned a Spring Queen. A significant part of my discussion with Mark dwelt on the subject of Michaela and Gafsa. Their story intrigued me because they disrupt the neat dual notion of gender that has been materialized in the factory with the design of the double stair, separating males from

\(^{232}\) Trinity Productions: 2004; Allegi: 2008; O’ Connell: 2012

\(^{233}\) Allegi makes reference to beauty pageants in early republican Turkey which were vehicles for public debates around feminist ideals; in post revolutionary Mexico, beauty pageants allowed for the highlighting of the plight of indigenous people, issues around Mayan ethinicity was represented in Guatemalan pageants and lastly, beauty pageants were expressive of a new pride in black feminity in Jamaica and the US. Allegi: 2008, 32

\(^{234}\) Tribeca film guide archive: 2013 [Online]
females, the separating screens in the canteens and of course the design of the vast toilet
blocks. During his time, Rex Trueform employed many transgendered individuals, though
Michaela was in his experience the only one that ‘performed’ as a woman permanently:

…but there was only one Michaela. Michaela was dragging 24/7 like a woman. Where Gafsa
was today he’s a boy and stuff like that.235

A small victory for Mark, himself an openly transgendered man, was when he discovered to
his shock and delight that the company had allowed Michaela to use the female toilets:

And you know what, Michaela was the only one in that Rex Trueform factory that used the
ladies toilets. And that for me was very shocking. And that the company allowed her to use
the ladies toilets but I think it was awesome. It’s a sign of acceptance.236

However the issue of acceptance did not go beyond the walls of the factory, it did not enter
the confines of the SACTWU Union hall and certainly not the cavernous curved spaces of
the Good Hope Centre:

When it got to the pageant. You see we’ve got rights from the Union because of the respect…
...what I meant by that … if the Union give us the green light in saying Michaela can win the
Spring Queen.237

I asked Mark about the race dynamics within the pageant and at first he explained to me that
some women believed that the administrative workers on the second floor were superior to
those on the factory floors, thus they would stand a better chance of winning the
competition. He was highly dismissive of these kinds of attitudes and said:

Their brain box was so narrow minded that they thought they were gonna win now because
they were a bit more rich or a bit more clever or sort out financially – no honey it doesn’t work
like that – get away from that shit.238

235 Donough: 2013 [Interview]
236 ibid
237 ibid
238 ibid
Mark is an ambitious person and has dreams of opening a consulting firm that would assist young transgendered individuals to cope with the trauma of non-acceptance from family and society. During our discussion Mark shared one more ambition with me. He wants to organize a ‘Queens vs Queens’ beauty pageant in which ‘drag queens’ and ‘SACTWU queens’ compete on the same stage. This is his ambition and framed in his own words:

But the message behind it is: I’m here to break it. I’m here to unite. I don’t want to be on the night – *hies nou allie* [here’s all the] drag queens and *hies nou allie* Sactwu spring queens, *nie*. *Jy gat nou almal, almal het ’n nommer* [Everyone goes, everyone has a number] that’s your number… And whoever’s the queen of the night let it be set it free. If the queen is the proper girl … let it be, or, if your first princess is a gay guy, let it be set it free. Accept. Live life. Fucking don’t come with these hidden agendas. Break it.\(^{239}\)

Mark is convinced that Michaela would win the competition if given the chance. To him the image of a beauty queen is not just about poise on the stage, an exuberant confidence and good looks. It is not about your race, your class or even your gender. I asked Mark what is for him the image of a beauty queen but he avoided an answer. Instead his answer is revealed when he proudly shows me images on his smartphone of drag queen artists, pointing out the achievements through ‘before’ and ‘after’ pictures. I understand from this that for him beauty is mostly about the ability to radically reimagine yourself and the extent to which you come close to realizing your own notion of yourself. To him notions of beauty and thus, yourself cannot be ascribed onto you by others, by laws and certainly not by architectural space.

\(^{239}\) ibid
Chapter 4

‘What makes the factory tick?’ Time, labour and the disciplining of bodies

Chapters one and two were concerned with the production of modern industrial space, arguing that the case of Rex Trueform cannot be viewed in isolation from the conditions set in place for the production of the apartheid city. Following chapter three, this chapter will briefly look at local regimens of time and space and then move on to evaluate the role that the disciplines of Sociology and Social Work played in the construction of the factory space. It will argue that these regimens of time were purposely performed for the construction of a ‘model’ space populated with ‘model’ citizens. A secondary layer to the chapter will ask: in what way were these modernist utopian ideals contested and disrupted?

Model employers, model workers.

Ex-workers of Rex Trueform have explained the operations of the production line to me almost exclusively in spatial terms. How the factory operated, and how the overall production was understood by workers was entirely tied in with their understanding of the spatial order of the buildings. Combined with archival material, I will follow these accounts of how the factory worked, as a way of thinking about time, labour, idleness and the disciplining of bodies.

Irene Murray, talking about the 1948 building, recollects that when she started in 1961:

… the second floor was all the offices. On third floor was where all the jackets were made. On the fourth floor was also jackets but look, over the years it changed. The first floor was the whole pressing floor. On fourth floor was the tailored jackets and on fifth floor was the men’s slacks. ‘Cos that is how we started – only men’s wear. And then designing was on 6th floor. Across the road was the cutting room. It still was the cutting room till the end. I used to go over there with the orders and our printing department was there where we had to print the orders and stuff like that. 240

Gregory Hoedemaker, a worker and union shop steward from 1991 to 2006, remembers that the space in the cutting room of the ‘old building’, i.e. the 1938 factory:

240 Murray: 2011 [Interview]
... would have been filled with tables as high as one’s torso where, layers of material would be laid out for cutting. The air would be filled with dust and the sound of Good Hope FM in the background.  

Mark Donough remembers starting out as a general worker in 1984, a job which took him to all the different parts of the factory:

... then I started to know people from sixth floor, the jackets department, and fifth floor for trousers, fourth floor was jackets again, third floor was waistcoats, second floor was all the admin and first floor was where all those garments came down, all the pressing. From the basement it was dispatched to all the various warehouses in Salt River.

Sheila Johnson and Mercia Ras were both relief workers during 1953 and 1973. Sheila had a station but Mercia did not. She was a ‘free hand’, meaning that she had to fill any gaps in the trouser production line. This system ensured that there was never a machine unattended. Along the production line everyone had a particular piece that they had to manufacture and in Mercia’s case it was the buttonholes.

A visual essay published in 1947 explains the manufacturing process based in the 1938 factory. (Figs. 84 – 88) In summary, the raw material was imported from the United Kingdom. It arrived on the ‘receiving platform’ and was stored. In the cutting room it got pattern graded and the suit lay was marked out. A specialized process of mechanical cutting, hand cutting, material sorting and checking was done before it proceeded to the start of the jackets assembly line. The images show only men labouring at this process up to this point. A picture of a woman enters for the first time at the start of the assembly line. (Fig. 85) From this point the jackets were assembled, shaped and pressed. Collars were marked and shaped, sleeves were basted and lined. All along, ‘highly trained craftsmen’ intermittently checked the garments. They are also steam pressed by hand or mechanically, using ‘Hoffman steam presses’ at certain stages during the process. After

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241 Hoedemaker: 2011 [Interview]
242 Donough: 2013 [Interview]
243 Johnson & Ras: 2011 [Interviews]
244 Rex Trueform: 1947, 15 - 18.
245 ibid
246 ibid
247 ibid
248 ibid
completion, the garments were sent downstairs via a lift, carefully wrapped in tissue paper and packed, ready for distribution.\textsuperscript{249}

With the expansion of the company in 1948, this process continued more or less unchanged, except that the entire 1938 building became the cutting-room and trucks would move the cut material from there to the other side to be assembled, stored and distributed.\textsuperscript{250}

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\textbf{Figure 84}

A visual essay was published in 1947 to explain the production line, step by step.

\textit{Source: Supplement to the Buyer (1947)
Figure 85
A visual essay was published in 1947 to explain the production line, step by step.
Source: *Supplement to the Buyer (1947)*

Figure 86
A visual essay was published in 1947 to explain the production line, step by step.
Source: *Supplement to the Buyer (1947)*
Figure 87
A visual essay was published in 1947 to explain the production line, step by step.

Source: Supplement to the Buyer (1947)

Figure 88
A visual essay was published in 1947 to explain the production line, step by step.

Source: Supplement to the Buyer (1947)
The hours of work and the division of the workday at Rex Trueform were not too dissimilar to those of concerns radically different to the industrial sector such as bureaucratic or corporate organizations. Work started at eight, morning tea was at ten. There was a lunch hour break at one o’clock followed by afternoon tea at four. Knock off time was at five thirty.\textsuperscript{251} In the early life of the Rex Trueform factory, the owners experimented with a local system of dividing work time and called it ‘the 55 minute hour’. The 55 minute hour was a unique invention and its purpose was to speed up production whilst not overworking operators. The owners thought that in order to have more efficient workers, the workers needed to take a 5 minute break every 55 minutes. The system is explained by Shub himself in 1947:

> At a fixed time each hour in the Rex Trueform factory, bells ring and the workers troop out for a five minute break. You cannot expect a cutter or machine attendant to sit hours on end doing specialised and intricate work and still give of his best. So out he goes for a smoke or perhaps he (or she) just leans back to relax. This idea is revolutionary – that no worker is permitted to work more than 55 minutes in any hour, apart from his tea and lunch intervals. And the whole plant is so highly organised that this five-minute-every-hour break can be allowed without increasing the cost to the man who buys and wears Rex Trueform clothes. In point of fact the worker is keener, more interested and the results are better. The innovation has been justified by production figures as well as by the personal reaction of the employees. As one man put it: ‘I can work twice as well with that five-minute break.’\textsuperscript{252}

In the 1947 brochure, much emphasis is also put on the fact that Rex Trueform was providing the ideal conditions for their workers:

> To the visitor to the factory the most impressive feature is the arrangements made for the staff to obtain refreshments. There are four beautifully designed restaurants – for European males and females and non-European males and females. The restaurants are roomy with tables arranged to suit batches of four friends. Then there are the change rooms and lockers, a comfortable waiting room at the surgery and four tea bars. Certainly Rex Trueform is the factory de luxe.\textsuperscript{253}

They also saw themselves as a microcosm of the city:

\textsuperscript{251} Johnson & Ras: 2011 [Interview]
\textsuperscript{252} Rex Trueform: 1947, 5
\textsuperscript{253} Rex Trueform: 1947, 11
The Rex Trueform factory is, in reality, the size of a small town and has, among its workers all the problems of a small town.\textsuperscript{254}

Harry Lawrence, the Union Government MP for Social Welfare congratulates the owners and makes an observation:

In making these plans for the future the Rex Trueform company is maintaining, and even hoping to improve upon, the tradition it has built up as a model employer.

With this in mind it is not inaccurate to think about the factory as a project in creating a utopian ideal with all the machinery at its disposal to achieve that ideal. This ideal ran concurrently with and along side a similar project on a national scale and would include notions of time, disciplining bodies and the racial categorising of people.

Rex Trueform was actively engaged in the production of a model workplace, directed by model employers and employing model workers. The mechanisms, the materials, that were at their disposal to assist in this utopian production were: the factory space with its various spatial divisions of power, good support from the ruling government and finally, the power to construct time to suit their aims for increased productivity and the time-disciplining of bodies.

However, the production of their factory space also talks about a specific project of modernity which is the idea of mechanising bodies, for the purposes of efficient production of capital.\textsuperscript{255} By introducing local versions of time discipline\textsuperscript{256} the owners of Rex Trueform were experimenting with their power to modernize. They did so by using time, bodies and space as their main resources.

\textsuperscript{254} Rex Trueform: 1947, 10
\textsuperscript{255} Thompson: 1967; Ollman: 1971; Postone: 1993
\textsuperscript{256} Thompson: 1967
Like most industrial plants, workers were issued with a clock card, which was used to track and control their work time. Sheila Johnson remembers: ‘Jy kry ‘n kaartjie en dan moet jy in clock hoeveel tyd jy aanstuur.’ [You get a card and then you must clock in how much you can send along.] In the present day abandoned manufacturing halls, this small ‘notice to all employers’ was still up, when I was doing my survey in 2012. The notice served as a reminder to workers with regards to the purpose of their clock cards.

Source: Chantal van Staden (2012)

The Cape Factory as a field for racist social science

The construction of Rex Trueform’s two most significant factories between 1938 and 1948, coincided with the creation and dissemination of nationalist racist social ideologies.257 These

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ideologies not only found formal expression in the built form (as discussed in chapters one and two) but the ‘factory’ as a generic space also became the field of investigation for the gathering of social data to support, develop and disseminate these ideologies.

*Fabriekswerksters in Kaapstad: ’n sosioologiese studie van 540 blanke en kleurling-fabriekswerksters (1937-1944)* [Female factory workers in Cape Town: a sociological study of 530 white and coloured female factory workers] by Erika Theron, draws directly from a previous and more significant study, the *Carnegie Investigation into the Poor White Question (1928 – 1932)*. Together these are key sociological investigations of their time and are indicative of disciplinary practices regarding racial categorisation, practices which were under construction prior to the National Party’s winning of the whites-only election in 1948.

When looking at the narrative surrounding these two studies and the currency that it gained, one could consider that the discipline of sociology, in South Africa, was largely founded on ideas of race classification, using poverty alleviation as the agenda and the factory as one of the prime sites of investigation. Erika Theron (1907 – 1990) is considered as a ‘doyen of social work in South Africa’. A 2010 biographical study of her sketches her as both a collaborator and critic of apartheid. She was drawn into social work with ideas of uplifting a group whom she identified as white Afrikaners, a group of which she saw herself as part. She was not part of the Carnegie Commission expert group who were selected to study the conditions of a particular section of this group, identified as ‘poor whites’. She was however invited by the reviewer of the report, HF Verwoerd, to assist him in implementing its recommendations.

Prior to the invitation Theron had enrolled for a PhD study at the University of Stellenbosch, in the newly-established Department of Sociology and Social Work. HF Verwoerd, the department’s first Head of Department, were to supervise her doctoral studies. Her proposed topic for her doctoral thesis was *Fabriekswerksters*. Verwoerd had mentioned in his public reviews of the Carnegie Commission report that such an enquiry would be immensely useful. Theron had gained some experience in Berlin whilst looking at the conditions of the female labour industry but also chose this particular focus for practical reasons. Influenced by the Carnegie Commission’s research methodology and the heavy emphasis on field research, it was invaluable to her research that her elder sister Daisy Theron, managed a hostel for young women in Salt River, Cape Town. Besides providing cheap lodgings, the

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258 Here on referred to as *Fabriekswerksters*
259 Here on referred to as the Carnegie Commission.
260 Tayler: 2010
261 Tayler: 2010, 99
hostel was also part of an Afrikaner Christelike Vroue Vereeniging [Afrikaner Christian Women’s Association] project to provide a place of refuge for young Afrikaner women hailing from the rural areas in search of work. Its aim was to provide an alternative to the racially-mixed slum areas, at the time perceived as places of moral degeneration. The influx of young white women to the cities seeking employment, was of particular concern for Afrikaner church organisations which viewed it ideologically, as an exploitation of Afrikaners by English industrialists. Furthermore, the fact that no legislation existed that enforced racial separation in the work place, was seen as particularly disturbing.

The focus of the study could also have been attractive for Theron because the conditions of Afrikaner white women held enormous weight within academic circles. The Afrikaner woman, the archetype, was actively being mythologised as the centre of survival of the Afrikaner nation. Geoffrey Cronje, who graduated with his MA in Greek the same year as Theron, wrote about this idea in ‘n Tuiste vir die nageslag [A home for posterity], where he describes white Afrikaner women as ‘protectors of the blood-purity of the Boer nation’ [Boer nation]. Cronje is singled out by Coetzee, in his seminal essay The mind of apartheid: Geoffrey Cronje (1907-) as a key Afrikaner intellectual in forming the theoretical basis for much of the apartheid segregationist legislation that would follow after 1948.

Completed in 1942, Fabriekwerksters, like the Carnegie Commission in 1928, was written in Afrikaans. Though she was awarded her PhD without cum laude its influence and importance was revealed in the institutional support she received through funding for its publication in 1944 from the South African Board of Educational and Social Research, University of Stellenbosch and the National Press (Naspers), its publisher. Theron writes in the introduction that the reason for the study emerged out of the great increase of blanke [white] women employed within the industrial sector in the Union of South Africa (from 7104 in 1924 to 27 483 in 1938) as well as nie-blankes [non-white] (from 7136 in 1924 to 10534 in 1938). She adds that this study is even more relevant in the Western Cape of 1938, where 60% of the total 10 000 factory workers are non-white women. Its aim, Theron writes:

[that the study will be of value to those who dealt with female factory workers with regards to, for instance, the determining of their wages, the improvement of the work

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262 Tayler: 2010, 50
263 Tayler: 2010, 99
264 Cronje in Coetzee: 1991, 6
265 Coetzee: 1991
267 Tayler: 2010, 100
Although one could say that the objectives of the study were modest there is great clarity in deciding on the audience Theron was addressing through her work. These included factory owners, wage boards and labour policy makers (determining wages and improvement of work conditions); government welfare departments (provision of housing) and community welfare organisations (provision of constructive entertainment and recreation programme). She states that the information was gathered in two ways: firstly by means of personal interviews with female factory workers at the factories and at their homes; secondly by analysing their work environment and speaking to employers. The study was divided into sixteen chapters. The chapter headings point towards an approach aimed at firstly clearly defining the subject, in this case comparing the two sets of subjects, white and Coloured female workers, (chapters 2 – 7); defining the space (the factory) in which they are found (7 and 8) and lastly defining the various concerns that come from the subject’s encounter with the space (9 – 14). Chapters 14 and 15 are specifically concerned with the lives of the chosen and defined subjects outside of the factory space. Based on the objectives as stated in the introduction, there is an attempt to propose an intervention into what factory workers do outside of their work hours.

On page 22 Theron makes an observation with regards to race. She states that 60% of factory workers in Cape Town are Coloured. She speculates about the reason for this great number, saying that it could be the fact that factory work was seen by the majority of whites as inferior work and whites therefore have a natural prejudice against this kind of work. Factory owners, because of this, have a long history of employing Coloureds. The introduction of minimum wages (for whites) by the wage board has not done much to reverse the prejudice. She also speculates that the higher number of Coloured factory workers could also be attributed to the fact that poverty is more rife within the Coloured population than in the white population.

Theron produced a series of maps, through the overlaying of residential addresses obtained from employers and racial profiles. These maps show where the Coloured female factory workers reside and the same for white female factory workers. The maps show that white workers were scattered loosely along the Southern Suburbs line in areas such as Mowbray, Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock. This largely overlaps with where Coloured female

\[\text{\footnotesize Theron: 1944, own translation.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize Tayler: 2010, 100}\]
factory workers reside, with a smaller concentration residing in the inner city residential suburb of Bo-Kaap. According to Theron’s map, significantly more Coloured female factory workers than white female factory workers lived in District Six, a suburb on the edges of the central business district. Theron describes District Six as over populated, with dilapidated buildings and dirty streets. Moreover she points out that this is the residential area in which most of Cape Town’s Coloured poor afhanklikes [state welfare dependent] reside.270

Within all the data that is collated, maps that are drawn and tables that are presented, Theron does not share one name of an individual factory worker, factory owner or factory premise. Her study is presented as collected facts based on her field work and existing accredited literature.271 The information is presented as pure, raw data seemingly without connection to real individuals and spaces, as observed and collected by herself, an objective expert in the field. Because of this it is not possible to confirm that the Rex Trueform factory was part of the study, but based on the large number of clothing factories that were visited within a relatively small area of Cape Town (Salt River) and within a short space of time 1937-1942 it is probable that Rex Trueform’s first factory of 1938 could have been part of the sociological study. (Fig. 90.)

Figure 90
On a table on page 3 of her study, Theron presents the kinds of factories that were included in the field work, the amounts thereof and the respective white and Coloured female workers visited. Group 4 listed in the first column as Klerasie nywerheid [clothing industry] is by far the type of industry that was visited the most, (41 factories) followed closely by the printing industry (32 factories).

Source: Theron (1944)

270 Theron: 1944
271 Theron makes use of, for instance, Wagner’s studies on Poverty and Dependence in Cape Town.
Theron makes another observation about race, this time with regards to Muslim workers.\textsuperscript{272} She observes that of the 59% of Coloured female factory workers that were studied, nearly 20% practiced Islam. She points out that many Muslim workers were encountered in the laundry and clothing industries, allowing her to come to the conclusion that this must be the work best suited for Muslims in general. When reading this I think about Coetzee’s essay \textit{The mind of apartheid} particularly his thoughts about how irrational, obsessive ideas spread and become generally accepted. In this essay Coetzee analyzes the writings of Cronje, who was a social scientist and contemporary of Theron, and by doing so Coetzee seeks to ‘question … how madness spreads itself or is made to spread through a social body.’\textsuperscript{273} In this context I would like to suggest that Theron’s study, with its irrational conclusions, distilled from seemingly rational scientifically extracted data, is a key source of social ideologies that were disseminated and standardized as facts, later to be formalized into racist policy.

During the 1940s and 1950s the sociology and social work became distinct disciplines in South Africa \textsuperscript{274}, with initial academic work mainly preoccupied with industrialization, poverty and race. This era of the social sciences illustrate a preoccupation with race but also points to social workers’ participation in the process of defining and fixing racial categories. What follows is an extract of such work, a UCT Masters in Social Science dissertation dated 1950 by A.G Weiss. In her introduction she states that her study depends heavily on Theron’s ‘ground-breaking’ study \textit{Fabriekwerksters}. The thesis is entitled \textit{The Cape Coloured Woman: - within an industrial community and at home}. It consists of a number of profiles of women factory workers such as ‘Maggie’ and ‘Dorothy’, described by Weiss as Cape Coloured women who keep modest but respectable homes:

\begin{quote}
But not all women between 30 and 40 are like Maggie and Dorothy. There is Ellen. She is 36, an attractive brunette, who could easily pass as a Latin beauty. Her father came from the Argentine, so she says. It must be true, as she is an extremely uneducated woman, and would not know that the Argentine existed otherwise. The father did not stay long enough in the country to find out that he had a daughter, and does not further feature in Ellen’s life. Her mother, a Coloured woman, married a Cape Coloured, and had four more children. Ellen herself married a good-looking, lightly Coloured man who is employed as a labourer by the City Council. They have five children, two of whom are already working. Ellen is not quite sure of her age, but
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{272} Theron: 1944, 23
\textsuperscript{273} Coetzee:1988, 3
\textsuperscript{274} Groenewald: 1987
she thinks she got married when she was 16. She cannot read or write. She is an ironer, and one of our quickest workers. Her only trouble is that she loves pleasure, and pleasure spells men. There are always well-to-do men around her. She is taken for drives, to have drinks and to the cinema. She can easily pass as a European and takes full advantage of this. She does not look after her home or her children. All this would have nothing to do with the factory, if her irate husband would not turn up at least once every week to threaten Ellen or have a fight with one of her Beaux. Ellen is a great source of gossip for the workers, and, though her ‘naughtiness’ is deplored, she supplies much entertainment on a dull working day. Several times she has been given notice already, but somehow she manages to remain. Ellen spends every penny she earns on herself. She is a grubby woman with worn-out, low-heeled shoes at the ironing board. Five minutes after the evening hooter has gone, out of the cloakroom emerges a coquettishly dressed, elegantly moving woman. Her father must have been an Argentinian after all…

Weiss declares her position and the basis for her enquiry explicitly in the preface. She filled the newly invented position of the personnel-welfare officer in a factory in Salt River, which she felt made her an ‘active participant in the community that she was studying.’ She states that, as an Austrian, trained in Vienna and who had spent time in Transvaal and Natal, ‘the colour question had never constituted a problem tinged with personal emotions.’ Her thesis is based on a series of questions that emerged out of her daily interactions with workers. She very early on observed that there exist two groupings of people in the factory and that a tension existed between the two groups. The one group is the ‘Cape Coloured’ and the other is the ‘Cape Malay’. For her, the two groups display distinct differences in culture, personal styling, levels of education, societal class structure, career motivation, ways of being female and ways of being male. She restricts the study to the women of these two groups, but the thesis does include her observations of male workers in the factory. Rather than only pointing out the differences, Weiss proceeds to organise a hierarchical system in which sometimes the Cape Coloured woman dominates and sometimes the Cape Malay woman dominates. For instance she notes that the Cape Malay woman is more beautiful and alluring, taking more care with her appearance than the practical, plainer Cape Coloured woman. The Cape Coloured woman on the other hand, dominates with higher levels of education, and they are generally from a better social class.

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275 Weiss: 1950, 99
276 Weiss: 1950, 7
277 ibid
278 Weiss: 1950, 45
than the Cape Malay woman. In the societal structures within which the Cape Coloured women find themselves, they are encouraged to take active participation in the factory by sitting on committees and becoming factory supervisors. Cape Malay women’s subservient role in Islam, on the other hand, discourages this kind of behaviour and Weiss writes that generally the Cape Malay woman is a silent, passive participant in the life of the factory. This is in contrast to Cape Malay men, who demand a level of power, more so than the Cape Coloured man, whom as Weiss describes in this statement:

Not one of the Coloured men takes an active part in the social life of the factory, or is in a position of authority, while eight of the Malay men are in leading positions, either as Foremen, or elected by workers to represent them on different committees. 279

Her ultimate goal with the documentation of her observations is to come to the root of a cultural rift that she has perceived, and to then try and solve it, ultimately, in order for the factory to produce without hindrances:

The split between Coloured and Malay sections was based on socio-religious differences. It did affect working efficiency and can be overcome by fostering community spirit with joint activities. 280

In my double capacity as Personnel and Welfare Officer I had not only to increase the well-being of the individual, but try also to improve the efficiency of the group. A more stable labour force ... was the aim. 281

Weiss, in her thesis, went to great lengths to illustrate her observations by designing a fairly consistent graphic language of symbols, tables and graphs. (Fig. 91) But her scientific representational approach and her crude classifications system is at odds with the depiction of Ellen, the factory worker described in the extract above. Ellen’s identity is not clear-cut, and does not neatly fall into either one of the two defined groups. She does not conform to Weiss’s narrative of the Cape Coloured woman as one of respectability, good moral standing, with aspirations towards middle-class civility. Neither is she a passive onlooker to her own life while in a male-dominated marriage, the narrative Weiss ascribes to the Cape Malay woman. Ellen represents a rupture, a slippage to the carefully constructed argument Weiss is trying to make, and it is exactly this rupture that begins to unravel the specific

279 ibid
280 Weiss: 1950,15
281 ibid
modes of being a female factory worker in a Cape Town clothing factory towards the end of the 1940s.

Figure 91
An example of the graphic charts, designed by Weiss, to categorise and classify racial and class distinctions between the two groups of workers that she identified: ‘Cape Coloured’ and ‘Malay’.

*Source: Weiss (1950)*
Between 1937/8 (when the first factory was designed and built) and 1946/7 (when the second factory was designed and built) ideas on racial categorisation were actively being constructed and inscribed onto people. The construction and inscription of race onto people were in part orchestrated under the guise of economic upliftment of poor whites as seen with the Carnegie Commission of Enquiry into the Poor White Problem of 1932. Offshoots from this type of inquiry like Erika Theron’s *Fabriekwerksters* were central to the establishment of a science based research methodology, with its roots in eugenics. The research methodology proclaimed the identification of a subject group, the collection of data of this subject group for the purposes of making conclusive statements regarding the behaviour of the defined subject groups. The conclusions would then be proposed as guidelines for social engineering. The use of the social survey, was established amidst a movement of poverty alleviation of white Afrikaner people, and the survival of the Afrikaner nation by preventing racial-mixing. It is within this backdrop that the disciplines of Sociology and Social Work were formalized within academic institutions. Social scientists serious about adopting a scientific approach to social research, adhered to the notion of field work, a key component of the social survey methodology. The manufacturing factory, because of their employment of people, particularly women, and the potential significance that this industry could have in terms of eradicating unemployment, became a key site of investigation for social workers and sociologists. The factory space, not only became the space of investigation but also became the space where the ideal conditions such as racial segregation, for the survival of a white minority group could be played out.

Thus, when thinking about time and production, particularly as it pertains to Africa and the construction of an African modernity, it is difficult to exclude thinking about notions of labour and idleness. Time, African modernity, labour and idleness are all concepts that have contributed to a specific theorisation of postcolonial subjectivities. But what is the exact nature of the spatial constructs within which these ideas might have emerged from or could have been played out? In this chapter I proposed that the space where the convergence of these concepts gained particular resonance, is the twentieth century African factory. It is my contention that the twentieth century factory space performed two roles, simultaneously. The first as a space of modern commercial enterprise celebrating progress, efficiency and production; the second as a space of colonial modernizing time disciplining of bodies, creation of industry with ideals of social and moral upliftment of the poor, and finally the scientific racial categorisation of subjects for the purposes of justifying racist social conditions. This chapter also endeavours to illustrate that, although space, together with

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283 Avermaete, Serhat & Van Osten: 2010
irrational conclusions based on racial science were used as the basis for ascribing identity, ruptures and discontinuities occurred pointing to ‘multiple ways of being human under apartheid.’\textsuperscript{284}

\textsuperscript{284} Alegi: 2008
Conclusion: The contemporary factory as a specter of an intricate past.

The buildings on Main Road (Fig. 92) are characterised by a façade that extends along the entire block between Queenspark Avenue on the north-west and Brickfield Road on the south-east. The Policansky cigarette factory was incorporated into Rex Trueform in the 1960s and used mainly as a depot for raw textile material. The roofline of the façade varies in its profile and height, depending on the original functioning of the spaces behind the façade. A six bay saw-tooth roof dominates this edge, with the former cigarette factory’s roofline continuing pragmatically up to the Brickfield Street corner. There are three different types and shapes of windows: long ribbon windows, rectilinear windows and circular porthole windows. Some windows have steel frames, others have aluminium frames. The curved stair landing on Queenspark Avenue, is enclosed with two storey high aluminium framed windows. Some of the windowpanes are missing on this glazed corner, the feature which dominates the façade of the building. The relatively flat planar, sparsely decorated façade is interrupted with a decorative balcony overhanging the entrance off Main Road. (Fig. 93)

Figure 92
View from Main Road with the semi-circular stair on Queenspark Avenue corner.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2013)

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285 Deed of Transfer records for erven 13715-13725
The current entrance is off Queenspark Avenue, with its signature canopy and circular column. (Fig. 94) The rest of the façade is plain and utilitarian. The building is set back generously from the road, allowing for off-street parking in this densely built neighbourhood. The Factory Road side, one block further, is covered in service ducts and pipes. The façade is a relentless repetition of windows of what used to be the workers’ cloakrooms, toilets and canteens. (Fig. 95)
Figure 94
View from Queenspark Avenue corner, the current entrance to the building.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2013)

Figure 95
View from Queenspark Avenue & Factory Road corner.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2013)
The Brickfield Road façade, on the south-eastern edge of the site, is not continuous like the other street façades but is formed around a courtyard. (Fig. 96) Here, the windows form more or less continuous bands of openings. The courtyard is enclosed with a vibracrete wall on the road edge and there is an escape stair on the Factory Road corner. The Brickfield Road corner is articulated by a four-storey building, formally contrasting to the rest of the built fabric in this area because of its balcony at the top level and the curved street corner. (Fig.97)

Figure 96
View of Brickfield Road façade.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2013)

Figure 97
View from Brickfield Street corner.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2013)
Currently, from the outside the buildings appear stark because most of the doors are nailed shut from the inside. The exterior of the building is in need of surface maintenance but it does not create an eyesore. However, it is within the interiors of the building where the neglect resulting, in part, from disuse, is most apparent. The upper most floor is in the best condition, having been recently used by an evangelist church group who occupied the building until 2012. The space is well lit with natural light flowing in from above through the saw-tooth roof. (Fig. 98) On the floor below, one can experience the balcony fronting onto Main Road. (Fig. 99) The space is dark, with the openings from the balcony doors as a meagre source of natural light. The balcony is a narrow strip; its decorative balustrades are rusting, the concrete canopy is spalling and the mosaic tiles on the three large columns are chipping away. (Fig. 100) Enclosing the balcony are large timber framed doors, in need of repair from the damage caused by water ingress. Down the semi-circular stair, the dignified grandeur that one perceives from outside, is contrasted with the dilapidation of the details that make up the stair: broken wall tiles, large parts of the elegant handrail missing, chipped stair treads and various glass panes destroyed. (Fig. 101) To reach the street entrance below the balcony, one has to walk past a section of the building that has been extensively vandalised. Thieves have wrecked walls and built-in furniture to seize electric cables and wiring. The 1944 entrance mural is in place but the surface is cracked and chipped.

286 Christ Amazing Love Ministries (2008) [Online]
Figure 98
Interior view of the first floor of the factory. Natural light enters from above through the saw-tooth roof.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2013)

Figure 99
View of the ground floor and Main Road balcony beyond.
Source: Gaelen Pinnock (2011)
Figure 100
The balcony is currently not in a good condition and requires repair and maintenance.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2013)

Figure 101
The once grand circular stair is now dilapidated and missing some of its features such as the handrail.
Source: Chantal van Staden (2013)
On the old cigarette factory side the spaces display their robust, industrial quality despite floors covered in bird and dog faeces. Good quality natural light enters from a monitor roof (Fig. 102) on the first floor, structural roof systems are sound and floors and walls are generally in a fair and stable condition. There are water puddles all over the concrete floors of the building, showing up the condition of the leaking roofs. Services, such as electricity, have long been shut down, a result of many burglaries and cable theft.

Figure 102
The adjacent Cavalla Cigarette factory forms part of the site. It features large halls lit from above, like the one in this photograph.

Source: Chantal van Staden (2013)
Walking through the building I am filled with a mixture of nostalgia, melancholy and optimism, but mostly a sense of wonderment and curiosity. The contemporary experience of the space makes it apparent that the buildings, particularly in their unoccupied vacant state, elicit reflection on the past, a past of which only threads remain. Depending on your involvement with that past these threads can be woven in a myriad ways, only to elicit more specters.

The birth of Rex Trueform coincides roughly with the construction of their factory in 1938, the first of many structures the company would build, buy or rent in its eighty years of existence. Chapter one described the genesis of the company by looking at the spatial conditions of Salt River prior to the construction of the factory, the biographies of the factory proprietors (both Lithuanian Jewish immigrants) and legislation regarding racial segregation within factories that was in place at the time. It is argued that the conditions of colonial modernity in Cape Town, such as the racially stratified social context, lent itself to imaginaries of industrial prospect, modernising and control. This resulted in architecture which materialized and spatialised these conditions of colonial modernity in Cape Town. The chapter illustrated the spatiality of these conditions in plan, section and elevation.

The second factory was built in 1948, across the road from the first one. With the second building, the company extended on practices learnt from the construction of the first factory. In the new factory, conceived as a building in two parts, separation was a central theme. People were separated based on ascribed racial, gender and class distinctions, with the same ease with which utilities and raw material were separated in the factory. The chapter continued by tracking the narrative of the buildings (the major extension in 1963 and the incorporation of neighbouring buildings), reading these moments parallel with key political shifts in South Africa (the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960 and Mandela’s release in 1991) in order to reflect on the production of the city based on apartheid government support for white capital. The Rex Trueform buildings then become a material consequence of ‘apartheid modernity’, based on their being situated within a time of apartheid and intertwined with the conditions of power in this era. Furthermore, the chapter explored the buildings in their contemporary, vacant and semi-ruined state, which resulted in part from their closure and the mass retrenchment of workers during the early 2000s. I reflected on the meaning of its current form and its future aspirations towards secure, A-Grade offices, within

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287 Mehrotra: 2010
288 Avermaete, Karakayali & von Osten: 2010
289 Murray: 2010
postapartheid socio-political imaginaries of globalization, aspirational desire and urban development.²⁹⁰

The detailed architectural readings of the buildings in chapters one and two provide the substrate for the reflection on issues of race and identity construction in the next two chapters. Titled as a question, “Is she coloured?”, chapter three interrogated notions of immigrant ‘Jewishness’, through the family histories of the Policanskys. How did these, and other families, new arrivals to early industrial Cape Town, negotiate their social position relative to other settlers in pre-apartheid Cape Town? Access to the modern world of global consumption was on offer to a small section of Cape Town elites, including ‘non-European’ families such as the Gools and the Abduraghmans. However, once the racist policies of apartheid were lawfully entrenched in 1948, racial classification determined limitations to access to modernity for all ‘non-Europeans’. The chapter outlined how Cissie Gool, an important figure in the political history of South Africa, fought unsuccessfully against this order of determination for people like her and her family, classified as ‘Coloured’.

Racial taxonomies are entangled with notions of beauty and gender. The chapter also explored the implications of this entanglement through the narratives of two ex-workers, Murray and Johnson. It looked at localized senses of beauty by including the accounts of transgendered individuals such as Donough, a past co-ordinator for Rex Trueform’s Spring Queen Beauty pageant.

Finally, chapter four looked at the workings of the factory simultaneously from a pragmatic and philosophical perspective. What were the daily practices of the factory and what did the mechanistic and ritualized practice of modern production mean in terms of the disciplining of a gendered and racialised labour force in Cape Town? The chapter explored Rex Trueform’s localized versions of time in order to think about how the company developed a local Cape modernity, using labouring people, architectural space and time as their resources. How did Rex Trueform establish themselves as a model factory, employing model workers in a model space? Were these utopian ideals disrupted or contested and, if so, how? During the 1940s the factory space became a space of research and experimentation for social scientists. Scholars identified industrial spaces like Rex Trueform for the collection of data in the form of social surveys, in order to find ‘solutions’ for some the consequences of industrialization such as poverty, rapid urban development and racial mixing. Within this scientific, objective pursuit of racial classification, certain ruptures and discontinuities occurred, pointing to the

human condition’s ability to contest and disrupt identities that have been imposed or ascribed through apartheid, modern industry, modern science and modern architecture.

In this dissertation my objective was to convey the plural nature of the narrative of Rex Trueform, a modern enterprise and a site of modern buildings in Cape Town. Using the buildings as a pretext, my aim was to explore the archive for ideas that highlight the conditions within which the buildings were conceived and built. This meant that the archive needed to be simultaneously assembled and ‘unstitched’ in an imaginative way to allow me to construct an argument about the important connections between architectural space, coloniality and on being human.
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