

# *A Gradual creep of change:*

## *Modernist infiltration of municipal infrastructure in Pietermaritzburg, 1930–1960*

*by Debbie Whelan*

**T**his article will discuss municipal buildings in Pietermaritzburg in the early twentieth century. It begins by examining the different types of building housing new technology; and then those that were created as a result of it. It will go on to describe the different types of building that were constructed to house the imperatives of separate development; and conclude with comments on the survival, condition and usage of these structures in a post-apartheid South Africa.

### **Introduction**

Cities grow organically, determined by population, economics and social systems. Pietermaritzburg is no different. Laid out in grid fashion during its brief

origins as a Dutch settler or Boer city, it was colonised by the British in 1843. The British brought with them Victorian technology, some of which required new types of building for which there was no precedent. New technology was not the only driver of new infrastructures; gradual exclusionary legislation along race lines, which informed provision of specific buildings for African people within the city, was slowly being implemented.

The new technical age required steam-driven electrical power stations as well as the means by which to enable the expansion of electricity across the city via substations. Electricity drove the potential for new transport systems, particularly tramlines and

tram stops. In addition to providing the infrastructure for the living, the city was also responsible for accommodating the dead, providing cemeteries and building crematoria. Legislation after World War I also drove the provision of corporation-funded housing for all races, as well as structures deemed necessary by the Union government: hostels to house African workers in the inner cities, as well as the legislated and formalised network of beerhalls and breweries that controlled the production and consumption of African beer.

From 1900, the initial architectural approach embraced a pattern-book style, adopting a late nineteenth century domestic aesthetic, which slowly mutated into a more politically inclusive though non-committal, Union period style after 1910. Significantly, at the beginning of the 1930s the municipal architecture began to change, employing a more streamlined, planar aesthetic that responded to purpose and at the same time presented a comparatively dramatic departure from the earlier precedent. It was modern, rooted in the city of Pietermaritzburg and had limited reference to the nostalgic architecture that came with the Victorian-era settlers.

Modernism came to South Africa early. In 1922, Rex Martienssen was in written communication with Le Corbusier, and the ideals of the spare technology were experimented with in buildings by architects such as Helmut Stauch and Martienssen in Johannesburg. It took a little longer to reach the provinces, particularly Natal, which was firmly in the thrall of British influence and revivals such as Tudorbethan, Spanish, Cape Dutch and then a localised Art Deco, frequently deployed in the seaport of Durban and playing to rapid international expansion after World War

I. These various architectural lenses all played palimpsest on tradition – tradition of a strong imported cultural background, a localised interpretation of international trends, a political construct of Union, a development of vernacular, and also most importantly in the case of the colony and then the province of Natal, an enduring Britishness. It is important to underpin the extant architectural traditions in the country as themselves a melange of influences both cultural and climatic, before discussing the gradual incursion of modernism as a global international influence, but also something that was originally in the city of Pietermaritzburg, both functional and whimsical.

Pietermaritzburg is the capital of KwaZulu-Natal; a densely inhabited province of rolling landscapes and different climates, ranging from sub-tropical along the Indian Ocean, to more temperate and even montane as the elevation rises on the escarpment. Pietermaritzburg sits at the climatic intersection – 80 kilometres inland from the sea with thornveld to the east and vegetation commonly known mistbelt to the west as the elevation rises drastically. Like its better-known sister city, Durban, a port and seaside destination, Pietermaritzburg has strong traditions of Britishness. However, its Dutch origins and political situation as seat of provincial power, mean that its built environment has complex and contested traditions: overlays of British and Dutch, a dramatic intervention in mid-century modernism, and then a desuetude promoted by an inward-looking political approach focused on revival and perpetuation of indigenous cultural traditions; leading to a slash-and-burn approach, retrospective rather than proactive planning that results in a

decolonial obliteration of existing built environments.

Given that the quotidian structures of cities (those which are not necessarily people-facing) are rarely celebrated, their documentation in civic histories is usually scant. In usual circumstances, urban researchers can rely on the information contained in city records, plans submitted for approval, minutes of meetings, and tax and insurance documentation. However, in the case of Pietermaritzburg, little of this evidence remains. With the election of the first democratic government in 1994, consequent political change in the 1990s in particular (as will be briefly outlined towards the end of this article) had a detrimental effect on the records of the city: documents and other records of the City Engineer were lost, destroyed or misfiled, and the institutional memory of people who worked for the city was gradually ousted and replaced by new staff. That the city did not have a properly functioning architectural department in this transition meant that the situation after transition became problematic: given inclusion of new political imperatives focused on housing, health and education focus was rather on town and regional planning and knee-jerk remedial development. Thus, the dearth of information – documentary, institutional memory, and published – means that the methodology of this paper necessarily works between the artefact (or memory of the artefact) and the scant information found in Town Clerk's files in the KwaZulu-Natal Archives, some unpublished material<sup>1</sup> and the Pietermaritzburg Corporation record books – city yearbooks comprising departmental reports as well as budgets and expenditure. However, these records very rarely mention the invisible people

who worked in departments, and plans of buildings (if found) are often not signed, so the investigatory methodology is palimpsest at best.

Focusing on Pietermaritzburg, this article briefly discusses the traditional vernaculars of the Boers, people of Dutch descent, anglicisation by British immigrants, and the development of public buildings using the architectural moulds of their time. It necessarily firmly foregrounds the long tradition of copy, respond, adapt in order to understand the brief spark of intentional design the city employed with the establishment of its first architecture section in the mid-1950s. It will then consider these whimsical and experimental utilitarian structures constructed by the Pietermaritzburg Corporation and the gradual move towards a streamlined modernism in the early 1950s. While the International style and vernacular modernism is well regarded as being associated with the National Party government after 1948, the buildings constructed in the city between 1955 and 1970 are of a singular local identity and not influenced to much degree by what was being designed and built by departments of the central government. While a localised modernist vernacular continued for some time, a post-1994 desuetude characterises the contemporary city of Pietermaritzburg. As a result of political change and government shifts in the early democratic period, a general wholesale erosion of governance, competence and authority has either led to demolition of most of these buildings or rendered them difficult to repair. This article then concludes that tradition, its rupture and its repercussions can, more broadly, be considered as cyclical – a process of developing and creating new traditions through a whole-

sale destruction of viable, but politically and racially specific, built environments. While the traditional built environment of aboriginal peoples, namely that of the Zulu, backgrounds this discussion, it is an element of the recrafting of tradition that the article will pick up on towards the conclusion.

### **The development of ‘tradition’: copy, respond, adapt**

Pietermaritzburg was originally laid out in 1838 in a grid pattern common to Dutch settler communities. The grids allowed for water furrows that were gravity-fed from higher land. The plots, or erven, were demarcated at roughly an acre in size, with the stipulation that the houses had to be situated on the street. The land behind allowed for horticultural plots, stables and the keeping of some necessary stock. The homes were simple, built of locally available shale with a thatched roof, and often comprised two rooms, common in these early homes. In the centre of the city was located the market place – a large open space that not only housed the market itself, but also the first official building for the parliament of Natal, the Raadzaal. A church was also situated on the site.

Around the town were a series of open spaces or outspans – overnight stops for travellers and their wagons, which in the context of Pietermaritzburg was an important feature given that the Boers were cattle farmers and had large ranches distant from the city. By 1843 this began to change. The British annexed Natal and anglicised the building forms, adding verandas liberally borrowed from other colonies such as India. But also as the Colony and its population grew, they incorporated materials produced in the industrial

centres of Britain, particularly wrought and cast iron, and corrugated iron sheeting. With them they also brought a mixed aesthetic – the classical revival common to the Victorian period, as well as Gothic revival and some more elaborate Renaissance styles imported from Europe.

Architects designing public buildings were largely imported from Britain – they arrived as settlers and in particular during boom times such as before and after the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1901) and World War I. With them they brought the British aesthetic, as well as a habit of applying ‘pattern’ – nominally suggested in pattern books such as the seminal *Grammar of Ornament* by Owen Jones,<sup>2</sup> and the earlier nostalgic romanticism of John Papworth.<sup>3</sup> This extended to replication of well-known and understood forms, architectural ‘standards’ and material interpretations: viz., the semiotic languages of brick, stone and timber, as well as the adoption of Classicism for a bank, Gothic for an Anglican church, and neo-Classical for a Methodist one. This adoption of patterns is important, and at the same time it was also deployed in buildings themselves: catalogue buildings of wood and iron offering a spread of options from basic simplicity to substantial dwellings were excellent solutions to rapid housing. Catalogues such as that of H.V. Marsh were still published in the early twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

With the shift in leadership, buildings in Natal briefly embraced the Edwardian style, but more strategically, after the Union of 1910 a Classical Union period was adopted to stylistically embed a oneness. While this was broadly rolled out across the country, the Union period classicism did not impact Pietermaritzburg to the extent that it did cities such

as Durban. However, it is important to understand the rollout of buildings in the city more closely in order to appreciate their role in developing a responsive style, but also to be able to position the impact of modernism, as it arrived in the mid-1950s, more specifically.

Designers in Pietermaritzburg adopted, rather, a copybook approach. With little in terms of major infrastructure development at the turn of the twentieth century, largely due to the financial impact of the Anglo-Boer War, what was important were the structures built to facilitate power rolled out in the city. The architectural templates adopted in the construction of the early electricity substations have reference. However, it is important to connect them to their parent structure, the electricity power station and then trickle down their development to track a gradual adoption of simpler rational styles moving into mid-century.

Utilitarian, non-civic buildings constructed by the Pietermaritzburg Corporation around the turn of the twentieth century slavishly retained their late-Victorian aesthetic: the municipal power station situated in Havelock Road was completed in 1898, and as with many early steam-driven power stations, this was a streamlined brick building, with a prominent chimney. It is a commanding structure, comprising a multi-gabled front with restrained elaboration incorporating large banks of windows to let in natural light (in itself progressive) but simplifying the Victorian aesthetic in providing factory space. The municipal takeover of power in the city has been described elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> but set in motion a silent infrastructure which drove the tram system (dismantled in 1933) which provided the vector for the rollout of electricity across the city.

Indeed, the growth of twentieth-century Pietermaritzburg can be mapped in its electrical substations – the early examples such as that in Boshoff Street (c.1901), Prestbury (c.1904) and driven by the tramline to the Botanic Gardens and Commercial Road (now Alan Paton Avenue), driven by the tramline to the Scottsville racecourse are brick (in the first two instances), with simple articulation at the roof line with brick on edge or brick placed at 45 degrees in order to provide a cap to the building, and a little architectural interest.

What is really important in this discussion is that first there is little evidence of any personnel working for the then Corporation of Pietermaritzburg who were trained in any specific form of architectural drawing and its conventions. Certainly, the Electricity Department retained a draughtsman who was seemingly deployed in designing the substations that were rolled out until the early 1930s. The examples described above, constructed at the turn of the twentieth century were the only buildings of any note built by the Corporation until the 1920s – this was due to financial crises brought on by the crippling effects of the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1901), the Bhambatha Uprising of 1906, and a fiduciary collapse that compelled the Colony to enter into union with the other three territories comprising contemporary South Africa in 1910. This was then compounded by the Union's participation in World War I. Construction of most buildings stopped to focus on the war effort, and only the most necessary infrastructure was installed – mostly connected with electrification (using wood and iron substations or else cast-iron mini-junction boxes), and water reticulation.

The city, however, expanded with the

impact of the Anglo-Boer War at the turn of the century, as well as returning servicemen and rural-urban migration after World War I. This not only led to a housing crisis, exacerbated by the lack of materials caused by the interruption of the war, but included two controversial pieces of legislation – namely the Beer Act of 1908, which allowed for the implementation of the Durban System, which will be unpacked a little later in this article, and the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923. Both these laws are critical in that they prioritised the development of infrastructure for the African residents in the city. This paved the way for later policies of separate development as reinforced by the National Party government after it came to power in 1948; but also prioritised construction of infrastructure for Africans over that for white residents. This means that much of the actual civic development in the early years of the twentieth century was not centered on buildings for general use, but rather those that reinforced the separate development encouraged through the Beer Act.

The first major structures built shortly after World War I were also bricolage – classically inspired electrical substations at the intersections of West and Pietermaritz streets and West Street and Victoria Road. It is no accident that they were placed here: they were close to the power station and as such took on much load for redistribution. These buildings were simple, orthogonal, double pitched tiled roof or in the case of Victoria Road, a hipped and gambrel roof. Rendering was roughcast plaster, and windows were portholes ringed with slender Roman tiles while the corners consisted of Roman bricks. Doors and any other forms of opening were originally of Rhodesian teak, a

hardwood commonly deployed in buildings of the Union period. This remained as such with the construction of the major substation in Alexandra Road (c.1927) which was built at the time of the crossover from direct to alternating current, again marking an extension of the growing city.

While interwar English Revivalism common in England in the 1930s was much practised in domestic buildings and those designed by architects who responded to the trends happening abroad, the civic structures in Pietermaritzburg desperately clung to the tradition that they had invented. Further substations built during the 1930s, some of which it appears were designed by one E.B. White, a technician in the Electricity Department, used reduced ornamentation. Many of these suburban buildings were also roughcast plastered, with a quarry tile placed at 45 degrees to emphasise the pitched roof and add an element of decoration.

Importantly, more substantial structures were built in the early 1930s that fulfilled the requirements of the city to provide amenities for its black inhabitants. Funded through the mechanism of the Durban System, the Native Affairs Department within the Corporation relied on income from municipally owned beerhalls, to pay for the infrastructural requirements of the city. While the original beerhalls opened in terms of this legislation occupied rental space, and the women's hostel also occupied a rented site, impetus arose in early 1934 to move the central beerhall to make way for a new magistrate's court. The political and social imperative of this, in addition to its rapid design and construction has been described elsewhere by the author in addition to its unfortunate and illegal demolition.<sup>6</sup>

The Retief Street beerhall was situated on the corner of Retief and Berg streets and opened in December 1934.<sup>7</sup> It was a substantial structure, with its main elevation on Berg (now Hoosen Haffeejee) Street. Partly face brick and partly rendered, the symmetrical building was almost Egyptianesque in its scale and proportion. A central projecting bay of face brickwork contained a set of double doors at ground level, with the brickwork stepping to a point at the top of the gable. The centrality was reinforced by a ventilation gap just under the roof, composed of corrugated sheeting. The central brickwork bay was flanked by rendered buttresses, which were also stepped, following the roofline. There were 3/3 steel windows at ground floor level, with the soffits of the windows falling slightly short of the soldier course above the double-door entranceway. As is common, a high dado of face brickwork connected the building to the ground protecting the walls against everyday damage.

The Sobantu Village hall was built around the same time, and most likely designed by the same architect. It conveys a similar gravitas as the beerhall, although this was designed as a substantial community building, the central focus of a brand new 'model native village'. These communities were political and social constructs that emerged from a late Victorian paternalism to promote social improvement and continued social mobility. In this case the Native Village had been mooted at Council level for many decades, but was promoted through municipally driven social housing, enabled by the 1919 Health Act promulgated under the aegis of the Department of Public Health and the more sinister Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, which controlled the lives

of African people living in the city. The Corporation's Department of Native Affairs understandably stepped in and assumed responsibility for providing this housing, in a rental arrangement of houses of different sizes and configurations to promote the social mobility agenda, but also to provide inner city housing and a labour pool of Africans living within the city.

Sobantu Village, as it became known in the late-1930s, was thus built from first principles – with potable water and electricity provided to individual homes (at the time quite novel), sewers and drainage and also amenities such as a trading store. The aesthetic of the hall is reversed: a central projecting rendered entrance bay celebrating a double door, with flanking walls of face brickwork – here high-level steel windows reflect the additional projection of the portico, while at ground floor level the window bay is reinforced by larger openings. The edges of the building are contained: vertical plastered bands run up the corner to the eaves, reflecting an engagement with popular building forms at the time, particularly Art Deco which was much vaunted in Durban. This streamlined aesthetic is reinforced by the way in which the corners reduce in width from the wide base to the eaves, and also in the manner in which the rather top-heavy entrance portal scales systematically upwards to a point celebrating 'entrance'. This again is reinforced by a conventional (for the city designers) inclusion of a porthole window above, again reinforcing verticality and centrality.

Other significant structures of this time include the original section of the Pietermaritz Street fire station, which reflects some of the monumentality in both the Sobantu Village hall and the



Retief Street beerhall. Again, the fire station, which sits directly on the pavement edge, is modulated with a combination of plastered components and face brickwork. This is then reflected in additions, later in the 1920s, and sets the module for the building turning the corner into Symons Street, with both the corner and terminal buildings in the complex being a streamlined Art Deco, with embellishment integrated in modulation, rather than additively.

The development of the Gardens suburb, also intended as municipal housing, but initially for white railway workers, commenced in the 1930s. This is significant as the entire suburb, which is located on a steep slope, is carefully regulated rhythmically, with the street-facing elevations characterised by single-car garages that are deliberately placed rather than being a random addition to the general plan allowing for a systematic and aesthetically balanced visual interpretation of the suburb.

Architects working in the colonies usually brought with them strong influences of their training abroad and deployed the basic principles and adapted them to local conditions. However, for civic institutions in which there were no specifically employed architects, people who may have received their draughting or design training in more vocational directions often had to adapt their skills to include buildings, and with this came the use of pattern, application and bricolage. It was only towards the end of the 1930s and certainly into the war years of the 1940s that the design of many of the civic structures in Pietermaritzburg began to develop a specific character, evidencing an experiment with design, but most importantly, design intention rather than a compilation of elements in palimpsest fashion. Further, build-

ings had been largely designed by the civic authority that was responsible for them; in the case of buildings connected to electrification it was the Electricity Department, and for native administration-associated buildings, it was a mix between the city engineers and the native administration authorities. By the middle of the 1950s, not only was the Commonwealth-wide requirement for urban planning (driven by post-war construction in Britain and the rise of the new towns movement) becoming important, but the City Engineer's Department, significantly, fissioned to allow not only for a town planning section, but also an architectural department, that employed architects and draughtspeople to compile all drawings of civic interest. This moment brought in specifically trained design professionals and heralded a decade of experimentation, which manipulated light and shade, played with form and colour, and pushed the boundaries of materials. It also considered a form of integrative regionalism, incorporating local flavour and contexts in using the generally negative and invisible palette of everyday buildings in the city in order to experiment with new ideas.

### **Disruption of tradition: modernism as play and as politics**

As noted in the introduction, modernism arrived early in South Africa. Architects based at the University of the Witwatersrand were well connected to the movement in Europe, and certainly practitioners in South Africa such as Rex Martienssen and Helmut Stauch were exposed to the slimmed-down aesthetics of Le Corbusier from the beginning of the 1920s. Their involvement in education meant that the trickle down of new ideas and architectural



practices was active, leading to a number of significant South African-trained modernist architects dominating the local landscape in the mid-twentieth century.

A few practitioners arrived in Pietermaritzburg; although Durban was perhaps more exciting given its rapid rise to fame as a seaside destination, and architectural practices such as Crofton & Benjamin designed a number of seminal buildings, mostly residential.<sup>8</sup> Little in the way of public buildings in a modernist form other than those designed and implemented by the city architects were built until later in the 1960s, and then a number in the 1970s which were funded by provincial and national money and focused on government buildings such as Natalia.

The vague flirtation with a slimmed-down aesthetic as seen in the Art Deco inspired Sobantu Village hall, the Gothic Revival entrance gate to Mountain Rise cemetery and the almost Egyptian Retief Street beerhall, constructed in a mix of roughcast render, plaster and face brick are elements of architectural forms and their concomitant detail deployed in the 1930s and 1940s. Certainly, it is known that the entrance to the Mountain Rise cemetery was designed through appointment of an external architect (although who this was has never been established), and that the design of the other two structures connected to the Corporation Native Affairs Department appear to have been carried out internally.

The appointment of professionally trained architects rather than multi-faceted draughtspeople to the borough was important. The snatches of influence present in the buildings of the 1930s and 1940s displayed an engagement with design and deliberate aesthetic decisions, rather than a patchwork approach. This

appropriation, response and adaptation of localised traditions based on international trends was to continue with the appointment of the city architects, but with a firm application of the rational response to the function, reflected in the form. At the same time, corporation buildings became a playing field for architectural experimentation – new materials, forms, aesthetics and structural elements comprise the buildings constructed between 1955 and 1965. Happily, given a more prosperous post-war situation, they are not restricted to buildings supporting separate development and the requirements of the Native Affairs Department, but include other elements of urban expansion.

Of course, the utilitarian electrical substations were one of the more neutral structures with which to experiment with materials, form, light and texture. While these have been more fully described elsewhere, the modernist resolutions of substations are often quite contextual (some clad with granite setts from the closure of the tramlines in 1933, others with slate-like shale, or slasto). While some of these are experimental, such as that in Coronation Road in Scottsville and the more diminutive example incorporating a bus stop on the Athlone Circle, many were very simple, beautiful structures with impossibly thin oversailing concrete flat roofs, and vertical fins allowing for good ventilation for the electrical gear. These fins, it seems, were part of a preferred aesthetic practised by one of the designers in the city architect's team, as they were also used on the water and waste sanitation building on Mayor's Walk: capturing the light to create dramatic areas of bright and intense dark, they added a compelling architectural flavour to what are fundamentally utilitarian buildings. In

addition, the construction was of high quality: the face brickwork is of a very high standard and the contemporary condition of some of these buildings is testament to their original builders.

In this tranche of modernist structures are those associated with the Native Affairs Department of the Corporation: established in order to manage the funds generated through the beerhalls in the Durban System, the construction of many of these buildings was prioritised above the less important needs of the city as they were essential buildings necessary to promote the implementation of separate development supporting apartheid policies from the late 1940s. Examples of this are the East Street native men's hostel (incrementally constructed from the 1930s onwards with the main construction being in the 1950s) and the now demolished (and rather compelling but architecturally unresolved) native bus terminus hub (c.1957). A final structure, which is itself a playful engagement with colour, form and elevational articulation, is located on the corner of Fitzsimmons Road. It has specifically designed elevations allowing it to be viewed and appreciated in the round.

This tradition of experimental modernism appears to have been overshadowed by politically nuanced public buildings funded by government such as Natalia and the Reserve Bank (both 1978) designed by B.R.H. Knappe. Corporation buildings were no longer designed internally but through external appointment specifically in the case of the Natal Society Library (Knappe, 1975) and the City Engineer's Building (Barnett and Sturrock, 1969). Indeed, Radford notes that this last design was the result of a competition launched in 1966, showing that the responsibility for

design and construction of civic-related buildings was no longer the aegis of architects employed within the city.<sup>9</sup>

### **Entrenchment of disruptive tradition as political norm**

The post-colonial city, particularly in Africa where racial segregation was so politically entrenched, suffers desuetude as the result of corruption, nepotism and clashing value systems. Pietermaritzburg is no different. However, the focus and origin of this urban decay is more complex than at face value and focuses not necessarily on clashing value systems as a result of racially polarised views on building and the association of modernist official buildings such as Natalia with authority and oppression, but more nuanced internecine battlefields of ethnic polarity instead.

In 1994, South Africa held its first democratic elections. Pietermaritzburg had been the political capital of the province until then and, as such, the Pietermaritzburg City Council was structurally propped up by the occasional requirements of the national parliament. After the first general elections in 1994, the political leadership of the province was taken over by Zulu nationalists in the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), and the provincial parliament was moved to Ulundi, the seat of the Zulu nation and erstwhile capital of the bantustan of KwaZulu. This shift unseated the leadership of the province and affected Pietermaritzburg as a city to a great extent. Not only was its role within the province questionable, but its association with people not aligned to the IFP, the African National Congress (ANC), meant that little political sanction for change or development was present. Even though this situation was reasonably short-lived, the seeds for desuetude

were sown: inner-city challenges started with the culling of institutional knowledge, replacing many old civil servants with new and not necessarily appropriately trained or experienced counterparts who were often politically aligned rather than role-competent.

### **Repercussions of tradition and disruption: the built environment as political playground**

In the early years of the current century, a local architect was commissioned to design the new bus terminus, an extension to the historic, classicist municipal police station (Brunskill, 1884) currently serving as the tourism hub, following his postmodern, glazed addition to Natal Society (now Bessie Head) Library. Both of these examples reveal a reactive response to a colonial structure (police station) and a modernist structure (library) associated with an architect who designed many buildings for the National Party government, including Natalia in close proximity. While conceptual ideas embracing transparency, and equal access for people of all races may be intimidated by the extensive use of glazing in these additions, such materials are inappropriate for a library as well as for a bus terminus waiting room in a city in which temperatures range from 0°C to 40°C. Similarly, the inclusion of a conical roof to both of these buildings is a trite attempt at contextualisation, misconceived social inclusion and cultural relativism.

Significantly, this inarticulate approach points towards a confusion of purpose; that in which the built environment, its stasis, its ruptures and reassessment are never considered processes of connection (given the need to disconnect). A long-term tradition of following a trickle-down Western building prac-

tice in the British mould particularly, followed by a formal, National Party government (apartheid) deployment of the International style, is intersected by a particularly short-lived and enthusiastic modernist practice in Pietermaritzburg in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This delivered a number of whimsical buildings, most of them silent given their utilitarian function (although their aesthetics were far from quotidian). Those buildings which still stand, display testimony to a brief period of critical thinking with respect to the production of utilitarian buildings with a considered design, and most importantly, those allocated to the 'other' such as the native bus terminus offices. In many ways they were resistant to the embedded and extant traditions, and in their deployment of considered aesthetics for buildings of the native administration in the city were in themselves a significant rupture. That they could stand as such, against the more contemporary and architecturally polarised buildings constructed in recent years such as additions to Bessie Head Library and the Pietermaritzburg tourism hub, is important. These last examples reveal that to intentionally position the buildings of the past as irrelevant, proves not only the frivolous and disingenuous politics of contemporary decolonised built environments, but that the determination to be 'different' from the 'tradition' is reactive and not architecturally considered within a broader, more extensive environment.

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NOTES

- 1 E.N. Meineke and G.M. Summers, *Municipal Engineering in Pietermaritzburg: The First Hundred Years* (Pietermaritzburg: City Engineer's Department, 1983).
- 2 Owen Jones, *Grammar of Ornament* (London: Day, 1856).
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- 7 P. du Plooy, 'African reaction to the beerhalls' in *Pietermaritzburg 1838–1988: A New Portrait of an African City* edited by John Laband and Rob Haswell (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Shuter & Shooter, 1988), pp. 142–3.
- 8 Dennis Radford, *A Guide to the Architecture of Durban and Pietermaritzburg* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002).
- 9 *ibid.*