
Multiplicities: Johannesburg the Urban Mediate

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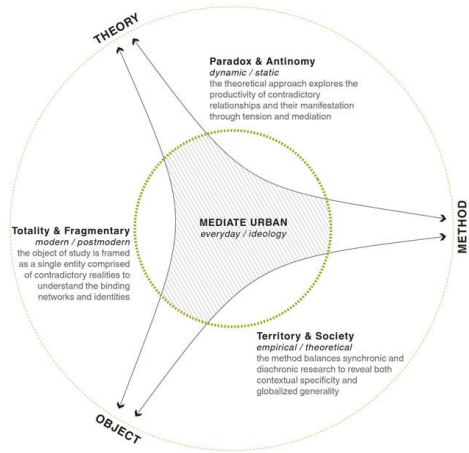
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In less than 130 years the city of Johannesburg has in fact been many different cities, both in ideology and reality. From its foundation and rapid growth following the discovery of gold, each identity was hastily built on top of the previous, leaving little time for sedimentation, such that the city's accumulated tensions and paradoxes remain at the surface. Johannesburg is a city of contradictions. Throughout its history it has simultaneously embodied ways of urban life and trends of development now considered common to either the global south or global north, but not typically both. Today, its unique cosmopolitanism and continued resistance to classification point to the need for an approach to urban theory which is not reductive and which, in an ever globalizing world, draws from the specificity and complexity of every city to be relevant to varied interpretations of urbanity.

Like Johannesburg, this research positions itself between popular urban paradigms of the competitive Global City and the chaotic Informal City and draws from Henri Lefebvre to frame the city as a contested space of mediation between homogenizing global forces of ideology and economy and individualizing local forces of everyday life. The research framework de-centres Apartheid as the primary analytical lens which has generally led to study focused on extreme and absurd conditions foreign to broader urban theory. The exceptional narratives of Johannesburg's compressed history are therefore explored within its complete trajectory and in relation

to underlying global trends such that the complexity of its urbanization may stand as a critical example of the processes of urban mediation.

A mediate condition occurs in both the passive and active sense and frames urban space as the site, agent and product of mediation. This process is not simply an amalgamation or blending of opposites, but one in which opposites are re-calibrated through interaction, thereby increasing rather than erasing differences. According to Kanishka Goonewardena, that which is immediate is never made mediate, or visible, until brought to light by an intermediary agent. Pure ideology is therefore immediate until confronted with everyday reality. Johannesburg is mediate because its urbanity, embodied in the multiplicity of its accumulated contradictions, has consistently refuted and redefined the ideologies through which it was, and still is, built.



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