

### **Pamila Gupta (University of the Witwatersrand)**

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### **Notes for a visual essay on the experience of Art Deco in South Africa**

For this visual essay, I am interested in thinking through the experience of Art Deco and locating it in South Africa. I take Geoff Dyer's inspiring and insipid (equally, at different turns) article entitled 'The Despair of Art Deco' (2003) with its focus on Art Deco in Miami, Florida as a counterpoint. I reflect on certain features and fixtures of Art Deco that I witnessed on three separate tours of cities in South Africa during 2018 (Springs in September, Joburg in October, and Durban in November). That I was accompanied by a changing group of South African urban planners, artists, and writers no doubt influenced the way I perceived and photographed these buildings. That I experienced Art Deco by mostly driving through each of these locations becomes my methodology for approaching African city-ness (Gupta 2018) and the way I understand these architectural sites of ruin, repair and renovation all layered upon each other (Gupta 2019). I also weave narrative bits of experience gleaned from an interview with the late Bill Freund in 2019, a historian of South Africa and a long-term resident of a heritage Art Deco building in Durban. My reading (of Art Deco) is also one of seeing architecture as a way to think through class and racial inequalities and (im)practicalities of day to day city living. Finally, I pose and ponder the question of how much persons 'live it [these buildings] without thinking it [Art Deco]' (Ndebele 2014).

