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The devil and his works: the owl in Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450-1516)

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This article interprets the work of early Netherlandish painter Hieronymus Bosch from the theological perspective of medieval Christian symbolism. The art of the early Netherlandish painter Hieronymus Bosch should be understood as part of the theological framework of the Renaissance (14th-16th centuries) and earlier Christian art. In Christian symbolism the owl stands for the devil and his works, and this article investigates the possibly of this interpretation for several works of Bosch. The owl makes a regular appearance on the Dutchman’s paintings and many in the Christian society of Bosch’s day were familiar with the religious implications of its presence. This bird of the night and darkness is a key to understanding Bosch’s thinking and the message of his paintings, which were largely produced for a religious setting, e.g. as altar paintings. Bosch painted in a society where the devil was seen as a real and present danger to any person. This article concludes that from the perspective of Christian symbolism and medieval Theology, the owl should not be taken as a traditional symbol of wisdom, but as representative of the devil and his schemes.

Key words: Hieronymus Bosch, owl, devil, Renaissance, symbolism

Die duiwel en sy werke: die uil in Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450-1516)
Hierdie artikel verstaan die kuns van die vroeg Nederlandse skilder Hieronymus Bosch vanuit die teologiese perspektief van middeleeuse Christelike simboliek. Die kuns van Hieronymus Bosch behoort verstaan te word binne die teologiese raamwerk van die Renaissance (14de tot 16de eeu) en vroeëre Christelike kuns. In Christelike simboliek verteenwoordig die uil die duivel en sy werke en hierdie artikel ondersoek die moontlikeheid van hierdie interpretasie by Bosch. Die uil maak dikwels sy verskyning op die skilderye van die Hollander en baie mense in die Christelike samelewingskontekse van Bosch was bekend met die godsdienstige implikasies van sy aanwesigheid. Die voël van die nag en duisternis is ‘n sleutel tot die verstaan van die boodskap van sy skilderye, wat in baie gevalle geskep is vir ‘n religieuse omgewing, bv. as altaarstukke. Boschs skilderye het ‘n samelewing wat die duiwel as ‘n persoonlike realiteit en ernstige gevaar gesien het. Hierdie artikel stel vas dat vanuit die perspektief van Christelike simboliek dit nie volhoubaar is om die uil in Bosch te verstaan as ‘n simbool van groot geleerdedheid nie. In die skilderye van Bosch staan die uil vir die duiewel en sy plannetjies om mense tot sonde te verlei.

Sleutelwoorde: Jeroen Bosch, uil, duivel, Renaissance, simboliek

Demons, evil creatures, weird and outright nightmarish and grotesque pictures dominate the work of the Dutch Renaissance painter Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450-1516). Why did he paint in this way? History does not suggest any medicinal reason, so what inspired him? The key to understanding Bosch might well be found in a multidisciplinary approach, by involving the field of Theology, in particular the religious symbolism of the Renaissance. This article will test this hypothesis for a bird that functions prominently in Bosch’s paintings, the owl. Is this a symbol of wisdom or rather something very sinister? Either interpretation has crucial implications for understanding Bosch’s works of art and the message he wished to portray (e.g. Jacobs 2000: 1009-1041). Whether the owl represents great learning, or presides over many a scene of sin and destruction, has great consequences for one’s interpretation of Bosch’s art. How tenable is the popular view that in the works of Bosch the owl is a representation of great learning? This view is not restricted to popular publications only, but has also been advocated in scientific journals, for instance by Elena Calas (1969: 451) who takes the owl as traditionally symbolizing both wisdom and philosophy, or, alternatively, as a slightly arrogant mocker. This interpretation is found as early as Benesch (1937: 260-264) who took a similar view and also wanted to recognize a notion of sadness, the wise owl who shakes his head, as it were. Calas
(1969: 450) saw the owl also in a positive light, at least with the moral high ground of a mocking bird. This article, however, will suggest that its presence is much more sinister than that of a wise observer shaking his head as he sees the follies of mankind.

Some of this has been recognized in the field of the Arts as well. Although this article doesn’t claim anything more than the application of Christian symbolism, it is helpful to notice that the connection between Satanic influence and the owl in the work of Bosch was already suggested by Dixon (1981: 109). Particularly since the publication of Paul van den Broeck’s thesis (1985: 19-135), on the owl as symbol for sin, several Bosch experts have started to appreciate the owl in Bosch’s art as a negative symbol.

Silver (2001: 630-632) sees the owl “ominous bird of night” and an ominous animal per excellence, a profoundly negative symbol in Bosch. He goes as far as to identify owls with demons when he discusses the 1516 triptych *the Hay Wain* (Silver 2001: 636).

Hartau (2005: 313) agrees:

> Ein negatives Omen ist insbesondere die Eule. Eulen sind in fast jedem Bild von Bosch anwesend; sie sind Lockvögel und Warnzeichen vor der Falschheit der Welt und der willentlichen Abkehr vom Christentum. [The owl in particular is a negative omen. Owls are present in nearly every picture of Bosch’s; they are decoy birds and danger warnings for the hypocrisy of the world and against wilful apostasy from Christianity.]

At any rate, without making the direct link to the owl, earlier contributions already recognized that the devil is an important theological theme in Bosch’s works of art (Traeger 1970: 298-331). This contribution from the field of Christian symbolism takes a subsequent step in interpreting the owl in Bosch’s art. It will test the thesis that the owl actually represents the devil personally and his subversive activity. From a historical perspective this seems natural as Renaissance artists operated in a religious framework of medieval Catholic theology, which included a belief in a personal Satan who was involved in everyone’s life, as well as in human history in general.

In antiquity the symbolism of the owl was already dubious and already a negative omen. In Christian symbolism, however, the owl becomes one of the most profound representations of the devil. Although he makes no reference to Bosch as such, Fergusson (1989: 22) in his standard work on symbolism in Christian art says that the owl was increasingly used by Christians to portray the devil in the fine arts:

> The owl, since it hides in darkness and fears the light, has come to symbolize Satan, the Prince of Darkness. As Satan deceives humanity, so the owl is said to trick other birds, causing them to fall into the snares set by hunters.

Owls are prominently used to lure and trap other birds. Jeroen Stumpel (2003: 150) concludes that this metaphor often denotes “the trapping of an individual, especially by the Devil.” He particularly applies this to the northern Renaissance painter Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), a contemporary of Bosch (Stumpel, 2003: 156): “To summarize, the identification of the devil as metaphorical fowler in Dürer’s engraving seems secure.”

That a personal role of the devil in the symbolism of the owl in Bosch maybe warranted, is indicated by Pinson (2005: 67): “the owl ensnaring other birds might also symbolize Satan.”

In this regard it is important to realize that the setting of Bosch’s paintings. Koerner (2004: 81) argued that in Bosch’s day, most paintings still had their place in Roman Catholic churches.
They drew their structure from that actual locality: “Artists labored to link the fictive spaces of their works to the real space of rituals in which those works functioned.”

So despite the popular view of the owl as a positive symbol of wisdom, there are dissenting voices. In the following section the viewpoint of medieval Christian symbolism of the owl as the devil and his work will be applied to several of Bosch’s paintings, to show that this is a plausible and valid interpretation of the works of this early Netherlandish artist. This may be illustrated from a selection of Bosch’s paintings: of the sin of envy in The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things (c. 1500); Hearing Forest and the Seeing Field (uncertain date); The Garden of Earthly Delights (c. 1490-1510); The Ship of Fools (c. 1490-1500); The Temptation of St Anthony (c. 1501); The Prodigal Son (started 1487, finished 1516) The Hay Wain (c. 1516); The Last Judgement (c. 1482) and The Conjurer (c. 1502). While this selection covers a variety of themes, its chronological diversity guarantees a measure of consistency in evaluating the Bosch’s use of the owl as a Christian symbol for the devil and his works.

Different approaches to Bosch

Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516) was the son of Anthonius van Aken (meaning “from Aachen”), but his father and grandfather were already citizens of ‘s Hertogenbosch in northern Brabant (presently southern Netherlands) at the time of his birth. His name derived from the church father Hieronymus (347-420), as parents in the Renaissance period often called their children after the saint on whose day the birth or baptism and name giving took place. Bosch signed a number of his paintings as “Jheronimus” Bosch, the medieval Latin form of his first name. He is also known as “Joen” (middle Dutch) or Jeroen Bosch. The surname points to his birth place, ‘s-Hertogenbosch (the duke’s forest/Bois le Duc), which is commonly called “Den Bosch”. Bosch was an orthodox Catholic and a prominent member of a local religious Brotherhood. He completed panels for their church of St. John which had been left unfinished by his father, who was a painter as well. In the 1480’s he married into a good family and inherited property (Osborne 1986: 149).

Recent years have seen the publication of several new books on Jerome Bosch, for instance Kurt Falk (2009), Lynda Harris (1996) and Richard Smoley (2007). Particularly authors who might be characterized as New Age sympathizers religiously and leaning towards conspiracy explanations of history otherwise, have shown a profound interest in the Dutch painter. The results make up for some fascinating reading: Bosch is ‘portrayed’ either as a member of a mystery religion, as one of the last Cathars, or as an covert promoter of the feminine divine who could teach Dan Brown (who promoted this recently in his best seller The Da Vinci Code) one or two lessons. Those who eagerly anticipate the next instalment about Bosch as the last Templar, who married a descendant of Mary Magdalene, should probably not continue to read this article. As background information it is important to be aware how Bosch is treated in popular literature, and sometimes even elsewhere, but from a historical and theological point of view there is hardly any warrant for taking these speculations seriously.

A more productive approach can be found in Dick Heesen’s (2010) “The secret message of Jerome Bosch”, published by the Jheronimus Bosch Art Center in the painter’s former hometown of Hertogenbosch and contains reproductions of all Bosch’s paintings. Heesen was a wealthy businessman who sold his machine factory to dedicate himself fulltime to the work of Bosch. He was a bit of a mystic in the best traditions of the Franciscans, a monastic order dating back to the Middle Ages. Surprisingly, to the postmodern reader in art circles at any rate, most of
this book consists of quotes from the Bible. For Heesen the key to understanding Bosch is to be found in Holy Scripture. His approach is admittedly less spectacular than bloodlines and grails, but far more productive if one takes Bosch’s historical context into account.

The world of Hieronymus Bosch was culturally that of the Renaissance, which was still heavily influenced by the Middle-Ages on a theological and spiritual level (cf. Dante’s Inferno). This was reflected by Bosch’s professional life. Many of his commissions were for churches, a common source of livelihood for artists in those days. Less than a century after Bosch’s passing, King Phillip II of Spain (1527-1598), one of the most obsessed Roman Catholic monarchs of all time, acquired many of Bosch’s paintings. They greatly appealed to his specifically religious appreciation of art. Philip was very much concerned with enforcing medieval Catholic concepts on all of his empire, which was one of the factors that led to the Dutch war of independence in 1568. Bosch’s art seemed compatible with the radicalized Roman Catholic perceptions of the Counter Reformation (from the second half of the 16th century), a movement Phillip represented and supported. From Heesen’s book it seems clear that the King of Spain may have overlooked some of Bosch’s messages, some of his paintings, like Ship of Fools, are highly critical of the role of the clergy. Nonetheless, the same can be said about loyal sons of the Church like Erasmus of Rotterdam. There is sufficient indication, and no evidence to the contrary, to suppose that Bosch was a loyal Catholic himself and a son of his time. Moral reforms were long overdue. In this, Bosch agreed with many of his contemporaries. In a world where the Vulgate Bible was widely read and preached from, in a society that was marked by Christianity in almost all aspects, it makes sense to understand Bosch in the light of his times and culture, rather than introducing popular 21st century fads and mystery hunts as key to the interpretation of his art.

The art language of the late Renaissance

For the owl, Heesen (2010: 85) also follows the much repeated view that the owl in the works of Bosch is a symbol of wisdom or great learning.

Otherwise, Heesen’s main conclusion is that the painter from Dutch Brabant criticized the corruption in the Roman Catholic Church and Christian society of his day, using biblical symbolism in his art. Although this is true of some of Bosch’s paintings, there is probably more to it. A weakness of Heesen’s book is that it doesn’t discuss different opinions, but merely provides his personal insights, showing what Bible references might apply. This makes for interesting reading, but is often subjective. All very legitimate, Heesen was an artist himself. However, for a more scientific understanding of Bosch one needs to take the historical context of Bosch and the religious symbolism of Christian Renaissance art into account. To understand an artist, you need to understand the language that he paints in, the conventions of the time. So to understand Bosch, knowledge of the Bible, familiarity with the history of the Western Church and the picture language of Renaissance painters is needed.

This may be illustrated with Bosch’s painting of the sin of envy in the The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things (c. 1500).

This work of art shows a gentleman with a falcon. Still this isn’t a scene about hunting, but a theological symbol of sin, not the sin of killing or animal rights, but one of the sins that every person in Renaissance Europe was familiar with. Without knowledge of theology and Christian doctrine it is almost impossible to grasp Bosch’s intentions. Because of secular tendencies, Western culture in the 21st century runs the risk of failing to understand Bosch’s biblical world of reference and his Renaissance art language. Everyone in Europe five hundred years earlier still
shared a common Christian civilisation with a common Latin language and Christian symbolism in many respects of society. All people in Bosch’s day were at least nominally Christian and were familiar with the seven deadly sins: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony. Dante Alighieri mentions them all in his epic poem *The Divine Comedy* (1309-1318). In Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales (c. 1390) they function as well, particularly in the *Parson’s tale*. However, arguably the best story about one of the deadly sins, greed, is found in one of the other stories on the road to Canterbury, the *Pardoner’s tale*. This pardoner was a clergyman of some sort who travelled the country to sell forgiveness of sins. “My tale is always one, and ever was, *radix malorum est cupiditas*,” are his legendary words. Greed is the root of all evils. This is a quote from the Bible (1 Timothy 6: 10). While the pardoner spoke up against the evil of greed continuously, he was committing it non-stop himself. Even for clergymen it was an easy sin to fall into.

Hieronymus Bosch painted the man with the falcon to portray the deadly sin of envy, one closely connected with greed as the last of the Ten Commandments: you shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbour. Why is a domestic falcon, a positive emblem in Christian symbolism, used in connection with this sin?

Fergusson (1989:18):

There are two kinds of falcons in religious symbolism: the wild and domestic. The wild falcon symbolized evil thought or action, while the domestic falcon represented the holy man, or the Gentile converted to the Christian faith. As the favourite hunting bird, the domestic falcon was often represented during the Renaissance in pageants and courtly scenes, and was often held by a page in the company of the Magi.

Jerome’s painting carries a positive message though, as he clearly uses a tamed falcon, used in game-hawking. It sits on the hunter’s glove, strapped on his arm, with a little cap. This shows that the falcon is tamed and domesticated. This signifies, from a theological perspective, that sin is under control. In other words, give the eyes no wrong desires to look at and let the hunter be in control. It is a mark of saints that they have “crucified the flesh” so in Renaissance paintings
the tamed falcon is often used to represent a saint or some pagan who converted to the Christian faith. Bosch’s message is encouraging for his fellow believers. It is not just a warning against the sin of greed, but by connecting it with a tamed falcon, he basically conveys the message: “Take heart, this thing of greed may be kept under control. You don’t need to be its victim.”

Another symbolism used in Renaissance art is nudity (Fergusson 1989: 49-50). Seldom, if ever, in the work of Bosch does it have a connotation of sex appeal. Quite the contrary, the arts distinguished between four different kinds of nudity (naturalis, temporalis, virtualis en criminalis), which all spoke a different message.

Nudity was applied to show man’s natural inability, vulnerability in a temporary existence on earth, his original innocence, and fallen state as sinful creature who realizes his nakedness and sinfulness in the sight of God, his Creator.

Bosch often makes use of the nudity criminalis, which has the association of shame, and temporalis, which has the reminder of mortality. This has a biblical background, as humanity only discovered its nakedness after it sinned and fell away from God (Genesis 3). After they had failed God, they first realized they were naked (nudity criminalis). Adam and Eve’s response to their crime was to try and cover up their nakedness with big leaves. The bible makes it clear that the consequence of their failure to observe God’s commandment was death. Their realization of nudity coincided with the awareness of guilt and them becoming subject to the curse of death (nudity temporalis).

The owl

For Renaissance painters in general, and Bosch in particular, the owl came first to mind as representation of the devil and his schemes (Fergusson 1989: 22), God’s adversary from the beginning. His advice resulted in worldly wisdom to the detriment of man’s spiritual state. When one looks at Bosch’s paintings that include owls from the perspective of Christian symbolism, much of it suddenly starts to make perfect sense.

Fergusson (1989: 22) states: “As Satan deceives humanity, so the owl is said to trick other birds, causing them to fall into the snares set by hunters.” The owl, par excellence, is the animal that hides under the cover of darkness when he goes about killing other birds and small animals. He stands for the power of darkness, which the New Testament contrasts with God’s power of light through Jesus Christ as spiritual light of the world. The devil owl tricked other birds into the fowler’s snare, resulting in bondage and death, actions that closely resembled Satan’s activities as a tempter. Fergusson allows for positive symbolism of the owl in scenes associated with the crucifixion of Christ (1989: 22):

The owl is sometimes seen in scenes of the crucifixion due to its positive attributes of wisdom and virtue, as such it represents Christ, who sacrificed himself to save man, “to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. . .” (Luke 1:7)

From a theological perspective this is an unlikely point of view, as the Gospels portray Jesus’ passion as a period of profound darkness, when the devil seems to be in full control. This is no coincidence, as Jesus himself had indicated that this was the hour of his adversaries “and the power of darkness” (Luke 22: 53). Although the later Christian symbolism of associating the owl with the devil was not yet practiced in the New Testament period, no reference to an owl is made in the New Testament, darkness is used to symbolize Satan. Jesus is portrayed as the light, so it would be illogical to connect him with the bird of the night. The three hours of darkness
over Calvary’s hill during the day of the crucifixion suggest that the owl operates in the power of darkness, overseeing the demise of the Son of God.

For Renaissance painters it all started in Paradise, where the devil caused the human race to fall away from God, but the light of God shone in the darkness, and the darkness was not able to overcome it (John 1:5).

The Hearing Forest and the seeing Field (of uncertain date)

One of Bosch’s drawings (Hearing Forest and the seeing Field/Owl in dead tree (date uncertain) shows an owl in a hollow dead tree. Living trees in the background and two flying birds of paradise suggest the Garden of Eden as setting. The tree of life is withered because of the schemes of the devil, which tempted Adam and Eve with the unreliable worldly wisdom that made them fall away from God (Genesis 3). A fox near the roots of the tree suggests further trickiness at the expense of others. Fergusson (1989: 18) sees the fox as a symbol of cunning and guile, and also as representing the devil. During the Renaissance this symbolic use of the fox was largely confined to book illustrations.

From a theological point of view it makes sense to understand the two human ears next to the tree at the level of the owl, to indicate that instead of preferring God’s tree of life in Paradise, mankind gave ear to the suggestions of the force of darkness. According to Fergusson (1989: 46) the human ear has come to be one of the symbols of the betrayal of Christ, which was preceded to Adam and Eve’s failure to give ear to God. As a result the tree is withered, Paradise lost, and human eyes lie scattered in the ground before the tree.

This latter symbolism is somewhat unusual, but has precedent in biblical imagery, both in the Old and New Testament. The fact that Hieronymus painted seven eyes on the earth combines two pictures from Scripture. Jesus is portrayed with seven eyes in the visions of St John the Divine (Revelation 5: 6). The fact that these eyes are scattered over the earth, present an Old Testament message of hope in Bosch’s otherwise sinister painting. These eyes recall 2 Chronicles 16:9: “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.”

While darkness seems in control and Paradise lost, there is hope in Christ who will strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

The owl in The Garden of Earthly Delights (c. 1490-1510)

The owl functions prominently on the famous triptych The Garden of Earthly Delights, which is usually dated between 1490 and 1510, the last twenty years of his life. It combines many symbols, but most prominently the owl and nakedness.

The panel on the left shows Adam and Eve in nudity naturalis, in their original state without sin together with Christ in the Garden of Eden. In the middle, made somewhat inaccessible by a pond and the underwater rocks on which it rests, stands a beautiful pink fountain. In church liturgy Pink symbolizes joy and happiness. In various churches it is used either for the Third or Fourth Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Joy at the impending birth of Jesus. It is an important theological theme that God already made provision for man’s sin by means of planning Christ’s sacrifice from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13: 8). Jesus also portrays himself as a fountain of living water (John 7:3 8).
Figure 3
*Hearing Forest ans the Seeing Field,*
uncertain date (source: public domain internet).

Figure 4
*The Garden of Earthly Delights,* c. 1490-1510 (source: public domain internet).
A pink fountain in Paradise foreshadows the source of life that the promised advent of Jesus will provide: a message of lingering hope, despite of mankind’s fall and subsequent expulsion from Paradise. The shape of the fountain resembles a tree, as it has branches and carries fruit. The hollow part near the bottom provides housing for the owl. It is the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17), the one tree Adam and Eve were not allowed to eat from. As in Genesis 2, they are not yet interested in its fruit and have only eyes for their relationship with Christ. This would soon change (Genesis 3).

The centre panel shows a wild procession of all sorts of naked people, obsessed with fruit. Two owls feature prominently, one to the left and one to the right. To the left, where the processions of men and animals seem to start, Adam embraces the owl, the source of all trouble. Adam and Eve walk, possibly quarrelling, but unable to halt the procession. The chain of events that the owl put into motion cannot be stopped. The owl’s counsel results in a self-obsessed partying crowd. To the right, however, it becomes clear that the eating of the forbidden fruit is going to have disastrous results. Adam and Eve are trapped inside a forbidden fruit, the same pink fruit visibly growing out of the tree fountain on the left-hand panel. They want to eat other fruit, want to continue in Paradise and enjoy its benefits, but they can’t because they have been swallowed, back to back, to tummy level by the forbidden fruit. They struggle, and their arms stick out, but a fat owl sits on top and presses the fruit firmly down. They are blinded by the devil and his wisdom, caught up in their own troubles. They are caught back to back, indicating that not only does sin blind their eyes to the real world, but also ruins human communication and relationships.

The third panel gives the result of this unwillingness to listen to God, symbolized by cut-off ears. Now all the green, the fruits and the beauty have disappeared. Instead darkness, fire, bondage and all sort of abuse abound, while demons sow death and destruction, as they instead of Christ take the human race by the hand to enjoy their dark world.

**The owl in The Ship of Fools (c. 1490-1500)**
The owl returns in one of Bosch’s other famous paintings: *The Ship of Fools* (Paris, c. 1500). This piece is possibly a fragment of a lost triptych which also included “Allegory of Gluttony” and “Lust” (which is the lower part of the Ship of Fools wing) and “Death and the Miser” (the other outer wing). It may have been inspired by Sebastian Brant’s famous satire *Das Narrenschiff*, published by Bergmann in 1494, which popularity and influence of which were not limited to Germany. It was published with 114 woodcuts. A Latin version by Jacobus Locher (1497) rivalled its popularity and in 1509 Alexander Barclay’s loosely imitated the German poem. All expressed the idea that there was something seriously wrong with the morals of the Christian society of their day, not least in the Church. Jerome Bosch laborates on this theme.

*The Ship of Fools* shows a small boat that is going nowhere, as its crew is eating, drinking and singing. Members of the clothe are portrayed very prominently in the centre: a nun playing the lute with a monk opposite her at an improvised table. Some men folk swim naked around the boat and desire a share of the spoils. Even the only oarsman is more interested in the food dangling before his face. The bowsprit appears to be a tree, growing out of the ship’s front. Sitting on its main branch is the jester, complete with foolscape and sceptre. Not surprisingly, he is drinking. Unlike Brant’s ship, which was packed with jesters, this is a boat carrying ordinary people who behave like fools without the dress. For Bosch the jester on the bow is sufficient
indication of the nature of the enterprise. The jester also surfaces in the Seven deadly Sins, where the fool is chastised with a large wooden spoon for the sin of extravagance (luxuria).

Like the bowsprit, the mast appears to be a tree as well. Two thirds up, with the ship’s flag, a roasted fowl of some sort is tied to the mast. A man with a knife, attracted by the prospect of meat, is trying to bring it down. In the Dutch vernacular of Hieronymus Bosch “hanging the roasted cock on display” (De gebraden haan uithangen) means to eat and drink excessively. It is not only a fool’s enterprise (jester) but also a display of debauchery (roasted cockerel). The dual symbolism becomes triple in nature if one looks higher up.

On top of the mast, taken largely out of sight by the leaves and branches, sits the owl and looks down on the festivities. It is a bunch of fools drifting aimlessly at sea, only interested in partying. It is a fool’s enterprise (jester), debauchery (roasted cockerel) and inspired by the devil (owl). As in Paradise, he used the attraction of food. In the beginning he persuaded the first people of the human race to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, inviting God’s curse upon them and their descendants. In the mind of Bosch it was food then, it continues to be food now. The seven deadly Sins shows this as well. While gluttony is being portrayed it is again the owl who watches from the darkness, while a woman serves up a roasted cockerel.

The temptations of the devil come to all. In The Ship of Fools the clergy and the common people are adrift on the same ship. As Bosch often uses Adam and Eve in his art, - and the theme of Paradise and Fall resonates in the background of this painting -, it is not unlikely that the nun represents Eve, playing the tune, while the men folk all sing and focus on the next bite of food. Like Bosch’s Garden of Earthly Delights, the Ship of Fools is a powerful combination of theological thoughts. Like the former it combines the symbolism of the tree, the owl, food, and, although less prominently, nakedness.

Figure 5
The Ship of Fools, c. 1490-1500 (source: public domain internet).
The owl in *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (1501)

Another painting with a religious theme, his triptych portraying *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (Lisbon), contains the owl as well. It tells the story of the desert monk Anthony the Great (c. 251–356), overcoming temptations in the wilderness and elsewhere. One of his struggles was with gluttony, an ever present weakness. To symbolize this as a continuing temptation, particularly for someone living on a monk’s diet, artists often portray Anthony in the company of a swine. Bosch does this too. On the centre panel the sin of gluttony is symbolized by a man in black with a pig snout. He carries a lute and leads a doggy with foolscap. Just as in *The Ship of Fools* it is food and music that are considered to be problematic. In the light of the previous paintings unsurprisingly, an owl sits on the head of the pig-man. It is again the devil who inspires from the top, whether on the top of the mast or pushing the fruit down to cause darkness in the life of Adam and Eve.

![Figure 6](source: public domain internet)

This has a profound biblical background. It is the logic of the devil: “Let us eat and drink, because tomorrow we die!”, as the apostle Paul reminded his flock (1 Corinthians 15:32). It is also reminiscent of a Dutch proverb that Bosch may have been familiar with: “One cannot keep birds from flying over, but one is able to keep them from making a nest on your head. (“*Je kunt niet voorkomen dat er vogels over je heen vliegen, wel dat ze op je hoofd nestelen.*”) This basically signifies that it is impossible to avoid the occasional wrong thought, but dwelling on sinful ideas is another matter entirely.

The owl in *The Prodigal Son* (started 1487, finished 1516)

The owl returns when Bosch paints the *Prodigal Son* (Rotterdam), a parable told by Jesus (Luke 15:11-32) about a man who wastes his inheritance and end up with the lowly job of looking after swine (unclean animals for Jews) in a foreign country. In the end he decides to go back to his father and plead for mercy.
Bosch has painted the son as he is on his way to his father, leaving his sinful life behind. It is symbolized by the inn in the background, which features revelling women and a pole on top with a wine-can. On the yard are the swine, but he is also leaving those behind. On the branch of a tree, overlooking the scene, sits an owl.

This time the bird is not sheltered by leaves. Neither is he confidently resting while things go his way, like he did in all the previous paintings mentioned. Here he is in full view. The owl even stoops down and looks at the departing man, but there is nothing he can do to prevent him from leaving. The man’s sinful life was inspired by the devil, but now the latter has to let go. The boy is going back to his father. It is beautiful religious symbolism. Like Bosch’s work on Jesus’ life it is completely devoid of the weird and demonic creatures, that some of his other paintings have become famous for.

![Image of The Prodigal Son](image)

**Figure 6**
The Prodigal Son, started 1487, finished 1516 (source: public domain internet).

The owl above *The Haywain* (c. 1516)

In *The Haywain* (farm wagon or cart), Bosch’s familiar biblical panorama of history and future is summed up. Mankind has left Paradise because of disobedience (left), is inclined to a vain life of sin (centre) and will suffer the consequences of the allegiance with the devil (right).

The centre piece is significant. It shows the human race chasing after the vainglory of the hay wagon. While an angel is looking up to Jesus and praying that it all might be over soon, people on earth follow the hay wagon, which is drawn by all sorts of demons. All sorts of sin, including quarrels and knifings, abound. On top of the hay a tree with a pole sticking out on the left side, flagging the familiar wine can. On the right and higher up a branch of the tree protrudes and shows the owl at ease in all its glory. Again, Bosch is showing the devil and his schemes. Both the world and the Church are caught up in this. While demons and men are piping and playing, the Christian king and the Pole are among the most prominent followers of the wagon. It is the nuns who are gathering more hay while a fat member of the cloth lifts another beaker of
spiritual strength, wine or beer, to his mouth. As in the Ship of Fools and The Temptation of St Anthony, a profoundly negative view of the Church in his day transpires.

Figure 7
The Haywain (c. 1516) (source: public domain internet).

The owl in The Last Judgement (c. 1482)

The owl is not a later introduction in the work of Bosch. Many of the symbols and theological themes of his later works are already found in the The Last Judgement (Vienna), also a triptych.

The panel on the left shares many of the features of The Garden of Earthly Delights. Mankind is created, falls into sin and loses his habitation in Paradise. The initial scene is one of nudity naturalis, with Christ in the Garden, but it ends in sin and shame: nudity criminalis. A dragon-like serpent hands the forbidden fruit to Eve, before she passes it on to Adam. On a branch in a tree not far away, but out of sight for Adam and Eve, sits the owl. Unlike his uneasiness about the converted man in The Prodigal Son, he is now completely relaxed and upright: things are going his way.

The results of the devil’s schemes become visible in The Last Judgement, as the angels blow the trumpet and Christ returns to judge a world that is struck by darkness. The evil creatures crawl all over the place. Naked people suffer tortures of diverse kinds as the demons have it their way on earth.

On the right panel it is time for Satan’s roll call. Hell is burning, but the remains of earth on the other side of the river of Death as well. Two thirds up on the painting, the owl presides over the intake of souls from the other side. It is the devil’s inspiration that brought them there. They reap the fruit of their actions. Lower down countless people are in hell already and others brought to the entrance by demons. As their names are not found in the book of life they receive entry. A dark lord, who seems to be in control of the procedures, lists the sins of the newcomer
and hands people over to the black dragon at the entry of the pit. Right above him, completely relaxed, sits the owl on his nest. He is at rest and at home here. Now things really go his way. The devil you know!

Figure 8
*The Last Judgement* (c. 1482) (source: public domain internet).

**The owl in The Conjurer (c. 1502)**

Among the six paintings that have been attributed to Bosch, but that are disputed, one shares the significant symbolism with the owl: *The Conjurer* (Saint-Germain-en-Laye).

Figure 9
*The Conjurer* (c. 1502) (source: public domain internet).
The magician keeps the attention of the public spellbound, while his assistant is cutting or emptying purses in the crowd. From a little basket attached to the conjurer’s belt, the owl watches. The devil and his works are a present reality in everyday life.

Conclusion

Theology and Christian symbolism make a valuable contribution to understanding Hieronymus Bosch and his paintings. The symbolic use of the owl, which was discussed in his article, shows that it is important to evaluate an artist in the context of his own time and the imagery and doctrines of his religion. Hieronymus Bosch was a profoundly religious person and should be understood from the theological framework and symbolism of the late Renaissance and earlier Christian art. As such this bird of the night and darkness is a key to understanding Bosch’s thinking and the message of his paintings. From eight examples it has become clear that Christian symbolism works for Bosch. In each painting the notion that the owl stands for the devil and his works, provides a valuable interpretation that does justice to the context and contents of the work and its author. Bosch was an orthodox Roman Catholic and member of a local religious brotherhood and for him and his contemporaries the devil was a real person who was involved in their lives and not a mere force. Bosch wanted the Christians who saw his paintings in church, clergy and laity alike, to recognize the devil’s presence and negative influence on their lives, society in general and particularly on the Church of his day. The owl was a familiar appearance: a solemn warning against the devil and his works.

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This paper considers the legacy of historicism and debates within modern/post-modern historiography – especially in the work of Keith Jenkins, Michael Podro and Hayden White – and discusses how these crucial perspectives have influenced the field of architectural studies and design. A leading question of the paper concerns the use of history in design, as well as the relation of architecture to tradition, modernity and post-modernity.

Key words: architecture, historicism, postmodern historiography

Argitektuur, historisisme en historiografie
Hierdie artikel beskou die nalatenskap van historisisme en debate in modern/postmoderne historiografie – veral in die werk van Keith Jenkins, Michael Podro en Hayden White – en bespreek hoe hierdie kritieke perspektiewe die veld van argitektuur en ontwerp beïnvloed het. ’n Leidende vraag in die artikel hou verband met die gebruik van geskiedenis in ontwerp, asook die verwantskap tussen argitektuur tot tradisie, moderniteit en postmodernisme.

Sleutelwoorde: argitektuur, historisisme, postmoderne historiografie

This paper considers questions of historiography as applied to architecture, and contemporary debates over historicism. The paper opens with a discussion of the literary nature of historical study before moving to consider, and criticise, various ways in which narrative forms and concepts – in particular the concepts of the origin, of the emergence and of plurality – have contributed to our understanding of architectural history.

At the start, it is necessary to consider the following three words: ‘history’, ‘historicism’ and ‘historiography’. First, for the purpose of this paper, a distinction should be made between the past – namely that which happened – and the historical account, be it oral or written, what attempts to capture, preserve and/or to criticise that self-same past. From this it may be observed that history is a representation of the past and not the past per se; that various forms of historical representation are possible; and broadly speaking it is possible to distinguish between grand historical narratives (i.e. ‘H’istory, with a capital ‘H’) that aim to capture the large picture from a singular perspective, versus more situated or micro histories (i.e. ‘h’istory, with a lower case ‘h’) that are rather more focused and less sweeping in their scope – a distinction to which the paper will return. Second, the term historicism is commonly used to designate the academic study of the past, a study that hopes to know the past without bias – to know it the way it was. ¹ Third, the word historiography refers to the methods that inform historical study as well as the corpus of historical narratives – texts that often differ according to their methods, perspective and/or literary approach.

With these definitions in mind, it may be observed that historicism, in its modern guise has been an attempt to establish a correct representation of the past, but is this really possible? Can the historian/critic, metaphorically speaking, ‘travel’ back in time, via academic study, to retrieve the past and thereby represent it, without bias, in a manner that is intelligible for our time? Keith Jenkins’ book The Postmodern History Reader (1997) provides an excellent collection of readings that introduce contemporary debate over the tradition of historicism – debate that is largely hinged upon a ‘modern’ defense of the claims of historicism versus a
postmodern skepticism toward the same. An excellent feature of this book is the way Jenkins has compiled essays from leading thinkers in the field, and various sides of the debate are richly represented. Indeed an encounter with this book will likely change one’s understanding of history, irrespective of which side of the debate one wishes to support.

In a nutshell, the postmodern position, as championed by Jenkins himself, thinks that a truly objective history is not possible: that historical study always was and always will be aligned to some form of ideological bias, and that such invariably issues from the embedded, present centered interests of the author, his/her ideological perspective. Returning to the former definition of the word history, Jenkins distinguishes between the past as a set of actual occurrences, preserved via evidence, and the historical narrative – or literary structure – that is used to tell the story of what happened (Jenkins 1991: 5-8). This distinction is important because the existence of evidence does not necessarily mean that there is a story line that connects and explains the so-called ‘facts’. A leading point that Jenkins makes in the introduction to his Reader (1997) is that historians have tended to conflate empiricism with realism – where empiricism is concerned with establishing the facts, and where realism is concerned with an account of what really happened. Paraphrasing McLennan, Jenkins states:

empiricism is not entailed by realism. It only appears as if empiricism is a property of realism rather than just being contingently connected on occasion. Therefore from the acceptance of the ontological actuality of the past no epistemology or method of any kind whatsoever necessarily follows … [and later he adds] … empiricism as a method, just cannot account for the significance it gives to the selection, distribution and weighting of “the facts” in finished narratives. The facts cannot themselves indicate their significance as though it were inherent in them, (Jenkins 1997: 10).

In other words, it’s through empirical study that historians establish the so-called ‘facts’ of the case. But it is through narrative, or story telling, that the facts are connected and the assumption of a ‘realism’ is achieved. Realism is the construal of language, and does not issue, directly, from the collecting of historical information. As Hayden White explains,

[there is an inexpungeable relativity in every representation of historical phenomena. The relativity of the representation is a function of the language used to describe and thereby constitute past events as possible objects of explanation and understanding. (Ibid: 392)

The conflation of empiricism with realism is convenient, because it precisely obscures the narrative structure and interpretive devices of the historical account. Without doubt, history is a narrative, and narrative relies upon language to tell its story, the implications of which, however, have not always been well considered. In what way, then, does narrative affect the portrayal of history? There are three leading points that are worth considering in this regard, namely: selecting and combining; the status of evidence; and interpretation, perspective and theory.

Selecting and combining

It’s simply not possible to write an account of everything that ever happened, which is due to what might be called the near infinite density of human life, the web of thought, imagination and deed. The only reliable way to ‘capture it all’ would be to hit rewind and replay the entire saga all over again – and, of course, as much is not possible. Yet – and this is the really important point – even if a replay were possible, it would not, in any case, produce a comprehensible, digestible understanding of the past. The blunt truth of the matter is that the past, in order to be rendered comprehensible, must be represented through a history that simplifies and domesticates the very thing it claims to capture.
The historian must gather as much information as she can find – and there will always be evidence that is missing – the historian must select the ‘facts’ that she wants to report on and finally she must construct a narrative that connects them. Two levels of interpretation are already at stake here. To select a piece of evidence is already to judge the status of its significance, and this significance is further qualified by the way the narrative connects it with other significant bits of evidence. As a consequence it may be noted, that the import of the ‘evidence’ is really the sense that the narrative brings to bear upon it – because the narrative is, precisely, the act of selecting and combining.

This realisation leads to an interesting question as to what constitutes a historic event. For sure things happen, indeed many things happen all the time. But, when it comes to the narrating of history, some occurrences are deemed to be more important than others, and thereby acquire the status of an event. Events are marked by dates, and get concretised through images and a verbal description that naturalise them. Yet it’s often possible to tell the ‘same’ story – or, more or less so – through a different selection of events. Indeed it’s even possible, broadly speaking, to share the same ideological commitment whilst telling the story in a different way. From this it may be concluded that it’s the historians’ narrative that confers the status of an event upon what happened, and not the other way round. And, this is not to say that history is mere fiction. To be sure, the literary construal features in historical narratives, but this is not the same as saying that a historian is free to lie about the evidence that is available to him – the invention of lies exists in another category, entirely.

The status of evidence

Regarding ‘facts’ and of evidence, there can be no doubt that there is a historical substance in the form of archaeology, photographs, eye witness accounts, diaries, documents and texts of various kinds. And one might argue that the ‘facts’ at least are given, and that it is merely the interpretative properties of the historian’s narrative that allows for bias – and this is hardly an unusual view. Yet this assumption is not entirely clear. In many cases the most reliable, or at least the most informative forms of evidence, exist in written form. Let’s say that one wishes to reconstruct the plans of a ruined building. Archaeological remains are ‘definite’ but fragmentary and therefore somewhat indeterminate – reconstruction would most likely require a fair degree of guesswork. A written description of the building, by someone who saw it in its entirety before its ruin might be more informative. But the hitch here is that the written description already takes the form of a narrative, and thus is already affected in terms of what was observed regarding the linguistic structure of selecting and combining. In poststructural terms, it may be argued that there are no ‘pre-discursive’ facts, because what might be call evidence is already constituted within a discursive field of deemed significance, and therefore of prior interpretation. Once again this does not mean to say that a historian may invent his own evidence, and one would expect good academic histories to be the kind that are open to the unforeseen, narratives that are deeply empirical in their attention to the fine details of all known forms of evidence.2

Interpretation, perspective and theory

These considerations help to demonstrate that histories are truly interpretive, and by the same token, histories are also projective of a certain way of thinking, of a certain perspective on things. To illustrate this point, one may consider the ‘official history’ of the bridge that was built across a valley – a triumph for the nation, and a paradigm of ‘humanistic’ ingenuity. But
conveniently ignored in this official account is the misery of the builders who risked their lives to build the bridge – indeed many of whom died in the process, died to build a bridge who’s primary purpose is to carry the goods that have made those with wealth all the more wealthy still. If told from the perspective of the builders/the workers, the narrative is likely to change. And the point here is not merely that the one view is right and the other wrong – as if we could ever finally know – but rather that the social is plural, and often times is conflicted to the core, such that in many cases the social field cannot be represented through the motions of a singular narrative. Histories are written from different vantage points and with the intention to achieve different forms of understanding such that a leading question that must be asked is “a history for whom”? It is here that the big questions of gender, of race and of class become relevant. Histories are positioned just as they are positioning, and naturally, one should aim to open ones mind and become more attentive to the historical perspectives that issue from others. Historical perspectives are also informed by theory – that is the methods and kind of approach that are used to inform a particular view. As Jenkins so aptly puts it, “In the end history is theory and theory is ideology and ideology just is material interests” (Jenkins 1991: 19).

**Common emplotments of art ‘H’istory**

If histories are constructed through narrative, then the question emerges as to what kinds of plot – emplotments – are used by histories of architecture and of art? Admittedly this question – as to the emplotment – seems, intuitively somewhat abstract and removed from the reality of history. And yet, oddly, the study of emplotments allows for more fidelity than is the case with the substance of history. This is so because the emplotment is the feature of the historical text that is, quite literally speaking, present to hand, whereas the substance of the historical narrative is precisely what has been lost to the past. And, it clearly is the case that certain styles of emplotment have had a profound influence upon the historiography of art. In this respect, this paper shall now consider the well-known concepts of *period style* and of *movement*.3

What might be called ‘traditional’ histories of art – following the lead of early art historiography, for example the work of Winckelmann or Hegel – are mostly histories of style. A period, which is delimited by clearly established dates, is said to possess a style. And, there is a relation between the more individual style of an artist and the period style that he or she exemplifies. Indeed, in many cases, individual styles are deemed to be a variance of the period style. And a correlate to this is that the aesthetic definition of the period style may be used to distinguish artistic genius – because as it turns out, not all artists are equally representative of the period style. This narrative makes for sensational reading, and it’s not the author’s intention to say that this approach is without merit. But is this description adequate, or entirely true?

An artistic period is also, often deemed to have an inner motion, a certain compulsion toward a perfection and a fall. The cycle normally goes like this: an early stage, a mature stage, a late stage and finally a decadent stage which give impetus to a new style, and the entire cycle repeats once again. In much art and architectural history it appears that artistic expression is pre-determined to follow this cycle, or some version of it. An important aspect of the cycle is to define the high point – an event marked by a date and an aesthetic character – the point of greatest genius up to which each successive work slowly aspires, and after which everything slowly declines. Once again this makes for a sensational read and it’s not the authors’ intention to say that this approach is without merit. But again, is this description adequate, or entirely true?
Jenkins notes:

Even the most empirical chronicler has to invent narrative structures to give shape to time and space ... And because stories emphasize linkages and play down the role of breaks, of rupture, then, concludes Lowenthal, histories as known to us appear more comprehensive that we have any reason to believe the past was, (Jenkins 1991: 13).

And here lies the leading problem with interpretations of period style and of movement, namely the blind spots that are exorcised out of the narrative framework. Why must a building that arrives prior to the high point be appreciated purely in terms of what it supposedly led up too, rather than being appreciated in terms of some inner merit, or upon some other terms entirely? Furthermore, the narrative of ‘good’ style tends to ignore works that contradict the assumed motion of history, and the resulting account is all too often prone to a censoring moralism. And so here lies the big question: how much of the historical narrative corresponds to the actuality of the past, and how much of the narrative is a construct of the historians’ perspective, his present centered interests and ideologies?

History, criticism and design

Having sketched, in broad terms, the argument for the narrative properties of historical study, it is prudent to consider what is perhaps a more fundamental question: namely why historical studies are relevant for architectural design, and in doing so, this opens a discussion of history in the upper and lower case – i.e. ‘H’istory versus ‘h’istory.

![Figure 1](image)


The study and criticism of history is important for architectural studies because histories are written to explicate or to vindicate a certain mode of practice. Histories both inform design and lend authority to the practice of design, such that these three history/theory/practice are thoroughly intertwined. Albrecht Dürer’s woodcut of 1538, ‘A man drawing a recumbent woman’, depicts an artist who draws from a model, with the aid of a grid – i.e. a scientific/descriptive device (see figure 1). This work, obviously, may be interpreted in various ways. For the purpose of this paper, however, this work is selected to illustrate an architects’ investment in the past. Now there are at least two important ways in which history may serve as an artistic/
productive model for architecture. Firstly, in many cases new designs are derived, or are informed by deviations and transformations of past designs. History is a model, and architects draw from the model that is history – history is on the couch. Secondly, the valences, techniques and forms of knowledge – including historical knowledge and judgment – that enable practice are, themselves, derived or transformed in relation to the past. With respect to Dürer’s woodcut, the describing grid is a projection from the present, one that is already informed by former projections that have occurred in the past – i.e. an architect draws with instruments that are themselves drawn from the history-as-model of the past. Historical construction is also on the couch.

History is almost like architecture’s ‘science’ in that it provides the techniques and forms of knowledge that are required for design, as well as the substance of aesthetic re-imagination. And since imagination is deeply embedded in the flux of time, the so-called ‘critical’ and ‘self-anointed’ practice of architectural criticism is more like one giant group psycho-therapy session with history on the couch. Architecture has always involved itself in a conversation with the past – to repeat or to deviate from historical precedent. And for which reason it is helpful to consider two limit conditions that have profoundly influenced architectural historiography, conditions that are tied to constructions of ‘H’istory with a capital ‘H’ – these being histories of the sweeping and aggrandising kinds. Hence the paper now moves to consider the assumed authority of the ‘origin’ which issues from the past, and the assumed authority of ‘progress’ which projects into the future.

An assumed authority of ‘origin’

It is well known that western classicism was modeled upon Roman copies of Greek architecture, and for which reason the writings of Vitruvius – *The Ten Books of Architecture* – were deemed to be a primary influence, and an originary form of evidence. The genius of Renaissance architecture was modeled on Greek origins – and the assumed authority of the origin is a theme that is well known to architectural history. Once more, in the 18th century, the so called Age of Enlightenment, Marc-Antoine Laugier’s mythical account (Laugier 1955) of the ‘little rustic hut’ (see figure 2), spoke of the primitive origin of architecture, in an attempt to ground a contemporary architectural theory on the premise of reason and of nature. Laugier’s rationalism of the ‘origin’ is one that would have far reaching effect, in a line of flight that connects 18th century rationalist classicism (for example Claude Perrault’s East façade of the Louvre, 1667-74), to the rationalist functionalism of the Modern Movement (for example the Fansworth House, by Mies van der Rohe, 1945-51), and is one that has had a profound bearing upon our recent past. The authority of an historical origin is here, firmly ‘on the couch’.

In the authors’ estimation, there is nothing inherently ‘wrong’ with an artistic imagination derived from a concept of the origin. But, a call to an exclusive and exclusionary authority of the origin, one that is invariably linked to the pejorative grand theses of Progress, of Nation and/or of Kin, is deeply disturbing. In his essay, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, Michel Foucault presents a far-reaching critique of the historiography of the origin. Foucault notes three discursive traits – or ideological features – of the origin, namely: one, its ‘attempt to capture the exact essence of things’ (and in Laugier we have the assumption of an ‘inherent’ rationality of architecture, which of course is also to exclude other equally important qualities); two, the origin precedes the fall (again, in Laugier, we must note his worry over the caprice of 18th century design, and his attempt to ground a rational theory that may answer to this troubled condition), three, and
linked to the other two is the notion of the origin as ‘the site of truth’ (lastly, in Laugier, the rustic hut is the singular, paradigm of architectural purity and of truth).

Foucault uses Nietzsche to untie the knot of this discursive trinity, hence regarding the first point, the essence of the origin, Foucault writes:

if the genealogist … listens to history, he finds that there is ‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence … What is found at the historical beginning is not the inviolable identity of the origin; it is the dissension of things. It is disparity. History also teaches to laugh at the solemnities of the origin (Rabinow 1984: 78 – 79).

Regarding the second point, the origin that precedes the fall, Foucault writes, “… historical beginnings are lowly, not in the sense of modest or discrete like the steps of a dove, but derisive and ironic, capable of undoing every infatuation.” (Ibid. 79) And finally, regarding the third point, the origin as ‘the site of truth’, “[f]rom the vantage of an absolute distance … the origin makes possible a field of knowledge whose function is to recover it, but always in a false recognition due to the excesses of its own speech. The origin lies at a place of inevitable loss …” (Ibid. 79).
In other words the selection of an origin – one that is arbitrarily lifted from the flux of time – sets out the logic for the history that will discover it. The logic of the origin is circular. And so finally from Foucault, “[t]he genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of the origin, somewhat in the manner of the pious philosopher who needs a doctor to exorcise the shadow of his soul.” (Ibid. 80)

An assumed authority of ‘progress’

A further limit condition is that of a flight into the future, and its incumbent denial of the past. In Towards a New Architecture, Le Corbusier proclaims the necessity of a new architecture for a new era, one that requires a fundamental break from the past. As Le Corbusier puts it:

A great epoch has begun. There exists a new spirit. Industry, overwhelming us like a flood which rolls on toward its destined ends, has furnished us with new tools adapted to this new epoch, animated by the new spirit … If this new fact be set against the past, then you have a revolution (Le Corbusier 1931: 6-7).

With Le Corbusier ‘the machine’ is proposed as the model for architectural aesthetics – the machine, rather than history, is now on the couch (see figure 3). Architectural modernism in its so-called ‘Heroic Phase’ may appear to reject history, but the modernist project was in fact steeped in historicist assumptions. To be modern is to reject tradition, and to do so requires, precisely, a theoretical conception of historical process, a conception of progress. Modernism requires antiquity, just as rationality requires myth and just as modern man requires the so-called ‘savage’ with whom he may choose to do battle as his ‘other’.

Figure 3
Le Corbusier, photograph of an airplane from Towards a New Architecture (source: Le Corbusier 1931:105).
In his recent book, *Histories of the Immediate Present*, Anthony Vidler (Vidler 2008) provides an illuminating discussion of the historiography that would, eventually, be enlisted in support of the modern movement. He notes that the intended break with the past required a historical narration of the before and the after. It is one that required at least three lines of thought, namely: first, that modernist history/theory had to demonstrate the fundamental antiquity of the past; second, that modernist history/theory had to construct narratives of the pre-history of modernism to show how it had emerged from its past; and third, according to Vidler, modernist history/theory had to redraw a notion of progress via a repertoire of formal and spatial motifs (Ibid.). Vidler also notes at least two stages in the historiography of the modern movement. An early stage from about 1930 – 40, represented by Pevsner, Hitchcock, Johnson and Gideon, where the leading notions of a fundamental break with the past were developed. And a later generation, post 1950, represented by Kaufmann, Rowe, Banham and Tafuri – the subject of his book – historians who followed a more self-consciously critical history of the modern, one that pushed back in time linking modernity with its various pre-figurations in the past. In so doing history was effectively re-cooperated for modernism – a history presented as the authoring *telos* of modern progress (Ibid.).

It is helpful to return to Foucault – in *Nietzsche, Genealogy and History* – who locates the assumed promise and authority of progress in the principle of “emergence, the moment of arising … Emergence is thus the entry of forces; it is their eruption, the leap from the wings to center stage, each in its youthful strength” (Ibid. 83 – 84). And then he follows with an insightful critique of the progressive posturing’s of the emergence, “… no one is responsible for an emergence; no one can glory in it, since it already occurs in the interstice. In a sense, only a single drama is ever staged in this ‘non-place’, the endlessly repeated play of dominations” (Ibid. 85). Hence for Foucault, progress, ironically involves a repeating of the same, the renewal of a traumatic drama. Indeed these words from Foucault, and our recent past bares this out. I think we know full well about the failed and conflicted utopias of the modernists, and of the postmodernists.

So, in summary, there is this pair of ‘limit’ conditions – limits of the origin and of progress – both of which have forcefully impressed themselves upon architectural ‘H’istory, transforming the flux of time into a fully determined *telos* of events. Although potentially innocent within themselves, these notions of origin and of progress have, inevitable twined with grander theses that result in a disturbing form of blindness, and an inflexible law of force. At first glance it might be assumed that the authority of the origin and of progress are opposed, for where the former pushes back into the past, the latter projects forward into the future. Yet this is not so, for on the contrary we may observe that the value of the origin, and the flight of progress support each other. This is so because the projection of progress requires a break from the past, and that break is invariably captured through the determinate logic of the origin. And in which case ‘H’istories (spelt with a capital ‘H’) of the origin and of progress are nothing but the circularity of narcissism, whose real interest is to preserve the perspectives of the present.

**Approaching history in the lower case**

To recapitulate, history is a constructed body of knowledge about the past. History doesn’t happen, it gets written, and it should be noted that the narratives, methods and convictions that produce history have changed through time – hence the opportunity to study a history of history, which has been considered here through discussing the limits of the origin and of progress. That said, this paper now considers the recent turn to ‘h’istory in the lower case – this being more
focused, detailed histories, the kind that attempt to answer to the censoring circularity of upper case history.

Michael Podro’s fascinating three-stage account of the development of German Art historicism, from his celebrated book The Critical Historians of Art (Podro 1982), is insightful for approaching this topic. The line of Podro’s enquiry in his book extends over roughly a century of European art, from 1827 – 1927, and in doing so he presents a convincing case, one that makes for a fascinating build up to the position that informs much criticism today. In the first chapter of his book Podro ventures his suggestion of a three-stage development of art history, which he develops as follow. The first stage, says Podro, “accommodated alien art only as a deviant or as a precursor of the writers own norm” (Ibid: 4), with Winckelmann being illustrative of this stage. In other words a normative commitment in the present was used, somewhat inflexibly, to judge the art of the past. Building upon this, one might argue that the commitment to an aesthetic ‘tradition’, one that is deemed to result from the seamless continuity of a norm, is a variant of this approach. It is one that results in a present re-enactment of the past-ness of the past, rather than a fully-fledged critical conversation with that past.

The second stage, which issues from Hegel, occurs where historians become more aware as to the differences that issue from the past – i.e. that the present is not the past, indeed that there are a variety of different pasts. A realisation that requires one to consider “different criteria and … [therefore] different norms” (Ibid.) in the appreciation of art. For Podro, this realization brings to question the key motivating issue of the critical historians of art: given that the present way of thinking and appreciating art differ from that of the past, how is the art of the past knowable today? How does history retrieve and appreciate a range of historically embedded norms that differ from those of the present? In attempting to answer this problem, the critical historians had tended to ask what aspect of art might belong to art itself, and in so doing might transcend time, rendering art knowable. Finally, according to Podro, a third stage was to follow, where “a general conception of art was constructed, of which particular arts were seen as modes of manifestation” (Ibid.), and for which Panofsky may serve as an example. In other words art history now serves to demonstrate particular aspects of a super-theorised conception of art.

Reflecting on Podro’s three stages, one may note a general movement toward an increasingly philosophical conception of art, one that seeks to accommodate the relativising of aesthetic values. Podro is also painfully aware as to the problems that emerge from this trajectory, namely the impossibility to think with any certainty beyond the horizon of an embedded historicity – that present-centeredness obscures appreciation of the past. And as conclusion to his book Podro ventures the notion of a “Multiplicity of Viewpoints” (Ibid. 213) to answer the problem of an embedded historicity, in an attempt to retain a semblance of the critical tradition. And, arguably, this is precisely the position that informs much criticism today.

In recent years art/architectural criticism has entered a new stage, that of an aesthetic nominalism – or a ‘partial’ nominalism. The position today is one of an aesthetic nominalism in that, it is possible to enjoy the Beatles whilst shopping at the mall, to relish a radio broadcast of Mozart on the way back home and pour over a book on Baroque architecture whilst sitting in a Miesian minimalist interior as the Sex Pistols blast, delightfully from the stereo. This may be accomplished, because in our time, we are witness to a near total emancipation of the aesthetic domain, the effects of which is almost impossible to resist or to escape. The position of an aesthetic nominalism comes in, precisely, with an attempt to theorise art – and human creation of various kinds – in its entirety, for aesthetic theory now needs to run the full gambit from Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel to Duchamp’s Urinal, from Albinoni to Zappa, from Alberti to
Zaha Hadid, and quite frankly there is little that may, assuredly, be said in an attempt to capture the deepest meaning of it all. Universalising assumptions as to the ‘essence’ of art appear to retreat from us, and in exchange we soon discover that particular aesthetic theories and formulations are better suited to the qualities of specific works. Hence aesthetic ideals proliferate to match the equal proliferation of artistic imaginations, which is to say that aesthetic theory has been rendered partial and open-ended, for most today.

This aesthetic nominalism – or if one prefers, the context of an expanding plurality of differing aesthetic values – parallels the new historiography of art, namely the trend, wide-spread today to replace art and architectural ‘H’istory conceived as a separate and autonomous field, with more culturally staged ‘h’istories set within and around the production of art/architecture, and to do so through focused studies that are richly layered and are attentive to peculiar qualities of uniqueness and difference. Because, in truth, everything about the architect, her life, her work, her patrons and clients as well as the reception of her work, everything of importance here also belong to cultural history, and to society at large; which is not to say that there is no room left for aesthetic theory. To the contrary, aesthetic and interpretive theory is as important as ever, only now interpretation accepts the sway of plurality, theory is pragmatically aligned to the specificity of the case that is to hand, and a critic is free to adopt different theoretical postures for different occasions.

The turn toward more culturally specific, micro and detailed histories of architecture and of art, results, in part, from what philosopher Jean-François Lyotard has called an “incredulity to metanarratives” (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). And indeed, most do approach the old school grand narratives of art/architectural history – for instance a sweeping progress from the Greeks to Modernity – with a solid dose of skepticism. However, and here’s the catch, just how long is a piece of string? When do micro-narratives cease being implicated in macro-narratives? Where’s the illusive cut-off point between the micro and macro, where is the threshold between? Actually, this profound question cannot be answered. And so, Keith Jenkins is correct where he argues that the critique of historical construction – which is how this paper began, namely the disassociation of empiricism and realism – applies to ‘h’istory in the lower case every bit as much as it does to ‘H’istory in the upper case. And from this vantage, although lower case ‘h’istory allows for an increased attention to the fine grain of empirical detail, the question of narrative construction remains. In other words, lower case history is every bit as interpretive – and if you will, ideological – as its upper case companion.

So the argument is back to where it started, namely with the prospect of a present centered, past-based, future-oriented and ideologically steeped history. As Jenkins eloquently maintains:

For to argue as, as lower case practitioners do, that the study of the past should not have anything to do with being present/future oriented is, of course, exactly as present and future oriented as the argument that it should. Upper case historiography is generally quite explicit that it is using the past for, say, a trajectory into a different future. The fact that the bourgeoisie doesn’t want a different future [...] means that it doesn’t any longer need a past-based future-oriented fabrication. Thus at this point, the point where the links between the past, present and future are broken because the present is everything, the past can be neutralized and studied not for our various sakes but for ‘its own sake’. For this is exactly what is currently required, a history that is finished now that it has led right up to us. Thus to ‘pretend’ not to be present-oriented is precisely what constitutes the present-centeredness of the lower case, (Jenkins 1997: 15-16).
Conclusion

And so, in closing this paper, it may be observed that the situation today is both challenging and exhilarating, for it is one that settles the score between a so called critical history (one that is championed by architectural critics and historians) versus the creative practice of doing innovative architecture – that is, history and design are mutually on the couch. The balance is restored because both history and design are, in fact, equally embedded in the flux of time, such that the thematic content, the material substance and the desires that require expression – be it through text or image/design – are produced in the sense that they are momentarily and pragmatically combined. Architecture is modeled on the content that issues from our present-past, made known through a conversation with history, but equally so, and as counter-motion, that history is modeled on the double artifice of architecture – once in the forming of its art, twice in the writing of its history.

Notes

1 For a helpful discussion on architectural historicism and historiography, see Alan Colquhoun ‘Three Kinds of Historicism’ (Colquhoun 1989: 3 – 19).

2 It is at this point that we may introduce a distinction between different genres of narrative, for example history versus fiction versus myth – for instance see Hayden White’s elegant discussion of Paul Ricoeur (Wood 1991: 141).

3 Ernst Gombrich’s discussion of ‘movements and periods’ is exemplary in this regard, see (Gombrich 1969: 35 – 45).

4 For example, the highly evolved late classicism of Edwin Lutyens was largely ignored by modernist historiography.

5 Laugier’s influential essay on architecture of 1755, argues that the origin of architecture in the ‘little rustic hut’, demonstrates the true essence of architectural design (Laugier 1979). It is a logic that delineates the essential components of architecture – the column, entablature and pediment. For Laugier, architecture requires a purified and rationalised expression, one that results from the re-composition of it’s essential components. In arguing this, Laugier’s interest was to support the Rationalist Classicism of his day, yet in doing so he also represents a turning point toward the future of rationalist and functionalist discourses in design.

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The Women’s Monument and memorial complexity in the context of political change: from memorial exclusivity to monument(al) inclusivity

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The Women’s Monument that was erected in Bloemfontein during 1913 fulfilled a strong urge by prominent Afrikaner leaders, such as President Steyn, to commemorate the sacrifices made by women and children during the Anglo Boer War of 1899–1902. However, the Women’s memorial focus to commemorate women was soon used as a platform to promote nationalistic agendas. Over the decades various additions have been made to the site that transformed the exclusive women’s memorial into an inclusive monument serving a broader agenda. In the post-1994 post-colonial epoch within a broad democratic arrangement the monument is undergoing further changes steering it even further away from its original focus. In addition the new democratic era has ushered in a broad comprehensive all-inclusiveness that has a further impact on the layout of the site and the memorial/museum. The purpose of this article was to examine the shift from memorial exclusiveness to an all-inclusive monument.

Key words: Women’s Monument, concentration camps, Anglo-Boer War, museum

Within the context of a postcolonial, transitional society the construction or reconstruction of memorials and monuments will always be a contested endeavour. However, the reality is that political change and transformation in a transitional state is an ongoing process which inevitably generates and maintains a context for perpetual shifting of political allegiances. The ebb and flow of the control over political power in turn provides the stimulus for the reconstruction of history and the manner in which past experiences would be reflected in memorials and monuments. As Estelle Maré (2007: 37) wrote: “Memory has always had political or ideological overtones, but each epoch found his own meaning in memory.”

The post-colonial process of construction new memorials and monuments and the reconstruction of existing memorials and monuments in South Africa is similarly an on-going phenomenon, with a protracted history not exclusively restricted to the post-1994 era. South Africa’s history has always functioned within the broader political context of colonialism and post-colonialism which has influenced and steered its historical and political contours for more than a century. This phenomenon of construction and reconstruction of memorials and

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monuments will form the central theme of this article. The Anglo Boer War (1899–1902) fought by the two Boer Republics against an imperialistic colonial power formed a watershed event in the country’s history. In the aftermath of the War the suffering and injustices subsequently provided a strong impetus to create memorials and monuments to ensure that its horrors will not slip into oblivion and that the fallen be honoured.

The suffering of women and children in concentration camps during the Anglo Boer War, with more than 30 000 fatalities, provided a strong impetus to honour the fallen with a memorial. The former Free State president, President Steyn, was determined after the war to raise the required funds to build a memorial for the women and children. Largely as a result of his efforts the funds were raised and the memorial constructed and inaugurated in 1913 (Schoeman 1983: 115).

It should be stated that although prominent role players did not specifically make a distinction between a memorial and a monument the intention was clearly to erect a memorial for the women and children. (The conceptual differences between a memorial and a monument will be explained under a different subheading.)

In the preface of the official program at the inauguration of the Women’s memorial Steyn stated the purpose of the memorial: “…naar de onthulling van het Monument, dat opgericht is ter herinnering van de duizende edele vrouwen en kinderen, de in de Koncentratie Kampen en elders ten gevolge van de oorlogzijn omgekomen.” (The inauguration of the Monument to commemorate the thousands of honorable women and children that died in concentration camps as a result of the war.) (Official program 1913: Inauguration of the Women’s Monument).

The intention of Steyn, as the initiator and primary driving force behind the Women’s memorial, was unmistakably to honour the women and children who had perished in the camps as a result of the war. His wife, Tibbie Steyn, saw the project as an attempt to place women on a high pedestal, while the influential Emily Hobhouse made it abundantly clear that it was essentially a women’s memorial of which all women should be proud (Nasson & Grundlingh 2013: 230).

It is now more than a hundred years since the inauguration of the sacred Women’s memorial that quietly nestles on the eastern slope of an unimposing hill in the barren veldt outside Bloemfontein. However, the observers that had witnessed the inauguration in 1913 will struggle in the modern era to recognise the site a hundred years later. Regular physical changes to the terrain and new additions near the original memorial resulted in a loss in focus. Bloemfontein had also sprawled and has crept closer to the memorial until it had finally encircled and urbanised the site. This ‘urbanisation’ of the memorial had stripped the memorial of its splendid solitude which had framed its existence during the first few decades. However, it is not only landscape changes that have taken place over hundred years the broader context has also changed which resulted in a focus shift. The backdrop of political change, colonial construction and post-colonial reconstruction of the Women’s memorial had clearly a profound effect on the memorial. The 100 year period could be subdivided in two broad periods 1902–1994 and post–1994. The increased number of additions on the site during these two broad periods has shifted the initial emphasis, central values and intention irrevocably away from its original focus towards a broader less focused inclusivity.
Changing the playing field? Memorials and monuments – to remember and not to forget

The central question that this article wishes to address is to outline the emphasis shift that has taken place in the physical appearance, underlying theme and messages of the Women’s memorial. The related secondary question is to establish if these changes have resulted in a change from memorial exclusivity, to honour women and children, to an all-inclusive monument that embraces the encompassing values of a broader all-inclusive society? If the latter is indeed the prevailing thought or underpinning driving force, then the inclusive purpose of a women and children memorial has lost its initial focus in the drive to a broader all-encompassing inclusivity.

It is important to recognise that all the changes and the additions did not happen within the decades after 1994. The shift from the original exclusive agenda to honour women and children to a broader interpretation were already implemented within the first two decades after the 1913 inauguration. However, it should be remembered that the original underpinning motive for the memorial was not done within a specific or a strong political context. The original construction of the memorial was to honour women and children and not to serve a specific political agenda. An analysis of the speeches during the inauguration reveals that they were regressively emphasizing the sacrifices of women and children. This aligns with the distinctive intention of a memorial to honour the death. The creation of a political context that influenced the memorial and site coincided a decade later with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and sporadically flared up until the end of the era of apartheid. The post-1994 changes have again affected radical change and additions to the site in an effort to align it with the new all-inclusive political context in a broader democracy.

The strong Afrikaner nationalistic drive in the decades after the inauguration of the memorial and the related impact on the site meant that the intention to honour women and children has been progressively used to serve a political agenda. Within this political agenda the women in children were relegated to be subservient to the ‘greater need in the following decades’ or ‘for the nationalistic good of the Afrikaner.’

Figure 1
The women’s memorial displaying the obelisk, the statues, the two side panels and the enclosed area accessed by the central steps, (source: Google Images).
Grundlingh (2013: 241) has recognised that this shift from memorial exclusiveness to broader interpretation occurred within the first few decades since the memorial’s inauguration. He explained that the shift occurred when nationalistic principles surpassed the earlier noble intentions of the Commission: ”… (namely to) materially depicting the role of the women as serving male nationalism … women (was) silenced by a greater cause.”

This shift also represented a technical change, because the intended purpose of the memorial was as a result transformed into a monument. The original intention of the Steyn’s Commission was to erect a memorial, and not a monument, for the women and children that perished in the concentration camps. Memorials and monuments are treated by many as the same concept, but there are subtle and very distinct differences between the two concepts. Ware (2008: 1) indicated that although the two concepts are etymologically linked as a result of both evolving from the root word “to be reminded and to be mindful”, the application and deeper meaning of the root word has forced a distinction between the two concepts. Danto also makes a very vivid distinction between a memorial and a monument and explained that the word memorial is used to honour the death, while in the case of a monument the intention is to honour the living (Snyman 1996: 182).

According to Snyman (1996: 181) there are distinct rules that govern the distinction between monuments and war memorials. He quoted Danto (1987: 115) that explains that: “… we erect monuments that we shall always remember and build memorials so that we shall never forget … Monuments commemorate the memorable and embody the myths of beginning. Memorials ritualise remembrance and mark the reality of ends. Very few nations erect monuments to their defeats, but many set up memorials to the defeated death.”

Danto (1987: 115) as referred to by Snyman (1996: 181) also make a further important distinction between memorials and monuments: “monuments made heroes, triumphs, victories, conquests perpetually present and part of life. Contrary to that a memorial is a special precinct extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honour the dead. With monuments we honour ourselves.”

M.C. Botha (1952: 15), when the building and the raison d’etre of the Voortrekkermonument was challenged, explained that the impressive monument should primarily ‘force’ Voortrekker descendants to think about the sacrifices made by their forebears in order to create an independent nation. “When entering the Monument the visitor should be overwhelmed with gratitude towards God.” He emphasised that the Monument should remind descendants that they should be mindful of and thankful of the past sacrifices. Within the strict context of the difference between a monument and a memorial the Voortrekker monument is in reality a memorial and not a monument. However, both the Women’s memorial and the Voortrekker monument have over the years blurred the intended meaning of the word.

If the differences between a memorial and a monument are put opposed to each other their differences could be graphically presented as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monuments</th>
<th>Memorials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To remember</td>
<td>Not to forget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commemorate the memorable and embody the beginnings</td>
<td>Ritualise remembrance and mark the reality of ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a celebration of past triumphs</td>
<td>Mediation cast in stone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Very few monuments “celebrate” defeat
Memorials are set up after defeats and death
Monuments make heroes and triumphs perpetually present
Memorials is extruded from live to honour the death

Within the post-colonial epoch the Blood River/ Ncome monument, is an interesting combination of a memorial and a monument on one site. The initial building and expansion of the Blood River Monument was exactly for the purposes outlined above; namely to remember, to commemorate the beginning of white political domination, it celebrated the beginning and the military triumph of the battle of Blood River and the heroes that emerged from the battle. In the shadow of the Blood River monument the newly erected Ncome complex was built as a memorial to represent the Zulu experience of the battle. It was set up after defeats and death to honour those who have perished in search of freedom (Schonfeldt-Altman 1997: 223-225).

The initial intention of the Women’s memorial before 1913 was to honour women and children who had paid with their lives during the Anglo Boer War. However, this noble idea was gradually sacrificed for the greater political good of the Afrikaner within its nationalistic surge to gain political power. This change also represented a shift from exclusivity to inclusivity with an accompanied lost in focus and cohesion of what the site should have originally represented. This shift from an exclusive Women’s memorial to an all-inclusive monument meant that the memorial and site has surrendered its special status to serve a broader political purpose. In the post-apartheid era this shift has been accelerated within the new political context with a further loss of focus.

In the next subsections this shift from an exclusive women’s and children memorial to an inclusive monument will be outlined within two broad periods; namely from 1913–1994 followed by an outline of the post-1994 period.

The underlying meaning and purpose of the Women’s monument – 1913 to 1994

The first important step is to extract the original purpose for erecting the Women’s memorial could be extracted from the first publications on the memorial. NJ. van der Merwe wrote the first publication on the Women’s Monument (undated) and clearly stated the purpose of the Memorial:”Is dit dan nie ‘n wonder dat daar ‘n begeerte by die manne ontstaan is om ‘n gedenkteken op te rig vir die heldinne wat met hul kinders feil gehad het nie? (Is it not a wonder that the need originated with the men to erect a memorial for the women and children) (Van der Merwe undated:12).

When Steyn and the Monument Commission on the 7th February 1907 convened a conference to plan the building of the memorial a joint decision was taken by all interested parties, including political parties and the Dutch Churches on the purpose of the memorial namely: “… dat de tijd aangebroken is om een Monument op Zuid-Afrika’s boden daar te stellen, ter roemrijke nagedachtenis van de moeders, vrouwen en kinderen die tijdens den jongste oorlog zijn omgekomen … ” (The time has arrived to erect a Monument in South Africa to honour the mothers, women and children who died during the recent war (Van Schoor 1993: 6).
When Tibbie Steyn, the wife of President Steyn, was asked to unveil the Women’s monument she declared: “In naam van onze vrouwen en kinderen onthul ik dit monument.” (In the name of our women and children I unveil the monument (Truter 1997: 121).

It is unnecessary to belabour the point, because it is clearly evident that the original idea shortly after the signing of the peace treaty was that a memorial should be erected for the women and children that lost their lives in concentration camps during the Anglo Boer War. Although the border between a memorial and a monument was clearly blurred, used interchangeably and even further exacerbated in the decades leading up to the centurial celebration, the imbedded ground motive for erecting the memorial was well articulated.

The setting and the way the memorial was constructed confirmed that it’s the focus was to honour women and children and not to serve a broader purpose. This notion is reinforced by the geographical backdrop, the outline of the statue and the side plates of women and children. The obelisk with its 36, 5 meter high needle with its inscription that dominate the gentle slope of a nearby kopje and the enclosure all speak to this imbedded meaning and ground motive namely to serve as a memorial for women and children who died in concentration camps during the war. The general setting all meet the classic criteria of a memorial, because it cast the tragic (the death of women and children) in something heroic as a memorial to the defeated death so that those behind should never forget (Snyman 1996: 190).

The 1913 Monument: A spatial analysis of the setting and the placement of the obelisk

Bloemfontein, the capital of the old Free State republic, was chosen as a suitable setting for the Women’s memorial. The decision was done against some stiff opposition from the English speaking community in the city (Van Schoor 1993: 7). However, in spite of the descending voices from the majority English speakers on the City Council, the terrain southwest of Bloemfontein was donated as the setting and after a lengthy fund-raising campaign the memorial was constructed and erected in 1913.

The site that was preferred was in the flat barren open veldt southwest of Bloemfontein, devoid of any prominent geographical features. The original access road to the site was the old national road that led south along Monument Avenue to the Cape Province. The old road forked off just outside the city limits and then branched off to the right to provide access to the entrance to the memorial. The surrounding flat arid veldt provided the appropriate backdrop that not only accentuated the memorial, but also symbolically complemented its significance. This placing allowed an open unobstructed vista that stretches far ahead over a flat terrain to the next horizon.

The openness and barrenness of the flat terrain devoid of any vegetation, with a little hill to the left (east), ensured that the attention of the visitor of the memorial was fully occupied and unobstructed. The area devoid of any traffic or other sounds accentuated the memorial’s simple dominance of the surrounding area and provided an unsophisticated view of the memorial with its very basic features. The outside appearance of the memorial within the ocean of vastness was reminiscent of the life in the concentration camps with its destitute appearance and it desolate setting in the barren open veldt.
On entering the terrain in 1913 the road had originally curled gently into a gentle western arch to provide access to the obelisk and the inner sanctum. The memorial complemented the initial simplistic features observed from a distance when it was approached by road. It basically consisted of an obelisk and a wall that enclosed an inner paved area. The access to the inner area was provided by way of a central set of steps placed in the middle of the wall with the central focus point an imposing main sculpture group and two bas-relief panels on the side (Van Zyl 2013: 192).

The imposing sculpture of the scene at a concentration camp was done by the sculpture Anton van Wouw, overseen by Hobhouse, who had very specific ideas in mind what the sculpture should sublimely reflect. Hobhouse was to a certain extent critical of Van Wouw’s ability to fully reflect the plight and suffering of the women and children in the concentration camps and various changes were suggested and made before the final product was accepted.

The Commission preferred the placement of the sandstone obelisk next to and not on top of the small kopje on the terrain. The sculpture of the two women and child was placed at the bottom section of the needle-like obelisk on a four meter high pedestal. The finished sculpture embodied grief and suffering reminiscent of a tragic scene that Hobhouse envisaged at the Springfontein camp during the War. Hobhouse described how she had to watch how a woman experienced in agony how her only child drew his last breath. The mother never moved or wept although it was her only child who died. Dry eyed, but deathly white, she sat there motionless, looking not to the child, but far into the depths of grief beyond her tears. A friend that stood behind the woman and child silently called on Heaven as a witness to this tragedy (Van Schoor 1993: 8).
Figure 3
The sculpture of the two women and child at Springfontein camp (source: Google Images).

The obelisk and the sculpture have been complemented by the two side panels; the first depicted the destruction of the farms and the manner how the women and children were forcibly removed to the concentration camps. The second side panel depicts a scene of a dying child in a concentration camp with onlookers that stood in silence around the tent. According to Snyman (1996: 190) the second panel has a receding focal point that spatially connects with the onlooker (visitor). In the scene the dying child on a bed in a tent is in the background in low relief, while the onlookers outside the tent are depicted in high relief, which establishes a nexus between the two dimensions. There is a spatial continuity between the onlookers outside the tent and the onlookers (visitors) observing the panel. The onlookers outside the tent are dominated by two women figures, one on the left and the second on the right of the panel. The first women look into the tent and the women on the right, with her face partly obscured by her bonnet, looking at the onlookers (visitors) and invite them in silence to be a witness of what had occurred. This forms a telescopic nexus from the viewer to the women looking at him/her with the second women and then focuses on the dying child. The way the panel was constructed forms a clear spatial connection and a flow between the three dimensions, the suffering child and mother inside the tent, the onlooker just outside the tent and the onlooker (visitor) observing the suffering.

When the whole setting of the Women’s memorial within the 1913 context is analysed it is clear that the suffering and plight of the women and child who died in the concentration camps were clearly the focal point. From a spatial perspective the memorial dominate the open area with little or no competing structure to influence the uninhibited view of the memorial. The kopje was very skilfully used as a supporting structure to complement the setting. The 3,6 metre
high needle obelisk formed a focal point and the placing of the sculpture on a pedestal four metres above ground level forces the visitor to look upwards in the same manner when a church or a cathedral is entered. The high placement “conveys something heroic, dignified and elevated above the ordinary, but more importantly it emphasizes the central underpinning theme of the memorial the suffering of the women and children” (Snyman 1996: 190).

In the final analysis it is very clear that the memorial in 1913 was very successful in creating a spatial continuity between the past and the present. It was also very successful on a sublime level to link the onlooker as an observer and as a witness to align themselves with the suffering of the women and children. The whole setting adheres to classic rules to establish a memorial as outlined above. In short it was built that the onlookers (visitors) shall never forget, because it ritualises remembrance and marks the reality of ends and was erected in memory and to honour the defeated dead.

When the memorial was inaugurated in 1913 further developments on the terrain were entrusted to National Women’s Memorial Commission under Steyn’s chairmanship. The next chairman was the Reverend Kestell who initiated the building of a museum on the terrain where items dating from the period and donated to the Commission could be stored (Van Schoor 1993: 15). The cornerstone of the museum was laid in 1926 and the unveiling by General Hertzog happened four years later in 1930.

However, the Commission then took a significant emphasis shifting decision to allow Afrikaner heroes of the era to be buried beneath the obelisk within the sacred sanctum that was originally reserved for women and children. This crucial decision to bury men at the site started the process that diverted the attention away from its original purpose. The direction change brought a broader dimension to the site that fragmented the focus of the terrain. President Steyn (1916), General de Wet (1922), Emily Hobhouse (1926) and Reverend Kestell (1941) found a resting place within the enclosure of the obelisk. Tibbie Steyn, who died in 1955, was also buried in the same grave as her husband within the enclosure. According to Truter (1997: 121) it was well-known that she was very reluctant to be buried at the monument, because she was of the opinion that it would detract from the original purpose of the monument.

However, this was only the prelude to the changes to the site. In an alarming move within a decade or two after the inauguration nationalistic politics started to spill over onto the terrain and managed to pull the women’s memorial even deeper within the political realm. Van Zyl (2013: 224) points out how several political meetings were held on the site clearly to exploit the status of the memorial. On 20 July 1940 more than 70, 000 people gathered on the terrain to protest against South Africa’s participation in the Second World War. The gathering was moved to an area north of the Memorial, because of concerns of the impact of such an event, although the decision has already compromised the integrity of the area.

The 1938 symbolic ox-wagon trek was also celebrated on the terrain and it was allowed that imprints be made on a block of cement to eternalise the event. The imprints were later moved to a less conspicuous place, but the integrity of the memorial was already compromised. The 1949 inauguration of the Voortrekkermonument was also celebrated on the terrain which added to the broader focus of the Women’s memorial (Van Schoor 1993: 22 - 23).

The use of the terrain for nationalistic and political propaganda was further compromised with the decision to erect sculptures depicting certain events of the Anglo Boer War on the site. Naturally it was predominantly men that were depicted which did not align with the original aim of the Women’s memorial. The erection of sculptures together with the earlier use of the
terrain for political and nationalistic reasons has already attracted a fair bit of criticism that the monument has already lost its central focus. The first Commission’s intention was clearly set that nothing should be erected to divert the focus from the monument itself, but the new additions were implemented regardless (Van Zyl 2013: 224).

In the last decade before 1994 a number of additions have been added to the site. Dotted on the open terrain a number of statues have over the years been unveiled to commemorate the role of burghers during the War. The first addition was a statue of a burgher and a young boy as prisoners of war clinging to the rail of a ship on their way to one of a number of camps outside South Africa. This was followed by statues of the ‘Bittereninder’ and ‘Farewell’ statues representing respectively the burgher who fought until the bitter end and the moving scene of the burgher who has left for the front leaving his family behind (Van Schoor 1993: 22-23).

![Figure 4](source: Google Images)

One of the statues that were erected on the terrain to commemorate the last farewell between the departing burgher and his family.

A spatial analysis of the Women’s Monument after 100 years

The visitors who attended the 1913 unveiling of the Women’s monument would be hard pressed to recognize the original setting and outline of the original memorial if they were able to witness the contemporary site in the modern era (Schoeman 1983: 121). The city has expanded in the 100 years since the inauguration of the memorial and in a few decades has thrown its tentacles in the form of ever expanding suburbs around the monument. The enclosed site in the modern era resembles a little island lost in the middle of the huge expanse of suburbia. The urbanisation of the surrounding area meant that the monument has lost its centrality within the vast inhibited openness that framed and formed such a fitting background in the past.

On entering the site a neat sandstone wall as part of the entrance was constructed and provides a sombre, but dignified entrance to the monument. On the left, after entering the complex, a single story building nestles amongst a cluster of trees which houses a small restaurant and kiosk. Dotted between the building and the museum complex various structures
were recreated such as block houses, trains and other paraphernalia from the war. However, the central dominating point on the site is now a two story museum placed on a small rise and its sheer size now forms the pivotal point to the terrain.

![Figure 5](image)

**Figure 5**
The Women’s Monument in the new era with a paved access area and on the side small plaques are commemorating the various camps and the number of women children who have perished in the camps (source: Public domain internet).

Within the postcolonial and post-apartheid epoch the modern day visitor will notice many changes under the umbrella of progress that have been made to expand the site in search of broader inclusiveness and acceptance. The original concentration camp theme has also been accentuated with more recent additions. The access way to the obelisk has been paved with little small plaques or gravestones, spaced along the edge of the pathway, with the names of the camps and the number of women and children who died in those camps. However, one of the most notable changes on the terrain is a small memorial on the edge of the pathway that acknowledged the fact that 140 514 black people were also confined in 65 camps all over South Africa. The plaque reflects the fact that more than 10,000 black inhabitants died as a result of malnutrition and diseases. The inscriptions on the memorial are done in Afrikaans, English and Sesotho. Grundlingh (2013: 243) correctly points out those black women were not singled out and is merely included within the more comprehensive changes to the terrain. However, changes are already put in place to stronger commemorate the plight of black women and children elsewhere on the terrain which will rectify the situation. One more recent addition was specifically aimed at the role of black males with the erection of a black mounted servant known as an “agterryer”, retainer or servant to commemorate the more than 12 000 that assisted the burghers on commando.
From memorial exclusiveness to broad inclusiveness in an environment of political transformation and change

The consideration of the events leading and underpinning the erection of the Women’s monument clearly establish the original underlying motive to erect a single memorial and not a monument and addition structure. The Women’s memorial was built relatively shortly after the carnage of the Anglo Boer War as Ware (2008: 1) indicated to be reminded and to be mindful and in this specific case to be reminded of the suffering and plight of the women and children.

However, it was clear from the outset with Afrikaner nationalism on the rise that the notion of exclusiveness for white women and children would be challenged over time. In the modern era and in the new political context the challenge is more intense. Although the suffering of women and children was essentially in the centre of the monument it was done selectively with very or no reference to the plight of black women and children who also perished in concentration camps. The addition of honouring across the racial divide to include all women and children that perished in the camps however has no impact on the integrity of the site.

However, the nationalistic drive to selectively monopolise history during the decades leading up to the attainment of a Republic in 1961 had left a legacy which opened itself up to be challenged within a different political environment. The nationalistic drive of the post-1913 era bypassed legitimate reasons for inclusiveness of all women and children (white and black) who died in concentration camps. The nationalistic agenda monopolised the meaning of the monument to be for the suffering of white women and children only for their own benefit. Snyman (1996: 24) emphasised “that the Afrikaner circumvented the issue of black sacrifice for the sake of soil and freedom and that for many the central team of concentration camps and the suffering legitimized a claim political power on the basis of the suffering of white women and white children.”

As Maré (2007: 36) reminds memorials and statues inevitably cast a specific memory in stone and the statue cannot be modified. The obelisk, the statues on the pedestal and the side panels were erected within a specific political context and cannot be modified or changed, because of its iconic status amongst a large section of the white community.

However, as a result of fundamental political changes under a new all-inclusive democratic government it was inevitable that the nationalistic monopolisation of “suffering during the Anglo-Boer War” could no longer be legitimised or diverted. The election of an ANC dominated government signalled a change in the political context and culturally museums have to adapt to the new political environment, maintain themselves or perish in an effort to maintain their independence.

Conclusion

In the final analysis it is evident that the erection of the initial structures of the Women’s memorial on the terrain after the Anglo Boer War and its unveiling in 1913 was done within a political context and that the underlying momentum was to honour the suffering of women and children. However, as outlined in the unpredictable political opportunism the political narrative changed the initial intention of Steyn. It was monopolised to provide a political essence for nationalistic propaganda.
It proved almost impossible within a political context to maintain the original meaning. In order to balance a more comprehensive account of the Anglo Boer War the construction of the museum complex followed which broadened the focus which diluted and relegated the original obelisk to a peripheral “side-show” within the broader exhibition of the war.

Although the shift from exclusiveness to inclusiveness (1913–1994) from a white perspective was a gradual process the 1994 political transformation followed by the centenary celebrations hastened the inevitable rethinking of the site. The predominantly black government in power necessitated a rethinking of how to more exclusively reflect the war. The new political context necessitated the memorial for black people in concentration camps, the statue of the “agtererryer” and the changes made within the museum to reflect black participation. However as Grundling (2013: 242 & 243) correctly points out very little has been done to specifically honour the plight of the black women as it was done for the white women in 1913. In correcting this omission something of the original intention to commemorate women and children in a memorial could be regained.

Works cited


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At the time of their making, colonial paintings were considered objective accounts of actual places and situations. Contemporary redress of colonial depictions contends however that such representations were culturally and materially determined and thus reflects the philosophical and moral bias of their painters. Charles Davidson Bell’s painting *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* (1850) is often reproduced in South African history books without proper context - neither the artist nor the artwork has received much critical attention from art historical scholars. I regard the critical revisiting of Bell as important because it interrogates how Victorian colonial artists, such as Bell, employed authoring strategies and visual codes that served to entrench and naturalise debasing perceptions of their subjects. In this article, I consolidate various authoring strategies, put forward by different theorists, in a triangulated interpretive reading that further takes into account ideological frameworks and social reality in the interpretation of this artwork. My interpretation shows that Bell conformed to entrenched authoring strategies, concepts and features familiar to him, and aesthetic modalities that typified the art of his time. Scrutiny of the artist’s authoring strategies brings to light the role of the colonial gaze in establishing hierarchical relationships between binaries of colonial self and other/coloniser and colonised.

**Key words:** Charles Davidson Bell, colonial gaze, colonial painting, O/others, persuasive imaging

Charles Davidson Bell’s painting *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* (1850) (figure 1) is familiar to many South Africans through its reproduction in various of the country’s popular, as well as scholarly, history books - often without mention of the artist responsible or the time and context in which the original artwork was produced. Presented in this way, the image is held up as an unproblematic representation of a specific historical occurrence in a particular historical account of South Africa.
This artwork depicts an event that marks the beginning of sustained European colonial presence in Southern Africa - the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck, agent of the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, at the Cape of Good Hope. The work is painted in a naturalistic style akin to Romantic Naturalism (cf. Rosenblum and Janson 2005: 156). The setting that Bell chose for this scene is the beach near Table Mountain - in the distance Devil’s Peak towers under a dramatic semi-clouded sky. The moment depicted is the first meeting between Van Riebeeck’s party and a group of indigenous Khoikhoi. Perched on the central sand dune and bathed in strong directional light are Van Riebeeck and a number of his men, on the other, depicted just outside the spotlight and separated from the Europeans by the shallow gully, the Khoikhoi. The Europeans are dressed in period style, brandishing various regalia and weaponry. The Khoikhoi are shown in traditional dress, although a figure sitting closest to the European group appears naked.

In an effort to introduce history painting to the Cape Bell produced two oils in 1850, *The Isle of the Holy Cross* (figure 2) and *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* (cf. Brooke Simons, 1998: 93-94; Godby, 1998: 156). *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* was considered the best historical painting on exhibit when displayed at Cape Town’s First Exhibition of Fine Arts in 1851 (Lipschitz 1992: 18-19). Generally speaking the genre of historic landscapes reflect scenes that tend to deal with historical, and sometimes mythical, subjects as set in the past, and which are often populated by figures that are part of that particular narrative (cf. Chu 2003: 183). Both the genre and context of the first public viewing of this artwork suggest that its intended viewing audience was the metropolitan cultural elite of British society at the Cape.
Scottish-born Bell (1813-1882) first arrived in Cape Town in 1830. Bell is often described as an explorer-painter, who also worked as a book illustrator (Brown 1978: 4-6; Ogilvie, 1988: 54). In 1834 Bell was recruited as second draughtsman to the scientific expedition of the Cape of Good Hope Association for Exploring Central Africa into the central regions of Southern Africa under the leadership of Dr Andrew Smith (Brooke Simons 1998: 28) – his task was to record ethnographical subjects and landscapes (Lipschitz 1992: 2). It was on this journey that Bell first encountered, what fellow expedition member John Burrow termed, a ‘real native’ (Brooke Simons 1998: 31). In 1838 Bell qualified as a land surveyor, an occupation he became familiar with as a member of Smyth’s expedition. In February of the same year Bell was appointed as Government Surveyor to the Surveyor General’s Office (Brooke Simons 1998:167, Lipschitz 1992: 11). While working in the Surveyor-General’s department, Bell produced a number of ethnographic paintings that purported to reflect events relating to the behaviour of indigenous peoples (Record 1994: 64).

Very few publications are dedicated to Bell or his work. The first to attempt at a detailed biography of Bell was undertaken by Anna Smith in an article published in 1954, seventy-two years after his death. Smith drew most of her information from contemporaneous 19th century sources such as newspapers, as well as information gathered from documents in the Cape Archives (Bradlow 1998: 10). A later contribution by Smith was a biography of Bell contained in the Dictionary of South African biography (1968, volume. 1). In this instance, Smith included information from Bell’s obituary written by his long time friend Charles Piazzi Smyth (Lipschitz 1992: 27). Most South African art historical reference books and compendiums contain only passing references to Bell (these include: Brown 1978: 5, 8, 9, 12, 21, 24); Fransen 1981: 129-130; Ogilvie 1988: 53-54), of which Fransen (1981: 129) and Ogilvie (1988: 53) also contain errors and inconsistencies. Other sources completely omit any mention of him (cf. Alexander, 1940: i-171; Alexander & Cohen 1990: 1-179; Battis 1941: 1-43; Berman 1983: 1-368; Bouwman 1948: 1-134).

Academic research documents on the artist and his work are also scant. At the time of writing two Master’s dissertations were registered on the national research database: Lipshitz’s The Charles Davidson Trust Collection: A Catalogue and Critical Study (1992: 1-215) and my Own, A Comparative Reading of the Depiction of Afrikaner Ancestry in two Works by C. D. Bell (Strydom 2009: 1-212). Lipshitz’s dissertationcatalogues and critically surveys the Bell Heritage Trust Collection. It includes a biographical overview of Bell that derives primarily from unpublished and secondary sources such as documents from the Surveyor General and Colonial Office, housed in the Cape Archives. Lipshitz (1992: 1-28) gathered further information from letters written by Bell, kept in the Cape Archives and the Bell Heritage Trust Collection. However, The Life and Work of Charles Bell by Brooke Simons (1998: 1-176) remains the only contemporary publication to date dealing exclusively with Bell’s biography and oeuvre as artist. Brooke Simons draws from a wide spectrum of sources both in South Africa and Scotland, including the John and Charles Bell Heritage Trust Collection, the South African Library, South African Cultural History Museum, MuseumAfrica, the Cape Archives, Crail Museum and the National Museums of Scotland.

However, Godby (1998: 140) emphasises that knowledge about Bell, especially as an artist, is sketchy and often greatly distorted. He is best known for his two large oil paintings displayed in the South African Library - The landing of Van Riebeeck and The Isle of the Holy Cross (cf. Bradlow 1998: 10). Both are painted, as noted, in the realist Romantic tradition and can generally be considered part of the 19th century genre of history painting. These two
works belong to a group of several artworks Bell based on extracts from Van Riebeeck’s journal (Brooke Simons 1998: 93; Lipschitz 1992: 18).

In addition to referring to historical sources, the naturalistic approach that Bell employs in *The landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*, akin to a style Rosenblum and Janson (2005: 156) call Romantic Naturalism, creates the impression of a faithful and believable depiction of the subject matter that presupposes objective empirical observation on behalf of the artist. The style satisfied the Victorian criteria of judging painting in terms of its representational qualities, presenting ‘real life’ (cf. Guy 2002: 314); a view supported by the actual setting of *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*, which in turn suggest an eyewitness account of the event. However, painted two centuries after the actual event, Bell clearly had to draw on his imagination to depict this historical moment.

To render his view of the event believable to his audience, Bell employed several authoring strategies to support his naturalistic style, among them Claudian principles of pictorial arrangement such as separating foreground, middle-ground and background by using light and tonal perspective to recreate the spatial depth typical of European depictions at the time (cf. Godby 1998: 144).
Persuasive imaging and the colonial gaze

I contend that Bell’s use of authoring strategies amounted to a form of persuasive imaging that supported his colonial gaze. According to Yancy (2008: 6), the colonial gaze “is that broadly construed epistemic perspective, a process of seeing without being seen, that constructs the Black [sic] body into its own colonial imagery”. The colonial gaze belies the notion of the ‘innocent eye’, which Brown (2001: 23) describes as, “one of the most powerful Romantic myths”. This presumed innocent eye made its way into the reception of depictions of nature and landscapes. It sustained the belief that an artist’s innate instinctive vision would guarantee a truthful, objective depiction regardless of his own academic artistic training or external factors such as social, cultural, political or economic contexts. In practice, however, artists’ depictions were of course telling of their own cultural milieu and artistic imagination (Brown 2001: 24).

Weheliye (2005: 40) ascribes the power of the colonial gaze to the hegemonic position of vision and “ocularcentric discourse” in Western modernity and exposes the complicit role thereof in the construction of race and racism. The colonial gaze contributes to the denigration and objectification the colonial other (McFarlane 2004: 175, 176). It serves to essentialise and fix the identity of the colonised according to an entrenched European hierarchy of same-other/coloniser-colonised dialectics. This dialectic of difference was based on pre-existing racial categories and was brought to bear by European myths, pseudo-science and ingrained beliefs regarding the other. In turn, the colonial gaze reinforced these racial categories, which again served to underpin the colonial gaze (Yancy 2008: 2 - 4).

In colonial discourse, the subjectivity of the colonised is continually located in the gaze of the imperial Other, or so-called grande-autre (Ashcroft et al., 1998: 171). In Lacanian terms the grande-autre/Other refers to the symbolic and the unconscious (cf. Payne, 2000: 392). From a postcolonial perspective, the grande-autre can be likened to both imperial discourse and the imperial centre, as well as to empire itself (Ashcroft et al. 1998: 170). This interrelation functions on two levels: on one hand the Other represents the vehicle by which the colonised subject’s perception of the world is mediated. By the same token, the Other – like imperial discourse, the imperial centre and empire – sets the standards by which the colonised subject is defined as different or other. In a similar way, an artist’s colonial gaze and use of persuasive imaging not only suggest mastery of the colonial landscape, but also of its inhabitants.

Ashcroft (2001: 15, 141) argues that colonial painting functions as an allegory of imperial control by which the surveyed comes into being. By means of perspective, modes of surveillance and cartography, Europeans translated their control of space into cultural control. Ashcroft (2001: 141) further argues that surveillance and observation are in the same league as the most powerful authoring strategies of imperial dominance:

it implies a viewer with an elevated vantage point, it suggests the power to process and understand that which is seen, and it objectifies, and interpolates, the colonised subject in a way that fixes its identity in relation to the surveyor.

In a similar vein Ashcroft (2001: 141) suggests that both Arcadian and Sublime modes of colonial painting function as an allegory of imperial control, because it is through the representation of surveillance that the surveyed comes into being.

According to Boehmer (1995: 94-95) the coloniser’s motive for documenting the colonised landscape and its peoples stemmed from two main pretexts. On one hand, there was a desire to understand and control the unfamiliar, and on the other, a need to shy off, tame and demarcate
that which seemed uncontrollable. In the process the coloniser employed a number of strategies such as highlighting the unfamiliar as strange and exotic or, conversely, omitting the inscrutable altogether. Whatever the motives behind the documentation of the colonised peoples and lands, such representations reinforced perceptions regarding the dominance of Empire by making imperialism seem part of the natural order of things. However, these strategies only served to frustrate the situation as it exposed the actual “unreadability of the other” (Boehmer 1995: 2-3, 94).

The colonisers faced a further difficult task in their attempts to graft their own hermeneutic structures onto the colonised milieu (Boehmer 1995: 92). Hence, those documenting the unfamiliar environment were constantly dependent on their own customary concepts, narratives and metaphors in order to describe and encompass their unsettling new surroundings (Boehmer, 1995: 92). Jacobs (1995: 9) adds that European perceptions of foreign lands invariably incorporated both factual and fictitious conceptions. Thus, when confronted with the non-native aesthetics of their new milieu:

[European] travellers adapted the familiar concepts of hill, meadow, brook and so on to give shape to their experience. They sought out features conforming to their own aesthetic schemes – misty tones, a heterogeneity of natural and geological features, the idealised landscapes associated with the seventeenth-century French painter Claude. So, it was as we now tend to believe, that the reality most feasible for a colonial culture to occupy was one of its own making, described in its own language (Boehmer 1995: 92).

The above excerpt illustrates how pictorial devices such as linear perspective, elevated vantage points and other illusionistic artifices were employed as strategies that abetted European artists’ ‘persuasive imaging’ of the colonised landscape. Hills (1991: 100) uses the term persuasive imaging to describe how the viewer may be convinced of the reality of a particular depiction through the artist’s use of the conventions of naturalism - in spite of the fact that the pictorial information in question is mediated by the artist’s selection and manipulation thereof. I would suggest that in light of the pseudo-scientific bias that underpinned the depiction of colonised peoples (cf. Ashcroft et al. 1998: 209; Loomba 2005: 56,101-102), the notion of persuasive imaging is not only confined to the depiction of the landscape but also to colonial depictions of others and otherness.

In support of the notion of persuasive imaging, European artists also employed a number of other pictorial devices and visual codes that served to entrench and naturalise debasing perceptions of their subjects through their depictions. There were particular aesthetic protocols that determined the depiction of certain classes, for example. These protocols were also indicative of social and moral codes of behaviour (Barrell 1992: 1). The use of colour, rendering of light and shadow and composition may all be used to codify power relations. This is eloquently illustrated in Wa Thoing’o’s (1993: 43) description of conventional colonialist painting: “In many paintings of the colonial period, the white adventurer was always at the centre of the action with rays of light radiating outwards from him. Africans were background shadows merging with the outer darkness and the natural landscape”. Wa Thoing’o’s judgement is supported by Boime’s (1990: 2) suggestion that chiaroscuro transcends the mere modelling of light and shadow - that as a polarity, it represents the religious dualism of Good versus Evil. Therefore, I argue, that this dualism inherent in chiaroscuro can also be read in terms of the Manichean allegory, which itself illustrates the way that all aspects regarding the relationship between coloniser and colonised are polarised through imperial discourse, to set up a binary opposition that pits good against evil and superior against inferior and, ultimately, European against other.
Another conventional way to delineate exclusivity and social hierarchies within a picture is the use of a triangle or pyramidical composition, often by means of a hierarchical descending order from top to bottom (cf. Barrell 1992: 123; Boime 1990: 19, 95, 209). Dividing the picture into different planes from top to bottom and foreground to background may indicate not only the physical but also the social position of a figure, with those regarded as inferior or subordinate often relegated to the lowest register or point of the composition (cf. Boime 1990: 92, 183). Other devices used to signify social standing include posture and material markers such as clothing. Subordinates tend to be depicted in crouching or kneeling positions, for example, and are often shabbily dressed in contrast to the upright poses and regal dress of the élite (cf. Barrell 1992: 44; Boime 1990: 103, 170, 179). Racial markers were used for more extreme forms of juxtaposing. For example, in 16th century European portraits of the upper classes black people were often depicted with the purpose of drawing attention to the Other’s white complexion – and by implication their superiority as subject (Honour & Fleming 1999: 27).

The various authoring strategies discussed above demonstrably support the persuasive imaging of colonial territories and peoples, thus facilitating the colonial gaze of European artists. Considered together these strategies comprise a set of criteria that can provide a more thorough interpretation of colonial artworks and yield illuminating insights. Whereas the notion of the innocent eye promoted the belief that colonial artists’ innate instinctive vision would guarantee a truthful, objective depiction regardless of aspects like academic artistic training or external factors such as social, cultural, political or economic contexts, their depictions were in fact telling of their own cultural milieu and artistic imagination (Brown 2001: 23, 24). Thus, with a view to determine how Bell’s colonial gaze influenced his persuasive imaging in The landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652, I will conduct a triangulated interpretive reading as proposed by Lerner (1991: 335). This approach considers the (1) ideological frameworks, (2) social reality and (3) authoring strategies that governed the production of the artwork. The reading will serve to provide a more comprehensive perspective on Bell’s work, and in particular helps to establish how the artist’s colonial gaze and use of authoring strategies determined his depiction of early Dutch colonisers and indigenous Khoikhoi people in the colonial landscape.

The colonial gaze and persuasive imaging in Charles Davidson Bell’s

*The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*

The ideological framework: the Victorian context

Since colonial paintings reflect the intangible social values and cultural assumptions of their time (Carruthers & Arnold 2000: 119), an analysis of *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* within the ideological framework of its production, necessitates a consideration of the ways in which this artwork reflects Bell’s bequeathed Victorian cultural values.

The title of the work reflects its subject matter and, along with its position in the history-painting genre, thus also suggests that it can be interpreted as a narrative piece. The story told is European, and is related from a European perspective. There are no references to pre-colonial history. Thus, the artwork negates the existence of the pre-colonial - hence colonialism is cited as the only history. The main impetuses behind modern European imperialism were to colonise and expand territory, and this artwork depicts and commemorates the beginning of this process at the Cape. The historical reference point, 1652, is determined according to the Western calendar and it depicts an event that has significance for European colonial history. Painted nearly two centuries
after the occasion, this artwork represents an epic scene of “inflated heroism” depicted in the Romantic style (Record 1994: 64). Significantly, the only individual named is Van Riebeeck.

Since this artwork depicts an event of historical importance, it can also be read as a memorial painting. However, when it was painted, the Cape was a British colony and no longer under Dutch control. Britain, together with France, is considered as the foremost imperial power of the 19th century and therefore epitomised European power (cf. Young 2001: 31). Thus, painted from a British perspective, the work is not a memorial to Dutch power and grandeur – but rather homage to the rise of British imperial expansionism.

The dissemination of Eurocentric culture was an important motivating factor behind modern European imperialism and was congruous with a perceived need to civilise non-Europeans (cf. Ferro 1997: 11-12; Young 2001: 31). In Bell’s painting this is evidenced in the presence of a priest representing the Christian faith in opposition to what was considered a godless heathen indigenous culture (cf. Mountain 2003: 30). The Khoikhoi’s position in front of Devil’s Peak further alludes to their non-adherence to Western religious conventions. The shallow gulley separating them from the Europeans further strengthens the implied divide between the civilised Christian and heathen savage. The inclusion of a religious minister is significant since Christianity was a central tenet of the Western account and codification of history (cf. Ferro 1998: 20). Loomba (2005: 99) posits that missionary zeal and efforts to convert natives went hand in hand with most colonial enterprises. In many instances the bestowal of Christianity was used as justification for the economic pillage of colonies.

In the artwork, European commodities brought ashore for barter purposes represent the other great European meta-narrative – mercantile capitalism. Van Riebeeck and his wealthy merchants, religious minister and gentry occupy the central position of importance to the middle of the picture, with the Khoikhoi relegated to the far right corner of the painting. European national vanity and Europeans’ own perceived custodianship of the balance of world power were also intrinsic to the European imperial programme (cf. Ferro 1997: 11-12; Young 2001: 31). As propounded by Ashcroft et al. (1998: 126), the European desire for and belief in its own cultural superiority was of far greater consequence than the conquest of profit. Hence in this artwork, depicted in a glow of light, we find Van Riebeeck and his men with their opulent costumes and weaponry as markers of wealth, status, military superiority and national identity (the latter also symbolised by the Dutch flag), signifying the prosperity of civilisation which they have come to bestow on a ‘primitive’, exotic corner of an ‘uncivilised’ Africa. The display of national status symbols and pageantry can be seen as an expression of colonial authority and the dominance of the coloniser. The flag is of exceptional scale compared to the figures and towers over the scene. The flagpost pierces the African sky and points away from Devil’s Peak towards Europe. Hence, similar to Delacroix’s (1798-1863) The 28th of July: Liberty Leading the people (1830), Bell’s use of the flag in this artwork can be seen to combine allegory with actuality with the flag here symbolising not only colonial conquest, but also the ‘liberation’ of the indigenous population from a perceived backward, godless and uncivilized existence (cf. Honour & Fleming 1999: 655). The Khoikhoi’s position in front of Devil’s Peak may further attest to this, since Christians at the time often equated skin colour with religious persuasion and cultural status (cf. Giliomee 2003: 14).

Not only did the indigenous peoples appear somatically different from Europeans, but to European observers they also seemed to have no economy, religious or political structures and neither literacy nor what Europeans considered an intelligible language (cf. Mountain 2003: 30). These perceptions were supported by pseudo-scientific theories of the time (e.g. Phrenology and
other theories bolstered by social Darwinism). According to such theories, race was regarded as a result of an immutable biological hierarchy with Europeans occupying the highest rung (cf. Ashcroft et al. 1998: 209; Loomba 2005: 56, 101-102). Another example of this was the pseudo-science of physiognomy. This contributed to the advancement of the notion that biological features such as race somehow divined a person or a group’s social and psychological character and traits, and was therefore also responsible for historical development and cultural formation (cf. Lambourne 1999: 259). Thus, indigenous peoples were generally viewed as primitives who lacked culture altogether. Their depiction on the periphery of the composition in The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652 is thus not surprising, and at the same time validating Wa Thiong’ o’s indictment of stereotypical colonialist paintings (cf. 1993: 43).

In spite of the perceived inferiority of indigenous peoples, Europeans often resorted to portraying them in the manner of ancient Greeks and Romans, in a manner that would associate them with the notion of the noble savage. This represented an individual who was somehow redeemed on the basis that he shunned society in favour of communing with nature, existing as a naïve primitive on the periphery of civilisation while still possessing no culture (cf. Marien & Fleming 2005: 504). According to Van Wyk Smith (1992: 285) the noble savage trope forms part of a dichotomy that served to present the native as both exotic, but sufficiently familiar to a European audience. The opposite extreme represented natives as brute savages. This practice was evident in the works of several authors and artists working in South Africa during the 19th century, including Bell’s (cf. Godby 1998: 146, 153). The depiction of the Khoikhoi in this artwork attests to this, with at least two members of the group (the standing figure and the seated figure on the far right) depicted in poses recalling classical sculpture.

In spite of this allusion to classical pose, the Khoikhoi’s facial features are depicted coarsely and are far more generalised in appearance than those of the Dutch colonisers, rendering them unrecognisable as individuals and in this way identifying them as a homogenous ‘type’ different from Europeans. Barrell (1992: 134) suggests that figures painted indistinctly in this manner constitute an attempt to evade the question of their actuality. Bell’s practice of depicting various South African ethnic and racial groups as particular ‘types’, as evidenced also in his early ethnographic drawings (cf. Godby 1998: 145-146), is consistent with the pseudo-scientific racial discourse of the time, where it was conceived that physiognomical distinctions such as race could determine a person or a group’s social and psychological character and traits. In turn, this belief helped to sustain the notion of the natural world as a universal hierarchical system (cf. Carruthers & Arnold 2000: 22,171). Their rudimentary attire and various degrees of nudity, which starkly contrasts with the richly dressed and adorned Europeans, further show the Khoikhoi’s supposed primitive savagery.

According to Godby (1998: 145-146) there is evidence that Bell’s works reflect the shared European prejudice of the time regarding Africans’ inferiority as a race; as is evident in the ethnographic drawings Bell made on Smith’s 1834 expedition. Godby (1998: 146) argues that: “many [of these] drawings reveal a patent satirical intention in their style that is directly at odds with any scientific purpose”, that, indeed, through their style of caricature they serve to convey a detached sense of superiority over their subject matter by means of satire. In this regard Godby (1998: 146) cites a drawing, Medicine man blowing counter charm towards the enemy (1834) (figure 3), as cogent example of Bell’s manipulation of different modes of depiction used to frame aspects that will appeal to his presumed rationalist European audience’s sense of the primitive and the ridiculous. In contrast, Bell’s depictions of himself at the time (figures 4 & 5) differ markedly from his stereotypical depictions of others (Godby 1998: 147). In this regard Bell echoed the mindset of many colonists for whom others in their society represented a certain
set of associations based on colonial prejudice. Negative perceptions about the Khoikhoi in particular, had been entrenched in the mainstream British public imagination (Viljoen, 2008: 190). In Cape society at the time of Bell, the Khoikhoi were considered to be quarrelsome, down-at-heel inebriated sloths (figure 6), whereas the local Boers (figure 7) were seen as obese and boorish sloths (Godby 1998: 147; Moodie 1835: 169-170). Godby (1998: 147) argues that Bell often tended to depict his subjects according to prevailing colonial perceptions:

Bell insisted that certain behaviour typified any given subject, he also maintained a very restricted image of its physical form. In the same way that his ‘Boer’ was invariably fat, so he took every opportunity to exaggerate the appearance of steatopygia in his ‘Hottentot’ and ‘Bushman’ subjects.

In light of the above discussion it becomes evident that this artwork is both a reflection and evidence of the ideological context in which it was produced. The current reading of this painting also seeks to bring to light the ideological frameworks that determined the hierarchical relationships between the binaries of colonial self and other, pitting the representation of coloniser against colonised, the civilised against the uncivilised, as well as the hierarchy of racial superiority.

Figure 3
C. D. Bell, Medicine man blowing counter charm towards the enemy, 1834, watercolour (monochrome), 18.5 cm x 26.7 cm, MuseumAfrica Collection (source: Brooke Simons 1998: figure 8: 145).
Figure 4
C. D. Bell, Illustration taken from letter to the artist’s sister Christina, 1837, ink, Bell Heritage Trust Collection, UCT (source: Brooke Simons 1998: figure 10: 147).

Figure 5
C. D. Bell, Self portrait, not dated, crayon on paper, 70 cm x 57 cm, William Fehr Collection (source: Brooke Simons 1998: figure 1: 2).
Social realities

The Khoikhoi presented an otherness foreign not only to European social realities, but also the Europeans’ previous encounters with foreign peoples in the East (cf. Giliomee 2003: 3; Katzen 1982: 198, 202). Bell likely inherited a view of the Khoikhoi derived from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century British travelogue accounts, notably by the likes of John Barrow (1764 – 1848). Barrow’s view of the Khoikhoi seemed more benevolent than previous accounts, yet he still regarded them as inferior human beings (cf. Van Wyk Smith 1992: 310, 319-320). Importantly, Barrow was also instrumental in shaping English public opinion regarding the
boers. He suggested that their reluctance to engage with the British reflected the manner a “vanquished people” generally reacted to their conquerors (Streak 1974: 6, 12, 22, 88, 91). Van Wyk Smith (1992: 322) argues that Barrow’s compassionate view of the Khoikhoi should in fact be viewed against his disdain for the boers, whom he regarded as “…more indolent, more ignorant and more brutal, than any set of men, bearing the reputation of being civilized, upon the face of the whole earth”.

Barrow’s account of the boers echoed nineteenth century British depictions of the Malay, who formed part of the British Empire in the East (cf. Alatas 1977: 204). The negative portrayal of certain sectors of society in this manner had its roots in Britain itself, where the working class were considered indolent, morally inferior and dim - characteristics that were readily projected on colonised peoples. However, as Alatas (1977: 30) points out, a negative portrayal of the British working class was no indictment of the British nation as a whole, whereas in the case of the colonised, entire ethnic groups were easily arraigned to such prejudice. According to Alatas (1977: 120, 125) such negative stereotypes served as justification for colonial domination and territorial conquest. For the most part these negative stereotypes were based on superficial observations that were already premised on prejudice. Furthermore, these accounts were not scholarly but generally contributed by the likes of civil servants, sailors and travel writers (Alatas, 1977: 112).

Convention, however, determined the inferior position of non-Europeans in canonical depictions (Boime 1990: 21). Bell’s use of naturalistic style enables him to distinguish the Khoikhoi racially from the Dutch colonisers. Racial biases were presented as objective truth and were often supported by a similarly entrenched gender bias – the one often serving as mutual justification for bias against the other. Perceived feminine characteristics were assigned to “the lower races” during the mid-nineteenth century, for example (cf. Loomba 2005: 58-59). In other instances, Caucasian women were deemed closer to Africans than to white men. Within this hierarchy, African women occupied the lowest rung. They were considered so lowly and ‘primitive’ that they were seen not to possess the self-awareness to even be able to go insane. On other occasions the colonised landscape, and not necessarily the people, were feminised - as in particular explorers’ accounts of Africa (Boehmer 1995: 87).

Both racial and gender biases are discernable in The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652. In spite of the naturalistic style, Bell’s depiction of the Khoikhoi in this painting is gender-vague due to the generalised way he painted their features. In contrast, the Dutchmen are carefully depicted with great attention to detail and a discernable individuality to each figure. The Khoikhoi are depicted as physically similar, with the exception of an apparent mother and child grouping. Whereas adornments may indicate a distinction of rank and gender within the group, facial features and clothing appear alike in all the Khoikhoi, except for the figure seated to the left, who appears nude and as a result, ironically more genderless. In this depiction, the traditional attire and body form of the Khoikhoi further serves to highlight their otherness from the European norm.

Apart from conspicuous somatic differences, the Khoikhoi were also culturally different from the colonisers. Significant primary cultural differences were lodged in the way in which indigenous societies were structured socially, politically and economically. The Khoikhoi were perceived to be technologically and culturally far less developed than the indigenous peoples in the East with whom the Dutch and the British had already had more sustained contact (cf. Giliomee 2003: 3). The Khoikhoi were former hunter-gatherers who adopted domesticated livestock via West and Central African Iron age peoples (Giliomee & Mbenga 2007: viii). They
lived a lifestyle of nomadic pastoralists and traveled seasonally, taking their portable matjieshuise (houses made of woven basketry) with them. When settled in a particular location, they lived in village encampments consisting of roughly a hundred clan members. Territories for grazing were more or less defined, but the low nutritional value of fynbos and regular droughts meant that clans often had to move beyond their own territory to find grazing (Mountain 2003: 40-46). Probably because local conditions necessitated the sharing of resources, the Khoikhoi’s notion of private ownership related only to livestock and did not extend to land (Smith & Pheiffer 1993: 17). Khoikhoi society was plutocratic. In such societies, an individual’s wealth was determined by political standing. In Khoikhoi society, wealth was primarily measured in terms of livestock. However, their notion of private ownership related only to livestock and did not extend to the land, which they considered as inalienable (cf. Smith & Pheiffer 1993: 17). In contrast, Europeans regarded land as a commodity and bartered with the intention of obtaining realty rights. Thus after European settlement, the cattle trade with the Dutch actually eroded the traditional power structures and social cohesion of the Khoikhoi (Elphick 1985: 38,112; Ross, 1999: 10, 22). The different views regarding land occupation and usage led to the European myth of a terra nullius – an empty and unused landscape that was for the taking (cf. Van Eeden 2004: 25-26). This notion is also found in the tradition of British landscape painting where a well-ordered and controlled fecund landscape equalled a well-organised society (cf. Barrell 1992: 133). In The landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652 the landscape depicted also represents a vacuum domicilem – an unproductive and uncultivated land, thus unused and up for grabs.

The Khoikhoi’s lack of material goods highlights another significant disparity between coloniser and indigenous economies. The Dutch are depicted presenting and carrying ashore many wares and goods, material proof of their wealth as a mercantile colonial power. Both the subject matter and the narrative of this painting – the establishment of a victualing station on the profitable Cape trade route – commemorate the expansion of the Dutch (and by implication, broader European) merchant empire. Interaction and trade with Europeans eventually led to the disintegration of traditional Khoikhoi society (cf. Ross 1999: 10, 22) – a fait accompli by the time the artwork was painted.

One social reality that is not apparent in Bell’s depiction of colonial relationships between coloniser and colonised is the British attitude towards the Dutch – neither at the time of the event depicted, nor at the time of the artwork’s completion. By the time the painting was completed, South Africa’s colonial history had nearly spanned two centuries; the majority of that time under Dutch occupation and rule. In 1652 the British and Dutch were colonial rivals, but by 1850 the descendants of the colonial heroes depicted in Bell’s painting were subjects of the British Empire. This aspect gains significance when considering that both the artist and intended audience of the artwork were British.

By the time the Cape Dutch people became British subjects, their society had already become African-based (or sociologically indigenous) and had lost most of its cultural associations with the Netherlands (cf. Steyn 2001: xxiv). Indeed, English civil society at the Cape disregarded and disdained everything associated with the Cape Dutch. To them Dutch settlers were culturally different; they spoke a foreign language and adhered to a different religious persuasion. British accounts of the Cape Dutch tended to be very negative and disparaging. The common English perception of these people, by the time also called boers, included attributes such as indolence, ignorance, indifference, treachery, cruelty, boorishness, troublesomeness, disaffectedness, moral degenerateness, coarseness and a lack of polish in manner, and suggested that they were dirty and slovenly in appearance. The Spectator of 17 May 1834 referred to these people, who by then could be called Afrikaners, as “semi-savage Dutch Africans” with Kitchener’s description
of the Afrikaner as “uncivilised Afrikaner savages with a thin white veneer” six decades later, corroborating such a stance (cf. Streak, 1974: 125, Steyn 2001: 26). Apart from considering themselves morally superior, the English found Afrikaners’ non-observance regarding class, rank and title particularly irksome. During the first years of British occupation, the British’s sense of superiority was a recurring issue in English/Cape Afrikaner relations (Streak 1974: 41).

At the time Bell painted his account of South African Imperial history, another pivotal colonial event that shaped South Africa as a country and its history, the Great Trek (1836-1854) was drawing to a close. In many ways this event represented the social, ideological and above all political rejection of British hegemony - an event considered by some to herald the birth of the Afrikaner nation (cf. De Klerk 2008: 342-343). Ross’ claim that British nationalism was the “prime nationalism to which both Afrikaner and African nationalism reacted” (cf. Giliomee, 2003: 194) supports such a view. Thus, Bell’s choice to depict an event that heralds the beginning of the history of the Afrikaner seems at odds with the social, cultural and political status quo that existed between British and Cape Afrikaners at the time. The painting bears little relation to the actual event, and is rather concerned with the perceptions and values of 19th century British colonial power. Thus, giving credence to Record’s (1994: 65) suggestion that the artwork represents a “jingoist appropriation” of Dutch history for British imperialist purposes.

**Authoring strategies**

European artists used various authoring strategies to convey their observations of both the colonised other and colonised landscape. Such depictions were generally predicated on stereotypical representations. These artists further tended to resort to conventional and familiar concepts, narratives and metaphors in order to describe and encompass their unsettling new surroundings (cf. Boehmer 1995: 92). One such strategy is the depiction of the colonised as sub-human. In contrast with the superiority afforded representations of an expanding Europe, the colonised were either represented in generic terms such as faceless masses; or in lesser terms by showing them as uncivilised, subhuman, child or animal-like; all part of the attempt to justify and rationalise European colonialism (cf. Boehmer 1995: 79; Smith & Pheiffer 1993: 20).

Bell’s belief in British superiority as race and in the colonial project meant that he too on occasion regarded indigenous peoples as savages – as examples in his personal correspondence attest (cf. Brooke Simons 1998: 35). Reading *The landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* in its ideological context reveals the artist’s disregard for the Cape’s indigenous inhabitants and pre-colonial history – an attitude that literally rendered these ‘opaque centuries’ invisible. The superiority afforded the representation of Europeans can be seen in the central position assigned to Van Riebeeck and his party compositionally. Posture is another device that may signify social standing (cf. Barrell 1992: 44; Boime 1990: 103, 170, 179). In this work all the Khoikhoi, bar one, are depicted in crouching or seated positions in contrast to the upright poses of the Van Riebeeck group, thus indicating the subordinate position of the Khoikhoi in relation to the Dutch.

The Khoikhoi’s depiction as a homogeneous and anonymous collection of people rather than individuals reiterates their subordinacy and corresponds to the way the other is viewed. The attention and detail afforded to the Europeans’ rank and occupation reflected in their dress further highlights the Khoikhoi’s anonymity. The Europeans’ rich attire reflects the prosperity of the Dutch merchant nation. Their costume displays variation in both style and colour, with vivid hues of gold, as well as orange, blue and white – representing the colours of the Dutch flag. The Europeans thus dominate the composition also in terms of palette. In contrast, the
artist renders the traditional dress of the Khoikhoi in a generic manner by depicting them in simple earth-coloured clothing. The pigmented skin depicting the backdrop of shadows cast by Table mountain visually consumes the Khoikhoi, thus echoing Wa Thiong’ o’s indictment of representation in colonialist paintings (cf. Wa Thiong’ o, 1993: 43). By using authoring strategies that depict the Khoikhoi as sub-human and inferior to Europeans, Bell situates them firmly in the position of the other.

While colonists’ depictions of indigenous peoples were regarded by their contemporaries as exemplifying the truth, these depictions represented a particular version of reality intended for a specific audience. Such accounts were often characterised by a heady mixture of fact and fiction. The Romantic Naturalist style in which Bell depicted the Khoikhoi presupposes the ‘believable’ and faithful depiction of subject matter thus rendering this painting ‘real’ for its intended audience (cf. Rosenblum & Janson 2005: 156). Ironically, Bell’s use of the Romantic style means that he also made use of pictorial strategies associated with the picturesque and sublime (cf. Godby 1998: 145, 156; Brooke Simons 1998: 67), adding a heroic flair, thus belying the supposed ‘reality’ of this picture.

As an aesthetic modality, the sublime is often associated with seascapes or mountainous scenery (cf. Chu 2003: 183) - both of which are present in this painting. An artist’s use of the sublime generally aims to elicit overpowering emotions in the viewer. This is achieved through the use of awe-inspiring epic vastness as well as rousing the imagination through the power of suggestion (cf. Clarke 2001: 234; Chilvers 2003: 574). The geographic character of Table Bay with its towering mountains, the unusual and iconic shape of Table Mountain and the reputedly stormy seas around the Cape naturally lend themselves to attaining this goal. Although Table Mountain itself is not depicted, the artwork’s primary intended audience of Cape residents could hardly be unaware of its towering omnipresence. Its omission, therefore, does not negate its implied presence in the imagination of the viewer. Bell’s decision to depict the enigmatically named Devil’s Peak under a stormy sky further serves to rouse the imagination through the power of suggestion. Since the sublime mode of colonial painting functions as an allegory of imperial control, the artist’s use of this authoring strategy highlights his complicity in colonial processes of representation (cf. Ashcroft 2001: 141).

Apart from aesthetic modalities such as the sublime, European artists also made use of composition and perspective as authoring strategies. In this work the Europeans stake the highest register - even towering above the imposing Devil’s Peak - their commanding flagpole piercing the overcast sky, alluding to the triumph of European Christian civilization over heathen Africa. The shallow gulley that separates the Europeans from the Khoikhoi further emphasises the divide between these two binaries. Despite historical records that estimate Van Riebeeck’s party numbering only around ninety (Giliomee 2003: xiv, 1, 4). Europeans occupy almost three quarters of the painting’s format and also constitute the focal point of the composition. They are pictured coming ashore – a sign of agency – and are represented as industrious and self-possessed in their new surroundings. Their advancement into the landscape is visually supported by the diagonal line flowing from the bottom left to the top right that dominates the format of the painting. In the same way, Van Riebeeck leads the Dutch advance into foreign territory - the strong diagonal line guides the viewer’s eye across the picture plane, visually conquering the expanse of the landscape it depicts. In contrast, a small group of Khoikhoi represents the entire indigenous population of the peninsula; and occupies only a quarter of the composition. Devil’s Peak frames the Khoikhoi group, further alluding to their supposed heathen (read: uncivilised) ways. They are shown passively awaiting an audience with Van Riebeeck. Thus, read from left to right, the picture purports the heroic arrival of European colonisers, easily able to stake their
claims in the face of a small and docile indigenous population, thus reflecting a very unlikely and idealised account of events, especially considering prior violent exchanges between the Khoikhoi and Europeans (cf. Mountain 2003: 46-47).

Apart from composition, the use of perspective as authoring strategy also comes into play in this artwork. Perspective in colonial paintings may be translated into real spatial situations through the persuasive imaging of the artist, whereby Europeans transfigured their control of space into military and cultural control and, ultimately, possession and thus highlighting the complicit role of artists in the colonial programme (cf. Ashcroft 2001: 15; Godby 1998: 144, 150). In this artwork perspective is characterized by a single controlling viewpoint that recedes from the foreground into the middle distance and distant background. This type of perspective renders depicted space accessible for the viewer. Bell’s use of a single controlling viewpoint thus assumes symbolic significance that represents an instrument of the possessive gaze of his imperial eye.

In the artwork, chiaroscuro light effects and tonal perspective further helps to achieve the separation of the picture plane into foreground, middle-distance and background, resulting in the illusion of great depth. However, as noted above and to recall Boime (1990: 2), chiaroscuro is concerned with more than the mere modelling of light and shadow - as a polarity it represents the religious dualism of Good versus Evil and thus analogous to the Manichean allegory.

The use of planar recession and chiaroscuro in this painting also evokes the landscape paintings of the 17th century artist Claude, whose types of Italian landscape painting set the canon for the picturesque. According to Lipschitz (1992: 67) Bell readily adopted picturesque stylistic and topographical conventions in his depictions of the South African landscape. This artwork is a striking example of the artist’s use of Claudian principles of pictorial arrangement. Thus, as an aesthetic modality, the picturesque was reliant on presupposed pictorial models that determined how nature was to be looked at and presented an all-embracing coded form of representation that presented the foreign landscape for the colonial gaze.

Conclusion

In my reading of the artwork it emerged that Bell relied on, and conformed to familiar concepts and features, established authoring strategies and aesthetic modalities that typified the art of his time. By considering the authoring strategies that governed the creation of this work, I exposed the hierarchical relationships between binaries of colonial self and other/coloniser and colonised.

I argued that the use of established conventions and aesthetic modalities abetted the Bell’s persuasive imaging of the colonized landscape as well as his stance on colonial others and otherness. In scrutinising such authoring strategies, the ideological frameworks that governed the hierarchical relationships between binaries of colonial self and other were exposed.

I demonstrated that this painting bears little relation to the actual event depicted, in spite of it being based on historical accounts. Rather, it deals with the perceptions and values of 19th century British colonial power and thus, to all intents and purposes, represents a partisan nationalist appropriation of Dutch history for British imperialist purposes. In light of this, this work may also be seen as a reflection of racial attitudes of the time in which it was painted, rather than a record of Dutch attitudes towards the Khoikhoi at the time of Jan van Riebeeck’s settlement.
Through his use of persuasive imaging, Bell attempted to convince his audience of the reality of his particular depiction of colonial history. By appropriating Dutch colonial history, Bell lays claim to almost two centuries of European occupation of the Cape, thus naturalising European presence on the sub-continent, while at the same time absconding Britain of the negative aspects of the imperial legacy inherited by the British in 1806 and framing it squarely on the colony’s Dutch heritage.

Note

1. These pastoralists, called Hottentots by the Dutch, used the term Khoikhoi to refer to themselves. The term Khoekhoen reflects the correct spelling according to modern Nama orthography (Smith & Pheiffer 1993: 79). With regard to the naming conventions of African communities and languages, I concur with Smith and Pheiffer (1993: 79) who use the commonly accepted term Khoikhoi, as opposed to Khoekhoen, and Giliomee and Mbenga (cf. 2007: x) who, according to convention, use epithets sans prefixes (for example Pedi as opposed to Bapedi).

Works cited


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Ontwortel/Uprooted: Jan van der Merwe’s archival practice

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The exhibition, Ontwortel/Uprooted (2009, 2013) by Jan van der Merwe is located as a form of deconstructive archive, foregrounding iterability and différance. The installation evokes a psychic space, highlighting the fragmentary nature of memory and suggesting an oscillation between the recall and repression of memory. This archive elicits an uncanny experience. It is a work of mourning and articulates a repetition compulsion, highlighting absence and loss.

Key words: archive, deconstruction, iterability, différance.

Ontwortel/Uprooted: Jan van der Merwe se argieferingsproses.
Die uitstalling, Ontwortel/Uprooted (2009, 2013), deur Jan van der Merwe word posisioneer as ‘n tipe dekonstruktiewe argief, wat Derrida se “herhaling” en différance beklemtoon. Die installasie skep ‘n psigiese ruimte wat die gefragmenteerde natuur van geheue beklemtoon en ‘n ossilasie tussen die herroep en onderdrukking van herinneringe suggereer. Hierdie argief skep ‘n gevoel van das Unheimliche. Dit is ‘n werk van rou wat die herhalings-kompulsie, afwesigheid en verlies oproep.

Sleutelwoorde: argief, dekonstruksie, herhaling, différance.

“[P]ersons desiring to train this faculty select localities and form mental images of the facts they wish to remember and store those images in the localities, with the result that the arrangement of the localities will preserve the order of the facts, and the images of the facts will designate the facts themselves...” Cicero (1967: 353-54).

Cicero’s statement records a Greek story regarding the invention of mnemotechnics, through the development of the loci memoriae, positing a significant connection between location and memory. This mnemonic method entails the use of a particular geographical or architectural space that is familiar to one and consists of discrete areas. A list of unfamiliar items is then remembered by associating each with a specific site in the loci memoriae (or memory palace, as it is commonly described). In this essay, an exhibition by the South African installation artist, Jan van der Merwe, will be considered as a specific form of loci memoriae - as a form of memory palace or archive where subjective memory supersedes the dictates of an objective historical memory.

Van der Merwe generally works with found objects and rusted metal. Found objects are transformed into artefacts of the present, suggestive of our vulnerability and fallibility. His use of metal, particularly the ubiquitous use of the tin can, serves as metaphor for the attempt to preserve that which is transient, while simultaneously, rusted, evoking deterioration (Kruger & Van der Merwe 2011: 159). This process is continued in Van der Merwe’s exhibition, Ontwortel/Uprooted, where the artist substitutes charcoal for his signature medium of rust, with both evoking decay. The exhibition has been installed in the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery (2009) as well as Bloemfontein’s Oliwenhuis Art Museum (2013) and an extension thereof was displayed for the Site-Specific International Land Art Event (2011) held at Plettenberg Bay.
The *Ontwortel/Uprooted* installation comprises several structures in which the stumps of uprooted trees have been hybridised through the addition of furniture, including a couch, chairs, a table, dumb valet and vitrine (Van der Merwe s.a.; figure 1, 2013). Everything has been blackened, and seems to have been scorched by fire. Each structure seems to have been dragged across a sheet of *Fabriano*, leaving a charcoal drag-mark in its wake.

*Dreyer* (s.a.) describes *Ontwortel/Uprooted* as articulating “three concepts: trace, loss and the archive.” We would like to take this assertion as a point of departure for a more extensive investigation of Van der Merwe’s work as archive, particularly in terms of Jacques Derrida’s conceptualisation thereof. Specifically, it will be argued that Van der Merwe’s exhibition comprises an archive of the subconscious. It is argued that various oppositions (for example, culture / nature) are interrelated in these structures in a manner expressive of Derridean *différance* and iterability. An examination thereof in relation to a Derridean theoretical framework has therefore been deemed appropriate.

**Archive fever**

Memory, particularly as articulated in terms of what art critic and historian Hal Foster (2004: 3-4) describes as an “archival impulse”, is a prevalent topic in contemporary art. Foster refers
to numerous artists in this regard, including Thomas Hirschhorn, Sam Durant, Douglas Gordon, Mark Dion and Renée Green and others who base their artworks on historical documents, found objects or images. However, the contemporary interest in the archival consists of more than merely the display of historical artefacts or the mimetic representation of history.

According to Gibbons (2012: 3), contemporary artists across the world are increasingly employing a personal approach in their examination of the themes of memory and history. Such artworks are generally based on a complex subjective and emotional rather than on a more “objective” understanding of the past (Gibbons 2012: 4). The contemporary French historian, Pierre Nora (1989: 15) corroborates this view, noting a general shift in emphasis “from the historical to the psychological, from the sociological to the individual, from the objective message to its subjective reception...” Van der Merwe’s exploration of memory in Ontwortel/ Uprooted, has a similarly subjective inflection. Gibbons (2012: 5) attributes the general artistic shift away from objectivity to the postmodern acknowledgement of the contingency of memory; the realisation that memory can at best only yield a few paltry, distorted facts. Marlene Manoff (2004: 14) similarly refers to “the postmodern suspicion of the historical record”.

Memory, though fallible, plays an important role in constructing our understanding of ourselves and our environment. The theorist Andreas Huyssen (1995: 7) has linked the contemporary Western preoccupation with memory to an attempt to step outside the fast-paced mutable digital landscape and its “non-synchronicity and information overload”, to find an anchoring point. The current South African context comprises a landscape fraught with the revision of history, literally being remade through the allocation of new street-names (with each street-name being replaced itself constituting a manifestation of a particular construction of history). This acute condition makes an exploration of the themes of history and memory highly relevant in the South African context.

Derrida (1995a: 17) problematises the notion of the archive in a manner that relates to the preceding discussion of memory and subjectivity. Derrida (1995a: 17) states that archiving “produces as much as it records the event” and describes the archive not as an objective receptacle and mirror of truth, but as shaping the manner history is interpreted. The archive is eminently fallible and fragmentary. It is this aspect that is particularly pertinent to our argument, as will be clarified. The arbitrary nature of the archive is encapsulated in Derrida’s (1996: 11,92) notion of mal d’archive, which can be translated as either “archive fever” or “the need for archives”. It denotes the co-existence of two conflicting forces: one related to the desire for destruction, implicated in forgetting and repression and the other an impulse for preservation. According to Derrida (s.a.: 11) “archive fever” refers to sickness in the sense that the process of archiving potentially begins the process of forgetting: once something is recorded, one might no longer rehearse the memory, but relegate its preservation solely to the archive. Moreover, archiving, like memory itself, will never be more than fragmentary and is subject to revision and manipulation or abuse. Derrida (s.a.: 11) states that all archives are characterised by “archi-violence”, referring to the inherent processes of selection and exclusion. All archives thus possess the potential for misinterpretation. Nevertheless, Derrida (1995a: 17,18) argues that these processes of evaluation and interpretation are an inevitable part of the construction of archives, calling for responsibility on the part of those in control of the archive. For memory to exist, an archive of some sort is necessary (Derrida 1995a: 17,18). The desire to do justice to the past through archiving must be weighed against the inevitable possibility of negation or injustice (Derrida 2002: 5-6).

An archive can be understood as an instance of what Derrida (1995a: 17,18) calls general writing. For Derrida, writing refers to the entire system of linguistic signs. While Derrida
(1976: 40-1,45) links writing to the “durable inscription of the sign”, he also associates writing specifically with the absence of the referent or signified. Derrida’s (1972: 19) concept of the sign as part of writing undermines the logocentric understanding of the sign as comprised of a unity of signifier and signified. Consequently, Derrida replaces the term signifier with trace which implies an absent signified or referent. The trace is emblematic of absence as it functions as a “signifier” of a “signifier”, marking the absence of a presence (Derrida 1995b: 26). The trace implies that every “sign” is inhabited by difference, with the semblance of identity merely produced through its relation to other traces (Derrida 1972: 33).

The operation of the trace and its relation to the psyche and archive is examined by Derrida (1982: 21) in his discussion of Freud’s mystic writing pad. Freud (1958: 230) conceived of the stratified relation between the conscious and unconscious mind in terms of the figure of the mystic writing pad, which similarly consists in layers. The writing pad registers the marks inscribed by a stylus from the outside, but also permanently retains traces of marks in the hidden layer of wax. Similarly, unconscious traces of memories persist, as though they have been embedded in wax. Echoing Freud’s discussion of the mystic writing pad, Derrida (1982: 21) sees the unconscious as comprising archives which bear traces of repressed memories that evade consciousness. Moreover, Derrida (1982: 21) describes these traces as relating to a past “that has never been present”. These repressed memories can only be accessed as traces, with their truth always already inaccessible (Derrida 1982: 21). Derrida (1978: 211) explains as follows: “There is then no unconscious truth to be rediscovered by virtue of having been written elsewhere. . . . The text is not conceivable in an originary or modified form of presence. The unconscious text is already a weave of pure traces, differences in which meaning and force are united - a text nowhere present, consisting of archives which are always already transcriptions... Everything begins with reproduction.”

Van der Merwe’s installations as loci memoriae

It is argued that Ontwortel/Uprooted, like the example of the mystic writing pad, evokes the trace-like nature of memory. In Ontwortel/Uprooted, Van der Merwe, as is typical of his practice, has created an environment that is indexical of occupants. Chairs, a cabinet and a clothes horse refer to their users, with “drawn” marks serving as “signatures” for people who, nevertheless, are conspicuous in their absence (figure 2, 2013). Tree stumps have been excavated and the pieces of furniture are scarred in order to seem aged, causing them to resemble archaeological artefacts and evoke history. Moreover, the installations evoke death: the elongated format of the paper recalls the proportion of graves, with the charred structures themselves resembling gravestones (because of their position at the head of the grave) or disinterred bodies (because of their skeletal shapes (Dreyer s.a.)). The artefacts are also deployed in a fairly ordered, methodical arrangement, so that the exhibition resembles an archive. As will become clear, the exhibition can be interpreted particularly as a form of subconscious archive, constituted out of mnemonic traces.
Walter Benjamin (1999: 576) provides a metaphor that facilitates the interpretation of the installation as a subjective archive. Benjamin (1999: 576) conceives of memory in terms of an archaeological metaphor, describing it as soil that has to be excavated: “He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil...” This metaphor allows an interpretation of Van der Merwe’s archaeological aesthetic as being suggestive of the subconscious. In *Ontwortel/Uprooted*, this aesthetic ambivalently suggests a process of mnemonic repression (with objects buried in a shroud of charcoal) as well as the search for artefacts (where hidden layers have been excavated). While the various hybrid structures are metonymic of memories they fail to evince particular narratives or referents. Direct reference to an identifiable signified has been effaced in each case; a relation which may, according to Derrida (1978: 211), never have existed.

The archaeological metaphor is particularly relevant in the South African context, in terms of the long history of the mining industry in South Africa and its connection with poverty, migrant labour, racial segregation and exploitation. The South African artist, William Kentridge, for example, uses geological layers in order to evoke historical change, including the erasure of history, repression, *et cetera*. This is supplemented by a technique where his charcoal marks are also erased, nevertheless leaving ghostly remnants indexical of the process of erasure. These marks of erasure comprise traces that evoke concealment, censorship or suppression, an oscillation between the recall and repression of memory, both on a personal and a wider political scale (Thompson & Laubser 2006: 818,819). This process is echoed in the art of Van der Merwe.
Trace, iterability and différance

The structures comprising *Ontwortel/Uprooted* underscore their trace-like nature. A charred tree stump is an index of an unmarred tree stump which is indexical of a tree, which in turn seems to refer to nature, and so on. Pieces of furniture (chairs, a clothes horse and a cabinet) seem to presuppose the presence of personal effects or a domestic environment or seem indexical of an owner who is nevertheless absent. Signifiers refer to signifiers in a chain of signification where meaning never quite arrives. The *signifiers* are more appropriately described as *traces* as they do not refer to a particular signified and function in a hybrid relation, emphasising interdependence (Derrida 1995b: 26; 1972: 33).

Figure 3

*Jan van der Merwe, Ontwortel/Uprooted, 2009 & 2013, installation: charred tree stump, wooden clothes horse, Fabriano, charcoal, life size, dimensions variable, Pretoria, private collection of the artist (photograph: Sylvester Mqeku / Karen Marais).*

Traces resembling written inscriptions have been made by dragging the objects across the sheets of paper (figure 3, 2013). In this archaeological context the drag-marks evoke associations of a written history, or perhaps comprise a form of automatic writing that, rather than yielding meaning, has devolved into nonsensical traces. The drag-marks are suggestive of writing, yet, rather than having any symbolic or representational value, the inscriptions comprise ephemeral and mute *marks*, suggesting the failure of coherent communication or a difficulty in articulating or retrieving memories. These archival texts, which trace the movement of objects that are themselves traces, comprise traces of traces. This sustains the open-ended nature of the installation as a whole. For some, the objects might articulate familial nostalgia or perhaps they might sometimes be read as ghostly vestiges of Lord Kitchener’s notorious scorched earth
policy (resembling remnants of burnt furniture salvaged from farm-houses); or perhaps, equally, they might be seen as speaking of an era of struggle (of poverty, the violence of forced removals or general displacement); or might connote tragedy on a universal scale... As is typical of the operation of the trace, the remnants embodied in the marks and the objects obdurately refuse or fail to relinquish coherent meaning. As with the Freud’s writing pad, this archive of memories comprises traces of narratives that are persistent but inaccessible. Two specific trace-like forces are particularly pertinent to this exhibition, namely iterability and différance.

Two specific trace-like forces are particularly pertinent to this exhibition, namely iterability and différance.

Figure 4
Jan van der Merwe, Ontwortel/Uprooted, 2009, installation: charred tree stumps, vitrine, wooden chest of drawers, wooden couch-frame, wooden table, wooden chairs, wooden clothes horse, wooden table, Fabriano, charcoal, life size, dimensions variable, Pretoria, private collection of the artist (photograph: Rupert de Beer).

Traditional binary oppositions have not been treated in a manner respectful of the conventional hierarchy and have all been subjected to the operation of différance. Many binary oppositions are interrelated in this manner, including: manmade / organic, culture / nature, inside / outside, destruction / transformation, life / death and, significantly, remembrance / forgetting. The fragmentary objects are forcibly interrelated through hybridisation and function as interdependent signifiers in a web of differences. The temporality of différance is evoked as each object constantly transforms into another in a moebius of continuity, and as everything is forever caught in a play between growth and decomposition (Figure 4, 2009). The structures are neither purely manmade nor organic, but, partially both; they partake of neither purely the
human nor the natural domain, but partially, both; the exhibition changes location, migrating from inside to outside; the scorched artefacts are neither purely in the process of obliteration nor in a process of transformation, but partially both and can be described as being sous rature (under erasure). The objects are metonymic of memory and the foregrounding of différance suggests that they are emblematic of the strangely fluctuating space between the annihilation of memory and the reconstitution thereof.

Figure 5
Jan van der Merwe, Ontwortel/Uprooted, 2009, installation: charred tree stumps, vitrine, wooden couch-frame, wooden chairs, wooden table, Fabriano, charcoal, life size, dimensions variable, Pretoria, private collection of the artist (photograph: Rupert de Beer).
Jan van der Merwe, Ontwortel/Uprooted, 2009, installation: charred tree stumps, vitrine, wooden couch-frame, wooden chairs, wooden table, Fabriano, charcoal, life size, dimensions variable, Pretoria, private collection of the artist (photograph: Rupert de Beer).

Jan van der Merwe, Ontwortel/Uprooted, 2009, installation: charred tree stumps, vitrine, wooden chest of drawers, wooden couch-frame, wooden chairs, wooden clothes horse, wooden table, Fabriano, charcoal, life size, dimensions variable, Pretoria, private collection of the artist (photograph: Rupert de Beer).
The Ontwortel/Uprooted installation was originally exhibited at the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery (2009). Another permutation was subsequently exhibited at Bloemfontein’s Oliewenhuis Art Museum (2013). A new set of structures, an extension of this project, was exhibited for the Site-specific - International Land Art Event, held at Plettenberg Bay in 2011. The repetitive exhibition of the mnemonic structures in different permutations suggests the iterative nature of memory. With each iteration, a slight change in inflection and meaning occurs. The University of Johannesburg’s gallery comprises an oblong narrow space, with a cement floor and white walls; a clinical area. The structures have been dispersed in the space so that it evokes effluence and when viewers move into the space, they are pulled in and swept along (figures 5-7, 2009). In the Oliewenhuis Art Museum, there is a long central pathway leading from the front entrance through to the back of the museum. The floor is wooden and the walls cream-coloured, lending a warm atmosphere to the room. This space has lent itself to the installation being arranged in a manner suggestive of formal ritual, which encourages the viewer to approach and view each structure separately and as though paying his or her respects to a solitary grave (figures 8-10, 2013).

Figure 8
Figure 9

Figure 10
Similar structures are examined in a third context, in the *Site-specific - International Land Art Event* (Plettenberg Bay, 2011). The artist produced a new installation, entitled, *Uprooted* (figure 11, 2011), an extension of the original *Uprooted/Ontwortel* exhibition, for this occasion. Five constructions, again hybridised furniture / tree stumps, unambiguously recall the earlier structures (figures 12, 13, 2011). This work further pursues the original tendency towards entropy, as it is exhibited on the beach and resembles detritus accumulated from the ocean. The objects also recall debris from a shipwreck and evoke the arrival of colonisers or refugees. Whereas the work was originally exhibited in a man-made terrain on artificial flooring and subsequently in another cultural space, though against the natural material of wooden planking, the objects now occupy a liminal space, between nature and culture. The cycles of nature, including the ebb and flow of the tide and the setting sun also serve to underscore transition. At dusk, man-made light replaces the failing natural light. In this context, the interminably oscillating movement between organic/geometric and human/nature is exacerbated.

![Figure 11](image)

*Figures 11*


Iterability occurs on many levels. It is not only suggested by the repeated exhibition of similar installations, it inherently pervades each installation itself, as well. As stated previously, the charcoal structures are indexical of the original tree stumps, which are indexical of trees, which are indexical of nature. Because related objects have been hybridised, each structure is itself also inherently a microcosm of this larger iterability. The drag-marks comprise a further iteration. The charcoal inscriptions, in this setting, call to mind the creation of carbon copies for archival purposes. Following the logic of iterability, the duplication of information has not
been accurate, but has lead to divergence. This written iteration has, in turn, been repeated, because the original drag-marks have been augmented and additional ones simulated by the artist. Lines curve and interweave (figures 3, 4 and 5) in a manner that evokes this re-inscription. A further instance of iterability arises as the viewer moves from one structure to another, as each structure is an iteration of the former. The interminably iterative movement from one trace to the next is suggestive of a process of searching, absence and the continuous retrieval and loss of traces of memories. In this mnemonic setting, iterability suggests the difficulties involved in the coherent articulation and archival or psychical representation of memories.

Figure 12
Jan van der Merwe, Uprooted, 2011, installation: charred tree stumps, wooden chairs, life size, dimensions variable, private collection (photograph: Elizabeth Olivier-Kahlau).

Figure 13
Jan van der Merwe, Uprooted, 2011, installation: charred tree stumps, wooden chairs, life size, dimensions variable, private collection (photograph: Elizabeth Olivier-Kahlau (detail)).
Uncanny memories

Read as an archive, the various structures come to occupy a liminal space, typified by an indistinction between real and imaginary, psychic and objective reality. The objects seem to have an objective existence, as actual objects, but in their illogical character and their location in a ritualistic space, they also reference psychic space. They each comprise a veritable mystic writing pad, recording traces of unconscious processes. Simultaneously, the objects ambiguously oscillate between animate (organic) and inanimate (man-made). Together, these conditions (an indistinction between real / imaginary, animate / inanimate) evoke a sense of the uncanny (Freud 1963: 54).

The uncanny (Freud 1919: 339-76) refers to an encounter where the familiar (heimlich), for example, an object from the home, has unexpectedly been rendered alien (unheimlich or uncanny). Freud (1919: 345) associates it with a return of the repressed, describing it as an unresolved attempt to work through a trauma that one would rather forget (Freud 1961: 17). As such, an uncanny encounter produces anxiety (Freud 1963: 54). The uncanny results from instances of repetition, and is an expression of the repetition compulsion and death drive (Freud 1963: 5). Arising from repetition, the uncanny is also another instance of iterability. Van der Merwe’s work, by interminably oscillating between life and death, absence and presence, also evokes the fort / da of the repetition compulsion (Freud 1963: 5); an attempt to work through trauma. To the extent that it evokes the uncanny, the installation connotes the repression of traumatic knowledge. However, this aspect is again subjected to the continuously cyclical movement between forgetting and remembering, which, as previously described, is simultaneously evoked.

Conclusion

In his earlier works, rather than laying objects bare, Van der Merwe veiled the objects in a layer of rust. This practice is sustained in this exhibition where the surfaces of objects have been eroded through charring. In Ontwortel/Uprooted, inscriptive marks or traces are privileged over the signified and meaning is never quite relinquished in the play of traces. More than anything, the traces evoke associations with veiling and concealment and these marks of erasure seem to refer to erasure, as a metaphor of concealment or repression.

Derrida (1988: 18) has stated that all signs are subject to the force of iterability. However, whereas this is often repressed, Van der Merwe’s exhibition foregrounds this aspect. Internally, as stated previously, each artefact is governed by the force of repetition – for example, wood is echoed in paper, which is, in turn, echoed in charcoal. Moreover, as a collection, as though illustrative of a repetition compulsion, the various furniture objects enact several iterations of the same, appearing in several configurations or permutations. Lastly, the objects migrate from one exhibition to the next, so that the memory palace is constantly re-incarnated to reflect the rehearsal of memory. Ontwortel/Uprooted can be interpreted as an archive, where the emphasis on iterability and the trace suggests a comprehension of the archive and memory itself as always already contingent and fragmentary.

The archival process, as described by Derrida (1996: 91), is interminable, involving a continuous process of re-interpretation. Motivated by a desire to do justice to the past, it can be interpreted as a form of mourning, as a desire to remember and do justice to the other (Derrida 1995b: 48). Derrida (1995b: 48) states that the act of remembrance is always a work
of mourning. In this sense, the scorched artefacts call to mind Derrida’s discussion of cinders, where the cinder acts as a form of trace, which traces nothing so much as obliteration itself. According to Derrida (1995b: 207): “The experience of cinders is the experience not only of forgetting, but of the forgetting of forgetting, of the forgetting of which nothing remains.” They testify to “the disappearance of memory” or “the destruction of memory itself” (Derrida 1995b: 209).

Van der Merwe’s exhibition, and to some extent his entire body of work, as a whole, can be interpreted as a form of melancholic archive. The furniture is arranged in a manner suggestive of displacement, echoing the title of the exhibition. The interpretation of the work in terms of mourning is corroborated by the fact that the furniture is placed in such a manner that it evokes grave-stones or oceanic detritus. The space seems to be mourning for absent occupants. Mourning is not only evoked by the blackness, the dust, but also reflected in the skeletal shapes (Dreyer s.a.), the stripped furniture and the insistent evocation of absence by means of the spectral figures of the trace, différance and iterability. This archive has neither abrogated nor banished the traces of otherness, and can be described as an archive of interminable mourning (Derrida 1995b: 152).

Van der Merwe has always been preoccupied with layering and his objects generally resemble archaeological artefacts, where unearthed artefacts suggest the excavation of repressed memories. However, the traces bear no direct relation to a referent or signified. The traces signify nothing so much as the repression or fragmentation of memory and the inaccessibility of an experience of the other. Ontwortel/Uprooted is an archive of the psyche, populated with the spectral traces of the other, where memory is more a question of construction than recall.

The erased forms, as keepsakes or evidence of memory and history, bear witness to their erasure and the passage of time. In the South African context they call to mind the censorship, repression and exclusion of the era before democracy, possibly recalling for some that which Gavin Younge (in Williamson & Jamal s.a.) has described as the “elision of memory of a certain period - the desire to forget”. In this sense the artworks can be interpreted as bearing traces of the other. However, it is just as easy to interpret the exhibition as a personal archive referring to personal possessions, a personal history and enumerating personal experiences. Ultimately, Van der Merwe insists on keeping the work open-ended. He has tried to create a poetic moment, a moment of reflection.

Notes

1. Derrida (1976: 45) defines writing as follows: “If ‘writing’ signifies inscription and especially the durable institution of a sign, writing in general covers the entire field of linguistic signs”. Derrida (1976: 40-1,51) sees writing or “grammatology” as comprising the field of differential relations which enables thinking and communication, where the written sign or mark is seen as characteristic of signs in general.

2. Derrida (1972: 26) describes the operation of the trace as follows: “the play of differences supposes, in effect, synthesis and referrals that forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be present in and of itself, referring only to itself...no element can function as a sign without reference to another element which itself is not simply present. The interweaving results in each ‘element’ (phoneme or grapheme) being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system... there are only everywhere, differences and traces of traces”. Whereas scientific or metaphysical texts typically efface the signifier in order to create the illusion of direct access to the referent or truth (presence), literature and visual art, which use metaphorical language and marks unrelated to mimetic representation, foreground writing or the trace (Derrida 1976: 20; 2001: 22-3).
3. The mystic writing pad is a celluloid and wax-covered writing block where visible text can easily be erased. However, remnants of the imprints of previous texts remain in the hidden lower layers.

4. The artist initially derived partial inspiration for the structures from the crosses marking fatal accidents on sites next to the road. Moreover, the shapes of the structures, suggestive of growth as well as death, can perhaps be traced back to the artist’s memory of a fruit tree that had collapsed outside his window at the time of his father’s death. The fallen tree, all but dead, continued flowering. Van der Merwe’s objects often lean towards the anthropomorphic.

5. A noteworthy source of inspiration for the structures is the violent xenophobic attacks which were rife at the time of production, coupled with the widespread uprooting of foreign trees.

6. Derrida’s (1988: 18) concept of iterability describes the possibility of repetition and, with that, the possibility of alteration that underlies all signs. As context changes, irrespective of the original or intended meaning of a sign or text, the interpretation thereof will change. Iterability implies that a concept is never self-present, pure and absolute, but that its meaning is contingent.

7. Derrida (1972: 27) coins the term, *différance*, to describe an open-ended play of traces, the evasion of fixed meaning. *Différance* cannot be conceived of in terms of the pure opposition of presence and absence or identity and difference. It refers to “the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other” (Derrida 1981: 21).

8. Also: self/other. The pieces of furniture (including a couch, chairs, a table, dumb valet and vitrine) might, for some, evoke associations with the Afrikaner working class (with the clothes horse as an object of modest pride). To some extent, therefore, the objects could be interpreted as being indexical of the identity of this culture. However, the hybrid structures, richly polyvalent, recall other cultures, as well. If the objects indexical of nationhood are under erasure or subject to *différance* or iterability, traditional conceptions of identity or difference are necessarily challenged.

9. The term refers to the deconstructive practice of crossing out a word, while allowing it to remain in place. It describes the use of a term that is not quite suitable, but remains necessary, for lack of a better term (Sarup 1993: 33).

10. A sense of incompleteness is characteristic of the operation of the trace in general. The trace does not lead to presence or meaning but is expressive of nothing so much as openness. As “the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside...” (Derrida 1976: 70), the trace can be interpreted as destabilising categories of meaning.

11. *Fort / da* translates as forth / here, referring to the repetitious game Freud’s grandson played in an attempt to represent the absence of his mother and the distress this caused. Freud (1987: 309) interpreted this repetitive re-staging of the trauma of disappearance as relating to the death drive.

12. The sense of displacement pervading the installations, though derived from the artist’s personal frame of reference, can be metaphorical of the general condition of displacement or exclusion. In this sense, though the identity of this other that is evoked, is not specified, *Ontwortel/Uprooted* can to some extent be read as evoking the absence of an other perhaps previously excluded from history. Van der Merwe’s artwork searches for the unknown or the voiceless.

**Works cited**


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Jan van der Merwe is a senior lecturer in Fine Art at the Department of Fine and Applied Art, Tshwane University of Technology. He obtained a Master’s degree (cum laude) in Fine Art at the Pretoria Technikon (now TUT) in 1999 where he is also enrolled for his D (Tech). Both the Pretoria Art Museum (2006) and the Oliewenhuis Art Museum (2013) have hosted major exhibitions of his work and his work has won several awards. The new textbook on Visual Art for Grade 12 learners includes a chapter on his art. He has worked abroad on invitation on several occasions – the most recent being in New York for a two month residency as the recipient of the Ampersand Award, administered by the Ampersand Foundation.

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A rhetorical interpretation of a geometric diagram of Plato’s “Creation Myth” overlaid on the Parthenon’s main facade

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A visual rhetorical interpretation of the design and symbolism of the pedimented main facade of the Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis is based on a schematic geometric diagram of Plato’s “Creation Myth”, as described in his *Timaeus*. Following the aim of Gorgias (fifth century BCE) who claimed that a good speaker casts a spell on listeners, it is likewise postulated that Classical Greek architects strove to cast a visual spell on the viewers of their work by means of geometric composition. As a mind experiment this article proposes to persuade readers that the geometric design of the east facade of the Parthenon can be analysed according to the canons of Classical rhetoric, as explicated by Quintilian, and later expounded visually by Vitruvius and Alberti. The design process (tractatio) of the architects that resulted in the composition of the Parthenon’s east facade is analysed in a framework derived from Classical rhetoric: exordium, followed by diegesis, prothesis, pistis, and the five canons (*inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* and *prununtiatio*), until the peroratorio.

**Key words:** Plato’s “Creation Myth”, *Timaeus*, visual or silent rhetoric, Parthenon

The present research aspires to a visual interpretation of Plato’s “Creation Myth”, described in obscure terms in his *Timaeus* (32-36D). The proposed analysis by Tons Brunés in his work, *The Secret of Ancient Geometry and Its Use* (1967), in which Chapter 10 deals with “Pythagoras – and a geometric analysis of Plato’s *Timaeus*”, will be further expounded by a rhetorical interpretation. It is proposed that the geometric diagram that Brunés reconstructed from Plato’s cosmological description may be applied to the facades of various Classical Greek temples, since most of their facades and ground plans are variations of a basic geometric pattern. More specifically, Brunés’s geometric reconstruction of the pedimented east (or west) facade of the Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis, designed by the architects Ictinus and Callicrates (both active during the fifth century BCE) under the supervision of the sculptor Phidias (490-30 BCE), on which construction started in 447 and was opened in 438 BCE during the reign of the Greek statesman Pericles (495-29 BCE), has been selected for further interpretation.

“*The hidden harmony is better than the obvious*” (Heraclitus of Ephesus).
In an innovatory way, as a thought experiment, the geometric design of the Parthenon’s main pedimented facade will be analysed according to the rules of the Classical rhetorical canons, which follow a trajectory from the Greek rhetorician, Gorgias (fifth century BCE), to Roman rhetoricians and Italian Renaissance humanists who influenced architectural theory. The word *rhêtorikê* may have originated with Plato (424-348 BCE) who reviled the rhetoricians of his day. His criticism was aimed especially at the Sophists, who argued for effect, not truth, whereas Aristotle (384-322 BCE) viewed rhetoric as a companion to dialectic which is concerned with logical proof, probabilities and means of persuasion. In Roman times, rhetoric was revived by Cicero (106-43 BCE) and Quintilian (circa 43-circa 118 CE). The latter published his *Institutio oratoria*, a twelve volume textbook on the theory and practice of rhetoric in 95 CE, in which he explicated the manner in which discourse should be performed (i.e. arranged and styled) for the purpose of persuasion of the audience. In this research the orator’s methods of oral discourse are followed, but transformed and adjusted to enable a visual or silent rhetorical analysis of the excellence of the geometric design of the main facade of the Parthenon in terms of compositional harmony and meaning.

All visual works of art and architecture are mute physical objects, but their meaningful contents nevertheless communicate with viewers. The manner in which architecture communicates rhetorically has been a subject of interpretation since Vitruvius (80-70 BCE-after 15 CE), a Roman architect and engineer, best known for his theoretical work, *De architectura*. Steven Frith (2004: 40-41) notes that this work’s “reliance on rhetoric is extensive, not just in the form of his treatise, but in the ‘aesthetic’ prejudice he brings to the judgement of architecture”. Most importantly, Frith (2004: 41) adds: “If the task of architecture is to represent order, its means are enabled by eloquence.” Architectural eloquence is achieved in a visual manner, according to criteria borrowed from Classical rhetoric which remained important after Roman times. At Medieval universities rhetoric was taught as a subject of the secular liberal arts syllabus of the Trivium, together with grammar and logic, a practice that continued as a Humanist discipline during the Italian Renaissance. In architecture the value of Classical rhetoric was exemplified by Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72), an architect and architectural theoretician who was influenced by Vitruvius. His treatise on architecture, *De re aedificatoria*, which is composed according to rhetorical rules, is proof of his understanding of the value of rhetoric as an art of persuasion in theory and practice.

What follows is not a continuation of the speculation about the meaning of Plato’s Creation Myth as an expression of his cosmology or philosophy of nature, but an attempt to reestablish the validity of the application of rhetorical devices and canons to a great, “eloquent” work of architecture, the Parthenon. Its main facade is treated as if designed by a rhetor whose design process (*tractatio*) – a process referring to the arrangement of the parts of his compositional “discourse” – is analysed.

**Exordium (prooimion) [introduction]**

Plato did not write about architecture. Consequently his views on the Parthenon, which had been in existence for almost twenty years when he was born, are obscure. The question cannot be answered whether Plato recognised in the prominently elevated building on the Athenian Acropolis – which he must have viewed almost daily – a sacred geometrical design that aspired...
visually to philosophical ideals he were to formulate in the *Timaeus* in 340 BCE. It is nevertheless remarkable that he noted in the *Timaeus* (17A) that the soul learns chiefly through the eye.

Since a purely geometric analysis cannot be regarded as a definitive interpretation of the meaning encoded in various Classical Greek temple facades, I propose to take Brunès’s analysis of the Parthenon as a point of departure for a visual or silent rhetorical interpretation of its pedimented east (or west) facade (figure 1). This requires that the temple be contextualised with reference to the formal criteria of Classical Greek aesthetics as formulated during the period 510-323 BCE. Furthermore, the meaning of creation in Plato’s view is relevant because he held the belief, befitting Classical times, that “if this world is a thing of beauty and its maker good, manifestly his gaze was upon the eternal” (*Timaeus* 29A). In the *Timaeus* the maker is referred to as an artificer or *demiourgos*, who was created by the highest god as the primary cosmic craftsman whose task was to craft the spatial-temporal physical world. Milton Nahm (1947: 336) explicitly points out that “The theory put forward in *Timaeus* is one of making, not of creation”. By “imitating an unchanging and eternal model [the *demiourgos*] imposes mathematical order on a preexistent chaos to generate the ordered universe (*kosmos*)” (Zeyl 2013: 1). The purpose of this visible model, which is a likeness of an eternal Platonic Idea, was to enable order in the physical world, and should be emulated by human artificers whose gaze should, likewise, be upon the truth and the eternal, not the temporal. Sensibles are the physical images of forms, which together result in “the conjunction of immanence and transcendence” (Perl 1999: 340). This model to be emulated by the human craftsman is especially valid when evoking the sacred in temple design.

![Figure 1](image.png)

*Figure 1*  
Creation myth diagram.

**Narratio (diegesis) [exposition of facts / setting the theme]**

Before proceeding with a rhetorical account of the main facade of the Parthenon, based on Brunès’s schematic diagram, it is appropriate to elaborate on the importance of geometry in
Greek aesthetics and Plato’s philosophy. Plato displayed the famous slogan above the doorway to his Academy, “Let no-one ignorant of geometry enter here”. Geometry as the basis for the fashioning of objects and artefacts as copies of a changeless world are at the heart of Platonic ontology. The system of symmetria, that is the harmonious arrangement of parts of a craftsman’s work of technē, is central to Plato’s aesthetic belief in harmony, as taught at his Academy under the heading of mathematics, together with arithmetic, geometry and astronomy (Lassere 1964: 15). According to Richard Kraut (2013: 1), “His tribute to the mixed beauty of the sensible world, in *Timaeus*, consists in his depiction of it as the outcome of divine efforts to mould reality in the image of the forms, using simple geometrical patterns and harmonious arithmetic relations as building blocks”.

However, the assumption has been questioned that Plato’s cosmological insights are those of an initiate in mystical number mathematics, which was of Babylonian origin and developed by Pythagoras (Mandell 1996: 4).14 Brunés proposal that Plato was influenced by Pythagorean knowledge as an initiate of the Pythagorean school, which may have obliged him to conceal the essence of his insights when he formulated the myth describing the creation of the universe, is doubtful. Whatever the origin, the myth, commonly called the “Creation Myth”, is, according to R.G. Bury (1961: 3), central to the *Timaeus*. The first passage referring to the myth states:

> The construction of the world used up the whole of each of these four elements. For the creator constructed it of all the fire and water and air and earth available, leaving over no part or property of any of them (quoted by Brunés 1967: 242).

The invention of the four-element theory is attributed to Empedocles of Agrigentum (circa 492-circa 435-30 BCE), from which the understanding developed that the elemental cosmos is held together in geometrical relationships. The equilateral triangle represents fire, water and air, while the element earth is represented by the square. These elements and their geometric forms are Plato’s objects of contemplation of a metaphysical order.

The myth, as described in terms of the four elements and their geometrical equivalents in the passage referred to, was subjected by Brunés (1867: 246-58) to a meticulous exegesis and step-by-step geometrical reconstruction. He contends in the preamble to his exegesis that

> [in] order to explain to his initiate brethren how god had performed his task of creation Plato was obliged to resort to geometry and numbers since the story of creation was from ancient times built upon this sacred teaching, the teaching that everything divine resulted from geometry and its associate, numbers (Brunés 1867: 245).

Clearly, Plato found himself in a dilemma when he decided to write about geometric shapes without mentioning them by name or directly mentioning any of their features. Thomas Johansen (2004: 6) accurately observes that therefore, “The *Timaeus-Critias* can in part, then, be viewed as a philosophical ekphrasis, or depiction in words, of the whole cosmos”. This was a demanding task that required a description of the symbols’ symbols. Transforming these symbols into geometric forms, Brunés (1967: 249) testifies that he interpreted the composite geometric forms of the myth diagram strictly in accordance with Plato’s esoteric instructions. As such it is overlaid on the main facade of the Parthenon as the subject of a rhetorical investigation.

**Proposito (prothesis) [premise / development of a theme]**

Having established the composite geometric myth diagram reconstructed from the *Timaeus* in terms of a narrated Creation Myth, the next step is to interpret the meaning of the diagram that forms the design framework of the Parthenon’s pedimented facades, and assess whether it is
the key to the temple’s symbolic and cosmological meaning. When abstracted as a composite formal diagram it elegantly combines various geometric forms that can be contemplated as an imaginative exercise in sacred geometry, especially the use of circles, squares and triangles – all of which can be discerned in the geometric diagram. Since time immemorial a cosmological meaning have been ascribed to these geometrical figures: they respectively symbolise unity, associated with the heavens; materiality associated with the earth, while the three points of the triangle enable a qualitative transition from the abstract to the tangible.\textsuperscript{18} The diversity of circles, squares and triangles in the diagram forms a unity. Thus, diversity and unity as a blending of opposites also evokes transcendence and immanence. By interpreting the relationships of these geometrical figures in terms of a visual discourse it is proposed to draw a silent or non-verbal parallel with Classical rhetoric. It is furthermore the purpose of this thought experiment to derive an interpretation of the Classical Greek world view and cosmology that the Parthenon exemplifies (figure 2).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{diagram.png}
\caption{Composite form: squares, circles and triangles}
\end{figure}

\textit{Confirmatio (pistis) [proof]}

An analysis of the creation myth figure reveals that it is, in fact, a cosmology, an enquiry into the universe as a whole and the hierarchy of being.\textsuperscript{19} When overlaid on the east facade of the Parthenon, the closed framework of the figure can be subdivided into various zones that correspond to the articulation of its architectural elements: crepidoma, stylobate, columns, architrave, frieze and cornice, crowned by the pediment. Different zones are identified on the facade that respectively symbolise, from below to the top, the underworld, the domain of humans, the domain of heroes, the domain of gods and the ultimate metaphysical domain of Ideas. In the \textit{Timaeus} Plato refers to the “middle-soul” (represented by the column zone of the temple) as the soul of human beings who may look upwards to zone of the intelligibles that is comprehensible only to the intellect, thus exercising superior reason, or downwards to the shadow world of the senses and material objects, thus exercising inferior reason. Thus, a hierarchically descending progression of creation is postulated: from the highest to the lowest (figure 3).
The symbolic domains encoded architecturally on the east facade of the Parthenon form a geometric unity with optimal effect that may be interpreted as a visual “text”, in which rhetorical devices are identified. Most importantly, the overall *symmetria* articulated by the surface geometry unifies the cosmological representation and reveals various compositional *schemata* that will be illustrated later on.

Classical Greek works of architecture are basically geometric and consist of a balanced or harmonious arrangement of components, denoted by the term *symmetria*. The arrangement of parts was done according to a modular system which Plato acknowledged in the *Philebus* (56B) as the use builders make of measure to attain a remarkable degree of exactness in constructions. In the case of the Parthenon, the system of measure applied has been extensively researched, with the conclusion that a “4 6 9 theme pervades the entire Parthenon: in the symmetry of the architectural elements it leads to the geometric proportion 4:6 = 6:9” (Bulckens 2013: 4).

In the creation myth diagram *symmetria* can easily be recognised when applied to the east facade of the Parthenon as an architectural design motif (figure 4). The vertical centre line of the main square of the creation myth diagram that cuts through the pediment divides it into two equal rectangles. Similarly, the circle that fits into the main square is also divided into two equal parts. The symmetry of the vertical divisions balances the geometric diagram, but the horizontal divisions have further implications because of irregularities. Above the centre line is the peak of the pediment – the domain to which the gods belong. High above the triangular peak of the pediment is the peak of the central triangle. This domain, above that of the gods, is the superior zone of Ideas. Immediately below the pediment the strong horizontal architrave represents the zone of heroes, resting on the vertical columns that represent humanity – a domain that is equal in height to that of the minor circle. Below the square supported by the stylobate the crepidoma represents the underworld of demigods.
At this point in the argument, it is necessary to provide motivation for the visual application of rhetoric to a temple facade. In order to apply rhetorical devices to architecture as a visual art, as was done by Vitruvius, and later by Alberti during the Italian Quattrocento, it is necessary to “distinguish [rhetoric] by the task it had to perform” (Tatarkiewicz 1970: 259). Since the invention of rhetoric, its purpose “was neither imitation nor entertainment but persuasion and the achievement of an aim” (Tatarkiewicz 1970: 259). According to Gorgias (5th century BCE), the first outstanding figure in the history of rhetoric, a good speaker casts a spell on his listeners. Likewise, all visual artists and architects aim to cast a spell on the viewers of their work. Indeed, Gorgias believed that “the ideal speaker is indeed an ideal artist” (Tatarkiewicz 1970: 260). If the orator’s artistry succeeds, his speech will be effective and spellbinding; people will be persuaded to believe in what does not exist and they might even be convinced that the weak is strong and the strong is weak. Even if Plato had a moral attitude of rejection of rhetoric he did not question the value of technē. He required that the gaze of a creator or craftsman be upon the eternal, that is upon the Truth (Timaeus 29A).

The preceding explanation regarding the link between geometry and Classical cosmology leads to pertinent questions. First, how could the aims of rhetoric be fulfilled in a geometric design such as a pedimented temple facade? And second, how can the spatial and geometric design of Greek Classical temple architecture be interpreted as symbolically expressive in terms of rhetorical devices?

Cosmological symbolism, as explained above, is an integral part of the geometric essence of Classical temple design. Beside the evidence of aesthetic requirements, of which symmetria is the most important because measure [metriotes] and proportion are everywhere identified with beauty and virtue (Philebus 64E; Fowler 1962: 389), the evidence for the application of the rhetorical canons to the facades and plans of Classical temples become visible when the diagrammatic creation myth scheme is overlaid upon them.
What follows is an attempt to analyse the architect’s work or design process (tractatio) that resulted in the composition (compositio) of the Parthenon’s east facade in terms of the five rhetorical canons which are transformed into a visual analysis:

**Canon 1 Inventio (heuresis) [points of view (loci / topoi)]**

It can be said that inventio does not necessarily refer to the creation of new or the discovery of original insights, but make the subject (res) of persuasion convincing. Historically, sacred geometry and its reference to cosmological symbolism was an ancient *inventio* that existed before the Classical temples were built. The design of the pedimented facades of the Parthenon was a reinvention of the meaning of the geometric symbols it incorporates. The meaning of these symbols are related to the respective ascent and descent of the sacred and the secular realms, of eternity and time, and their integration with intermediate realms, represented by the circle, the square and the equilateral triangle.

![Figure 5: Symmetria: two halves or spheres and squares.](image)

**Canon 2 Disposition (taksis / oikonomia) [structuring the argument and parts of speech, partes orationis]**

The circle that signifies eternity, the square that signifies terrestrial time, and the triangles that signify intermediate realms between the sacred and the profane, feature prominently in the composition of the creation myth diagram. When overlaid on the pedimented temple facade the symbolism of the geometrical forms constitutes an integration of the temporal and the eternal composed into a totality, the former representing a mimesis of the eternal.
Canon 3  *Elecution* (*leksis*) [formulation]

The formal structure of the temple as exemplified by the geometric diagram can be interpreted in terms of the main tenets of Classical Greek aesthetics, namely *proportion* (beauty consists of measure and number), and *eurythmy* (subjective harmony: the understanding that beauty depends on how harmony is perceived by humans) (Tatarkiewicz 1970: 339). These tenets are interrelated with the visual *schemata* of the temple facade that links the *topos aestheticos* with the *topos nōetos* (see figure 6).

Canon 4  *Memoria* (*mneme*) [remembering and visualisation of images]

In oratory memoria refers to the rhetor’s knowledge of his subject and the recollection of the preceding three canons by means of the visualisation of *topoi*.22 However, memoria may also be interpreted on a different level, since Plato believed that the soul has innate knowledge of the transcendental forms. In Plato’s theory of education he proposed the notion that knowledge is remembering or *anamnesis*.23 The belief in reincarnation assumes that the human soul passes through a series of embodied and disembodied states, and that knowledge acquired during previous cycles remains innate and needs merely to be awakened to be remembered. Therefore, the creation myth diagram may be interpreted as essentially a memory image by means of which the structure of the cosmos as it manifests in the pedimented facades of the Parthenon may be visualised and retained in the memory of future generations of viewers. The myth’s symbolic reference, if recognised in the temple design, becomes the physical reminder, of a mimesis of eternal forms (see figure 6).
The fifth Century observers of the Parthenon – including Plato – were able to experience the inseparable links between aesthetic expression and religious ritual. In fact, viewers were able to experience the meaning of the temple phenomenologically. Moreover, knowledge of the creation myth as a mental abstraction could add layers of meaning to sense-perceived knowledge. By visualising the temple in the form of a geometrical abstraction, as made visible by the creation myth diagram, the viewer would have been reminded that the temporal and the eternal are integrated in the form of the great temple. This ideal unity finds visual expression in the repetition of the triangle as form connecting the squares and circles (figure 7).

The following *figurae elucutionis* that are considered devices enhancing the *prununtiatio* can be identified as sub-groups in the composition of the formal structure of the temple facade. These geometric figures are interpreted as the visual or silent equivalents of various oral rhetorical devices which enhance the complexity of a discourse:

**5a Inversion (anastrophe) [inversions]**

The amplification of triangles in figure 7, and likewise of the circles in figure 8, are visual proof of the use of inversion.
5b *Repetitio (geminatio)* [repetition/doubling]

Repetition is an important rhetorical figure that is evident in the diagram in which emphasis is achieved by means of the repetition of all the geometrical figures: squares, circles and triangles, as illustrated in figures 7, 8 and 9.
5c *Antithesis (contrapostium) [balance of opposites]*

The most important quality in this instance, *contrapostium (antithesis)*, denotes the ideal of balance, consisting of movement and counter-movement. An ideal balance between opposites characterises the visual arts of the Classical period. What is emphasised on the one side of the central axis in the diagram is counterbalanced on the other side in an intricate pattern, visible in the various geometric forms of different dimensions (see figures 8 and 9). Thus, visual balance implies the unification of the physical forms of the temple with the symbolic ideals represented by geometric forms that are symbolic of creation of a higher order.

*Peroratorio (epilogos) [conclusion]*

To conclude, the question may be asked: if the task of rhetoric is to persuade, how does the creation myth diagram persuade the viewer of when overlaid on the Parthenon facade? In a restatement of the theme of the preceding argument it transpires, first and foremost, that, according to Classical theory, the patrons and architects of the temple had a divine mission. By means of geometry which is immaterial, abstract and exemplifies the immutable reality that seemingly exists independent of the material realm, the designers formed an architectural structure composed of figures of thought (not figures of speech as in oratory). They shaped the material realm of the temple in terms of the immaterial, echoing Plato’s pronouncement to students of geometry: that they make use of and reason about visible figures, aspiring to resemble the original Forms. Thus, when designers and builders reason about the square, circle and triangle, or whatever geometrical figure they conceive, they should actually have the Absolute Figure in mind. Quite explicitly Plato stated in *Philebus* that the rectilinear, circular or other geometric surfaces composed with precision instruments “are not, like the others [i.e. living things], beautiful under certain conditions; they are always beautiful in themselves”. Nevertheless, the figures that the students of geometry draw or model, they should “treat as illustrations only, the real subjects of their investigation being invisible except to the eye of the mind” (*Republic* 510D; Lee 1955: 276-7).

Following the above line of reasoning the conclusion is drawn that the *topos aesthetos* of the main facade of the Parthenon, and by extension the whole temple, is the *mimesis* of an ideal cosmology. The geometric structure is the framework of the rhetorical scheme that relates to the hierarchy of being in terms of Classical cosmology. One may substantiate the preceding analysis of the formal harmony of the temple facade with the already quoted statement from the *Timaeus* (19A): “For if this world is a thing of beauty and its maker good, manifestly his gaze was upon the eternal.” If this statement is valid for the intention of the patrons and designers of the Parthenon as a microcosm, their gaze was symbolically directed beyond physical vision, manifesting the eternal in the design. This view calls to mind Heraclitus’s mystical insight that “The hidden harmony is stronger (or better) than the visible” (Tatarkiewicz 1970: 89). In order for this insight to be understood, the hidden harmony of a Classical artefact like the Parthenon has to be visualised in its geometric form. It could be that the purpose of the designers and builders of temples was to conceal their intentions in forms not visible to the physical eye, but evident only to initiates as a figure of thought. The spiritual background of Classical architecture owes a debt to Pythagorean symbolic numbers that persisted in Plato’s theory of Forms.

Ultimately, the geometry of the Parthenon is persuasive in communicating an insight into the eternal human mind. An analysis of the temple reveals a cosmology that is linked to the secrets of the universe. In this regard P. Davies (1992: 150) expresses the awesome truth that
mathematics, which is a product of the human mind, is still linked to the secrets of the universe, but that can only be understood as a human construct. Finally, it follows that if rhetoric is the art of persuasive communication, then Classical temples in general and the Parthenon in particular are structures that communicate of a visual mental or memory image, that image communicates the truth about the universe, as understood in Classical times.

In the case of the temple as a sacred building situated in a demarcated precinct, it is appropriate that it should incorporate cosmological references to time and eternity: to the physical and the eternal, the secular and the sacred. It can therefore be praised for its suitability of purpose, its decorum (prepon).

Finally, the Parthenon is composed in a visually vivid way that is bold and forceful in its geometric representation. Its vivid representation of geometric forms is expressive of energeia (hypotyposis), especially as a mimetic construct of an ideal form. In that sense it is a double inventio.

Notes

1  Timaeus is one of Plato’s dialogues, written circa 350 BCE. It deals with the nature of the physical world and human beings. For an analysis of the work, see Zeyl (2013).
2  See my previous research with reference to the Parthenon (Maré 2007 and 2013).
3  For an overview of Classical rhetoric, see Eden (2010).
4  According to Sciappa (1992) the term rhētorikê may have originated with Plato.
5  For a discussion of Plato’s arguments against rhetoric and poetry, see Griswold (2012).
6  For a discussion of Aristotle’s views on rhetoric, see Rapp (2010).
7  For an overview of Classical Greek rhetoric as the art of persuasion, see Worthington (1994).
8  Krautheimer (1963) discusses the influence of Vitruvius on Alberti.
9  See Grafton (2000) for an analysis of Alberti’s application of rhetoric to architecture, and Van Eck (1999) for his application of rhetoric to his theory of architecture.
10  For a study of Plato’s natural philosophy, see Cornford (1997) and Johansen (2004).
11  The rhetor is defined as the persuasive communicator.
12  For an analysis of the numerical construction of the universe by the demiurge, see Ferguson (2010: 130–31).
13  Technē is most often translated as either art or craft. Plato’s use of the term includes the creation of the cosmos, as discussed by Parry (2007).
14  The Pythagorean legend has continuously been researched by various sceptics and believers. However, there is no reliable evidence that Pythagoras solved any problem in mathematics, music or astronomy. In 1962 Burkert was the first to refute the idea that Pythagoras was a mathematician. Other sceptics include Kingsley (1995), Riedweg (2002), Joost-Gautier (2006), Ferguson (2008) and Huffman (2011).
15  For a discussion of Empedocles’ natural philosophy, see Campbell (2010: 1).
16  In the Timaeus Plato associated the four elements (earth, air, water and fire) with the regular solids, respectively the cube, the octahedron, the icosahedron and the tetrahedron.
17  Brunês (1967: 249) statement that he “tried to clear away the curtain of secrecy that Plato intentionally draped over his text to render it incomprehensible to non-initiates – in which he was successful”, cannot be substantiated as no information could be traced that Plato was an initiate of a secret sect. See note 9.
18 Lawlor (1982: 12) deals with the historical and general meaning of the triangle and also as a connecting geometrical figure when applied in combination with other figures.

19 Many ancient buildings, both sacred and secular, that were constructed according to strict geometrical principles, of which the most famous – the Egyptian pyramids and the Sumerian ziggurats – had a cosmological reference.

20 For a discussion of Gorgias, see Kahn (1998).

22 Topos (plural topoi) refers in the context of Classical Greek rhetoric to a standardized method of constructing an argument.

23 The concept of anamnesis is developed in Plato’s dialogues Meno and Phaedo.

24 See Perl (1999: 340), who argues that “immanence and transcendence are not opposed [in Plato’s Timaeus] but that, on the contrary, the former implies the latter”.

25 The aspect of the compositional unity of opposites in a figure is referred to by various authors on Classical Greek art. See for example Grüben (1966: 163) who notes this aspect in the architecture of the period.

26 The theme of the secular and the sacred is dealt with in my articles on the Parthenon. See Maré (2007 and 2013). This article is a revised and expanded version of the paper read at the Second International Conference on Argumentation and Rhetoric (Argumentor), held at Oradea, Romania, from 21-22 September 2012.

Works cited


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Bellman hangars: structures of scale and functionality

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Industrial buildings and structures are not usually associated with the discipline of architecture but rather with civil engineering. However, industrial structures form an important part of the manmade landscape of the Gauteng Province. The largest concentrations of settlements and sites associated with the manufacturing sector were established in Gauteng, the result of the presence and processing of minerals in the region. This resulted in the occurrence and legacy of a variety of predominantly industrial building types associated with mining, industry and manufacturing. One branch of engineering structures that also occur in South Africa includes buildings and structures associated with the country’s military and aviation history. Aircraft hangars, and especially the so-called Bellman hangar, are the most common of these buildings. As the location of most iron and steel manufacturing plants also occur in Gauteng, the construction of industrial structures and the manufacturing of hangars are closely related to the establishment and development of these companies.

Key words: aircraft hangars, Bellman hangars, industrial structures, Second World War, air force bases

It remains difficult to classify hangars in the domain of architecture as they tend to be associated with civil engineering rather than “architecture”. However, an aircraft hangar still remains a “building” as is reinforced by the statement by Pevsner: “Nearly everything that encloses space on a scale sufficient for human beings to move in is a building; the term architecture applies only to a building designed with a view to aesthetic appeal”. The Bellman hangar was designed to house aircraft and not primarily for humans, therefore considered to be a building. In addition, the scale of the hangar building type and its almost complete utilitarian character stripped of all aesthetic characteristics are usually not associated with architecture or the work of architects and from a purist viewpoint remain peripheral to the domain of architecture. Another reason why hangars are preferably categorized with engineering rather than architecture may be because they have mostly been designed by engineers, as the storage of planes on such a scale has always been seen as the domain of civil engineering.

However, this does not mean that the design principles of hangars cannot be applied to architecture or any building that enters the sphere of architectural aesthetics. The work of the well-known architect Mies van der Rohe (period 1920 to 1970) and of engineers such as Pier
Luigi Nervi (1891-1979) and Robert Maillart (1872-1940) supplies ample examples where engineering is merged with architecture and vice versa. Even with such fine examples, the common perception remains that the aircraft hangar types, still found at airfields, are clinical shed-type structures. These are the buildings referred to in this article.

The discourse can be approached from various angles; one is to merely describe the history of and background to this particular building type while another may be to reflect on the more universal aspect of large structures associated with this particular period in human history. Other angles would include placing the topic under the auspices of military history of the 20th century or merely the history relating to the Second World War, the history of ‘catalogue’ architecture and engineering works or focusing on the history of prefabricated materials and techniques during a particular period, e.g. during the Second World War from 1938 to 1945.

Where do hangars fit into the history of large structures? Are they mere sheds, do they have monumental qualities, are they mere containers for manmade artefacts or do they reflect something of the human spirit and its history of designing and constructing large structures?

As the investigation progressed, it became clear that hangars should not be approached from a ‘monumental’ point of view in terms of representing or memorializing any events or extreme historic ‘happenings’, but that they should be approached from a more functional point of view. Therefore, it was decided to merely touch on the aspect of monumentality in general and try to select and focus on some of the elements involved in the historic manifestation of large scale structures and apply them to the hangar type in particular. Hangars cannot be classified in the same category as true monumental structures such as the pyramids of Egypt, the Parthenon (or any large structure associated with this period such as the Hephasteion temple (figure 1), Gothic cathedrals, castles and palaces that were erected over time. They remain utilitarian structures of the mid-20th century even though some examples, due to their engineering ingenuity, as celebrations of the free human spirit and as contributions to the history of industrial building design.

Figure 1
The Hephasteion, Athens (ca. 449-444 BC) is a building of monumental scale, similar in form but created to encapsulate other cultural aspects not large ‘objects’ such as aircraft (source: Architectural Design 1982: 12).
Motivation for the study

Since 2001 the National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999) made heritage impact assessments (HIAs) compulsory for certain development projects. Such assessments enforced the evaluation of manmade structures, sites and settlements of all kinds and due to Section 34 of the Act, buildings older than 60 years are protected by law. This resulted in the large scale involvement of heritage practitioners in the assessment of sites and buildings, including engineering structures and installations.²

The Second World War ended in 1945 and South Africa, which was part of the British Empire at the time of the War had to play a significant role in Britain’s involvement in the War. With the 60 years clause of the South African National Heritage Resources Act structures or sites associated with the War need special attention.³ Even within this paradigm the legal obligations of the heritage legislation enforces the protection and at least the assessment of military structures older than 60 years – automatically including those associated with the Second World War.

Not all structures with a roof can be classified as architecture, being the art and science of building (Noero 2012: 6 Architecture South Africa June July). Engineering and industrial developments in construction technology do not necessarily form part of the study of architecture and the assessment of industrial structures or any construction work that emerged from the designs of civil engineering cannot always be assessed by architectural historians. Engineers are trained to design and not as historians or as historians of their own products. Historic buildings and structures designed by engineers in the South African landscape mostly become redundant without listing or the necessary assessment before they are discarded and sold off as recyclable material.

A huge void regarding the South African history of sheltering structures in the discipline of engineering history and military installations in particular exist. This is partly the result of closed and tight security regulations regarding military structures and any engineering work or designs that were created or were born of military needs – especially during periods of war. The military archives contain extremely informative data but can be accessed only through certain procedures that rely on the researcher’s ability to manipulate red tape and administrative systems involved.

Several projects where the buildings at military and semi-military airfields had to be assessed come to mind. A heritage impact assessment (HIA) was done at the Rand Airport (Germiston, Gauteng Province). The airport owns a large area of land, which is typical of all airports that date from the early part of the 20th century. Managing these properties is expensive and it was decided to redesign the existing land development plan for the airport. Some land had to be sold off to industry and related business ventures. The land where this development had to be located contained several old buildings relating to the early years of Rand Airport’s history when civil aviation and the South African Air Force shared the same facilities. A training school was located at Rand Airport. The heritage impact assessment identified the last six dwellings that remained on this part of the property and the process was started to either protect them or find another solution to memorialize the histories of the buildings in an appropriate way. Fortunately a portion of land of about 1.2 hectares was set aside for heritage purposes where old planes could be parked and educational and entertainment amenities could be erected to present aviation related aspects to the public.
All South African airports are currently under pressure to be expanded due to the growing demands of the tourism industry (the result of the political changes since 1994). O.R. Tambo International Airport (formerly known as Jan Smuts Airport and later as Johannesburg International Airport) needed urgent upgrading and some of the air traffic pressure at this facility had to be directed to other airports resulting in extreme pressure on all other smaller and formerly lesser significant airports. After the elections of 1994 all the military South African Air Force (SAAF) bases had to be downscaled and their operational strategies were altered from active to passive operations. This had a negative impact on the military activities and training needs at military bases such as Zwartkops and Waterkloof Air Force bases (Pretoria). It also had a negative impact on Rand Airport where the training school was closed resulting in land becoming available for other development and more commercial enterprises. At all these bases the future of the bases and their facilities had to be re-assessed, including the assessment of the military installations such as hangars, creating a need to investigate the history of various hangar types – in particular the origin of the Bellman hangar.

The period 1930-40: a period of ‘order’

The development of iron and steel frame structures did not originate in the 1930s but many examples of earlier structures (first constructed with cast iron elements) exist.

The use of iron and steel introduced a new era into the world of engineering and architecture. The ‘new’ materials allowed larger structures to be erected in short periods of time and the manufacturing of prefabricated sections and elements made it possible to transport these elements to a building site where the structure had to be assembled.

The changes were brought about by the inventions and patents of the Industrial Revolution in Britain and made it possible to construct architectural and engineering structures that were able to create vast covered floor spaces in order to create ample room for a variety of indoor uses. One of the outstanding buildings was the Crystal Palace (London) that was erected in Hyde Park as early as 1850 (figure 2). It was designed by Joseph Paxton and was constructed over a period of five months. The structure covered 19 acres of Hyde Park. It became famous for its size and design but also as an example of the speed and efficiency of construction that became possible when using prefabricated parts and materials.

The history of hangars is linked to the history of aeronautics in Europe and especially the history of Great Britain within its European context after the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, its role as colonial power with colonies all over the world, and its later involvement in both World War I and World War II.

The 1930s in Europe was characterized by the rising of several dictatorships in countries such as Portugal and Greece. In some places dictatorships erupted into tragedy such as the Spanish Civil War. Dictatorship was the order supported by aspirations for durability, continuity and national identity.4 Dictatorships are characterized by the creation of a so-called ‘new order’ often reflected in large-scale building projects and large individual buildings. According to Franco Borsi “in architecture the element of order is inseparable from the concept of monumentality…”5

Between the First and Second World Wars architecture experienced various directions and schools of thought. During the 1930s architecture became inundated with decoration and melancholy while some schools (such as the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany) promoted the
complete stripping of embellishment. At the same time beauty was to be reflected in simplicity: the structure and form of a building had to be simple though beautiful in its minimalistic state. Engineering had to serve architecture. It was within this paradigm that engineering as discipline had to expand into both ‘architecture’ and ‘purist’ engineering. ‘Order’ had to be precise and resulted in the well-defined contrast between ‘architecture’ and ‘engineering’: ‘building’ versus ‘technology’. In architecture, ‘technology’ had to be integrated into each of these cadres, each supporting the other while in pure engineering, parts had to be separated and designed either to be modular or purpose designed: the latter being the ideal scenario for the design and construction of hangars. Adding the additional quality of having a transportable shelter that could be either enlarged or made smaller, increased the possibility for alterations to size and scale while remaining sufficient, clinical and retaining strength.

Figure 2
Drawing of the main and largest arched space of the Crystal Palace, which was destroyed by fire in 1939, unbolted and moved from Hyde Park to another park in South London (photograph: Foster 1982: 113).

Following these new paradigms, the 20th century is characterized by a thrust towards minimalism, along an evolutionary trajectory. The drive towards minimalism as expressed in the design of the Bellman hangar was motivated by war and serving an essential need by designing a structure that consisted of the absolute critical components to make manufacturing, transporting and erection easier and quicker.

The 20th century has also been the century of internationalism. Any individual considered to be a member of the avant-garde had to be a product of the city, whose prototype had no roots and traveling beyond ones ‘own’ boundaries was the driving force and objective at the same time. The flipside of the coin asked for respect of the virtues of the Heimat and Heim – a common value and ideal on every German’s lips. And an aspiration for a ‘new’ order and new ‘universal’ order became a strong driving force in each European country. ‘Order’ implied making distinctions and the first task of order was to ‘distinguish’ and ‘classify’, automatically
resulting in the creation of classes of ‘separation’. It was within this scenario of ‘order’ that the separation between ‘architecture’ and ‘engineering’ evolved.

Possibly part of this split was the move away from classic architecture and historicism and the thrust to create something new, something mostly separate and isolated from classical architecture. To some extent this drive resulted in so-called Modernism – a movement that clearly favoured the purist approach of engineering rather than the more humane approach favoured by architecture prior to this period. The ‘clean’ spirited approach of Mies van der Rohe and the relationship of his work to classical Greek architecture are eloquently presented and summarized by Norris Kelly Smith:

I do not mean to suggest that the measured and impersonal style of Mies and his imitators can be regarded as a modern equivalent of the traditional classicism that descends from the Greek temple. While it possesses something of the formal purity and objectivity of that style, it quite lacks the relationship to the word which is essential to the humanizing significance of the ordered architecture of the past. Whereas every part of the Greek temple …has its own distinctive form, belongs to a class of similar and interchangeable parts, and can be identified by name, the Miesian building consist only of rectangles – shapes that have little relation to the human body and which do not come together… (Norris Kelly Smith).

According to Charles Jencks, Mies van der Rohe’s Crown Hall on the university campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology (figure 3) can be described as a “….temple carried by four large trusses and seventeen I-beams, [in] major and minor order of construction. The building lacks several classical features: polychromy, ornament, conventional symbolism, statutory and ‘named’ set of parts”.

Figure 3

The reference to Mies’ work as a ‘temple’ may be deliberate than incidental as it guides us to the association between the historic perception of temples and cathedrals to the 20th century’s
perception of buildings of the same scale and in some instances an enthusiasm for the same architectural detail and aesthetic. These definitions or critiques on the purist approach of Mies somehow also direct us towards a definition of ‘a utilitarian structure’ such as an aircraft hangar – even if it is in an opposite direction - way from an aesthetic approach to form giving in general and form giving elements in particular. To the scholar with a tendency or ‘free range’ attitude towards such statements, the latter quote of Jencks may even be applicable to an aircraft hangar. As much as Mies has become one of the icons of the 20th century Western architecture, he has also crossed the threshold into purist engineering – with a significant difference: the addition of an exceptional sense for minimalist aesthetics through his selection of materials. The latter aspect of design (aesthetics) often missing or only a mere hint in pure engineering structures such as bridges, factories and hangars.

**Industrial products**

In architecture ‘order’ involved rationality, an emphasis on classification and ‘typology’ with architecture broken down into private, public, industrial or military categories. Hangars and other sheds designed for utilitarian uses where large open floor spaces were needed, had the potential to be created with minimal steel structures and could be covered with any industrial prefabricated sheeting. The mass produced products such as steel sections, corrugated iron sheeting, nuts and bolts that resulted from the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century were ideal for this purpose.

One of the key products resulting from the Industrial Revolution was corrugated iron, a principal product in the history of hangar development. According to legend either John Walker in 1832 or Henry Robinson Palmer in 1828 may have been the first to manufacture corrugated iron. The process consisted of rolling out wrought iron sheets of a limited length to a very small thickness and at the end of the process dipping them in a bath of molten zinc – creating ‘galvanized iron’ (in the 1890s mild steel replaced wrought iron).

In 1934 the South African Steel and Iron Corporation (later known as ISCOR) manufactured South Africa’s first iron and steel members. Corrugated iron was only manufactured at the Vanderbijlpark plant (Gauteng) later during the 1940s. South Africa then acquired the ability to use this versatile prefabricated building element for a variety of uses and in vast quantities. Iscor was able to meet the demand for structural engineering steel for the engineering and building industry and it seems to have been an appropriate time and moment in the history of South Africa when Bellman hangars could be manufactured locally and in ample numbers to be exported abroad.

The advantages of steel are multiple:

- Steel provides a fire proof structure and is durable.
- It is exceptionally suited for adaptation and expansion and can be carried from one location to the other.
- It allows alteration in internal layout design with minimum of expenditure.
- Partitions can be erected that are easily removable and require a minimum of internal supports.
• With steel construction it is possible to obtain the largest span with the least height providing the minimum of obstruction to incoming and outgoing aircraft – a feature of great importance in a hangar.

• Holes drilled through the steel frames and sub-frames allow for a variety of coverings that can be used for roofs and side walls for example galvanized corrugated iron sheets, corrugated asbestos sheets (now illegal in South Africa) corrugated Cellactite sheeting and Robertson’s metal sheeting.10

Of all steel and glass structures, factories epitomize the freedom these materials allow in terms of creating large flexible covered areas for manufacturing workspace. The need for flat floor surfaces and ample light to execute numerous job types is still the major motivation for office space today and the creation of workspace in high density areas guided this need to build upwards, into multi-storey buildings and skyscrapers. However, some uses cannot be stacked and floor space needed to be expanded horizontally.

Even though some effort is made in this article to highlight the period between 1930 and 1945, the oldest all-metal frame multi-storey building with rigid connections to take wind loads is probably the four-storey Sheerness Boathouse in Kent, Britain (1850-1860) (still existing). The designer of the building Colonel Godfrey Greene had previously employed the contractors who built the Crystal Palace (1850-1851: London) and may have been influenced by them. The Boathouse is clad in corrugated iron and it was the first building to use H-sections and I-beams which are standard in structural steelwork today.11

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, one of the exceptional examples of an industrial structure is the large Dodge half-ton truck assembly plant (1938) in Detroit Michigan. Its uniqueness was endorsed in 1944 when the Museum of Modern Art selected the building as one of the outstanding examples of American architecture. It consists of a large covered floor space where every phase of production occurs on the same floor, on the same level and within a single open space. It has a strong steel skeleton and a lightweight skin of brick and glass on the exterior. The building is of special interest because it was designed by an architect, Albert Kahn. Prior to the American Civil War, most factories were designed and built by the combined efforts of the millwright and owner. Later they were designed by men who referred to themselves as ‘mill engineers’. Kahn, who designed this building for the Dodge Division of the Chrysler Corporation, was a pioneer in modern industrial architecture and with his brother Moritz Kahn established the pre-stressed concrete product ‘Kahncrete’.12

![Figure 4](Dodge truck assembly plant in Detroit (Michigan) designed by Albert Kahn and constructed in 1937. The roof structure makes provision for additional light in the central portion of the building (source: Foster 1982: 116).)

10
11
12
The crossover from architecture to engineering was not only the privilege of architects but also became apparent with the work of master engineer Pier Luigi Nervi whose engineering designs have also become icons in the architectural discipline. Several projects where he had to span large open spaces applying the discipline of engineering and using structural engineering as point of departure resulted in master pieces, though some have since been destroyed. One of these is the large minimalist aircraft hangar at Orbetello, covering an area of 100m by 40m (figure 6).

Although a building with exceptional beauty in its simplicity, minimalist design and avant-garde approach to solving the problem of creating a large open floor space with minimal barriers inhibiting any kind of horizontal movement into and out of the structure, it remains an expensive solution to the needs of war, when the objective is rather on spending money on the manufacturing of aircraft than a storage facility.

However, the rules for the design for a functional hangar type are clearly defined and expressed in the minimal occurrence of columns and supports. The same minimalism seems to be lost in the vaulted roof structure - even more refined when presented in a minimalist drawing (figure 5). The use of the vault also expresses the potential of this very useful form type to cover larger open spaces – so cleverly experimented within Gothic cathedrals eight centuries earlier.

One of the outstanding aspects of this structure is its experimental character and personality even though it does not qualify as a pedigree ‘hangar’ with closed sides and large doors. The building has become a monument for the design of a roof or open-sided shelter but nevertheless addressed and identified the need for minimalist design ‘columns’ to support a vast spanning roof structure. Here ‘security’ and ‘safety’ are of little concern as the need for covered space has been distilled to a single focus and objective for design: to create a roof. The result is a covered space where the inside and outside share the same floor surface, same level and almost no vertical barriers or screens to define the interior or the exterior (figure 6).
Completed structure of an airplane hangar at Orbetello (Italy) in 1939 constructed with pre-cast reinforced concrete. Designed by Pier Luigi Nervi, destroyed during the Second World War (source: Foster 1982: 143).

Structure and functionality

At first glance it seems fair to assume that a hangar only had to be a simple closable ‘shed’ and the super structure had to be designed in such a way that it does exactly what it is supposed to do: function as a frame to which a light type of cladding can be fixed to operate as mere screens between the interior and exterior. Aesthetics played no role and the structure had no relationship with the discipline of architecture and had no need to serve personal needs or to create humane space. It had to provide space for parking, storing and servicing aircraft.

Simple linear steel roof structure supported by thin columns (Drawing: Pestman ca. 1965-75: 17).

Internal frame with the roof and walls sharing the structural stresses – design for a timber frame shelter (source: Pestman ca. 1965-75: 17).
Hangars had to span large floor spaces and could not be constructed with any supporting members or a superstructure that would impact negatively on the movement of a plane inside the building. Two options existed to solve this problem: (a) use an internal superstructure and cover the exterior with a lightweight material or (b) expose the structure to the elements and install the cladding on the inside of the structure. Both methods were used during the war and examples of both still exist. In the case of the Bellman hangar, the entire superstructure is located inside and the cladding or covering was done on the outside leaving the exterior of the hangar almost smooth allowing less wind resistance and protecting the structure from sabotage or damage.

The two options addressed have also been experimented with successfully by Mies van der Rohe, but in its extremely functional and minimalist manner.

![Figure 9](image)

**Figure 9**

External frame with suspended roof - National Theatre Mannheim, Germany, ca. 1953

**First World War (1914-18)**

The history of the South African Air Force cannot be separated from the time and political matrix in which the institution was established: when South Africa functioned as a Union and formed part of the British Empire. This implied that whatever happened in and to Great Britain had an impact on South Africa in particular an event such as the First World War. The result was that South Africa and various local industries played a significant role in supporting the British Empire’s war effort. The history of aeronautics, the South African Airways and the South African Air Force reflected and endorsed this highly political and strong strategic connection.

Britain was an important player in world politics and was strategically positioned as an ‘island’ on the threshold to Europe while remaining isolated from it at the same time. During the First World War several hundred airfields existed in Britain. These sites ranged from stations with more than a hundred aircraft to just a landing strip for a detached flight of a Home Defense squadron. As a result there are some thousand sites in the United Kingdom that have evidence of wartime aeronautical activity.

When the Royal Flying Corps was formed in 1912 a standard hangar was used. It consisted of a large timber frame shed with gable front sliding doors and could house three aircraft. In later years some of the wood was replaced by galvanized iron. This replacement was not exceptional nor surprising as its superstructure was based on the galvanized sheds used by the British Army as garrison stores at all the ‘outposts’ of the British Empire. Some of these sheds
predate the Anglo-Boer War and were sent to India and trans-shipped to South Africa where they were erected during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).\textsuperscript{15}

The Bessonneau hangar was a portable timber and canvas aircraft hangar used by the Royal Flying Corps during World War I. It was designed and manufactured around 1908 by the French rope and canvas manufacturer \textit{Etablissements Bessonneau} based at Anger, but it was called the Bessonneau tent. During World War I it was adopted by the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) to house aircraft in Britain and France. From 1917 these structures were used mainly as temporary protection while more permanent hangars were constructed. After World War I, Bessonneau hangars were often used for cheap and portable storage for civilian aircraft. The use of these hangars by the Royal Air Force (RAF) continued into World War II and remained in use for storing powered aircraft and gliders operated by the Air Training Corps until about 1990.\textsuperscript{16}

The hangar was supplied as a kit that could be easily erected, dismantled, transported and re-erected at different locations. The principal material for the framework was wood, joined by wooden plates, steel brackets and steel bolts. Vertical stanchions were used to support the roof trusses with tie beams and ties. A tailored canvas covering was tied to the framework with ropes.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{The Second World War (1939-45)}

At the end of the First World War it became clear that aeronautics and warfare based on air power and dominance of airspace would play an exceptionally important role and become a deciding factor in any future display of power and serious large-scale military activities. Even though the planes were unsophisticated and most of the bombing and shooting from planes had to be done by hand, it set the scene for several specialized directions in mechanical, civil, electronic and aeronautical engineering. The result of this dynamic scenario, created by the change in warfare, resulted in numerous developments in aeronautics and related types of defense mechanisms.

The developments in aeronautics and the design of new types of planes had to be supported by the design and creation of many infrastructural landscapes where planes could take-off and land. Air stations from where the defense systems of different countries could be managed and used became pivotal points in a landscape that had to be interpreted from a military and strategic point of view rather than from an aesthetic viewpoint. The outbreak of the Second World War clearly defined and increased this need for air strips, military sheltering, strategic and tactical locations and bases. This set the scene for the design of several types of structures related to the discipline of civil engineering – such as new air strips, bridges, hangars and other structures.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{bellman_hangars.png}
\caption{Exposed lightweight lattice joists on the interior similar to those used in the construction of Bellman Hangars (source: Siegel 1975: 181).}
\end{figure}
In terms of the needs for military purposes and the need for transportability, ease to construct and erect structures, engineering solutions had to be efficient and aesthetics had little or no role to play in the design or the execution of the construction process (figure 10). This was a clear break from the principles and manifestos for commercial and avant-garde architecture at the time. The need for clinical and mere functional structures became more acute when war broke out and decisions had to be taken quickly and construction work had to be executed within short periods of time. The aesthetics of the avant-garde was replaced with the aesthetics relating to camouflage and concealment.

Other exceptional hangar types associated with the period 1930 to 1940 are the extremely large structures erected to accommodate air ships (figure 11). They had to cater for another type of aircraft not at all related to airplanes but had to allow for additional height and volume rather than floor space alone. These were huge “monumental” structures and reflected exceptional ingenuity from the engineering discipline at the time. Compared to these hangars, Bellman Hangars tend to be simple and almost appear to be ‘parochial’ sheds. The use of the vaulted roof continued to be used and more recent hangars were later constructed using the same engineering principles and architectural form (figure 12).

![Figure 11](image1.png)

**Figure 11**
Hangars constructed for air ships at Orly (1916-1924) but destroyed during the Second World War (source: Foster 1982: 141).

![Figure 12](image2.png)

**Figure 12**
Operational hangar (unknown air base in France) of similar shape and form as those erected for air ships of an earlier era (source: Robinson 1980: 153).
The development of engineering solutions towards the creation of simple structures that could cover vast floor areas without elaborate and expensive reinforced concrete construction techniques continued after the war. One of the solutions that became common practice during this period was the introduction of the lightweight so-called space frame structures (figure 13).

A space frame structure is a refinement of previous construction methods and design options. It is a lightweight rigid structure constructed from interlocking struts in a geometric pattern. It is used to span large areas with few interior supports. The basic geometric shape is a triangle and pyramid. A single pyramid is multiplied and used in an interlocking sequence.

![Figure 13](image)


**Striving towards an engineering objective**

Contrary to the designing of buildings during the war, buildings designed on military property and for military purposes in England prior to the war had to be screened for their ‘aesthetic appropriateness’.

The expansion of the Royal Air Force (RAF) between 1935 and 1939 provided the Air Ministry Works Directorate with its first real opportunity to design and construct permanent buildings (not engineering structures such as sheds and hangars) of ‘character’ and uniformity. The first priority of the Directorate was to produce standard building designs for both airfield and domestic facilities. Contrary to later designs elsewhere in the Empire, elevation treatments on all architectural plans for permanent buildings were subject to approval by the Royal Fine Arts Commission. The Commission and the Society for the Preservation of Rural England both shared an interest in the location and placing of buildings in relation to the countryside. A ‘Georgian’ character was allowed in the design of barrack blocks, mess and married quarter buildings in an attempt to provide ‘dignified lines’ that would blend into the landscape. This approach was abruptly cut short when the war broke out and the seriousness of full-scale conflict had to be confronted head-on.

Several hangar types evolved due to the pressures and needs for such large structures during the Second World War. Of these hangars, the Bellman hangar was the most significant, also in the South African Air Force history. As aircraft design evolved and planes became larger.
the need for larger covered floor space also guided alterations to the designs of sheds and shelters destined for military purposes. The need for larger sheds resulted in the alteration of the basic designs and increased the pressure on manufacturers to manufacture sections that could span wider spaces and that could still be transported as easily as the smaller predecessors.

The Bellman hangar evolved from its predecessor: a hangar built by the company Boulton & Paul Ltd of Norwich.\(^{19}\) It was designed by a group of engineers well-known for designing aircraft. They were the only aircraft manufacturers with a structural engineering department at the time. However, their steel frame structures became common occurrences and were used all over the world popularly known as B & P structures, used for factories, warehouses and smaller examples such as club houses.\(^{20}\)

![Figure 14](http://daveg4otu.tripod.com/iowweb/sha.html)

**Figure 14**

Boulton and Paul hangar at Apse Manor Farm built at Shankilin in 1932 for PSIOWA (Portsmouth Southsea and Isle of Wight Aviation Ltd - Britain)


The smallest B & P hangar type was designed to accommodate a single small plane and covered a floor surface of 30ft by 30ft (9,2m by 9,2m). Another standard type was larger, covering a floor space of 90ft (27,5m) by 60ft (18,3m) wide and 15ft (4,5m) high. It came with the addition of lean-tos at the back, based on a need determined by the market for attached workshops and offices. The large door allowed access clearance of 45ft (13,71m) wide and 15ft (4,57m) high. A third type was 100ft (30,48m) long and 50ft (15,24m) wide. It was divided into two separate spaces of 50ft by 20ft. For larger aircraft a hangar of 328ft by 82ft wide without any restrictive columns or any other obstructions inside, was also manufactured.\(^{21}\) One of the distinguishing aspects of the B & P hangars was that the doors could be either located along the side or at the gable-end.\(^{22}\)

![Figure 15](http://daveg4otu.tripod.com/iowweb/sha.html)

**Figure 15**

Hangar built by Boulton & Paul Ltd at Rand Airport Germiston (source: Flight 1932: 226).
Specifications for a B & P hangar consisted of stanchions of rolled steel joists complete with caps and bases; roof trusses of steel angles and flats complete with all gussets, shoes, cleats; purlins and girts of steel angles and bracing where necessary. The doors varied according to the size and number of the aircraft to be housed. They consisted of steel frames covered with galvanized corrugated sheeting and ran on a top rack with guides and a guide rail at the bottom. Large high doors had a bottom rail track with guides at the top.23

Sheeting for the roof was 22gauge while 24gauge was used for the sides, ends and doors with a 6inch (150mm) overlap. All the nuts and bolts were provided. Un-galvanized steel work was given a coat of paint before dispatch and all sections were checked and tested prior to dispatching to ensure correct fitting. Fitting and construction were made easier by markings to guide assembly on site. Buildings even had gutters according to the measures of each hangar type with stop ends, outlets and straps for fixing. Rain water downpipes were supplied with shoes, bends and clips for fixing. If a hangar was destined for a country with a hot or tropical climate, windows were placed in the sides and the kit was supplied with putty and pegs. In countries with less harsh climates rooflights of patent glazing or glass on puttied steel T-bars were provided.24

The most significant hangar type and probably the most commonly known in South Africa is the Bellman hangar. The Bellman hangar was designed in 1936, patented by Mr N.S. Bellman of the British Air Ministry and became the standard hangar type to be used during the Second World War. It was designed to be a transportable hangar as it had to be relocated from Britain to the various colonies of the United Kingdom.25 Transportability meant that it had to be manufactured in precise sections and parts on the factory floor as no errors could be afforded once it left the factory. It had to be assembled on any of the many air stations based on exact specifications and exact fittings. As South Africa was a Union at the time, it remained a ‘colony’ of the British Empire and therefore benefited from engineering developments in Britain. The Bellman hangar is one of the legacies of this relationship. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, resulted in an urgent need for the extensive construction of a hangar type that would suit all conditions regarding accommodation for aircraft and a hangar had to be designed that served this purpose but remained ‘generic’ to the extent that it could be ordered by kit and be erected anywhere in the world. Bellman hangars were the result of this brief.

Figure 16
View of the side elevation of a Bellman hangar with the addition of small windows breaking the monotonous flat wall (photograph: M. Naudé).
The gable-end of the hangar. The gable is structural with no aesthetic function while almost the entire gable end slides open with large steel frame-sheet iron clad doors (photograph: M. Naudé).

Windows attached to the exterior of the building allowing light inside (photograph: M. Naudé).

Large Bellman hangar in front with later model hangars at the back - Zwartkops Air Force base, Pretoria (photograph: M. Naudé).
It was therefore quite fortunate that the design of the Bellman hangar already existed at the time the Second World War started.

Soon after the outbreak of the Second World War, the South African Government decided to establish air schools at various centres in the country and the Department of Defense decided that the Bellman hangar would be the standard hangar type to be erected at these locations. The Government of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was also part of the British Empire air training programme and agreed to use the same hangar type.\textsuperscript{26}

The South African Union Government equipped their air schools with hangars that were 95ft (28,95m) wide, 125ft (38,1m) long and 26ft (7,92m) high (height at the top of the doors) while those in Southern Rhodesia were only 50ft long.

The advantages of the Bellman hangar was based on its mobility, simplicity of construction, short period in which it could be erected, and the ease of transporting the various sections. However, this particular aspect is questioned by some authors who claim that the Bellman hangars: “… were costly to produce and time consuming to erect. As a result the Air Ministry, in collaboration with Teeside Bridge and Engineering Works, developed a new ‘transportable shed’. The author notes that another type of hangar, the T-shed, was designed to counter the difficulties experienced with the Bellman Hangar.\textsuperscript{27} The T-shed received its name from the configuration in which planes were parked inside the hangar.\textsuperscript{28}

**Manufacturing of Bellman hangars in South Africa**

As Britain had to secure its own borders and coastline while also safeguarding its major cities and industrial nodes it had to plan strategically. One of the strategies was to have some of the construction and manufacturing of its armaments and structures required for its own war effort to be initiated and continued in its colonies – of which South Africa was only one. South Africa was geographically (not necessarily strategically) almost completely isolated from the war activities in Europe and also had all the essential minerals and manufacturing plants that could enhance, support and reinforce Britain in its war effort. Iscor (South Africa’s largest iron and steel corporation at the time) had been in operation for about six years. Numerous other steel related manufacturing businesses were established in support of Iscor and have been in production for the same period. These industries all had the option to benefit from the war effort.

Soon after the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, four of the leading structural engineering companies in South Africa decided to set up a new company, Dorman Long (Africa) Ltd, which would act as a central body to take responsibility for the ordering and allocation of materials, co-ordinate the manufacturing and attend to all negotiations relating to the supply of materials, the deliveries of completed hangars and all financial and administrative matters. Activities started immediately after the establishment of the central company and manufacturing of Bellman hangars was in progress by January 1940. Dorman Long (Africa) Ltd was deeply involved in work of national importance right from the moment the Government’s war production proposals were known. Soon after Dorman Long’s establishment, the first move was the formation of Consolidated Engineering Industries (Pty) Ltd, a company established to act as a central body responsible for coordinating all war contracts.\textsuperscript{29}
On all the orders on which Consolidated Engineering Industries (CEI) acted as main contractors at least 50% of the actual manufacturing was done by Dorman Long. The two companies were operated in conjunction under the same chairmanship to be able to achieve the best results and efficiency from the engineering industry as a whole. In order to coordinate the supply of separate units, different materials and all other needs for parts and sections of hangars, a special facility was set up for the storage of corrugated iron, glass, sheet metal fittings, erection bolts, and other accessory materials for every hangar manufactured in South Africa.

Complete hangars were delivered just over a month later and soon afterwards were manufactured at a rate of more than twenty per month. By careful subcontracting the production increased to 25 per month. Throughout the entire period of production from January 1940 until the end of 1945 an average of 20 hangars per month was maintained. A total of 915 structures of varying sizes were manufactured.

The value of the new company as a coordinating body on war contracts responsible for distributing work to different companies and manufacturing firms became quite apparent to the Director General of War Supplies, and a few months after Bellman hangar manufacturing was under way, the company was asked to undertake the production of small box girder bridges of which 79 were manufactured.

South Africa remained a supplier of hangars for the war and approximately 50% of the hangars manufactured in South Africa were exported abroad. The remaining number was distributed to various stations in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia where they were used as hangars, maintenance shops, engineering workshops, stores and factories. One South African company, whose parent company in Britain (the pioneers of Bellman hangars), produced many of these hangars particularly for the Middle and Far East.

CEI handled Government orders for a number of projects such as the manufacturing of water carriers and special trucks to carry bridging materials. When airplane hangars of greater span became necessary (larger planes were designed and built as the war progressed) the company made the same production arrangements for 41 of these structures (130ft (39,62m) span by 250ft (76,2m) long) and a special flying boat hangar of 150ft (45,72m) space for Durban was designed and manufactured. A small number of hangar units were also built by a company in Durban.

CEI subcontracted many of the sections of large projects. Between 75 and 80 different subcontractors were located in almost all the major urban centres such as Pretoria, Johannesburg, Durban, East London, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. The designs and detailed drawings of many of the products that were manufactured by CEI were prepared in their offices or in some of the constituent companies, reducing the pressure that existed in the offices of the Director General of War Supplies.

Dorman Long seems to have been the principal company responsible for manufacturing of Bellman Hangars at their Germiston works and the new workshops that were erected for this purpose turned out a steady flow of these units each month. According to Thomson (et al) few undertakings have been as successful as the production of Bellman Hangars and a standard was set which has not been surpassed in any other line of constructive engineering activity in the Union at the time.
Another company involved in the manufacturing of Bellman hangars was Alpheus Williams & Dowse. The company was formed in 1935 to purchase the structural engineering business of E.G. Dowse & Co. It had a reputation for soundness in structural design and was responsible for the design, supply, delivery and erection of many of the large mine headgears on the Witwatersrand and elsewhere. The company also erected steel buildings, railway bridges and other structures. At the outbreak of World War II the company switched its entire production line to the manufacturing of war related products and supplies. Its newly (1940) acquired Benoni branch was equipped and converted to produce armoured car spares and Bellman hangar units. It continued manufacturing these until 1945 when the Benoni branch was relocated to a site near Germiston.36

The new plant, at Germiston, continued to manufacture armoured cars, box girder bridges, Bellman hangar units and a large number of fuel, oil and petrol storage tanks. A significant event during this time was the construction of a hangar in Lourenco Marques (now Maputo). It was the largest of its kind erected in South Africa at the time. However, the second hangar was preceded by an earlier hangar (completed shortly before the war and also erected by Williams & Dowse), that used to be the largest span hangar in Southern Africa. It was also the first large-scale construction outside South Africa in which Iscor steel was used. The second hangar was slightly larger but considered significant because of its large unobstructed floor space of 26,000sq feet (7,924.8sq m).37

The materials used for the construction of Bellman Hangars are so-called ‘mild’ steel sections welded together into transportable building elements. No timber was needed. They also required no foundations or guys. Being lighter than the weight of an ordinary hangar of equal capacity, they could be easily transported to any construction site. Hangars capable of housing the largest type of airplanes used at the time were made locally. They were also designed to be used as storage sheds and some were exported to Egypt and elsewhere for this purpose.38

The hangars were made to standard units making it possible to use unskilled labour to be employed during construction. Another advantage was that hangars could be easily repaired when and if damaged either during transporting or due to war activities. In South Africa the structures were clad with plain corrugated sheeting of an ‘easy-fix’ type. Sheets could be easily fixed in position by the workers who simply had to push the hook bolts through the hook holes provided. The doors were fitted with an overhead track and bottom guide allowing closing and opening without mechanical or electrical support.39

The standard units were designed in such a way that they could be loaded onto railway trucks, motor vehicles and mules without the necessity for special lifting tackle. The average number of men needed for construction of these standard units was twelve including the foreman.40

All components were positioned for assembly in welding jigs in order to minimize any errors that may occur when assembled. Tests for straightness and quality of the welding were carried out on every unit. All holes were drilled in drilling jigs ensuring interchangeability. Each unit contained several secondary members including bracing units, knee braces, purloins, guides for the rolling doors, wind bracing etc. All corrections indicated by the inspectors were done before the units were painted. Specifications determined that all units needed three coats of paint. Units were dipped in three tanks each containing a different colour. The system was dubbed the ‘abattoir system’ as the units were suspended on hooks from an overhead rail along which they traveled. Dipping was done with the aid of winches and ensured that each part received its coat
of paint. Each unit remained suspended above the tank until dipping was completed. When dry, each unit was transported per suspended rail to the end of the production line where they were stacked and delivered as required. Applying this system ensured that the units of a single hangar could be painted with quick drying paint within 24 hrs. The smaller detail parts of the hangars were dipped in baths of separate colours and suspended in a similar manner to dry.41

Conclusion

Bellman hangars are utilitarian structures with historic significance relating to South African engineering history rather than architectural history. The objective to create large covered and unrestricted open spaces still continues and has also become the objective and significant thrust of architecture. The need for the design of large ‘containers’ for human activities seems to be almost never ending and it is within this timeline that the development of different types of engineering cum architectural ‘crossover’ structures has evolved.

Hangars are not the only engineering structures that need to be researched and rescued from the commercial drive for demolishing and selling-off of industrial and engineering structures as scrap metal. It is fortunate that they are large shed type structures and that the need for this type of vast ‘covered space’ is becoming more common. However, their utilitarian and generic spatial measurements as ‘covered space’ tend to be too large and seemingly too custom-designed to fit into commercial building sites. While the re-use of a Bellman hangar as a warehouse would be cost-effective, it would be less viable to adapt such a hangar for the purposes of a church, apartments, shops or offices. To the man in the street these engineering structures are of little concern as they tend to be negated as useless heritage objects or simplistic structures. Hangars are not considered part of formal architecture, probably because they arguably have no relationship with the designing discipline of architecture. They are not presented in the popular architectural glossies and do not feature in the dense urban environments dominated by the works of architects.

Bellman hangars now qualify for protection under the 60 years clause of the National Heritage Resources Act as all indications are that the production of these hangars was culminated after 1946. They have now become part of South Africa’s built heritage and probably form part of a plethora of industrial structures that resulted from engineering (as discipline) and not from architecture and many examples still need to be identified and listed as places and structures of heritage significance.

Hangars will remain engineering rather than architectural structures and essentially storage facilities and will probably never lose their utilitarian character, relationship and associations with warehouses and sheds – those buildings that tend to be avoided by architects though appreciated and enjoyed by engineers.

Notes

1 Copplestone (1983:19).
2 Two Bellman hangars accommodate the majority of displays at the DITSONG: National Museum of Military History in Saxonwold in Johannesburg. This museum forms part of a conglomerate of state (or national) museums and as the Bellman hangars are older than 60 years it is appropriate to determine the significance of these buildings in order to draft an necessary conservation management plan for the site and buildings.
3 The commemoration of the war by the South African Government or any other organization received little attention.

4 Borsi (1986: 10).

5 Borsi (1986: 52).

6 Borsi (1986: 12).


8 Borsi (1986: 13).


10 Anonymous. 1932.

11 Foster (1982: 112-3).


14 The aircraft used during the First World War were smaller than those developed during the Second World War.


18 Congdon (1985: 13).

19 Anonymous (1932: 226).

20 Anonymous (1932: 226).


22 Anonymous (1932: 226).


25 Thomson (1946: 64).

26 Thomson (1946: 64).


28 This is merely an assumption by the author as no other literature confirms the continuation of production of the ‘first’ Bellman hangars, neither does any source indicate that the Bellman hangar used in South Africa was also known as the ‘T’ type. However, the issue has not been cleared yet and needs further investigation.

29 Thomson (1946: 234).

30 Thomson (1946: 234).

31 Thomson (1946: 228).

32 Thomson (1946: 64).

33 Thomson (1946: 65).

34 Thomson (1946: 228).

35 Thomson (1946: 34).

36 Thomson (1946: 345).

37 Thomson (1946: 346).

38 Thomson (1946: 64).

39 Thomson (1946: 64).

40 Thomson (1946: 64).

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This article focuses on the work of two contemporary artists and the ways in which their work can be shown to relate to Zen Buddhist philosophies and aesthetics. It aims to examine the interpretation of Western art by using Eastern thinking and aesthetics as an interpretative strategy, and in particular, aims to examine the application of Zen philosophy and aesthetics to contemporary artists Andy Goldsworthy and Anish Kapoor. The artists have been selected for their varied backgrounds, unique styles, diverse forms of art and varying media, and because in spite of differences their work shows a noteworthy similarity in the manifestation of Zen aesthetic principles, whether intended or unintended.

Key words: Zen Buddhism, Zen aesthetics, tea ceremony, Andy Goldsworthy, Anish Kapoor

Zen originated from Buddhism, which taught that the material world was simply an illusion, and that pain and suffering were rooted in desire. Suffering ended when one reached a state of nirvana. Liberation from the continuous cycle of life, death and rebirth was attainable by giving up desires and worldly ties. Buddhism may be described as a process of enlightenment attained through practices such as committing no evil, cultivating goodwill and purifying one’s mind (Kaviratna 1980: 73). Buddhism entered China around the time of Christ, where it fused with Chinese Daoism, to become Zen. The concept around which all of Daoist mystical philosophy revolves is the infinitely mysterious one of the Dao. The Dao is the ‘way of final reality’, which is described as the ‘Way of the Universe’, the rhythm, creative force, the subtle dance of nature and the ‘Way of Authentic Human Life’ (Harvey 1998: 17).

Daoism’s central teaching is a way to live in harmony with nature, through the practice of wu wei (non-action). It can therefore be said that the way of Daoism is to leave things to take their natural course. Additionally, one should not try to manipulate the thoughts of others, but leave them to find their own way to enlightenment, through their acceptance of the Dao. This means working with rather than against nature. Thus the Dao de Jing proposes that a wise person or leader may accomplish much by not doing anything in particular and may achieve a great deal through silence.

The Dao may be known by no thoughts or reflections. It may be approached by resting in nothingness, by following nothing and pursuing nothing. The Dao is thus realized by abiding in silence and the way to silence is found by letting go. To search for knowledge means to acquire day after day; to seek the Dao means to let go day after day (Hoover, 1977:99).
Eastern philosophy can be difficult to define in Western terms. The difficulty associated with defining Daoism is evident in the *Dao de Jing*. The poetic nature of the text makes it too vague to relate to in a practical manner. The text begins by stating, “The Dao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Dao. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name” (Thomas, 2010). Much Zen writing takes a similar approach.

Zen is thus a school of Buddhism which developed in China in the sixth century and, after combining with Daoism, spread to Japan. The word Zen has its origins in the Sanskrit word *Dhyana*, which means meditation. It proposes that salvation and self-realisation may be reached through the path of consecrated meditation (Blyth 1977: 28). Zen is not a religion, but is instead an indefinable, incommunicable path to a meditative state, free from names, descriptions and concepts, (although it may currently manifest in Japan as an organized religion with its own hierarchies, ambitions and political aspects, much like organized religion in the west). Zen in its purer, philosophical form can only be experienced by each individual (Okakura 1991: 67). In this sense, it is ideally not bound to any religion or to Buddhism per sé. It foregrounds experience of the primordial perfection of everything that exists, referred to by various names, experienced by many great sages and founders of the religions of the world.

Zen, like Daoism, appreciates the seeming contradictions of relativity (Ross 1973: 140). Truth can be reached only with an understanding of opposites. The yin-yang symbol in Daoism demonstrates this, with two nestling commas in black and white, symbolising two principles of change, yin being the passive female principle and yang being the active male principle (Yamamoto 1982: 53). In Buddhism, the value of non-dualism rather than dualism arises when contemplating the balance between good and evil, mind and body, earth and sky, etc. Another aspect of Buddhism and Zen is characterised by Buddha’s vision of reality as ‘empty’, as devoid of any inherent permanence or meaning.

Zen Buddhism is one of the Buddhist sects that advocates relying on oneself to attain enlightenment, thus the doctrine is essentially individualist, commanding its disciples to discipline themselves by relying on their own powers until enlightenment is reached (Suzuki 1993: 9). Zen is neither an intellectual philosophy nor a quest, but emphasises daily life practice, along with intensive periods of meditation (Okakura 1991: 22). In explaining Zen Buddhism, Japanese Zen teachers have made the point that Zen is a ‘way of life’. Suzuki emphasised a life of humility, labour and service as well as a life of gratitude and meditation. Zen emphasises that seemingly tedious, everyday tasks, like drinking tea, present opportunities to experience truth. The natural and reverential simplicity of paying attention to everyday activities finds its consummation in the *cha-no-yu* (hot water for tea), an art form that lies between the everyday and the artistically artificial, based on the act of drinking tea (Varley & Isao 1989: 235).

**The tea ceremony and Zen aesthetics**

Japanese followers of Zen are deeply appreciative of the beauty of nature and of the simplicity of everyday tasks. It is out of this reverence for the beauty of everyday activities, often taken for granted and relegated to the mundane, that the tea ceremony, which originated in China, was adapted by Zen practitioners after the sixteenth century (Dumoulin 1990: 143). Turner (1996: 335) points out that drinking tea may be an ordinary experience, but to focus on the activity elevates the simple act of drinking tea to ceremonial status, rather like the Catholic mass, encouraging introspection and presenting new pathways for discovery to participants. It occurs when participants come together to share in tea drinking, and guests and hosts conduct
themselves according to the strictest code of etiquette in an atmosphere of spiritual discipline and harmony.

One of the earliest explorations into the real meaning of the Japanese tea ceremony was by Okakura (1862-1913), a Japanese scholar and author, who defined and praised the tea ceremony as the religion of aestheticism, the adulation of the beautiful and as a work of art. According to Okakura (1991: 69), tea masters studied Zen and tried to introduce its practices into their daily lives: “Zen and tea are one.” The ideal of the tea ceremony is a result of the Zen concept of seeing greatness in the smallest of life’s incidences.

In the tea ceremony, although some masters and periods favoured highly perfect, ornate tea bowls, those that are commonly used and have become associated with the ceremony (figure 1) are usually not commercially fashioned, but are hand-made. They are utilitarian and are appreciated for their rough beauty, inherent flaws and uniqueness. A penchant for irregularity can engage participants in the tea ceremony, who contemplate the oddity of a flaw in a bowl, and manifest an appreciation of uneven, coarse surfaces and the use of natural and commonplace materials. This appreciation of accidental effects, irregularity and asymmetry reflect the potter’s individuality and free spirited approach to the finish of a vessel. This ceremony gave rise to a unique aesthetic approach which integrates the rituals of Zen and the beauty of art in simple everyday objects.

![Figure 1](http://example.com/figure1.jpg)

**Figure 1**


The respect for simplicity and one’s ability to see beauty in imperfection, according to Okakura (in Yanagi 1982: 115), is the larger issue and it is here that the foundation for aesthetic expression in cha-no-yu exists. Authentic beauty, according to Zen principles, may be realised and experienced by one who completes the incomplete mentally (Okakura 1991: 95). So objects used in the tea ceremony are not often selected for their conformity or perfection of form. The ceramic utensils used in the ceremony confirm this. Their shapes may be irregular, with dry or sandy surfaces and glazes of uneven thickness. Pieces placed in the kiln remain unglazed where the pots rest on one another and even fire cracks are accepted. These characteristics are not merely tolerated or overlooked, but are accepted as an integral part of pot making and therefore
potentially beautiful (Yanagi 1982: 119). The tea masters saw and appreciated unusual beauty in commonplace, simple and ordinary utensils. They were connoisseurs who selected items that the Japanese describe as showing *shibui* – literally, ‘tastefully astringent’, better described by Yanagi (1982: 184), as having a “profound, unassuming, and quiet feeling”. The tea masters were among the earliest to consciously appreciate the beauty of irregularity and take it as the principle underlying the tea ceremony and this is can be seen in many of the bowls used in the tea ceremony.

There are more considerations regarding the taste for imperfection in the tea ceremony. Yanagi (1982: 120) argues that perfection carries no overtones and communicates nothing. Perfection is static and regimented. Humans, imperfect, are repelled by perceived perfection, since everything is apparent from the outset and there is no suggestion of anything beyond. Beauty requires an association with the incomplete.

Zen aesthetics encompass a complex assortment of terms that include words like *shibui*, *wabi*, *mu* and *miyabi*. Okakura (1991: 124) highlights the fact that these Japanese terms are not easily translated into English. *Shibui* means a lack of pretence or the absence of adornment. The appreciation of *shibui* might bring about enlightenment, as it leaves the viewer to experience aesthetics through reflection and appreciation of natural beauty, rather than through suggestion or distraction. *Wabi*, according to Okakura (1991: 156), is the feeling of detachment and simplicity which Japanese tea masters looked for in objects associated with the tea ceremony. It implies solitude, suggesting the Zen and Daoist concept of liberation from material and emotional strife. It is the supreme submission to the non-existent. This non-existence is known as *mu*.

At the heart of Zen is an aesthetic characterised by the word *miyabi*, which refers to the sedate pleasures or aspects of beauty, appreciated only by the so called refined or cultured sensitivity for pale colours, fragility and fine textures (Baholyodhin 2000: 84). This is in part, the awareness of gestures – such as a stroke of the calligrapher’s brush (Ross 1973: 143). When one responds to such nuances, one may be more receptive to the transience of material things and also the experience of spiritual or soul consciousness. When an artist adopts an introspective approach, creativity and spontaneity are allowed to emerge more easily, in an approach that differs from alternate beliefs that creativity is inspired by outward or worldly efforts. The consequent expression is often one of simplicity, with work produced with little apparent interference from the artist. It can therefore be said that Zen believes in the inherent beauty of an object in its rudimentary state without theoretical framing, and an appreciation of the unambiguous reality or inner nature of things (Yanagi 1982: 120).

Zen philosophy prizes the purity of natural objects and appreciates the value of the grain of wood, the texture of matting and the irregularity of natural rock (Stanley-Baker 1992: 861). Ornamentation in the Western sense has little place in Zen traditions as it stems from the superficial, prettifying elements in the mind – the part that sees nature and arrogantly seeks to improve it. To be truly artistic in a Zen sense is to pay homage to, rather than enter into a contest with, nature (Dumoulin 1990: 243). In this sense, Zen continues the Daoist belief in non-action, which both link to the laws of nature, suggesting that a harmonious relationship with one’s surroundings and others is important and that the balance ought not to be disturbed, but left to its natural flow. The value of this belief is replicated in art and is demonstrated by the importance of suggestion (Okakura 1991: 67). In allowing something to be incomplete or unfinished, the viewer or critic is provided with an opportunity to complete the idea, which is how a work of art may engage its beholders until they seem to become an essential part of it. The artist thus does not strive for completion. The concepts of transience or impermanence, spontaneity and
flexibility or adaptability are important Zen ideals, and place emphasis on the journey rather than the destination. So Zen aims at producing objects that seem to simply ‘be’, to come into being without intervention, action or effort on the part of the artist, to be ‘self-made’ objects.

The principle of non-action or detachment is related to the notion of the void. The doctrine of the void, according to Suzuki (1996: 26), is a means of escape from worldly attachment and asserts that things have no self, that is to say, they are empty. The void, therefore, signifies and communicates the all-inclusive, thereby negating dualism. It is a place where emptying out and filling up are synonymous. The reality of a room, for example, could be found in the unoccupied space, rather than the restrictive walls, roof or floor. Similarly, according to the Dao de Jing, the usefulness of a vase resides in the emptiness within, that might hold water, not in the shape of the vase or the substance out of which it was fashioned. The formless void is a powerful metaphor in Buddhism and Zen. The notions of the void, non-dualism and non-action are therefore intertwined.

These subtleties of Zen aesthetics may be interpreted generally as qi. In art, qi is that which merges the self and the mind completely. The space between subject and object is diminished (Beittel 1989:23). This harmonious union of the mind and the body is the aim of art practice from a Zen perspective. It is not easy to achieve and is not accomplished by an act of will, nor by taking someone else’s work as a standard. Zen in the art of pottery, for example, involves the centring of the body and mind. It is meditation in action, in which the humblest bowl arises from some deep space, where one’s forms and decorations seem no longer one’s own but appear as though they were already there to begin with and all one needed to do was complete this union of body and mind to reveal it. The trick is to use no tricks and be completely present-minded in the activity occupying one (Beittel, 1989:35). The Zen approach is different from that of other cultures, for example, the Greek search for perfection, hence the general antithesis between East and West in matters of beauty. In the field of ceramics, Western pots are almost always patterned and perfectly finished. The beauty of the plain pot was almost unperceived in Western ceramics,⁶ and shapes were rooted in symmetry (Yanagi, 1982:124), as the ideal of Greek beauty scarcely permits irregularity or asymmetry, because it was founded upon the symmetry of the human body. By contrast Eastern practitioners found irregular beauty in nature.

The key issues emerging from the overview of Zen Buddhism include, but are not limited to, simplicity and reflection, living in harmony with one’s surroundings and nature and being aware of the natural flow of events. Zen encourages spontaneity and self cultivation. Furthermore, there are a number of subtleties that are not easily translated from Japanese to English. Words like wabi-sabi communicate the depth of many of the concepts and Zen’s favouring of incompleteness, as the importance placed on suggestion shows.

The notion that art resides in the mind of the viewer, rather than in the mind of the artist or in the artwork, is a parallel drawn by Grande (1994:60) with Buddha’s realisation that suffering resides not in events or objects, but in one’s mind. Similarly, art influenced by Zen Buddhism affords the viewer an opportunity to explore non-dualistic ideas in a direct and intimate way. The distinctive philosophies of Buddhism, such as fluidity, detachment and spontaneity, could be argued to be useful in interpreting the works of artists Andy Goldsworthy and Anish Kapoor.

This article does not intend to imply that there are no Western philosophical or aesthetic systems that acknowledge impermanence, transience, imperfection or an accord with nature, but seeks merely to find fresh ways of interpreting important contemporary works by selected artists.
Andy Goldsworthy

Andy Goldsworthy (born. 1956) lives and works in Scotland. Goldsworthy combines his skills as a photographer, sculptor and environmentalist to create location specific land art and sculptures. He worked as a farm labourer in his youth and has likened the rhythmic activities associated with farming to his sculpting. Inspired by Joseph Beuys and Yves Klein, Goldsworthy considers his artistic career to have begun in 1976, when he was still a fine art student and snow was an available medium with which to work (Goldsworthy 2001: 8) (figure 2).

Using materials from nature, he allows the elements to constitute his creations, as his constructions of wood, leaves, stone and ice move and erode over time (Goldsworthy 1990: 11). He pays close, patient, devoted attention to nature’s rhythms, cycles and phases, creating temporary structures from natural materials found on location, which he then leaves for nature to reclaim and transform. What takes these natural materials into the realm of art is that they show creative intervention, and might have an aesthetic effect that could leave the viewer wondering how they came to be, albeit temporarily. A finished work can last for as long as a few days or as briefly as a minute, before a breeze or a tide undoes it. The lack of permanence and accord with nature can be seen to accord with Zen aesthetics.

Goldsworthy is interested in the nature of things, in their colour, form and composition, their taste and smell and their place within nature. He works in remote locations (although some locations allow people to interact with his work), and factors seasonal cycles and weather conditions into his projects, which range in scale and size. Obtaining colour from leaves and flowers or icicles, he forms star or snake-like sculptures that sometimes last a few moments before they begin to melt. Using a variety of materials including driftwood, stone, leaves, wilted fern stems, sticks, mud, pinecones and thorns, he is able to express himself in a unique way in complete harmony with nature (Lailach 2007: 48), in works that can be said to reflect shibui (are quiet and unassuming), wabi (have simplicity) and finally wu wei (seem to have appeared naturally, not to be the result of human action or effort).
However, this Zen aspect is somewhat diluted by the photography that is vital to Goldsworthy’s art, as many of his works have a finite lifespan. Consequently much of his work is exhibited in galleries in the form of photographs, either as a series of images or of the works at the height of their completion. This process raises issues of memory and transience. While Goldsworthy is able to travel to remote parts of the globe and experience the results of his labours before leaving his work to the elements, he records his work mechanically, in order to share it with others. The photographs give permanence to his completed but temporary artworks. This might not accord with Zen ideals of transience, as it engages the oppositions of permanence and impermanence by creating art in harmony with nature, yet Goldsworthy is able to extend its longevity and share it afterwards through the use of modern photographic technology. The photographs capture his work either decaying, being reclaimed by the ocean, melted by the sun or blown away by the wind, leaving powerful and striking images that depict incompleteness and leave space for one to complete the picture in one’s mind, although they themselves are permanent.

From a Zen perspective, the themes that surface in Goldsworthy’s art have to do with harmonising with nature, making art that is at one with its environment, with transience and a lack of action, harnessing the energy or qi and the union of opposites which goes beyond dualism. In one of Goldsworthy’s earliest snow works (figure 3) the artist created an illusion of a black void on a white void, by completely covering a metre high snowball in black peaty soil and placing it in the centre of a frozen pond.

Goldsworthy often erases footprints and other evidence that his artworks were manufactured, adding to the mystique that characterises his artworks and allowing them to act as a medium for deeper thought. In the case of Mud Covered Snowball, he was pleased that the pond surface appeared undisturbed upon completion of the artwork, as if there was no human involvement, no action, in its making and placement (Goldsworthy 2001: 12).
The desire for his audience to experience an emotional response in nature (Cempellin, S.a.), as well as a moment of concentration and awareness, has inspired the *Untitled* work (figure 4), featuring a floating chain made up of stitched maple leaves. The leaves, stitched together with grass, form a series of concentric circles around a small opening, suggesting either human intervention or a pattern that was formed by chance occurrences in nature, for example by water currents. In a sense, in this suggested balance between intervention and non-intervention, the work is both dualistic and potentially non-dualistic, or suggests a luminal space between these two states.

One of Goldsworthy’s more permanent works titled *Wall* (figure 5) continues a dialogue, this time between wood and stone, which characterises many of his works. Asked to re-construct a dilapidated wall, Goldsworthy traced its foundation through the local woods. Rather than stick to man-made boundaries, he opted instead to follow an edge naturally set by the trees, accepting that they might someday destroy the wall. Completely immersed in its surroundings, the wall changes character and appearance with the seasons, as snow and ice cover the stone, as it meanders its way through the trees in a river-like manner, creating the illusion of movement and energy that a straight wall would be unlikely to do (Goldsworthy, Baker & Thompson 2000: 89). The Japanese words *wabi-sabi* come to mind in relation to *Wall*, which is completely at one with the environment, the loose rocks balancing their material strength with the flexibility and fluidity required to coexist with the trees beside them in a simple and non-invasive manner. The dry stone wall was constructed with stone quarried from the surrounding areas and, where possible, included dead tree trunks as well as live root material. This allows a natural and harmonious interaction between the trees and the wall: as tree growth occurs, the wall recedes in places, whilst restricting growth at the same time (Goldsworthy, Baker & Thompson 2000: 10). The result, according to Goldsworthy, is a wall as an enclosing gesture, rather than a physical barrier.

Furthermore, the wall takes on a life of its own each time it changes, as a result of weather conditions, human intervention or new growth from the forest, and gives continuity to its relationship with its surroundings. In the work a compromise between risk and fragility is highlighted, which mirrors the creative tension between the wall and its surroundings (Goldsworthy, Baker & Thompson 2000: 77). Also noteworthy is Goldsworthy’s admission that the final form of the wall remained unknown until it was almost completed. The Zen-like manner in which potential for growth is left, as well as the apparent incompleteness of the wall, further highlights the potential of Zen aesthetics for its interpretation.

The artworks by Andy Goldsworthy examined here can be said to show Zen aspects, as they incorporate key elements, including harmonising with one’s environment, being aware of the interconnectedness between all phenomenon and that a simple unity exists between different things. Some of Goldsworthy’s works reflect spontaneity in conception, however their construction requires patience, perseverance and a knowledge of how various elements work together, in order to work successfully with the elements in nature. The themes however can be related to Zen teachings, with his works showing humility, remaining unsigned, leaving no formal legacy and little or no trace that the artist was ever there.

**Anish Kapoor**

British artist Anish Kapoor (born. 1954), explores the concept of immateriality (or the immateriality of material) and the void in his sculptures. He cuts holes into blocks of stone,
sometimes coating the exterior or interior surfaces with a rich pigment, transforming the void into a charged, dark space. He also works with reflective surfaces, which mirror and engulf or eliminate the viewer and the surrounding space. His evocative sculptures provoke an intense perceptual and physical response (Kapoor, Bhabha & Tazzi 1998: 11), one might almost say a spiritual response. In diverse religions one finds expressions of ‘emptiness’: mystics have often used the notion of emptiness to allude to their experiences of God or the Divine (Foreman & Winston 2008: 44). It is in religions of the East that this notion is explicit, particularly within Buddhism and Daoism. The immediacy of Kapoor’s sculptures cannot be ignored and can be said to allude to nothingness or immateriality, a distinctive trait of Zen philosophy.

Kapoor was born in Mumbai to a Jewish-Iraqi mother and an Indian father and states that inspiration for his sculptures is drawn from both the Middle East and India (Brown 1996: 151). He moved to the United Kingdom in 1972 where he studied art. He works with a variety of media, including coloured pigment, stone, steel, glass, fibreglass, concrete and PVC. Kapoor’s artistic career began with his first solo exhibition in Paris in 1980, after returning from India, where he was struck by mounds of pigment for sale in street markets and their use in temple rituals (Anfam 2009: 92). The series he subsequently produced consists of bold shapes and curved forms covered in brightly coloured pure pigment (figure 6). This was to characterise Kapoor’s work throughout the eighties. In these works, Kapoor uses wood and plaster covered in raw red and yellow pigment and the geometric, globular, curved and sharp surfaces dissolve into the powdered pigment surface that extends from the shapes to the floor (Bracewell & Renton 2011: 12). The shapes compel the viewer to question their materiality as they have an insubstantiality and yet a solidity about them. Speaking to Interview magazine in 1990, Kapoor described pigment as, “colour in its rawest form with incredible materiality” (Brown 1996: 152), yet it is insubstantial. The use of powdered pigment disrupts the relationship between the surface of the object and its volume, reflecting an in-between state. These kinds of pieces allow Kapoor to enter the realm of non-duality, or alternatively a very solid duality, as simplicity is harmonised with complexity and materiality contrasted with immateriality. So one could see these works as suggesting a subtle relationship between duality and non-duality, between reality and non-reality. This installation conveys a feeling of transience, with objects appearing partially submerged and liable to change their powdery forms.

According to Kapoor (in Foreman and Winston 2008: 33), the singular, pure, dense and matt qualities of raw pigment allow the viewer to perceive the symbolic objects directly, as the objects awaken in the viewer a high state of awareness with their optical intensity, appearing to dissolve volume into an illusory colour (Baume 2008: 15). This dissolving and illusory quality has characterised Kapoor’s works, as their physical status is always brought into question. Throughout his career, Kapoor has been acclaimed for his exploration and expression of matter and non-matter by exploiting the properties of pigment and for his use of the void. The void, according to Kapoor, (Brown 1996: 152), represents a vast emptiness, yet also contains everything and draws the viewer into another state of mind. Kapoor (In Kapoor et al 2009: 173) has spoken of the space in his works being “bigger than meets the eye.” In a conversation between Kapoor and Homi Bhabha, Bhabha (in Kapoor, et al 2009: 173) explains that the “sudden disappearance of the surface into a deep dark hole literally cuts the ground from one’s feet”.

In the late eighties, Kapoor began working with quarried stone, making blocks with carved apertures and cavities. This medium served Kapoor’s desire to explore non-duality in new ways, as many of his works hint at the relationship and connection between the earth and the sky, matter and non-matter, darkness and light, emptiness and fullness. In Kapoor’s own, Zen-like, words about this in-between or non-dualistic state: “The most creative words I know are, I don’t
know. If you know, then there is no yearning and no art. Because knowing is finite and false. Not knowing and yearning is infinite and truth revealed. Yearning is Art” (Kapoor, Bhabha & Tazzi 1998: 29).

![Figure 6](image)

**Figure 6**
Anish Kapoor, *To reflect an intimate part of the red*, 1981, mixed media and pigment, 200cm x 800cm x 800cm, artist’s studio, London (source: Baume, 2008: 20).

This statement suggests that Kapoor understands the Buddhist concepts of incompleteness, imperfection and non-dualism, and explores these in his work. The Buddhist notion of emptiness is present in free standing sculptures as well as his more ambitious installation pieces. “There is a fullness to Buddhist emptiness,” writes Mark Epstien (in Baas & Jacob, 2004:34), “a spaciousness that both saturates the physical world and expands to allow access to the dimension of intermediate experience.”

Kapoor’s 1989 work *Adam* (figure 7) features a solitary sandstone block approximately two metres high, inset with an oblong area of blue pigment. The pillar has an archaeological, mystical yet industrial feel. Similar to Kapoor’s pigment pieces, *Adam* develops the concept of manifestation, taking the work beyond form, implying a sense of presence and place in a space beyond the gallery space. The disappearance of the rock’s surface into an open, dark space highlights the Zen notion of the void (Baas & Jacob 2004: 72) with a play on materiality and non-materiality (Brown 1996: 152). Furthermore, according to Kapoor (in Baume 2008: 50), *Adam* introduces an additional complexity to the problem of space, as it deals with dark emptiness in a way that is introspective and evocative. The use of sandstone evokes universal forces in nature, according to Bracewell (in Bracewell & Renton 2011: 17).

Unlike classic sculpture which manifests as volume in space, Kapoor’s *Cloud gate* (figure 8) is very much a volume in space and yet the non-object manifests in the presence of the viewer and in the context of his/her perceptions. Kapoor’s work explores the notion of the non-intrusive as well as his interest in the expression of presence and absence. Many of Kapoor’s works recede...
or seem to fall away into emptiness, and *Cloud Gate* is a striking example of this, where Kapoor makes a vast object that seems to transcend the physical world by dramatically exploiting the reflective properties of stainless steel, resulting in a work that is apparently neither material nor non-material, neither solid nor void, without boundaries.

![Anish Kapoor, Adam, 1989, sandstone and pigment, 236cm x 119cm x 102cm, on loan to Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, UK (source: Bracewell & Renton, 2011: 41).](image)

Many of his works in this period distort reflections and the space around them, providing an engaging experience from different angles and perspectives. In *Cloud Gate*, the sensual form and reflective surface feature prominently, this time as the centrepiece at AT&T Plaza in Millennium Park in Chicago. *Cloud Gate*, with a mass of one hundred and ten tonnes, is made up of one hundred and sixty-nine stainless steel hand-rolled plates (Foreman & Winston 2008: 91), welded together using plasma technology with no evident seams, then hand polished.

Distortion plays an important role in Kapoor’s work, often engaging viewers and bringing an immediacy of awareness of the environment, as the piece merges with the environment. The distorted images defy definitions such as up or down, right or left and in or out and dissolve these forms of dualism. It can therefore be argued that what appears to be real is just an illusion, as Kapoor presents a physical embodiment of non-dualism, just as the tea ceremony does. This work manifests non-dualism more clearly, it could be concluded, than any of the other works discussed in this article. It enables a state of reflection and offers multiple levels of experience. This is reflected in the brief and transient appearance of the viewer, other people and objects reflected in its surface. Kapoor (in Baume 2008: 131) notes that in using the artwork as an object
of devotional practice, deeper thought may be cultivated. *Cloud Gate* is thus about the self and beyond the self. The distorted images, even though transient, allow viewers to experience the interconnectedness of everything around them. In the words of the artist (in Brown 1996: 152): “My work has to do with the coming to immateriality. One of the most important questions that has arisen for me as an artist, is the question of the status of the object, the uncertainty of the object.”

![Figure 7](image)

*Figure 7*

*Anish Kapoor, Cloud Gate, 2004-2006, stainless steel, 1000cm x 1300cm x 2000cm, Chicago USA, (source: Baume, 2008: 127).*

We would argue that some of Kapoor’s early works defy logic, as might a Zen koan, while his larger and more ambitious pieces transcend into objects of devotion or conduits through which one may connect to the space beyond the physical. The Japanese term *shibui* is appropriate as many of Kapoor’s works not only communicate beauty, but do so by harmonising the complexity associated with their materials and construction, with very simple shapes and forms in their final presentation.

**Conclusion**

This article set out to examine the potential of applying Zen philosophies and aesthetics to interpreting the work of Andy Goldsworthy and Anish Kapoor and began by sketching a background on Buddhism, Daoism and Zen. The emphasis in Zen is on direct intuitive experience and Zen holds the conviction that penetration to the heart of life's meaning is not brought about by the mind alone but should be incorporated into one’s lifestyle. The basic principles include
non-action (wu wei), the concept of detachment carried forward into the doctrine of the void, the Buddhist metaphor for emptiness equating emptying out with filling up, the connection of all phenomenon, the importance of selflessness.

An examination of the Japanese tea ceremony demonstrated Zen beliefs in everyday action, where the simple act of drinking tea is elevated and accorded ritualistic status, cultivating an aura of simplicity, beauty, peace and tranquillity. The ceremony lays a foundation for aesthetic expression and provides participants with the space to reflect on life’s simplicity contrasted with the complexity often taken to be an inescapable reality. The Japanese concepts of wabi-sabi and shibui provide insights into Zen aesthetics and the associated rituals and utensils. One of the aspects of Zen aesthetics was the spontaneity and willingness, on the part of the artist, to accept an end result that was perhaps not fully crystallised in the mind of the artist at the time of conception. At the beginning of this article, the idea of objects making themselves was touched upon. This suggests that when artists concede that the final form of the work is not fully planned, they are indeed at a point where they have committed to a journey of discovery toward the inevitable object. The analysis of Goldsworthy’s and Kapoor’s artworks has shown this achievement of the apparently inevitable object, the ‘self-made object’. Both the artists, at some point in their careers, have admitted to either not knowing what their artworks are, that is to say, leaving viewers to experience them, or are open to a wide variety of interpretation. This study suggests that, whether or not an artist explicitly adopts Zen principles, he or she can allow creativity to emerge in a spontaneous way, which can be interpreted by the application of Zen principles.

Kapoor’s artworks in the form of modern day koans or visual paradoxes act as objects of devotion and as medium for deeper thought, and could be said to defy the laws of physics. Goldsworthy’s creations, on the other hand, show a special interest in and appreciation for nature and allow those who experience his work directly to experience the self as part of the fabric of nature, as they may be said to defy the laws of biology. As the tide came in and swept away one of his works, Goldsworthy (1990: 45), noted, “The very thing that brought it to life, will bring about its death,” demonstrating detachment from the material world and accepting the natural flows and rhythms of life, that carry one to the point beyond attachment.

All these works engage the viewers and transport them through this journey of creation, toward the inevitable object. That the artists possess some understanding of Zen principles is not the point of this article, although one might speculate that they might indeed find a rapport with Zen doctrines insofar as these might suggest interpretations for their work, which might however arise from different, western artistic conventions. These works often confound one and provoke a powerful aesthetic experience. Such works can act as channels for reflection and contemplation.

Notes

1. Buddhism was founded in North East India by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha or ‘Enlightened One’. It then spread through Asia, influencing and mixing with many cultures along the way. Buddhist ‘mysticism’ began with the Buddha’s own enlightenment in Bodhgaya (Littleton 1999: 65), in approximately 528 BC. So unshakable was Buddha’s faith that he devoted the rest of his life to instructing others on how to accomplish this, leaving his followers to propagate his values long after his death (Klostermaier 2002: 47).
2 Daoism is a philosophical system developed by Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu advocating a simple honest life and non-interference with the course of natural events (Griffiths & Keenan 1990: 132.)

3 The *Dao de Jing* is a classic text of Chinese philosophy dating to the sixth century BC. It deals poetically and philosophically with ideas such as non-dualism, emptiness and the unnameable.

4 One might understand the variety of tea bowls, of which many are irregular and imperfect while others are highly perfect and decorated, with the Shin-Gyo-So system: this categorises design, such as gardens or tea bowls, as either Shin (formal, perfect, symmetrical), as So (informal, imperfect, asymmetrical) or Gyo (a mixture) (Richie 2011: 95).

5 Of course, there are western thinkers who appreciate and emphasize imperfection. For example, John Ruskin in an essay titled “The nature of Gothic” in the book *The stones of Venice* (1853) explains in some detail the value of imperfection.

6 There are exceptions to this, for example English slipware is very plain and often rough, while some contemporary Western pots, such as those of the so-called Leach school, much influenced by Japanese ceramics, also seek for simplicity and naturalness.

7 A Koan is a paradoxical anecdote or riddle, used in Zen Buddhism to demonstrate the inadequacy of logical reasoning and to provoke enlightenment.

### Works cited


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Poorvi Bhana studied fine art at Tshwane University of Technology, inspired by her father, a leading sculptor in the community. Her inspiration is drawn from both African and Indian culture. Her work is based largely on clay and mixed media installations. Since graduating with an M Tech (Fine Arts) degree, she has featured prominently in exhibitions, both as exhibitor and curator. Her first solo exhibition (2013) was titled Samsara... the journey of the soul. Bhana was selected as a finalist at the Sasol New Signatures Art Competition (2009) and awarded a merit prize, later winning first prize for the piece, Sankhya at the Thami Mnyele Fine Art Competition.

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This article contributes to the renewed interest in Le Corbusier by exploring a proposition by the African American architect and scholar, Melvin Mitchell, that West African art and architecture had a decisive influence on a number of Le Corbusier’s projects. The proposition is explored by means of a matrix that cross-references the three levels of human settlement with three sets of architectural form-giving principles. Since Le Corbusier never acknowledged sub-Saharan sources, the results range from debatable to defensible. It is emphasised that the value of studying Le Corbusier does not so much lie in the tangible forms of his buildings, but rather in the thought processes that informed their conceptualisation and design resolution.

Key words: Le Corbusier, Melvin Mitchell, West African vernacular architecture

Up to now the 21st century has not been architecture’s proudest period. In a recent interview Kenneth Frampton, renowned architectural critic, historian and theoretician, described current architecture as “brutal and barbaric”, lamenting that “spaces in contemporary buildings have no quality whatsoever, and depend on the exclusivity of surface and shape” (quoted by Brillembourgh 2010). Clients complain that buildings are not fit for purpose, and engineers complain that architects are becoming deskilled. Many academics embrace vague philosophies of space and place, while rejecting the pragmatism of Christopher Alexander and Le Corbusier (1887-1965) as passé or unfashionable.

Le Corbusier’s œuvre has nevertheless been revived as a powerful inspiration for the recent Modernist revival in architecture. A major exhibition of his work at the Barbican Art Gallery in London in 2009 was followed by one at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (June to August 2013) and another at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm (January to April 2013). These were not travelling exhibitions; each had its own theme. Equally surprising is that at least ten new books focussing on various aspects of Le Corbusier’s life and work have been released in English since the beginning of 2011.

Award-winning South African architect and urban planner, Andrew Makin (comment at his Sophia Gray memorial lecture. Bloemfontein, South Africa, 2006), proclaims that there is hardly any contemporary building of three storeys or higher today that does not include one or more of Le Corbusier’s Five Points. Frampton (2002: 1) once remarked: “We shall never finish with Le Corbusier”.

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Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre maintain that where his projects have been duplicated, their “dysfunctional aspects” were often emphasised, while “obscuring the critical and programmatic qualities inherent in his work as a whole” (1985: 8). They add significantly:

Seen from this point of view, the work of Le Corbusier remains an unfinished project. His lasting contribution is to have put together a comprehensive modern framework for thinking and for posing the questions out of which many answers to contemporary problems can eventually emerge.

And as Léon Krier declares: “… there is no coherent neo-modernist thinking that, like Le Corbusier’s, is capable of building an authoritative body of theory offering the necessary synthesis of urban planning and land use, on the one hand, and architecture and building, on the other” (1998: 65).

Le Corbusier inspires and informs on so many levels and on every conceivable aspect of architecture, that his oeuvre provides an inexhaustible body for exploration. A previous article entitled “The manifestations of African art in Le Corbusier’s architecture” (Steyn 2013) explored the African origins of “the Picasso-Cubist inspired architecture of Le Corbusier”, referred to by the African American architect and scholar, Melvin Mitchell (2003: 263). This article goes beyond that specific topic and pursues a thesis, also postulated by Mitchell, , who claims in his seminal work The Crises of the African-American Architect that West Africa shaped Modernist art and architecture through Le Corbusier (Mitchell 2003: 11, 65). Considering the growing importance of many sub-Saharan economies and a concomitant emerging African cultural renaissance, such a proposition simply cannot be ignored.

Methodology and sources of information

In spite of Mitchell’s claim, Le Corbusier makes absolutely no reference to West Africa anywhere in his writings. When he mapped his ideas for a world-wide network of cities, sub-Saharan Africa was excluded from this equation, although what could be Ghana was marked with a cross (figure 1). There is, however, no doubt that he was thoroughly familiar with pre-colonial West African art; when he arrived to settle in Paris in 1917 he “cruised” the museums looking at “primitive and prehistoric art – woven carpets and carved idols” (Giedion 1977: 520). During the early decades of the 20th century the art and artefacts of West Africa were widely referred to as “primitive” and perhaps Le Corbusier (1964: 6) unwittingly revealed his sub-Saharan inspiration when he proclaimed “I seek out primitive men, not for their barbarity, but for their Wisdom”.

![Figure 1](source: Le Corbusier 1947: 97)
The simplest way to research the topic would have been to search images for similar forms in literature on West African vernacular architecture to those in Le Corbusier’s oeuvre. For example, the houses in Timbuktu, Mali, and the unbuilt residential complex for pilgrims at La Sainte-Baume in Provence (1949) have very similar visual characteristics (figure 2). The walls of La Sainte-Baume were, like those in much of West Africa, of earth construction or pisé (rammed earth) to be more precise (Samuel 2007: 32), and the vaulted roofs were covered with grass. La Sainte-Baume not only emulates the materiality and scale of the vernacular, but because of its roughness and planted roof it seems to have emerged from the earth; quite the opposite of “The cutting off of the building from the land” that Le Corbusier has been so often accused of (Bacon 1967: 217).

![Figure 2](image)

Figure 2

This approach, however, would have been too opportunistic and arbitrary. A framework was needed to guide the search. David Hughes (1994: 8), the African American architect and author (Afrocentric Architecture: a Design Primer) states that Afrocentric architecture – which for Mitchell (2003: xi) is synonymous with Le Corbusier’s oeuvre – reflects three “principal areas of the built environment”: historic precedent, cultural elements and environmental/ecological elements. Hughes’ notion of the principal areas was subsequently adopted as search criteria for this study. A morphological matrix was set up by using the three scales of human settlement as the vertical axis to integrate the process by means of cross referencing (figure 3). The resulting nine cross-referenced cells constitute the research framework. Their numbers correspond with the sequence in which they are discussed below.

The matrix was systematically populated by searching for patterns that demonstrate commonality in terms of the search criteria. Since a study such as this necessarily focuses on a comparison of formalistic characteristics, it inevitably contains some speculative choices. Although the matrix was intended to achieve a more rigorous and probing method of investigation, some randomness and value judgement remain unavoidable. An aspect pertaining to value judgement is the fact that we have so become accustomed to ‘deconstructivism’ and ‘blob architecture’ that we cannot really appreciate how radically different Le Corbusier’s designs and dogma were at that time. Throughout his 50 year professional career he progressed through a number of paradigmatic phases – from the slick, white, floating Purist buildings to
rough, solid, monumental buildings – and each of his projects was unconventional, pioneering and quite different from what was considered to be the popular ideal (figure 4).

| CRITERIA |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Historic precedent [spatiality, typology, tectonics] | Cultural elements [customs, living patterns and physical artefacts] | Environmental/ecological elements [climate, geologic conditions and physical features] |
| Buildings and tectonics | | |
| Building complexes | | |
| Urban | | |

Figure 3
The research framework and case studies (source: the author).

Figure 4
1. Buildings and tectonics/historic precedents
   Buildings as rooms in a box: Hausa compound, Nigeria, and UN Headquarters in New York (1947)

For the design of the UN headquarters in New York (1947) Le Corbusier, although part of a team, played a significant role in developing the concept. While the office towers clearly evolved from the Ministry of Education Building in Rio de Janeiro (1936), the Secretariat (meeting venues) were conceptualised as “rooms in a box” (Gargiani and Rosellini 2011: 107; figure 4). This is the quintessential African compound pattern, as exemplified by the Hausa homestead in Zaria, eastern Nigeria, recorded by Friedrich Schwerdtfeger (1971: 72). The palace of the Assembly in Chandigarh (1958) is another example, although not as obvious. The value of this concept is its inherent flexibility. The interior functions can be adapted to new needs or technologies without compromising the exterior envelope which, because of structural, climatic and aesthetic demands will probably be the most expensive and durable element of the building.

![Figure 5](Hausa homestead in Zaria, Nigeria and the Secretariat building of the UN in New York (sources: section and plan from Gargiani and Rosellini 2011: 107; perspective view from Le Corbusier 1995, volume 5: 37)).

2. Buildings and tectonics/cultural elements
   Courtyards: Tokolor mosque and the Chapel of Ronchamp (1949)

Mitchell (2003: 11, 263) describes the Chapel of Ronchamp – a highly sculptural free form building in concrete – as the ultimate Afrocentric architecture. He asserts that Afrocentric architecture had evolved to its “logical aesthetic conclusion in Le Corbusier’s voluptuously
curvilinear Chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Haut” and describes the Chapel at Notre Dame as “openly 1950s West African aesthetic based”. Why?

Here Le Corbusier considered the “question of profiles in the landscape”. In order to resist strong wind the roof was aerodynamically conoid shaped like an airplane wing and early designs in 1951 intended it to be constructed of metal. By 1954 it was decided to build walls, cupolas and roof in béton brut (Gargiani and Rosellini 2011: 127-135). Oeuvre complete makes no mention of airplane technology, but rather refers to “the acoustics of the landscape, taking as a starting point the four horizons” (Le Corbusier 1995, volume 5: 72). In later years he would claim that a crab’s shell inspired the shape of the roof (Maak 2011: 16), giving the process a biomorphic rather than technological theme. Danièle Pauly (1985: 35-6) writes that Le Corbusier’s sketches during a trip to the valley of the M’zab in the northern Sahara in 1931 captured essential elements of Mozabite architecture, including how “openings were distributed parsimoniously [spARINGLY] in the thick walls”. Pauly shows a photograph of a mosque in the M’zab to substantiate this assertion, but says that the architecture did not influence the chapel of Ronchamp directly or consciously, but the “memory” obviously did.

There is some resemblance to West African forms, for example with the Tokolor mosque in Senegal that dates from the 1890s (figures 6, 7). What is striking is that both buildings derive much of their natural interior light indirectly from openings in light wells/towers, a feature also found in Dogon houses (Bourdier and Minh-ha 2011: 130).

![Ronchamp](source: Elan Barr 2007 from http://architecturewiki.editme.com/lecorbusier),

3. Buildings and tectonics/environmental/ ecological elements

Climatic responsiveness: Dogon and brise-soleil

William Curtis (1986: 115-6) and others suggest that Le Corbusier’s *brise-soleil* was inspired by the Arab *musharabiya* (also called *rowshan*), conceived to ensure privacy for women, although their materiality is too delicate and filigreed to be convincing. However, the modulated wall construction of some building types of the Dogon of southern Mali seems to reflect the much more robust pattern and scale of the *brise-soleil*, as well as the purpose (sun-breaks; figure 8). The high relief is a common feature of vernacular buildings in the hot-dry northern parts of West African (Bourgeois 1996: 75), not only protecting the wall from direct sunlight for much of the day, but also, as René Gardi (1973: 113-4) reports, “the niches are inhabited by ancestors”.

Screens and transitional spaces are found in traditional African architecture for shade, privacy and territoriality, and in some forms of Mediterranean architecture (as loggias), but have been rare in 20th century architecture. Of the *brise-soleil* Le Corbusier and De Pierrefeu (1948: 110) comment: “Before the glass skin a further element can be installed, the sun-breaker. An unlimited architectural resource, the key to new architectural riches” (figure 9). Today, however, screens and skins are common elements in contemporary architecture.
Section through Tokolor house and Le Corbusier’s sketch explaining sun-breakers and glass skins (sources: Bourdier and Minh-ha 1996: 86; Le Corbusier and De Pierrefeu 1948: 110).

### 4. Building complexes/historic precedent

**Composition: Mousgoum homestead and Olivetti Centre (1962)**

Christopher Alexander (1964: 30-1), well known American architect and author, refers to the African mud hut as a “recognised example” of a good fit between form and context, as well as of clarity of organisation. He was referring to the Mousgoum “mud castles” of the Cameroun, well known because of their sculptural forms (figure 10). The Olivetti Electronic Centre was intended to be built near Milan (figure 11). Superimposed on the controlled Euclidean geometries of the L-shaped workshop podium block and research laboratories in ten-storey slabs, the main entrance, restaurant library and other social facilities are accommodated in an organic free-form arrangement that is reminiscent of a number of iconic African compounds with their central cores, all connected by curved pathways (figure 12). The pod-like spaces in particular, resemble Mousgoum homesteads on plan. Interestingly, their sectional profiles show sculptured, scalloped roof shapes (figure 13).

Contrasting plan forms and differentiated spaces and volumes can make way finding in a big building considerably easier. This concept can also reduce the intimidating effect of unfamiliar, monolithic tectonics so characteristic of some institutional buildings.

![Figure 9](image-url)  
Section through Tokolor house and Le Corbusier’s sketch explaining sun-breakers and glass skins (sources: Bourdier and Minh-ha 1996: 86; Le Corbusier and De Pierrefeu 1948: 110).

![Figure 10](image-url)  
Mousgoum homestead, Cameroun (sources: drawing by the author after Fraser 1868: 53; photos from Guidoni 1975: 133).
Figure 11

Figure 12
Mousgoum homestead and plan of Olivetti Centre (drawings by the author).
5. Building complexes/cultural elements

Fractal geometry: Barcelona Workers’ Quarter (1933)

Although Michael Batty and Paul Longley’s *The Fractal City* was published only in 1994, two fractal modes are evident in Le Corbusier’s site planning in 1933 for workers’ housing in Barcelona (figure 13), the one being the hierarchical circulation pattern that is very similar to that of a ksour in the M’zab (which he visited) and also that of a typical rural West African village (which he did not; figure 14). Richard Hull (1976: 47) describes the “astonishingly efficient use of space” achieved by the Igbo in Nigeria through clustering (figure 15). This pattern is called “branching fractals” by Ron Eglash (1999: 34). The other is the *quincunx*, a fractal pattern found as decoration in Senegal (Eglash 1999: 55). Fractals constitute a fascinating (and visually spectacular) mathematical concept, but they are probably still undeveloped as urban design tools. However, because of the resulting hierarchical scaling it is a subtle way of creating semi-private/semi-public spaces and defining territory without overtly excluding strangers.
6. Building complexes/environmental/ecological elements
Responding to the physical context: Yoruba Palace and Venice Hospital (1964)

Douglas Fraser (1968: 43) describes Yoruba town planning as “among the most elaborate in Africa south of the Sahara”. The region is not known for its big buildings, but with a footprint of 2.4 hectares for the palace of the Obas (king) in Oyo, this complex, typical of Yoruba royal compounds in Nigeria, must be one of the largest. Set in an 8.1 hectare walled precinct, the courtyard typology, materiality and tectonic form are similar to that of the surrounding fabric; the spaces are all just considerably bigger.

With a base coverage of 3.0 hectares the scheme for the Venice hospital, on which Le Corbusier was working before his death, was not much bigger (figure 16). Charles Jencks insists (2000: 325) that this complex “has many of the complex, urban aspects which his critics were asking for”, including respect for the context. Tzonis and Lefaivre add (1985: 7) that it responds to “a growing demand for a low-profile architecture capable of being integrated into the existing urban fabric”. Designed in 1964, this envisaged (but unbuilt) new hospital was planned for 1,200 beds, and was configured in four levels with courtyards and a regular circulation grid. It is interesting that in *Euvre Complète* (Le Corbusier 1995, volume 7: 140-9) the model and all the site plans show the existing surrounding fabric. The horizontality, narrow lanes and courtyards of the existing fabric inform the concept as its major morphological elements. However, unlike the vernacular Yoruba builders, there is less need to replicate existing materials in the 20th century and the Hospital is built with reinforced concrete. It possesses some fractal qualities since the grid is centrifugal and can be endlessly incrementally “spun” out (figure 17).

Interestingly, he now had the opportunity to emulate the introverted pattern (figure 18) he sketched at Ben-Isghem in Mauritania and commented on as being “well-filled shells” and “within: a poem” (Le Corbusier 1964: 232). Nowhere did Le Corbusier pursue the courtyard

![Figure 15](image1.png)

Fractal patterns and the Barcelona workers’ quarter (drawings by the author).
theme so conclusively and boldly. The Venice Hospital is an example of a large carpet building, on many sites an appropriate alternative to towers for large institutional complexes.

Figure 16

Figure 17
Site plan of the Venice Hospital and the palace at Oyo, Nigeria (drawings by the author).
7. **Urban/historic precedent**  
**Urban squares: Asante and Roq-et-Rob (1949)**

Andrew Rutter (1971: 161-62) points out that Asante settlement planning is based on “a main street pattern whose axis east-west or north-south had religious significance”, and that in smaller settlements “a simple pattern based on a single main street was sufficient”. The market square in the centre is social space in every sense. Unlike Islamic cities such as Timbuktu and Djenné, the layout of the rural villages in Kumasi’s hinterland is codified around the precepts of axes and a centre. This is also the organisational pattern Le Corbusier applied for Roq-et-Rob (figure 19). His unquestionable preference for collectivism – also embedded in African culture – is evident here in the generously-scaled centralised communal courtyard (accessible from eight directions) surrounded by private dwellings with courtyards as family sanctuaries. Although the ideological meaning has been lost, the social and psychological values of this hierarchical arrangement of courtyards remain relevant.
8. Urban/cultural elements

Anthropomorphism: Dogon Village and Radiant City (1930)

Radiant City, a hypothetical project for Moscow (Le Corbusier 1964: 124) was exhibited at the Brussels Conference of CIAM and although he explains and motivates all aspects of the design in considerable depth, Le Corbusier is totally silent about the anthropomorphic layout claimed by Maurice Besset (1987: 167). Besset does not identify the source of the illustration listed as “Sketch of the Radiant City”, but as a former administrator of the Foundation Le Corbusier in Paris he certainly had access to unpublished material. Anthropomorphism is rare in Western architectural dogma, but intrinsic to many African ideologies, like that of the Dogon in Mali as described by Fraser (1968: 51, figure 20).

![Anthropomorphism in urbanism (sources: Fraser 1968: 51; Besset 1987: 167).](image)

9. Urban/environmental/ecological elements

Merging/respecting the site: La Sainte-Baume (1948) and Roq-et-Rob (1949)

The French Coast projects, La Sainte-Baume on the Côte d’Azur (1948) and Roq-et-Rob at Cap Martin (1949), are two of Le Corbusier’s unbuilt carpet schemes – low, contour-hugging structures that cover the landscape like a crust. Besset (1987: 126) comments on this transition to formless architecture, referring to the “outspread structure strictly governed by those natural forms”. These “stepped clusters of contiguous dwellings” are typologically identical to the cliff-type Dogon villages of Mali, so succinctly described and illustrated by Norbert Schoenauer (2000: 64-6; figure 21). In both instances the building clusters merge and blend with their site and respect the topography. In many respects Le Corbusier’s carpet projects, and Roq-et-Rob in particular, preceded Critical Regionalism by many decades. To quote Pallasmaa (2007: 137):

The [Second] Modernism frequently expresses gravity and stability and a sense of materiality and earth. The return of earth and gravity as expressive means of architecture has more than metaphoric meaning; after its arrogant and utopian journey, architecture has returned to the safety of Mother Earth, back to the sources of rebirth and creativity.
Conclusion

From Le Corbusier’s travel notes and sketches we know that he was impressed by Greco-Roman and Turkish architecture, but it was during his visits to North Africa that the Kasbah in Algiers and the fortified villages in the M’zab made him appreciate the value of the more rugged and textured North African vernacular. The architectural forms of the Maghreb are derived from the Middle East via Islam, and since a number of authors, including the authoritative Kaizer Talib (1984: 47), recognise a typological relationship between Middle Eastern and African dwellings, it can be suggested that the representation of West African patterns in Le Corbusier’s work is purely coincidental. To avoid that burden of proof this article refers to similarities simply as “reflections” and not “inspiration”; it suggests phenomenological similarities, rather than claim deliberate connections.

Le Corbusier’s exposure to the vernacular unquestionably convinced him that the traditional indigenous forms are not as ‘unplanned’ as generally perceived. As an avid reader and probing researcher, there is the possibility that he might have tracked the vernacular from the Kasbah in Algiers, to Ben-Isghem in the M’zab and from there across the Sahara to the Sahelian towns and further south along the trading routes into the Forest Zone. Le Corbusier employed a somewhat contentious form of Critical Regionalism in the way he reinterpreted and applied traditional local elements totally stripped of their cultural underpinnings in another region and context.

He considered the Indian climate quite a challenge to the point where he felt compelled to develop the Climatic Grid in order to be able to respond architecturally in an adequate manner. In fact, Curtis (1986: 115) reminds us, Le Corbusier’s “regionalism was not so much cultural as climatic”. Mitchell (2003: 16) believes that Ghana is the cradle land of Corbusian-inspired modernism. Actually, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, who joined Le Corbusier at Chandigarh in 1951, worked in Ghana and studied local vernacular patterns, writing the seminal Village Housing in the Tropics – with Special Reference to West Africa (1947). It is not inconceivable that they shared their expertise with him. Just like Le Corbusier they appreciated the Ghanaian vernacular not for its cultural appropriateness, but for its climatic responsiveness.

The intrinsic characteristics of the West African vernacular are reflected in Le Corbusier’s oeuvre in many other ways including: site and contextual sensitivity; optimal land-use intensity without compromising private outdoor space; privacy gradients through hierarchical spatial
progression; the sensibility of earth construction; and the emotional reassurance of earthy
textures and colours.

The wide range of sources and methods Le Corbusier employed to inform his design
concepts is well known and widely recorded, including setting-out geometry, proportions, biology,
analogies from nature, historical and vernacular precedents, ideas from his contemporaries
and formative ideas from every historical age, from antiquity to the futurists. Le Corbusier
was always elusive about the true inspirations for his design concepts; as Adolf Vogt (2000: x) wittily declares, Le Corbusier was good at covering his tracks! My argument is that West
African art, including architecture and artefacts, was for him a ‘secret’ source of formative ideas
that he mined for creative ideas that allowed him to consistently produce unique and surprising
architecture.

Works cited


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“Slow” architecture and its links with Slow Food

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There have always been links between food and architecture, but the connections between Slow Food and Slow Architecture that are explored here could highlight a number of lessons learned and shared between these two multidisciplinary movements. As global trends within the context of an increased awareness of sustainability, they could make a contribution towards a renewed focus on local regions, craft and sensory experience.

Key words: Slow Food, slow architecture, regionalism, craft, and the senses.

Over the past few decades there has been an increasing global awareness of the need for sustainable development. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 highlighted the links between environmental quality and the quality of life (Rogers, Jalal and Boyd, 2005: 42), and the United Nations attempted to bring these concerns onto the political agenda by publishing the report Our Common Future in 1987 (WCED, 1987). This report provided the widely-used definition of sustainable development as “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The subsequent Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the adoption of Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration and the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development helped to consolidate this awareness into what some might call a collective consciousness.

It is in this context of an increased societal awareness of sustainability that Slow Food has evolved, and in parallel with Slow Food, there have been various resurgences and evolutions in architectural practice that can be seen to have links with this movement and could therefore be referred to as “Slow” architecture.

The growth of Slow Food

The idea for this paper struck me while I was cutting a round loaf of bread. Not just any bread, but a loaf made of wheat and rye sourdough, baked in a wood-fired oven by a fourth generation baker using locally produced stoneground flour in a slow fermentation and long-rising process. He uses no preservatives or artificial substances in his bread, but it lasts longer than most other types of bread that we have become accustomed to. It can be frozen for weeks, defrosted and then reheated and it still tastes better than the average mass-produced loaf of bread that is packed
with additives to make it last longer. This baker subscribes to the principles of the so-called Slow Food movement.4

Slow Food is currently an international organisation with upwards of 100 000 members in 1300 local chapters or convivia in more than a hundred countries (Slow Food 2013: 1). It started with humble beginnings in the early 1980s when Carlo Petrini and a group of his friends from the small town of Bra in Italy’s Piedmont region were outraged by the quality of the food at the Festival of the Thrush in Montalcino. They were all members of the Associazione ricreativa culturale italiana, or Arci for short, which was a national association in Italy that was supported by the Communist and Socialist Parties. Arci had branches throughout the country, called Case del Popolo or “houses of the people” that organised cultural events like festivals, sporting events and debates.

The small towns in Italy were (and sometimes still are) quite insular, so the friends were in Montalcino to learn about the local wine called Brunello de Montalcino, in order to improve the wine culture in their own region, which produces the red wines Barolo and Barbaresco. However, due to poorly prepared thrushes, inedible ribollita (Tuscan soup), red wine that was too cold and a bad dessert, the group of friends decided to take the issue of bad food up with the Arci organisation.5 A lengthy debate ensued, which led to the formation of Arci Gola or Arcigoga (which is a play of words that means arch-taster or arch-gourmand), a national oeno-gastronomical league, in Bra in 1986. This organisation eventually led to the establishment of Slow Food (which was initially also a reaction to the fast food giant McDonald’s’ opening of a 1200m² outlet on the Piazza di Spagna in Rome and the spread of fast food culture, television and consumerism in Italy) and the inaugural meeting of the International Slow Food Movement took place at the Opéra Comique in Paris in 1989.7

Slow food, in essence, is against the standardisation of culture and taste. Its main principles can be summarised as placing an emphasis on the appreciation of good, healthy food and the skills involved during its production, the protection of local customs and species, the protection of biodiversity, and the education of a broader public about food.8 The movement’s manifesto (Slow Food, 2013) mentions the principles of Good, Clean and Fair: Good is about food’s sensory qualities, but it is also about the quality of materials and production; Clean is about the environment, biodiversity, health, sustainable farming, processing and consumption; and Fair is about social justice, better labour conditions, the right to food, reward, cultural diversity, tradition and a more balanced global economy.

Slow Food aims to promote regional food that is prepared by identifiable producers, as opposed to the sometimes bland, industrially manufactured consumer products that permeate the marketplace. This resonates with many people who are concerned about the industrialised food cycle where genetically modified organisms, the use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers, numerous additives, homogenised taste and unknown origins are often integral to the process. Meneley (2004: 172) provides a somewhat extreme and overly simplified table of these apparent opposites as shown in Table 1, but the reality is much less clear-cut and there are numerous grey areas.
A fairly lengthy argument can be constructed around any of the opposites found in this table, for instance the mere fact that Slow Food International exists, can be seen to negate its claims to localism. While specific products are categorised according to region, many of the producers are networking internationally, usually in the hope that their products can be distributed in foreign markets. Slow Food does promote region-specific products, variants or methods where the terroir and producers are acknowledged and valued, so suffice it to say that the table provides diametric opposites to the basic intentions of Slow Food, but that the items under fast food do not necessarily represent its intentions, and that the tendency for significant overlap on both sides should be acknowledged. There are also unintended consequences, for instance where larger producers that are affiliated with Slow Food are more likely to gain access to international markets, rather than the smaller artisanal producers that Slow Food usually seeks to promote.9

Slow Food is frequently criticised as being elitist, since it often promotes expensive, high-quality, specialised products that only the well-off can afford,10 and Simonetti (2012: 171) is of the opinion that the movement’s principles of Good, Clean and Fair are all just marketing in order to reach well-off consumers who feel guilty about it and who want to ease their conscience by being on “the right side” while eating well. Van der Meulen (2008: 234) makes the point that conspicuous consumption of these products by the elite could turn these products into so-called cultural goods, which will make them desirable and eventually more accessible to the so-called middle and lower classes. Mass-producers often follow the example of smaller, specialist producers, which also means that similar products (not necessarily always of the same quality) can become readily available. Tam (2008: 210) argues that the criticism of Slow Food being elitist is as a result of limited understanding of the movement, where the enjoyment of food is also about the relationship with one’s social and natural environment: She argues that the movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slow food</th>
<th>Fast food</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artisanal</td>
<td>Industrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handcrafted</td>
<td>Mass-produced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Global</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>Artificial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy</td>
<td>Dangerous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pure</td>
<td>Tainted by additives and artificial modifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctive</td>
<td>Homogenised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumed convivially</td>
<td>Consumed alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable</td>
<td>Hegemonic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>Profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of origin known</td>
<td>Place of origin erased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producer known</td>
<td>Identity of workers erased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defetishised</td>
<td>Fetishised</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1
Oppositional framework between slow food and fast food. (source: Meneley, 2004: 172).
is doing much to preserve biodiversity, food knowledge, and craft and by doing this, it is aligned with the drive for the eradication of hunger. Page (2012: 2) also mentions the movement’s focus on social and environmental responsibility and notes that it has moved beyond its original, more gastronomic focus to become more concerned about the environment, education and fair trade. Schneider (2008: 385), while conceding that Slow Food’s emphasis on artisanal production can run the risk of being too expensive for most people, proclaims Slow Food as being a social movement, since it is responding to issues such as globalisation and biodiversity loss through its collective identity. The way it uses existing social and cultural capital, forms networks between different occupations, uses the media, provides education, promotes good ingredients and products, stands for craftsmanship, considers fair trade, emphasises the use of care when doing things, all proves that it has concerns other than just the sheer enjoyment that is to be had when things are done in a certain way.

**Pumpkins on the roof: food and architecture**

Cooking is able – just like architecture, to report precisely on a culture, a region or a person. So cooking does not just mean preparing appetizing food, but [it] is a cultural activity on the same plane as architectural work – even though it is a more transient art as such (Hagen Hodgson and Toyka, 2007: 9).

The link between food and architecture is not limited to the design of buildings where food is produced or consumed, or to mental images of pumpkins drying on corrugated roofs or to the traditional roof-wetting *braai* (barbeque). The connection between food and architecture, or between cooking and shelter, has been widely published: Vitruvius mentioned the fire and the roof as the two main requirements for dwelling; Gottfried Semper defined the four elements of architecture as the hearth, the roof, the floor and the wall; while today, access to food and housing are enshrined in our constitution as basic human rights. Cooking and building are both referred to as arts – *Baukunst* and *Kockkunst*, or *Boukuns* and *Kookkuns*, but they both combine function or necessity with art. The link between food and architecture is about entire interconnected systems and life cycles; the production of both typically starts in the soil as natural ingredients or materials, which go through various growth and production stages, are transported, prepared and assembled, consumed or occupied, until being disposed of or demolished, or alternatively composted or recycled. Both of these systems have a wide range of impacts on the environment, the economy and society (so-called three-tiered sustainability as outlined in the previously mentioned United Nations report *Our Common Future*), but in this case the focus will be on specific links between food and architecture that may be drawn from the principles of the Slow Food philosophy.

**Ingredients and production:** The architect Claudio Silvestrin (in Hagen Hodgson and Toyka 2007: 125) compares his work with traditional Italian cooking, where the quality of natural ingredients is one of its most important elements. Speaking about a small plaza close to his home, the Australian architect Richard Leplastrier (1999: 9) says that “It’s nothing about ‘good design’, it’s everything about ingredients.” A restaurant called Nomu in Copenhagen, Denmark, is a case in point, where the foraging and harvesting of local and seasonal indigenous ingredients is a key feature of its new Nordic cuisine. The unbroken connection from the origin of an ingredient to the patron’s plate is a driving force in the restaurant’s ethos, and the owners believe that there is usually a decline in flavour as soon as an ingredient is removed from its natural situation. In an attempt to preserve the time and place of its original setting, the natural environment in which an ingredient found itself prior to plating is reflected in the
restaurant’s dishes. This can be compared to the use of a natural, unprocessed timber pole, called a *tokobashira*, sometimes found in the *tokonoma* of a traditional Japanese house.

Both in cooking and architecture, raw materials are processed through craft to become something else or to create something that is greater than the sum of its parts. The quality, environmental and ethical qualities of these materials are important though: Slow Food is in favour of organic agriculture, which has less of an impact on the environment and reduces the use of pesticides, but organic certification is perceived to be insufficient if farming or production is not done according to the “Good, clean and fair” principles to ensure sustainable production. Donal Hickey (in Castelli and Haslam 2012: 49) makes the point that Slow Food has been very effective in increasing organic production, changing labelling practices and improving food traceability.

The production and consumption of seasonal, local and traditional produce is highly encouraged by Slow Food – while it can be argued that being able to buy most products at any time during the year virtually anywhere in the world naturally improves people’s diets (and it is very convenient), it can also be said that the hidden costs associated with this (and the fact that most products have to be frozen during transport) results in an environmental and economic deficit in other areas of the world. Another issue that Schneider (2008: 397) mentions, is that the loss of biodiversity through the reduction of the different number of plant and animal species offered to the market, and the mass-production of monocultures, undermines the very advantages that globalisation can offer in terms of diversity. He goes on to mention Petrini’s position towards globalisation as the reduction of the different number of plant and animal species offered to the market, and the mass-production of monocultures, undermines the very advantages that globalisation can offer in terms of diversity. He goes on to mention Petrini’s position towards globalisation as a desirable thing if it helps to create diverse networks of communities, instead of levelling them. The growth in popularity of heirloom fruits and vegetables shows a renewed interest in biodiversity and the diversity of taste, resilience and lifespan of produce - if processing can be less intensive, or if products can be used closer to their natural form it will result in less energy use and cost. The same applies to building materials (one can equate the use of unprocessed building materials to the raw food movement), where less processing can reduce energy use, costs, and maintenance, while also making them easier to recycle. They will in most cases then also be more intrinsically linked to their place of origin: Norberg-Schulz (1979: 18) explains the spirit of place as being what something is, which is similar to Louis Kahn’s statement that materials or elements should be what they want to be. Fuentes, Roaf and Thomas (2007: 111) call it “building-in soul” where each material has an essence that can link one to a specific locality, and each material can also be imprinted with care to add additional layers of meaning. This link to the environment or craft is lost when something is overly processed or industrially transformed (as opposed to being industrially shaped or crafted in its natural state) to such an extent that its character or connection to its environment has been lost – there is a saying that if you have something in your shopping basket that your grandmother would not recognise, it is probably not such a good idea to buy it.

Community: As is evident in the sheer number of associations, groups, movements and networks that have been created during the lifetime of Slow Food, the idea of community is important when thinking about food. It is about shared experience and conviviality. This is perhaps something that is lacking in the experience of architecture – it has become a jealous profession, and it does not always produce spaces and places that encourage this shared conviviality. One can compare the sterility of many fast food outlets with the sterility of mass housing delivery, where infrastructural economies, the aspirations of housing recipients, the requirement for large profit margins and outdated planning and zoning regulations are just some of the reasons that hamper the creation of successful public space that is conducive to a sense of community and conviviality. An interesting aspect of Slow Food’s use of social capital is that its
founders made extensive use of existing social networks to increase the reach of their movement, which included old local associations and widespread political networks like the previously mentioned Arci, which had offices spread throughout Italy. In a similar way, while there are and have been many networks within the architectural profession, there are also networks outside of their profession that architects can draw on, like trade networks, craft networks, specifiers’ networks, professional networks (not just including their own profession) and social media networks to form effective groupings to promote specific aims. There is an increased awareness of local fashion, a small resurgence in the much maligned local textile industry, local arts and crafts (like weaving, basketry and wood turning), and furniture design amongst others. Many of these items are also being promoted through initiatives like the World Design Capital 2014 and tradeshows like Design Indaba, local magazines and television, and many of them are being used as integral parts of architectural projects.

Publicising specific groupings can be very effective: Van der Meulen (2008: 228) mentions the Osterie d’Italia, which was first published by Slow Food Editore in 1990. This guide of small, traditional restaurants did a lot to promote them and to ensure their continued existence, while the Vini d’Italia guidebooks provide exposure for many Italian wines that would otherwise not have had it. Page (2012: 3) argues that the creation of localised groupings are essential to connect producers to consumers, and she mentions that Petrini describes consumers who make the decision to purchase products grown in economically and environmentally sustainable conditions as “co-producers”. This can be compared to participatory design in architecture or urbanism, where end-users can be involved in the design or construction process – if this can be achieved more readily in the creation of buildings, it could contribute to the increased creation of social capital.

Form, proportion and measurement: Hagen Hodgson and Toyka (2007: 8) in questioning the connection between the art of building and the art of cooking, argue that both measure and consider proportion, both deal with form and shape, composition, assembly and harmony: They are simultaneously art and craft. In terms of both food and architecture, measure and proportion refer to size, scale and composition on a plate or as elements in space, or as the proportional measure and quantity of ingredients or different materials. Form, shape, assembly and composition relate to the way that ingredients or building elements are volumetrically designed and grouped together, while harmony refers to the overall balance of the final composition of a dish or a building in terms of all the senses. The way that cooks add ingredients, and continually taste a dish in order to make small adjustments in flavour until the composition is proportionally balanced before serving it, can be compared to the continuous tweaking, adjusting and redrawing of a design or a model before completing the building.

The senses: Slow Food has been arranging the biennial Salone del Gusto (trade fairs devoted to artisanal products) which include Taste Workshops that focus specifically on the sensorial aspects of food, and in 1997 Slow Food also launched the “Ark of Taste”, which is committed to publicising endangered products, to analyse them from a sensory perspective, to encourage people to purchase and eat them, and to award restaurants that use and promote these products in their own region. While Slow Food has often been accused of being hedonistic, its drive to preserve products, cultural heritage, biodiversity and tastes shows a measure of responsibility beyond mere sensory gratification.

Taste, when considered as a preference, rather than one of the physical senses, is also something that food and architecture have in common: Hagen Hodgson and Toyka (2007: 11) note that taste is based on shared social values and quote the philosopher Immanuel Kant’s
definition of taste as “The ability of aesthetic judgement to choose in a way that is generally valid. Thus it is an ability to make social judgements of outside objects in the imagination.” According to him, ideal taste is about morality and not pleasure alone.

There are other, more tenuous links that one can make between food and architecture in terms of age, preservation, and patina too: The curing or ageing of food to improve certain taste characteristics, to reduce the amount of processing, or to aid in its lifespan can be compared to the purposeful weathering of building products (like weathered or naturally oxidising steel, which is gaining popularity again) or the Japanese concept of *wabi-sabi* (the love of imperfect things, weathering or decay that show evidence of the transience of life). Pallasmaa (1996: 21) also laments the ageless perfection of industrially manufactured materials and he emphasises the importance of the experience of time.

**Poetry:** Cooking and building are both about something more than necessity or utility – they are about culture, society, art and sometimes the intangible. Norberg-Schulz (1979: 23) argues that architecture is about practicality and poetry, and that society’s achievements do not count for much if people are unable to dwell poetically.

Humans like sweet things, but not all the time; we like salt, but it is unbearable in huge quantities. It is the same when things are just too utilitarian. It doesn’t fully satisfy the appetite. The utilitarian gives answers but the poetic creates wonder, and architecture involves the inclusion of these two, often competing, qualities. (Brit Andresen in McCartney, 2011: 164)

There are a number interpretations of what *slow architecture* can be, ranging from architecture that took a long time to build, for example the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona by Antoni Gaudi; or architecture that is produced slower, more organically or more sustainably. Another focus is on liveability as promoted by Slow Home Studio in North America in response to “cookie cutter fast houses”, where “A ‘fast house’ is designed to be sold. It’s designed as a marketing event, just like a Doritos corn chip is designed to be eaten. It’s designed to be so irresistible that you can’t just eat one, even if it’s bad for you. You want to consume it (John Brown, quoted in Hofmann 2010: 1).

O’Brian (in Castelli and Haslam 2012: 3) lists six traits of slow architecture as patience during the process and for the refinement of craft, craft itself (the slowness of craft, but also the allowance for weathering), sensuality and materiality, specificity and adaptability, delight, and contentment. Some of these traits are explored further in this paper with a specific focus on the principles that link to those of the Slow Food movement itself (these will be explored in later sections and include rootedness, the senses and craft in particular), where the emphasis is on the care of production: A member of the 2011 Pritzker Prize jury, upon evaluating Eduardo Souto de Moura’s work, referred to it as *slow architecture* because it required careful consideration and that it is rooted in its site. This does not necessarily mean that architecture produced on a tight schedule is not site-sensitive or well-considered, but the jury felt that Souto de Moura made a particular point of really integrating his work with its surroundings. In basic terms, slow architecture can therefore be described as a combination of a concern for region, craft and sensory experience. These principles have been a concern for many architects in the past, but a few have produced a body of work that exemplifies the integration of all of these ideas.

Historically there are a number of local South African architects in whose work some of the traits of slow architecture are evident, including Sir Herbert Baker (who was schooled in the Arts and Crafts tradition), Gerhard Moerdijk, Norman Eaton and more recently Gawie Fagan. However, in terms of southern hemisphere countries, there is a group of contemporary
Australian architects, including the likes of Glenn Murcutt, Richard Leplastrier and Brit Andresen, who have been, and currently are, practicing in a way akin to slow architecture. The rootedness of their designs in place and its localised globalism, the attention to climate, the quality of products, craft, the multi-sensory aspects of materials, and their readiness to educate and advocate the need for these principles aligns them firmly within this definition of slow architecture. Practitioners from around the world attend the annual Glenn Murcutt Master Class in Australia, and many do so in order to rediscover the basic principles of architecture; something that cannot be automatically achieved through the use of computers or modern technology. It is also about generating understanding, and Andresen (in Turner 2011: 36) mentions the fact that everyone generally wants to start designing too quickly, but that it is necessary to keep questioning and to slow down first. Part of this slowing down on the course involves developing an understanding of the landscape and local culture, which is usually facilitated by an aboriginal elder. There is also the connection with food on the course, where meals are crafted communally and the conviviality during meal times forms a big part of the experience.22

So in the world of tender deadlines, fast-track construction, critical path, and stringent delivery deadlines, slow architecture does not mean slower production or delivery times, but a more considered approach to material selection, origin, region and craft. Haslam (in Castelli and Haslam 2012: i) states that a specific amount of time is required to perform any given task well, and Tam (2008: 210) echoes this statement in saying that slowness is not about speed or the lack of it, but about pleasure and care, and that fast food is not bad because of its speed, but because it is careless. She adds that the slow movement is not just about speed or duration, but about timelessness and opportunity in a specific moment. One can compare the process of delivering a building to ordering a meal in a slow food restaurant; the preparation, cooking and delivery usually takes place under pressure and within a very tight timeframe – the slowness comes in the growing, production and selection of the ingredients and the time taken to savour the final product.

Three existing architectural ideas or movements that can be seen to be compatible with the principles of Slow Food are critical regionalism, the arts and crafts movement, and phenomenology or architecture of the senses, so some parallels between these three concepts and Slow Food will be briefly explored in the following sections.23

Rootedness in place

Christian Norberg-Schulz (1979: 18) speaks of genius loci or the spirit of place and he cites Lawrence Durrell writing in 1960 that “As you get to know Europe slowly, tasting the wines, cheeses and characters of the different countries you begin to realize that the important determinant of any culture is after all the spirit of place.”

There is often a disconnection between products or buildings and their locality or the origin of their products, which can result in a sense of placelessness and anonymity, in fact it was (and is) sometimes a very real intention in architecture and food if one thinks of modernism, the International Style and international food franchises. Meneley (2004: 166) mentions that the success of most Tuscan extra virgin olive oil can largely be attributed to the craft used in its production (mostly traditional methods with considered technological streamlining only) and the embedded nature of place in the product: The region and the producer’s estate are always clearly identifiable and traceable, including the romantic imagery that is conjured up when most people think of Tuscany – there is a direct link between the product and its locality, and also
between the consumer and the producer. Ironically enough, some of the largest multinational
fast food outlets of today started in this way as small, local outlets in Orange County, California
in the 1940s and 1950s.\footnote{24}

With increasing globalisation and mass production, the tradition of craftsmanship and
the knowledge of craft can play a big role in the re-emergence of local food and architectural
typologies. This is especially relevant in South Africa where labour-intensive construction
techniques can be beneficial in terms of employment and Architectural expression – these do
not necessarily have to be based on traditional vernacular building methods, but can also be
developed as by-products of regional industries, for example where disused fruit packaging
crates were recently redeveloped as a cladding system for a crèche in Prince Alfred by students
from the RWTH Aachen University. Besides the environmental advantages and the creation of
employment, it also means that the new building has a very direct visual reference to its place
of origin. A rather unexpected person to have mentioned similarities between the principles of
Slow Food and architecture is the Prince of Wales in an address at a Terra Madre conference in

> Slow Food is traditional food. It is also local – and local cuisine is one of the most important ways
> we identify with the place and region where we live. It is the same with the buildings in our towns,
cities and villages. Well-designed places and buildings that relate to locality and landscape and that
put people before cars enhance a sense of community and rootedness. All these things are connected.
We no more want to live in anonymous concrete blocks that are just like anywhere else in the world
than we want to eat anonymous junk food which can be bought anywhere. At the end of the day,
values such as sustainability, community, health, and taste are more important than pure convenience.
We need to have distinctive and varied places and distinctive and varied food in order to retain our
sanity, if nothing else.

While one can disagree with his version of regionalism and his preferred aesthetic, the link
between food or architecture and its region is an important one. Petrini \textit{et al} (2005: 119)
agrees with other authors that the benefit of regionalism in terms of food has only recently
been appreciated again in the western world and that it has long been neglected. Some of the
difficulties encountered by Slow Food in terms of regionalism, which can also be encountered in
the pursuit of architectural regionalism, are described by Van der Meulen (2008: 225) as the three
“major `business` dilemmas” of Slow Food: Setting up local food groups to compete with global
mass-production, the creation of their own regionalist food group as opposed to their own multi-
national network, and the necessity of engagement with larger sponsors while championing
smaller producers. An example from the \textit{Terra Madre} network of successful regionalist Slow
Food production is the Monkó cacao of São Tomé,\footnote{25} which is an island off the Gabonese coast
in West Africa: Here a unique type of rustic chocolate is manufactured close to the plantations,
which because of its special origin can compete with larger producers from other countries.
Engagement with \textit{Terra Madre}, links to other international organisations, and international
publicity is providing plenty of exposure for the small-scale producers on the island.

It may be a case of “Think global, act local” as the saying goes, but architects are also
increasingly working in a local and global arena simultaneously, where regionalism has to be re-
evaluated in terms of global trends and advancements without losing its local identity. Frampton
(1992: 315) mentions the need for local cultures and identities to be local manifestations of
global culture and that it is not just a variation of vernacular architecture. He cites the works of
Alvaro Siza, which are tactile and tectonic, while being intimately tied to their local topography
without being overly conscious of their image – this suggests a link between critical regionalism
and architecture of the senses. He also cites the work of Luis Barragan as a local, highly visual
and atmospheric manifestation that originally had its roots in the International style, but was transformed to create a unique, locally relevant typology. Other architects whom he mentions as practitioners of critical regionalism whose work also addresses the importance of material selection and craftsmanship are Jørn Utzon, Sverre Fehn, Carlo Scarpa, Mario Botta, and Tadao Ando. Regionalism is one of the traits that are also part of the arts and crafts movement, where “fidelity to place” was something that was publicised by A.W.N. Pugin, who had strong objections against so-called modern or foreign styles (Davey 1980: 13).

Wang Shu, of the practice Amateur Architecture Studio that he runs with his wife Lu Wenyu, is another architect who can be seen to practice according to the principles of slow architecture. Many of his projects take years to be conceived and he often ponders a design for a long time without drawing anything (other than calligraphy, which helps him to relax), before the entire design is often hand-drawn in one continuous flurry of activity. One of his main concerns is the loss of social and cultural capital due to the rapid demolition of so many of China’s old hutong neighbourhoods like the one that he grew up in. He is fascinated by China’s literati tradition and his buildings reflect this by showing a strong link to region and tradition, and they are often fragmented to create the impression that they were designed by different architects over time and to create a sense of community (like the Hangzhou campus of the China Academy of Art), or their inside spaces are varied and echo the lost spaces of the hutongs with narrow, twisting passages that lead into large atriums like in the History Museum in Ningbo. His contemporary historic-regionalist approach draws on traditional Chinese landscape painting, poetry and calligraphy, the Zhejiang Province’s vernacular traditions and the local landscape, and this museum was initially conceived as a hill (since the area has a very old tradition of hill and water painting) and then gradually resolved into a village, which was a response to preserve the memory of the houses that were demolished on the museum’s site. He approaches all of his buildings as a house, which imparts additional meaning or the sense of dwelling to any structure (the new tendency in South Africa of referring especially to government buildings along these lines, for example Government House, Education House or Finance House in turn lacks some of this depth) and he refers to the vernacular Chinese courtyard houses as the principal origin of most Chinese buildings today.

Besides for buildings, slowness can also be applied on an urban scale, as is evident in the Città Slow or the Slow City Association. The principles of Slow Food were adopted by a number of small cities in Italy in 1999 that identified themselves as centres of artisanal food production with a specific sense of place. This gave rise to the Slow City movement and Città Slow in 2000. The central ideas of the association are to regulate urban development in order to preserve the traditional city fabric and to promote sustainable transport solutions, to provide economic incentives to support food production through natural means, and to provide opportunities for producers and artisans to engage directly with consumers and agriculture. It would probably be easier to achieve these goals in smaller centres and some proponents of the movement are arguing for slower development with a higher quality, which is not always possible, but many of these small centres get global recognition though another Slow Food initiative called Terra Madre. This is an international network of more than two thousand food communities, which connects food producers and chefs with academics and consumers to share ideas, techniques and flavours.
The senses

One of the challenges facing both food and architecture is the increased ornamentalisation of both through the media. High-quality visual imagery is used to portray both, to the extent that its real substance and the other sensory experiences like taste, touch and spatial experience become secondary – Norberg-Schulz (1979: 190) calls it the poverty of stimuli. In terms of food, the media promotes the aesthetics of being thin, so scientific measures like weight-loss pills and dietary supplements are being employed on the one side, with generally unhealthy scientifically manufactured foods (usually supported by glossy visual imagery) being one of the primary causes of obesity on the other. Similar aspirational trends are found in buildings, where people have a specific media-induced image of what a house should be, but where engineering guidelines determine the design of houses and suburbs with inferior spatial and environmental qualities. Tam (2008: 211) makes the point that the portrayal of food as so-called “gastro-porn” heightens expectations, but as with real pornography, that gratification is never met. One can make the same point about “archi-porn”; Frampton (1992: 327) warns against this reduction of architecture to a series of images, and lists architecture’s tectonic nature as one of the principles of critical regionalism:

Critical regionalism emphasises the tactile as much as the visual. It is aware that the environment can be experienced in terms other than sight alone. It is sensitive to such complementary perceptions as varying levels of illumination, ambient sensations of heat, cold, humidity and air movement, varying aromas and sounds given off by different materials in different volumes, and even the varying sensations induced by floor finishes, which cause the body to experience involuntary changes in posture, gait, etc. It is opposed to the tendency in an age dominated by media to the replacement of experience by information.

Pallasmaa (1996: 20) has a similar opinion when he calls scenographic architecture that does not pay attention to craft and materials “stage sets for the eye”. He describes the historic dominance of sight as a sense in western culture, which is being continued by the media today, where sight and hearing are the dominant senses, while the others are regarded as archaic sensory remnants. He argues that multi-sensory experience or collaboration between all of the senses enhances one’s sense of reality, that buildings are frozen moments in time, and that architecture can allow one to experience the healing qualities of time in an increasingly fast world, which is similar to what Alexander (1979: 511) calls the timeless way.

Norberg-Schulz (1979: 190) uses similar terminology to that of Pallasmaa when describing the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and his use of natural materials as a want for rootedness and a hunger for reality. This relates to Pallasmaa’s view that the more senses something addresses, the more real it becomes. The tactility that Frampton mentions above (and the relationship between sensuality and reality mentioned by Pallasmaa and Norberg-Schulz)) is something that Cooke (2013: 40) also discusses in his comparison between textural architecture and so-called magic boxes: He compares the highly tactile, sensual and multi-sensory work of Alvar Aalto and Sigurd Lewerentz (particularly St. Mark’s Church in Stockholm, Sweden) with the new library in Seinäjoki by JKMM Architects. He describes the new library as using an approach that is currently commonly used by many architects, where visually-dominated, globalised building designs aim to create a “kind of magical, illusionistic fantasy world”. One can make the same comparison between the atmosphere in unique local restaurants and globalised fast-food chains’ “magic boxes” that impose their own standard reality wherever they arrive. Food itself also traditionally grew its very tactile own wrapping (an orange peel or banana skin would be a case
in point), which can be compared to the typical fast-food magic box that contains yet another bland hamburger.

Pallasmaa (1996: 49) also mentions Alvar Aalto as an architect who considered all of the senses in his architecture, and who was interested in the encounter between an object and a person’s body as opposed to its aesthetic qualities only:

The architecture of Alvar Aalto exhibits a muscular and haptic presence. Aalto’s architecture incorporates dislocations, skew confrontations, irregularities and poly-rhythms in order to arouse these bodily, muscular and haptic experiences. His elaborate surface textures and details, crafted for the hand, invite the sense of touch, and create an atmosphere of intimacy and warmth. Instead of the disembodied Cartesian idealism of the architecture of the eye, Aalto’s architecture is based on sensory realism; his buildings are not based on a single dominant concept or Gestalt; they are sensory agglomerations.

These principles can be compared with those of one of the most well-known and acclaimed restaurants in the world, which was a small Michelin 3-star restaurant called elBulli. It defined the multi-sensorial experience as one of the most important aspects of its food, together with regionalism, a bond with nature, and the link between creativity and technique.

Education is one way of making people aware of all the other sensory aspects that can contribute to good food and architecture. Schneider (2008: 391) mentions the success of Slow Food’s school-based and community-based sensorial education programmes. It also launched the previously mentioned Ark of Taste, which is a catalogue that aims to preserve specific types of heritage foods (those that are tasty, in danger of disappearing as a tradition or product, sustainably produced, historically or culturally important and generally produced on a smaller scale). Donal Hickey (in Castelli and Haslam 2012: 49) mentions the success of so-called food heroes and celebrity chefs in improving knowledge about good food through education and advocacy. In 2010, a Slow Architecture Project was launched in Ireland, which took place on a (slow) canal boat that travelled along the Grand Canal from Shannon to Liffey, stopping at seven different destinations with exhibitions and workshops as part of its tour. Several artists and architects took part in this travelling exhibition, where more than 300 learners from a number of schools along the route had the opportunity to take part in workshops about the theme of slow architecture. The creation of intra- and interdisciplinary networks are a very good way to foster education and innovation in different fields, and networks or groupings like Slow Food’s Terra Madre, convivia and presidia are somewhat reminiscent of the arts and crafts movement’s guilds like The Art Workers’ Guild, the Century Guild, the Guild and School of Handicraft, and the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, while the integration of craftsmanship, design and the senses taught at the University of Gastronomic Sciences can be likened to the efforts of the Bauhaus. Both of these institutions had/have an interdisciplinary intake and teaching programme with a specific focus on the unification of art and craft.

**Craft (baking and making)**

John Ruskin, one of the original forerunners of the arts and crafts movement, when discussing the search for truth in his *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* published in 1849, mentions three basic principles that should be followed in architecture: The honesty of structure, the quality of materials, and the use of craftspeople in lieu of machine-manufacture. This can be compared to Slow Food’s *Good, Clean and Fair* principles as explained previously, which refer to the
quality of materials, reduction of processing (honesty), and social justice in terms of better labour conditions.

Meneley (2004: 172) makes the link between Slow Food and the Arts and Crafts movement and she mentions that both movements locate the solution to industrialisation and capitalism in the individual: The idea that a positive sensory experience can ameliorate the negative aspects of society, be it through the provision of beautiful hand-crafted objects in their homes, or through the ingestion of good food. The unequal distribution of resources can be used as a critique on both movements, since high-quality crafted goods and food both tend to be much more expensive than the mass-produced alternatives, although a more direct link between consumers and producers will be able to reduce the difference in cost. As with all things, there are sometimes hidden costs which are not accounted for if one only thinks in monetary terms: The perceived affordability of mass-produced building materials or foods does not mean that there are not very high environmental or social costs. Higher embodied energy in products, pollution (especially through unsustainable harvesting or extraction, production and transportation), infrastructure costs, the lack of fair trade, unequal distribution of profits, increased resistance to antibiotics, obesity and toxins contained in both building materials and foodstuffs are just some of the factors that society is paying for without them necessarily being included in the physical cost of each mass-produced item.

Simonetti (2012: 180) feels that Slow Food’s ideology does fit in with the idealised image of the countryside that emerged in England during the 1700s and 1800s, but that the movement is prone to mythicise and romanticise the past with blatant historical inaccuracy. He goes on to mention the class and gender differences, lack of social mobility, lack of food, and oppression rampant during those times and that according to him, these issues were addressed specifically through technological advances and economic growth. A potential problem that he raises in terms of craft is that artisanal production or hand-crafted products imply a limited production (which Slow Food is generally in favour of) of items that demand a higher price-tag. While he also mentions that Slow Food is extremely suspicious of science, it should be noted that science is responsible for many of the best aspects of today’s world – the general principle should be one of considered science or science with conscience, where progress and tradition or globalism and regionalism can support one another. This is similar to the stance taken by Frampton (1992: 327), where he describes critical regionalism as being critical of modernism without denouncing it, or its emancipatory and progressive nature.

The Arts and Crafts movement does conjure up images of draperies and wallpaper, but craft has moved beyond that. Art and craft are ways of using and preserving traditional knowledge, which is being lost at a rapid rate in the construction industry, without compromising new technology or aesthetics but by underpinning them with social and cultural capital: Contrary to Ruskin’s complete rejection of technology, new materials or machine-manufacturing, Schneider (2008: 390) makes the point that traditional knowledge is a way of tempering scientific knowledge and he highlights the opportunities inherent in the preservation of traditional knowledge and its educational potential.37 This is something that Gottfried Semper explored in his work Der Stil and it was also the stance taken by Frank Lloyd Wright, who was a member of the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society and who advocated the fusion of arts and crafts with machine-manufacturing – he even gave a lecture in 1901 entitled The Art and Craft of the Machine, although he seems to have alternated between strong support for, and deep suspicion of, standardisation and mass-production.
The difficulty in finding experienced craftspeople and the lack of artisanal education in construction is a trend both in South Africa and abroad that should be addressed. In his work, Gion Caminada (in Hagen Hodgson and Toyka, 2007: 92) aims to add value through the extensive processing of sometimes inferior local building materials in order to promote job creation and craftsmanship. Local raw materials are usually fairly affordable, while localised processing can be fairly expensive, but the added value in terms of the creation of cultural capital cannot be underestimated. Brian O’Brian (in Castelli and Haslam, 2012: 2) feels that the lack of time during the creative phase of a building, when it can be layered through thought and craft, results in a reduction of a user’s experience of time and that it takes away the capability of buildings to mark time. Arts and crafts are not about nostalgia, and Pallasmaa (2009: 52) also feels that craft is highly relevant today:

Fortunately, a new interest in traditions has followed the industrial rage and saved these and numerous other crafts, but there are still countless skills and an immense stock of unverbalised knowledge around the world, embedded in ageless modes of life and livelihoods, that need to be maintained and restored. These traditional cumulative practices of the human hand around the world form the true survival skills of mankind.

The arts and crafts movement also saw an improvement in the relationship of people to their places of food preparation: The separate Victorian dining room and kitchen became less common (especially in middle-class houses) and were combined into one entity. A breakfast nook was provided in the kitchen or cooking area where the family could gather at any time during the day, which also tended to happen more often since the housewife now usually made the meals, instead of them being prepared by servants. This meant that the kitchen often became the heart of the home, where the art and craft of building and cooking were literally in the same place. Just as with Slow Food, the arts and crafts movement could be criticised for being a trend for the amusement of the wealthy only, for misplaced idealism, and that both do/did little for the conditions of ordinary workers. Davey (1980: 27) mentions William Morris’ contradictions in terms of the movement, which can be compared with Slow Food’s main dilemmas and the contradictions in terms of food mentioned earlier: “Morris was a capitalist who preached communism; a designer of mass produced art who believed in the freedom of individual craftsmen; a manufacturer of machine-made ornament who preferred utter simplicity.”

Davey (1980: 213) does however feel that craft is highly relevant in the face of the rapid deterioration of many modernist buildings and mass-produced goods: The quality and potential for individuality and the integration of work and leisure holds a lot of potential for the arts and crafts movement’s principles.

Pallasmaa (2009: 69) states his view that architects should develop deep, personal friendships with craftspeople, artisans and artists, so their intellectual world can be reconnected to the world of making. This is similar to the relationships that A.W.N. Pugin (one of the forerunners of the Arts and Crafts movement) forged with craftspeople – he was even a partner in one of the bigger craft manufacturing firms of the time (Davey, 1980: 11); Richard Leplastrier is also a case in point: It is through his almost life-long friendships with builders and shipwrights that a lot of his projects achieve an uncommonly high level of craftsmanship. One of his projects has a roof that lifts up like a sail to allow hot air to escape, while another has rolling canvas sides, and yet another has a harp-like system of ropes that control the opening of clerestory windows and ceiling panels – he’s been building his own boats for many years.
Leplastrier is probably the ultimate regionalist, both in his work and in his life – he has shunned architectural exposure so as not to be set apart from his local community whom he values so much. His most famous work is arguably the Palm Garden House, which was crafted relatively slowly over a period of 18 months and was completed in 1976. It was built by Leplastrier and his shipwright friends – his own description of the house (in Turner 2011: 38) tells of the importance of nature, climate and craft in his work:

It has a shell roof of corrugated copper and inside that is a skin ceiling that’s like a cello, made out of 6mm thick redwood and polished like a musical instrument. And as this roof rolls over away from the wall it starts to dissolve, disappearing at its edges like a mirage. And there is the garden, like a Rousseau painting, the heart of the house, with just these canvas [walls] that roll up.

Wang Shu’s regionalist work also has a strong focus on craft: He regularly uses recycled materials obtained from the demolished hutong buildings, which strengthen his own buildings’ link with the past. Russell (2013: 2) mentions a woman who would regularly go to stare at Wang Shu’s History Museum in Ningbo’s walls for long periods of time, who once told the architect that she sees “many familiar things” in them. The walls have similar characteristics to Dimitris Pikionis’ pathways on the Acropolis in Greece, and Wang Shu’s work can also be likened in some respects to that of certain arts and crafts architects: The walls of the Ningbo Museum’s walls follow the principle that Ruskin called savageness or the purposeful creation of imperfection (similar to wabi sabi). They can be compared to the highly textured walls of The Barn that Edward Schroeder Prior designed at Exmouth in 1896 and a passage from Davey (1980: 73) describing them, could well have been a description of the Ningbo Museum:

Warm grey ashlar is mixed haphazardly with passages of red boulders and little arpeggios of sea pebbles, all combined to give a wonderfully varied texture that could never had been exactly specified by the architect but which must have come at least as much from the craftsman’s sensibilities as from the drawing board.

One can trace a connection from the Arts and Crafts movement through practitioners of a more craft-based or regional modernism (in particular Scandinavian architects like Alvar Aalto and Sigurd Lewerentz in his later work) to the work of the “slow” architects mentioned here. In his later residential work like the Maisons Jaoul, Le Corbusier also moved away from the sleek,
white modernist aesthetic towards a more craft-based and textured approach, although the result was more brutalist than that of his Scandinavian counterparts. He developed close relationships with craftspeople and experimented with using industrial techniques and products combined with traditional technology like Catalan vaults and *mal foutue* (“messed up”) brickwork. He was initially criticised for this, but the Jaoul houses subsequently became very popular with architects.\(^4\)

![Figure 2](image)

**Figure 2**

*Comparison between the *savage* walling at The Barn, the walling of Lewerentz’s Church of St. Mark and the *wa pian qiang* walling at Ningbo.*

*(photograph by the author, 2013)*

Describing the Sanhe house in Nanjing, China, Wang Shu (Shu, 2013: 1.2) relates it to slowness: “I imagined a child from a village in southern China, asleep on the back of a buffalo working in a rice field, with that falling and rising hump. The house was also asleep. The atmosphere was so tranquil that time slowed down.”

**Conclusion**

Food and shelter have always been parallel requirements for human existence and together they support, and often define, the act of dwelling. In earlier times, people foraged or hunted for food to eat and materials to construct their dwellings, and then used these to provide for their most basic survival needs. However, over time, both these processes were increasingly refined through craft and skill to improve their performance (in terms of durability, economy, pleasure, and numerous other measures), until they could be elevated into art forms. Since the industrial revolution, many of these processes have been taken over by large economically-driven conglomerates that the general population supported in order to gain time for doing other things, but in doing so, much of what had been achieved in terms of environmental rootedness, craft, and pleasure, was increasingly neglected. There is, however, a growing counterpoint to this trend, which is related to an increased global awareness of food and sustainability. The culinary arts, gastronomy, and “foodie” culture in general have, in recent times, undergone unprecedented growth, and it has gained increasing exposure on television, in books and at food events, and the Slow Food movement has managed to achieve a global presence mainly due to this increased awareness.
Over the past few decades, the Slow Food movement, besides being concerned with taste, has been addressing social, economic and environmental sustainability through a wide range of initiatives centred on local production, artisanal values and various networks concerned with fair trade and labour. By exploring these principles and their primary links with slow architecture like rootedness in place, the engagement of the senses and craft, it could help architects to renew their focus on local opportunities of place-making, craft and expression within the larger global context of sustainability. Architecture has often taken its cues from art, philosophy and social movements, so while there are well-established principles and precedents in architecture in terms of arts and crafts, phenomenology and critical regionalism, Slow Food offers an opportunity to consider these ideas in one basket as it were; while there is cause for criticising the movement, thinking about architecture in terms of food can bring practitioners back to basic principles.

There have always been numerous links between the arts of food and architecture, including, amongst others, the careful selection of ingredients or materials, the processes of design and production, the engagement of community, the use of form, measurement and proportion, the means to engage all of the senses and the potential ability to turn the utilitarian into something that can satisfy all the senses. Food, especially slow food, is about physical, emotional and spiritual sustenance, and there are things like flavour and aroma that cannot really be explained without experiencing them. Food shares this with architecture. Architecture is also about more than economy, efficiency and industry – it is about poetry: Besides all the functional requirements, it is about framing, reflecting and amplifying its parts, its users, its site and its environment, and it is about the sheer enjoyment and sensory pleasure of buildings and places – not just as “eye candy” (like it is portrayed in magazines, on blogs, social media networks and websites) – but as an experiential act.

Notes

1 This document, which is commonly referred to as the Brundtland report is called Our Common Future, and it was published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987.

2 The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). This is also referred to as the Rio Conference or the Rio Summit, and it was followed by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, again in Rio de Janeiro, in 2012. This is sometimes referred to as Rio+20 or Rio Earth Summit 2012.

3 This is an oft-modified voluntary action plan or agenda for the United Nations, governments and various organisations that flowed from the so-called Earth Summit.

4 The master baker referred to here is Markus Färbinger of Ile de Pain in Knysna.


10 Färbinger (2014) argues that this is not necessarily the case, since commercial cereals can sell for R60.00-R150.00 per kilogramme, while artisanal bread usually sells for R35.00 per kilogramme. He is also of the opinion that the nutritional value in artisanal bread is higher than in most commercial cereals. The same applies to the difference between soft drinks and water or between sweets or candy and fresh fruit.


12 Semper, G. (1860). Der Stil in den Technischen und Tektonischen Künsten oder Praktische Aesthetik, volume 1. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft; and


This is a conceptual structuring of sustainability into three tiers that highlight the relationships between the environment, economic development and socio-political development. It is becoming more common to add additional tiers like institutional sustainability and moral or cultural sustainability.

This particular restaurant, under the watchful eye of Chef René Redzepi, was ranked the Best Restaurant in the World for three years running from 2010 to 2012 by *Restauranteur* magazine.

The *tokonoma* is the spiritual heart of a traditional Japanese house in the form of an alcove, where items of particular artistic merit are displayed. The *tokobashira* is a timber post, which is sometimes left in its raw form or only skinned without being planed, to symbolise the primary support for a house.

By providing products in stores in other parts of the world involves extensive transportation (which requires large quantities of fossil fuels, and results in pollution). Farming practices in developing countries where these products are sourced are not always monitored, which could result in soil degradation and biodiversity loss, and in some cases the need for providing cheap products results in labour exploitation through lower wages or the use of illegal labour to provide the products at a lower price.

For instance using techniques such as CNC (Computer Numerical Control) cutting of timber or laser-cutting of materials.

CIAM, the South African Modernist movement, Advocacy Planning and Community Design, the Congress for the New Urbanism and the various voluntary Architectural Institutes are just some examples.

The Cape Craft and Design Institute (CCDI) is a local case in point. See www.ccdi.org.za

Having had the good fortune of being able to attend the Master Class in 2005, I made a list of five or six bullet-points to remind myself of each day’s most memorable experiences. These were usually funny things that some of the fellow students said, places we visited, and words of wisdom from the masters, but the last note for every single day without exception was what we had for dinner…

The intention of this paper is not to delve into any of these concepts in detail, but rather to highlight a few similarities with principles of the Slow Food movement.


*Literati* refers to China’s cultured mandarins that effectively ruled the country for many years.


Cittaslow. (1999: 1-4); Slow Food. (2013: 6)

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Van Brandenburg unfurled: architecture in the expanded field of contemporary practice

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This article considers a current project undertaken by Architecture Van Brandenburg in Shenzhen, China. Locating, touching, mimicking, integrating, crafting, unfurling and exhibiting are subheadings used to discuss salient aspects of the project. Models made during the process through which the project developed were shown in the Museo Diocesano at the Architecture Biennale in Venice 2014. 

Key words: architecture, contemporary, touch, crafting, unfurling

Van Brandenburg ontvou: argitektuur in the verbreedte veld van hedendaagse praktyk
Hierdie artikel ondersoek ‘n huidige projek onderneem deur Argitektuur Van Brandenburg in Shenzhen, Sjina. Die belangrikste aspekte van die projek word bespreek in terme van lokalisering, handtastelikheid, mimiek, integrasie, vakmanskap, ontvouïng en uitstalling. Modelle gemaak tydens die ontwikkeling van die projek was te sien in the Museo Diocesano tydens die Argitektuur Biennale in Venesië 2014.

Sleutelwoorde: argitektuur, hedendaags, handtastelik, vakmanskap, ontvouïng

Locating: A fortuitous decision brought Architecture van Brandenburg of Dutch extraction via a life in South Africa to the small creative city of Dunedin on the east coast of the South Island of New Zealand. In this part of the world, spectacular mountains, a profusion of luscious fern varieties, green forests and blue lakes form a perfect fit for an architectural practice inspired by natural forms. Their office adjoins a chic Italian restaurant in downtown Dunedin with its own interior exuding the ambience of a sculpture studio – it’s clearly a place where ideas are made manifest in objects redolent of a particular geographic location. But, typical of our globalized era, Architecture van Brandenburg’s current project was commissioned for the Chinese Marisfrolg Apparel Headquarters in Shenzhen. Boris Groys reminds us that postmodernity “enacts a complex play of removing from sites and placing in (new) sites” (2008: 64) and Leslie Sklair analyses how “aspiring global cities use iconic architecture [from faraway places] as a prime strategy of urban intervention and self-identification” (2005: 488).

Touching

Marisfrolg is all about fashion; fashion is all about the senses; Architecture Van Brandenburg eschews the rationality of modernist design by foregrounding a tactile epistemology – one can understand the world through the haptic experience of matter. A hand has held and touched a leaf, a frond, a shell and this shows in the work. An intimate knowledge of the structural particularities of a natural object shines through. This kind of understanding has a long and proud genealogy in phenomenological discourse, stretching back to Henri Bergson on matter and memory and Gaston Bachelard on the imagination of matter. Nearer to our time Juhani Pallasmaa has brought this thinking into the realm of current architecture with The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses (2005) and “Hapticity and Time: Notes on Fragile Architecture” (2000), wherein he quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty to argue for the primacy of touch in “the task of architecture to make visible ‘how the world touches us’” (2000: 78).
A tactile epistemology is one which acknowledges the fragility and slowness of architecture in a world driven by digital media, speed and a uniformity imposed by dominance of the sense of vision. Instead, Pallasmaa yearns for an architecture which creates existential microcosms and embodied representations of the world; an architecture of opacity and depth, sensory invitation and discovery, mystery and shadow, an architecture of beauty and humility – the qualities one finds in Marisfrolg by Architecture van Brandenburg. This article contends that these qualities are achieved through strategies of mimicking, integrating, crafting and unfurling as discussed below.

**Mimicking**

Senior partner Fred van Brandenburg has expressed his passionate interest in biomimicry, a practice and related theory of design striving to find alternatives for the uniformity and flatness of surfaces in modern and modernist architecture. In a 2014 email conversation with the author, Fred stated: “The forms found in nature enthuse us. In our buildings the form changes as one moves around them. They are not flat surfaces – a front façade, a side façade, a rear façade and a roof plan, basically two dimensional objects that do not exist in nature – our designs do not need to struggle with proportions on a façade, or with other man-made rules of aesthetics.”

Biomimicry in current architecture critiques the foundations of Western architecture as entrenched from Vitruvius’s *De Architectura* in the 1st Century BC to Andrea Palladio’s 18th-Century *Four Books on Architecture*. The principles of *firmitas, utilitas and venustas* (solidity, usefulness and beauty) were firmly embedded in this tradition as was a cosmic order represented by geometric forms and the three orders of Classical architecture: the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian as based on the proportions of the human body. Current biomimicry in 21st-Century architecture eschews the first of the triad of principles, namely *firmitas* (solidity), the box-like structures resulting from the three proportional orders, and also the humanist-centred focus on the body.

In an era of heightened awareness around issues of sustainability, researchers at Eindhoven University of Technology write: “Why biomimicry?...We are already learning from nature, for instance, how to harness energy like a leaf, grow food like a prairie, build ceramics like an abalone…create color like a peacock, compute like a cell, and run a business like a hickory forest. The conscious emulation of life’s genius is a survival strategy for the human race, a path to a sustainable future. The more our world functions like the natural world, the more likely we are to endure in this home that is ours, but not ours alone” (Pronk, Blacha and Bots, 2008: s.p.). Michael Pawlyn concurs where he studies biomimicry as “ways of translating adaptations in biology to solutions in architecture…mimicking the functional basis of biological forms, processes and systems to produce sustainable solutions” (2011: 1).

The term “biomimicry” was first used around the mid-20th Century with a vastly enhanced interest manifesting in the last decade as scientists, architects, artists and designers increasingly question a humanist model in their search for sustainable and poetic alternatives. Writers like Pawlyn cite examples from the past, such as Swiss engineer George de Mestral’s innovative Velcro based on the forms and functions of the Burdock burr or Eero Saarinen’s TWA terminal at J.F. Kennedy Airport in New York where he used biomorphic forms to capture the poetry of light. And, of course, we remember Le Corbusier’s *Notre Dame du Haut* at Ronchamp with its heavy roof reminiscent of a rock overhang underneath which a mysterious space unfolds.
The discourse of biomimicry is establishing itself in world architecture and it’s in this discourse that Architecture van Brandenburg is situating its own practice. There are many dissenting voices, an example being Joe Kaplinsky who “takes issue with ‘biomimicry’ and the idea that nature rather than mechanical solutions is the key to unlocking architecture. He argues that biological language and analogies diminish the achievements of designers. He calls for a humanist sense of what architecture and engineering mean in the world” (2006: 70). These tensions play out in many contemporary practices of architecture and Architecture van Brandenburg’s Marisfrolg project contributes to this discourse.

**Integrating**

Alongside biomimicry, another discourse is relevant to Architecture van Brandenburg’s practice. “Integrated design” heals the rifts between the architect and other creative practitioners engaged in a project as they all work towards its materialization. Rifts created through the separation of architects and artists as against master builders and craftsmen – due to the superior intellectual training of the former – hails from the time of the Renaissance and Leon Battista Alberti’s intervention in the relationships between these parties. It is interesting to note that Alberti was also the architect who consolidated one-point perspective as a single master narrative or point of view, one which would be dominant in creative practice for many centuries.

As demonstrated by Architecture van Brandenburg, many points of view can, however, be integrated into architectural design today. We have not only entered the Ecological Era through our heightened awareness of sustainability pressures, but we also now work as productive ecologies wherein a range of roles are fluidly integrated. Branko Kolarevic and Kevin Klinger write that architects are “becoming more directly involved in the fabrication process from the earliest stages…” (2013: 3). Elsewhere, Kolarevic writes that “designers who engage design as a broadly integrative endeavor fluidly navigate across different disciplinary territories, and deploy algorithmic thinking, biomimicry, computation, digital fabrication, material exploration…to discover and create a process, technique, or a product that is qualitatively new” (2008: 653). Toshiko Mori states: “The age of mechanical production, of linear processes and the strict division of labor is collapsing around us” (2002: xv).

Architecture Van Brandenburg works as an ecology wherein they are sculptors, designers, architects, builders, painters, ceramicists – whatever the Marisfrolg project needs is paramount at any given point in their process. In an age of digital fusion in integrative design, they retain the handmade, the tactile epistemology of the crafts and the sculptor’s sense of the volume and weight of materials, while embracing the digital in all its aspects. Inspired by the work of Antonio Gaudi, Fred van Brandenburg and his team set out to research geometric codices to enable nature-inspired forms to be built in a practical way.

**Crafting**

The Architecture van Brandenburg way combines soaring lightly like a bird on the wing in the Marisfrolg project, while also grounding the building in the material and crafted properties of brick, stone, ceramic tile elements and painted detail. Following on from Rosalind Krauss’s seminal article “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” published in 1979, Anthony Vidler responded with his paper on “Architecture’s Expanded Field” in 2013. The notion of an “expanded field” critiques traditional boundaries between disciplines and materialities. Sculpture in an expanded field interfaces traditional techniques with the digital, with earthworks, with the filmic and so forth in order to respond to our time and its particular issues. Architecture has been more reticent, maintaining its autonomy far longer and understandably so in the light of its particular socio-economic responsibilities. Even recently, Vidler argued against the conflation of architecture with the other arts (2013: 318-331).
Another tension thus reverberates around the practice of Architecture van Brandenburg: not only the ecological versus the humanist; but also the expanded versus the autonomous. Their focus on biomimicry places them firmly in the ecological camp; and their interest in the craftedness of their buildings aligns them with the recently expanded field of architecture. In the background one remembers Gaudi’s organic forms and his ceramic details, but also Le Corbusier’s interest in the crafted details achieved through his use of coffered concrete.

Unfurling

Architecture Van Brandenburg is currently channelling their range of interests and alignments towards the realization of the Marisfrolg project in Shenzhen, consisting of 120,000 square metres of building consisting of a giant catwalk, a research and development area, spaces for manufacturing, warehousing, offices, a boutique hotel, restaurants and other amenities for workers and visitors, underground parking areas, and project spaces. This ambitious project is made more so through Architecture Van Brandenburg’s insistence on the creative interplay between the haptic experience of touch and the visual integrity of the complex; between biomorphic inspiration and the practicalities of built forms; between integrative design in the expanded field of architecture and the architecture-specific demands of the project; and between immense scale and the crafted details provided by artists.

Spaces open to the elements, natural forms unfurl like leaves or protect space like a shell; a central space soars in oblique reference to Medieval cathedrals created before the rifts between architects and others involved in the building process. Architecture van Brandenburg’s work creates the “qualitatively new” which is more than the sum of the parts discussed. And: it’s not just the product which is qualitatively new but also the ecologically-inspired direction in international architecture to which Architecture van Brandenburg is creatively contributing from New Zealand.

Exhibiting

During 2014, Architecture van Brandenburg showed its handcrafted models for its Marisfrolg project in the rooms of the Museo Diocesano di Venezia Sant’ Apollonia in Castello near the Doge’s Palace and St. Mark’s Square. In these spaces, the pieces act as sculptures between which the viewer can draw architectural connections before finding the model of the whole project near the exit. The biomorphic forms incorporated into the models sit inside the elaborately arched interiors of the museo – inspiration from natural forms translated into geometric solutions across centuries: earlier for architectural purposes in a confident era; now performing a new direction for survival in our time of understandings around the fragility of our world.

When asked by Jennifer Sigler about his ambitions in an interview, architect Rem Koolhaas – Director of the Architecture Biennale in Venice 2014 – was quoted as saying: “It is to keep thinking what architecture can be, in whatever form” (Sigler, 2000: s.p.). Architecture van Brandenburg is participating fully in the discourses prevalent in architectural conversations today, adding their own unique voice to international discussions and to how these are being deployed in our time.
Note

The images included in this article have been generously supplied by Architecture Van Brandenburg and are all of the Marisfrolg Project in Shenzhen China, either of models for the project or images of the project on site.

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The role of the second architect on a significant building site

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This article expounds Edmond Bacon’s “principle of the second man”, formulated in his Design of Cities (1967), as a criterion for judging the addition of another building or additional architectural structures on a significant building site. This principle basically implies that an architect who designs a new building for a site on which a significant building already exists, or a group of buildings that spatially belong together already exist, should not detract from the merit of the work of the first architect, but, also in the case of the restoration or addition to the original, should blend the new structure with the old, not necessarily by imitation or copying. This is a test for an architect’s creative ingenuity and moral responsibility, because a disharmonious architectural addition on an established site can destroy its sense of place. In broad terms, a site that may be considered as architecturally significant can be identified in various ways: it could be an enclosed space, such as most city squares in which a historically important building has pride of place; it could be a historical or culturally significant space in which a sense of place has already been established and reinforced architecturally, or, furthermore, in the case of cities regulated by law with respect to building materials, construction practices or design to ensure uniform aesthetic norms and homogenous cityscapes. On sites with a meaningful urban tradition the designs of second architects may be considered successful if they do not only not distract from the primacy of the existing main building or group of buildings that established and conserves the sense of place of the site, but instead reinforces or enhances its architectural merit and the perceptual unity of the group design.

Key words: second architect, Edmond Bacon, group design, architectural sense of place

Die rol van die tweede argitek op ’n belangrike bouterrein

In hierdie artikel word verder geteoretiseer oor Edmond Bacon se “beginsel van die tweede argitek wathy in sy Design of Cities (1967) geformuleer het as ’n kriterium vir die beoordeling van die toevoeging van ’n gebou of bykomendeargitiktoniese strukture op ’n belangrike bouterrein. Hierdie beginsel impliseer basies dat ’n argitek wat ’n nuwe gebou ontwerp vir ’n terrein waarop daar reeds ’n belangrike gebou of ’n groep geboue wat ruimtelik saam hoort, bestaan, nie aan die meriete van die eerste argitek nie afbreuk behoort te doen nie, maar om die nuwe struktuur, ook in die geval van die restourasie van of aanbouing, by die reeds bestaande aan te pas, nie noodwendig deur nabooting of kopiering nie. Dit is ’n toets vir ’n argitek se kreatiewe vindingrykheid en morele verantwoordelikheid, want ’n onharmoniese argitektoniese byvoeging op ’n gevestigde terrein kan die pleksin daarvan benadeel. In breë trekke kan ’n terrein wat as argitektonies belangrik beskou kan word, op verskillende maniere uitgeken word: dit kan ’n afgesluite ruimte wees soos die meeste stadspleine waar ’n geskiedkundig belangrike gebou aansien geniet; dit kan ’n geskiedkundig- of kultureel-belongrike ruimte wees waar die pleksin reeds gevestig of herbevestig is, of, in nog ’n instansie, in die geval van stede ten aansien waarvan die gebruik van boumateriaal, konstruksiemetodes of ontwerp wetlik beheer word met die doel om eenvormige estetiese norme en homogene stadslandskappe te verseker. Op terreine met ’n betekenisvolle stedelike tradisie kan die ontwerpe van tweede argitekte as geslaagd beskou word indien dit nie net nie afbreuk doen aan die voorrang van die bestaande gebou of groep geboue wat die pleksin gevestig het en steeds bewaar nie, maar daartoe hydra om die argitektoniese meriete en perceptuele eenheid van die groepontwerp van die terrein te bewaar of te verhoog.

Sleutelwoorde: tweede argitek, Edmund Bacon, groepontwerp, argitektoniese pleksin

For whom does an architect build? … I think he builds for the next great architect (Nietzsche 1988: 7).
The present paper expounds Edmond Bacon’s “principle of the second man”, formulated in his Design of Cities (1967), as a criterion for judging the addition of a further building or additional architectural structures on a significant building site. Bacon’s relevant statement reads as follows: “[I]t is the second man who determines whether the creation of the first man will be carried forward or destroyed.” This thesis basically implies that an architect who designs a new building on a site on which a significant sense of place has been determined, or on which a group of buildings that spatially belong together already exist, should not detract from the merit of the work of the first designer(s), but should subtly blend new structures with the old, not necessarily by imitation or copying, but should contribute to the perceptual totality of the group design. This is a test for an architect’s creative ingenuity and moral responsibility, because a disharmonious addition on an architecturally significant site can spoil its sense of place.

In broad terms, a building site that may be considered as architecturally significant can be identified in various ways. First, it could be an enclosed space, such as most city squares in which a historical building has or a group of buildings have pride of place. Second, it could be a historical or culturally significance space in which a sense of place has already been established, reestablished or reinforced architecturally. Third, cities in which building regulations regarding materials, construction or design ensure uniform aesthetic norms and homogenous cityscapes. In such places the designs of second architects may be considered successful if they do not distract from the primacy of the existing main building or group of buildings that established and conserves the sense of place of the site, but instead reinforces or enhances the architectural merit and unity of the site. It is granted that the second architect’s commission may be difficult to fulfill if the client is not concerned about a compatible design on a portion of urban real estate that has commercial value. A further reason for failure to harmonise with the existing ensemble can also be the architect’s intention to ensure that his/her creation dominates or contrasts with that which exists in an egocentric way. This negative approach could also be made worse by a client who insists on a corporate identity. In this regard Rêne Girard’s (1961) theory of “mimetic desire” is applicable, since desire turns into envy when one wants what another has. Desire is not only mimetic, but can turn conflictual and acquisitive when the second architect rivals the work of the first in an existing site.

For any architect the difficulty and responsibility of designing a building for a site on which a powerful sense of place already exists is beyond dispute. In a rapidly globalising world in which architects design buildings in places and countries with various cultural traditions, intertextuality becomes a supreme test for their expertise. The more restrictive the framework of possible designs that would accord with Bacon’s principle, the higher the demand to achieve an ingenious solution, such as those dealt with in Part II of this article.

The examples that are hereafter dealt with are chosen from widely different, mostly Western contexts, various periods and cultures around the world. They are grouped in three categories: first, unsuccessful architectural contextualisation of the designs of the second architects (the vast majority); second, examples of successful contextualisation, and third, examples referring to the co-existence of old and new architecture in historically unique cities.
I Non-successful contextualisation

*Saddam Hussein’s palace as a reconstruction of King Nebuchadnezzar II’s palace, Baghdad, Iraq*

Saddam Hussein (1937-2006) used architecture to awe and intimidate. When he rose to power as the President of Iraq, he conceived a grandiose scheme to rebuild the ancient city of Babylon, renowned for the hanging gardens, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Inspired by mimetic desire to equal the greatness of King Nebuchadnezzar II, who conquered Jerusalem 2,500 years ago, the Iraqi dictator also had a vision of ruling over a great empire.

In 1982 Saddam began reconstructing Babylon’s most imposing historical building, the 600-room palace of the Babylonian king. Adjacent to the ruins of Nebuchadnezzar’s palace that overlooked the Euphrates River, Saddam built his own palace, shaped like a ziggurat, surrounded by palm trees and rose gardens (figure 1). By building on top of ancient artefacts Saddam disfigured history. The four story palace extends across an area of five football fields that disrupted the dwellings of some thousand people. Saddam’s workers laid more than 60 million sand-coloured bricks inscribed with the words, “In the era of Saddam Hussein, protector of Iraq, who rebuilt civilization and rebuilt Babylon”, which began to crack after only ten years. This edifice was not merely conceived on a large scale, but as ostentatious. Consequently, it was enormously wasteful and costly in a poverty-stricken country.

![Figure 1](source: public domain internet)

After the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the conquering troops pitched their tents in the vast, empty rooms of the palace, parodying its lofty purpose as an emblem of empire. The mismatched towers of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Chartres, France Chartres cathedral is considered to be one of the finest examples of the French High Gothic style. It was constructed between 1193 and 1250, and remarkably, he speed with which it was built contributed to the consistency of its design. Its structure is in an excellent state of preservation; also the majority of the stained glass windows and sculptures survive intact. However, a strange anomaly is the unsymmetrical west facade which is characterised by two mismatched spires: one is a 105 metre plain, elongated pyramid dating from the 1140s, and the other a 113 metre tall early sixteenth-century Flamboyant spire on top of an older tower (figure 2).
After the destruction by lightning of the existing north spire in 1506 it was rebuilt in the Flamboyant style by a local mason, Jehan de Beauce. It took him seven years to accomplish the task of restoring Chartres Cathedral’s facade, but in an unsymmetrical way that is uncharacteristic of Gothic architecture.

*The conversion of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, Spain, into a cathedral*

The Ummayad Mosque, known as the Great Mosque of Córdoba was completed in 978 CE. On the original site there was a pagan temple. Then a Visigothic church was built there. The Ummayad Moors converted the church into a mosque, then demolished it and built the Great Mosque. The Great Mosque held a place of importance amongst the Islamic community for three centuries, and it was said that its beauty was so dazzling that it defied description (figure 3).
After the Spanish Reconquista, when Córdoba was captured by King Ferdinand III of Castile in 1236, spaces in the mosque were converted into chapels without much damage, but later a large plateresque cathedral later inserted into the centre of the Moorish building, causing major damage to the mosque (figure 3). The insertion of the cathedral into the mosque was done by permission of Charles V, king of Castile and Aragon – a gesture he regretted when he saw the destruction it had caused to the mosque.

![Figure 4](image)

The Great Mosque of Córdoba and the plateresque cathedral inserted into its centre (source: public domain internet).

The act of desecration of the mosque was an act of revenge by the Christians, but was surely also motivated by envy and mimetic desire. By regaining military, political, cultural and religious dominance the Spaniards took revenge on the Moors’ horizontally-spread architectural masterpiece by imposing a vertical, late Gothic structure into a significant part of its interior.

*The Alhambra and the Palace of Emperor Charles V, Granada, Spain*

The Alhambra (from the Arab “the red fortress”) is a palace and fortress complex constructed during the mid fourteenth century by Moorish rulers of the Emirate of Granada in Al-Andalus (Spanish Andalucia), occupying a hill on the southeastern border of the city of Granada. Completed towards the end of Muslim rule of Spain by Yusuf I (1333-35) and Muhammed V, Sultan of Granada (1353-91), the Alhambra is a reflection of the culture of the last centuries of Moorish rule over Andalucia. There was no master plan for the group of buildings on the hill and some are at odd positioning to each other. However, the Alhambra integrates natural site qualities with the finely decorated architectural structures and the lavish artificial gardens (figure 5).

After the conquest of Andalucia by the Catholic Monarchs in 1492, some rooms in the Alhambra were altered for re-use. Then Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, decided to establish his residence adjacent to the Alhambra palaces, a project was designed by Pedro Machuca (1520-50, who may have worked in Michelangelo’s studio). The plan of the palace, which was begun in 1527, is 63 metres square, containing an circular inner patio. Its exterior consists of a typical
Italian Renaissance palace combination of rustication at the lower level and ashlar on the upper. Mashuca’s design is reminiscent of the Italian Mannerist style that became popular in Italy at the time, but without following any prototype he created an avant-garde building, unique in sixteenth-century architecture (figures 6 and 7).

Figure 5
Detail of an Alhambra courtyard, Granada (source: public domain internet).

Figure 6
Pedro Machuca, exterior view of the palace of Emperor Charles V, Alhamba, Granada, Spain (source: public domain internet).

Figure 7
Pedro Machuca, courtyard of the palace of Emperor Charles V, Alhamba, Granada, Spain (source: public domain internet).
However, the question is: did Machuca, as the second architect succeed in enhancing the site of the Alhambra? In answer to this question Edward Hollis (2009: 146) states: “the Palacio Real of Charles V merely stands next to the Alhambra in a shotgun marriage of sorts. Both palaces in Granada were descended from the palaces of antiquity, but by very different routes, and so they were unable to communicate with one another.”

The Hagia Sophia versus the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey

The Hagia Sophia (From the Greek meaning “Holy Wisdom”) is a former Orthodox patriarchal basilica in Constantinople. At the orders of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian it was designed by Isodore of Miletus (a physicist) and Anthemius of Tralles (a mathematician), and built in about six years from 532-37. As an architectural construction it is famous for its massive dome that epitomises Byzantine architecture, and was the largest cathedral in the world for nearly a thousand years (figure 8). After Constantinople was conquered by Muslims the city was renamed Istanbul and the basilica was converted into a mosque. Later President Atatürk converted it into a museum.

![Figure 8](source: public domain internet)

Opposite the Hagia Sophia, on the Sultanahmet Square, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, called the Blue Mosque, was built by the conquerers between the years 1609-17 (figure 9). It was commissioned by the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed I (1603-17) to rival the splendour of the Hagia Sophia. This mosque is considered to be the last example of Ottoman architecture, designed by Davud Aga (died 1598), an apprentice under the Sinan (1450-1588), the architect who defined the Muslim architecture of the period. It is known that Sinan understood the structure of the Hagia Sophia well and executed some restoration work there after earthquake damage. In the single domed mosques he designed he emulated the basilica structure, but with additions and variations to create a functional mosque, and taught his pupil, Davud Aga, to do likewise.
On the Sultanahmet Square the two monumental structures – the basilica and the mosque – face each other, albeit with some distance between them. Since the Hagia Sophia was turned into a hybrid with minarets added, the Blue Mosque appears to be the more imposing structure, but, notwithstanding the fact that both are single domed structures, their coexistence is that of a pair of rivals and unfortunate.

The Red Square, the Kremlin and St Basil’s Cathedral, Moscow, Russian Federation

The Red Square, established in the fifteenth century under the rule of the Grand Prince Ivan III, epitomises the ancient Russian capital, but it is neither red, nor square. The enormous 400x150 metres open space – called red because it is the Russians’ favourite colour – lies in the heart of Moscow and at its four sides stand the Kremlin, an apartment store, the State Historical Museum and St. Basil’s Cathedral. Originally it was used as the equivalent of Rome’s Forum, a vast meeting place for the people. The Tzars addressed the people there and during the time of the Soviet Union it was used as a place for the display of military might. Lately Lenin’s Mausoleum has been installed there.

The Kremlin is a historic fortified complex, overlooking the Moskva River (figure 10). This citadel houses the Russian government, but it also includes four palaces, four cathedrals and the enclosing Kremlin wall and towers. The site has been continuously occupied since the second century BCE. However, it was Ivan III who organised the construction of the Kremlin as the seat of the tzars. The Kremlin walls were designed by Petrus Antonius Solarius (1445-94), a Swiss-Italian architect, and built between 1485 and 1495. After construction of the new Kremlin walls and churches inside, the monarch decreed that no structures should be built in the immediate vicinity of the citadel. It is notable that during the Soviet period Lenin selected the Kremlin Senate as his residence, but he removed tzarist emblems such as golden eagles on the towers and replaced them with shining Kremlin stars. The addition of Lenin’s Mausoleum turned the Kremlin wall into a necropolis.
The Russian Orthodox cathedral erected on the Red Square in 1555-61 by order of Ivan IV to commemorate the capture of Kazan and Astrakhan, called St. Basil’s Cathedral, or the Cathedral of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos on the Moat, is built over the grave of a venerated local saint, Vasily (Basil), and is considered to be the ultimate Russian architectural icon (figure 11). It marks the geometric centre of the city and was the tallest building in Moscow until the completion of Ivan the Great Bell Tower in 1600. St. Basil’s design is flamelike and consists of a montage of coloured onion-shaped domes, cupolas, arches, towers and spires. Since it stands adjacent to the Kremlin, it was completely secularised during the Soviet Union, but has an ambivalent existence the present Russian Federation.

The problem with St. Basil’s Cathedral is that it distracts from the austere Renaissance design of the Kremlin Wall and transgresses on the monarch’s decree that no structures should be built in the immediate vicinity of the citadel.
St. Paul’s Cathedral and its present surroundings, London, United Kingdom

St. Paul’s Cathedral is an Anglican cathedral, built on Ludgate Hill, the highest point in the city of London. The present building is London’s fifth St Paul’s Cathedral, all having been built on the same site since 604 CE (figure 12). The present building dates from the seventeenth century and was designed by Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723). At 111 metres high it was the tallest building in London from 1710 to 1962, and its dome is still one of the highest in the world.

Figure 12
The old St. Paul's Cathedral, London, in its original setting during the thirteenth century (source: public domain internet).

St. Paul’s Cathedral retains the status of one of London’s most impressive buildings. However, during the twentieth century London’s architects and urban planners have not been kind to the magnificence of Wren’s masterpiece by closely surrounding it with nondescript modern buildings. While real estate in London is at a premium, the grandeur of the cathedral is diminished by its present bland context (figure 13).

Figure 13
Sir Christopher Wren, St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, in its present environment (source: public domain internet).
The National Mall is an open-area national park in downtown Washington DC, comprising a unit of the national park service (figure 14). It connects the entire area between the Lincoln Memorial and the United States Capitol, with the Washington Monument providing a division slightly west of the centre. This remarkable urban open space receives about 24 million visitors annually.

The history of the Mall is important. In 1791 Pierre Charles L’Enfant envisioned a garden-lined grand avenue, approximately 2.6 kilometres in length and 400 metres wide, in an area that would lie between the Capitol and an equestrian statue of George Washington to be placed directly south of the White House. It is designed as a showcase of the nation’s history and culture, by including museums and historical memorials. The Vietnam Memorial is a recent addition. Unfortunately the art and history museums added adjacent to the Mall in the twentieth century do not enhance its prestige. Especially the Smithsonian Castle, the stark National Air and Space Museum and the Hirshhorn Museum by Gordon Bunshaft (1909-90) are unpleasing additions to the grand avenue with its stately focus on the Capitol (figure 15).

The creation of the Louvre as France’s national museum of art is closely identified with the French Revolution. On 18 November 1793, a revolutionary government under Jacobin
domination officially opened the Louvre Palace (Palais du Louvre) as a gallery displaying works of art that were formerly a part of the royal collection.

In the late twentieth century the Louvre required a new entrance above an underground lobby. Commissioned by the then President of France, François Mitterrand, in 1984, the contract was given to architect I.M. Pei (born 1917) who designed what became known as the Pyramide du Louvre (Louvre Pyramid). Situated in the main courtyard (Cour Napoléon) of the Louvre Palace this large glass pyramid, supported by a metal frame, is surrounded by three smaller pyramids. It reaches a height of 20.6 metres, its square base has sides of 35 metres and consists of 603 rhombus-shaped and 70 triangular glass segments (figure 16).

![Figure 16](image)

Completed in 1989 this structure has become a landmark in the city of Paris, but is this a successful architectural addition to the Palais du Louvre? To echo an ancient Egyptian shape in glass in 1989 seems weird, especially in the context of the late Renaissance Louvre Palace. An explanation for the anomaly is given by James Stevens Curl (1994) who adequately appraises Europe’s Egyptian obsession, since the time of Napoleon, with reference to the Egyptomania at the Louvre.

*The Koopmans de Wet House, Cape Town, South Africa*

On the site of the Koopmans de Wet House in Cape Town a rich merchant originally built a thatched cottage. The house was given its present form by Louis Thibault (1750-1815), a French-born, South African architect and engineer, in the mid-eighteenth century. Thibault designed a double-storey mansion with a flat roof in a distinctly neo-Classical style, which eventually belonged to the family Koopmans. After the death of the last family members the house, together with its most important contents, was purchased by the State and declared a public monument in 1940 (figure 17).

This house, which is a well-preserved architectural important link to South Africa’s colonial past has been surrounded by International-style high-rise buildings, as an inevitable symptom of the need for commercial development of real estate.
Rafael Moneo’s Town Hall, Cathedra Square, Murcia, Spain

Rafael Moneo (born 1937), the Spanish architect who won the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 1966, made the following statement in 1978: “The architectural object can no longer be considered as a single, isolated event because it is bounded by the world that surrounds it as well as by history. It extends its life to other objects by virtue of its specific architectural condition” (Moneo 1978: 44). It therefore came as a shock to the citizens of Murcia in Spain when he designed their new town hall in 1998, in the form a stark, rectangular concrete box with an irregular gridlike facade, but without an alluring entrance, centrally on the Cathedral Square, adjacent to the Baroque cathedral (figure 18). Also in Ávila, the ancient Medieval city, Moneo aroused the anger of the citizens by designing a bland, modern building on the Plaza de Santa Teresa, in close proximity to the Iglesia románica de San Pedro (dating from the twelfth century), and the city’s medieval walls that are classified as UNESCO Patrimonio de la Humanidad.
II Successful contextualisation

*Mnesicles’s design of the Propylaea on the Acropolis, Athens, Greece*

I evaluated the role of Mnesikles, the designer of the Propylaea on the Athenian Acropolis, in my article, “Mnesikles, the second architect on the Acropolis” (2008). I argued that Mnesikles, the second architect on the Acropolis of Athens, designed the Propylaea in a way that does not distract from the Parthenon, the main building on the site (figure 19).

Mnesikles was a Classical Greek architect, active circa 440 BCE, whose life cannot be reconstructed in detail. He was the architect of the Propylaea on the Athenian Acropolis, while adjacent buildings there, the Erechtheum and the Temple of Athena Niké, are attributed to him. What these three buildings have in common is their unprecedented design; especially the Erechtheum and the Propylaea violate the foremost rule of Classical design by being asymmetrical. By contrast the Parthenon, as the main temple on the Acropolis, is a normative building on a monumental scale. Many reasons for the deviant appearance of Mnesikles’s buildings can be gathered from the extensive literature on all three. Whatever the influence of the vicissitudes of history or the irregular buildings sites may be, the real reason for the irregularity of the buildings auxiliary to the Parthenon should be sought in Mnesikles’s purposeful design strategy. If the Propylaea, the Erechtheum and the Temple of Athena Niké are “bemished” buildings, according to Classical norms, one needs to ask if Mnesikles did not intend it that way. The ambiguities in the secondary temples on the Acropolis may justifiably be interpreted as purposefully disorderly, thus acting as a foil to the main temple which is geometrized to the point of abstraction. It is therefore proposed that Mnesikles, as the second architect, designed the later temples and the Propylaea on the Athenian Acropolis not to rival the dominance and perfection of the Parthenon, by consciously making these structures imperfect by means of incomplete architectural articulation, the fragmentation of their compositional components and by limiting their scale.
The Duomo and the Gallery of Emanuel I, Piazza del Duomo Milan, Italy

The Duomo is the most venerable Gothic cathedral in Italy, dedicated to Santa Maria Nascente, and serving as the seat of the Archbishop of Milan. This edifice took five centuries to build: the groundbreaking took place in 1386 and the structure was completed in 1965. In front of it originated the most central and historical site in the city, the Piazza del Duomo, established in 1330 by Azzone Visconti for mercantile purposes. Its urban importance is revealed in Milan’s layout, with streets either radiating from or circling the square. In 1936 another prominent structure on the square, adjacent to the cathedral, was inaugurated by Vittorio Emanuele II, who set the foundations of the Galleria, named after him, and later honoured with an equestrian statue placed in the centre of the square (Figure 20).

Figure 20
The Piazza del Duomo, Milan, showing the Galleria Emanuele II adjacent to the Cathedral Santa Maria Nascente (source: public domain internet).

The Galleria is a secular building, one of the world’s oldest shopping malls, designed in 1861 and built by Giuseppe Megoni (1829-77) between 1865 and 1877. Due to the long time difference between them, the Galleria does not compromise stylistically or functionally with the Cathedral. However, even if it is monumental in scale, the facade of the four story high Galleria, facing the piazza at right angles to the cathedral, in no way distracts from the Gothic structure. They Galleria coexist as proud exemplar of its time without intruding on the Cathedral’s space.

Giotto’s Campanile, Florence, Italy

Giotto di Bondone (1266-1337) was a supremenly influential painter of the fourteenth century in Italy. Being a versatile artist he could nevertheless also handle an architectural commission for a free standing bell tower or campanile that is part of the complex of buildings that make up Florence Cathedral on the Piazza del Duomo in Florence (Figure 21). Standing adjacent to the medieval Basilica of Santa Maria del Fiore and the Baptistry of St. John, the bell tower is one of the showpieces of Florentine late Gothic architecture, with its sculptural decorations and marble encrustations. The elegantly slender structure stands on a square plan with sides of 14.45 metres and a height of 84.7 metres, sustained by four polygonal buttresses at the corners. These four vertical lines are crossed by four horizontal ones, dividing the tower in five levels. It houses seven bells at the top.
As a later addition to the Piazza del Duomo the geometrical exactitude of the campanile design gives no offence to the Basilica of Santa Maria del Fiore and the Baptistry of St. John, but establishes itself as a complementary entity blending with its historical counterparts.

_Piazza della Santissima Annunziata, Florence, Italy_

The Piazza della Santissima Annunziata in Florence is a consummate success due to the genius of the second architect whom Bacon praises: “The quality of Piazza della Santissima Annunziata is largely derived from the consummate architectural expression that Filippo Brunelleschi gave the first work, the Innocenti arcade, but it is really to Antonio Sangallo that we owe the piazza in its present form. He set the course of continuity that has been followed by designers there ever since.”

Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio (1456-1534) and Baccio d’Agnolo (1462-1543) were the second architects on the site. They designed the Loggia dei Servi di Maria on the Piazza della Santissima Annunziata in 1518, following the model of the arcaded portico of the Spedale degli Innocenti by Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) (figure 22). The portico of the new building was made consistent with that of the Spedale. The later development of the Piazza followed the arcaded motif, giving it its enduring perceptual unity as an architectural group design (figure 24).
The Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy

The Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence is one of the oldest and most famous museums in the world. It was originally commissioned by Grand Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici in 1560 to serve as the offices (uffizi) for the Florentine magistrates. The original architect was Giorgio Vasari, but the commission was completed by Alfonso Parigi and Bernardo Buontalenti in 1581.

The cortile (internal courtyard) between the Uffizi’s two wings creates the effect of a short, idealised street, with a view towards the Palazzo Vecchio (figure 25). At its far end the courtyard is open to the River Arno through a Doric screen that articulates the space without blocking it. The design can truly be called the first regularised streetscape of Europe. As a painter Vasari knew how to emphasise the perspective length of the building by the matching facades of the two wings with continuous roof cornices, unbroken cornices between the storeys, and the three continuous steps on which the palace-fronts stand.
The Corridoro Vasariano, Florence, Italy

This corridor was built in five months by order of Grand Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici in 1564, to a design by Giorgio Vasari. It is an elevated enclosed passageway that connects the Palazzo Vecchio with the Palazzo Pitti, the city’s power-bases on each side of the River Arno. Beginning at the south side of the Palazzo Vecchio, it joins the Uffizi Gallery and leaves on its south side, crossing the Lungarno dei Archibuseiri, following the north bank of the Arno River until it crosses the Ponte Vecchio, it snakes its way further and finally joins the Palazzo Pitti. It actually adds a level to the Ponte Vecchio, built in 1345, an inhabited bridge (figure 26).

The tall, high-level corridor was added to the elevation of the bridge in a remarkably harmonious way, simply demarcated with evenly spaced rectangular openings, in a plastered wall that forms an extension of that of the covered bridge.
The Biblioteca Marciana, also called the Libreria Sansoviniana was constructed by Jacopo Sansovino (1486-1570), a Florentine architect who had settled in Venice after the Sack of Rome. The purpose of the library was to house the collection of Greek and Latin manuscripts which the great humanist scholar, Cardinal Bessarion of Trebizond left to the state of Venice. The site of the building is right opposite the Palazzo Ducale, Sansovino brought ambitious new ideas of the Roman Renaissance with his design, but also appealed to the Venetian love of surface decoration by endowing the surfaces of the structure with an abundance of statuary. His original plan included a barrel-vault ceiling that collapsed shortly after construction. For that failure the architect was put in prison, from which his friends Titian and Aretino rescued him.

While Sansovino undertook large projects around the piazetta of St Mark’s Square he created a need for improvements in the surrounding structures. By adjusting the angle of the stalls around the campanile to construct the library he freed the campanile from the wall and joined the piazza and piazetta together, and by making the tower stand individually Sansovino placed considerable more emphasis on the bell tower and its small loggia. Not only drawing attention to it spatially, the marked improvements of the surrounding structures made the existing loggia seem drab. Acknowledging the new grandeur surrounding it, the Procurata de Supra commissioned a replacement sometime before 1537, Sansovino as the chief architect led the project for the new loggia to its completion in the mid 1540s. A relatively small structure the new loggia’s exterior not only enhances the piazetta, but also the grandeur of the campanile (figure 27).

![Figure 27](source: public domain internet)

Arches on the axis of the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France

The Avenue des Champs-Élysées is one of the most famous streets in the world, known in France as “La plus belle avenue du monde”. It runs for two kilometres through the eighth arrondissement in northwestern Paris from the Place de la Concorde in the east, with the obelisk of Luxor, to the Place Charles de Gaulle (formerly the Place de l’Étoile) in the west, the location of the Arc de Triomphe, forming the major part of the Parisian “Axe historique” (figure 28).
The Arc de Triomphe was commissioned by Napoleon in 1806 shortly after his victory at Austerlitz, but it was not finished until 1836. There are four huge relief sculptures at the bases of the four pillars, all commemorating major French victories. For the construction of the modern arch in the business district La Défence, on the historical axis of Paris President François Mitterrand launched as design competition in 1992, which was won by the Danish entrants, the architect Johann Otto von Spreckelsen (1929-87) and the engineer Erik Reitzel. They designed the twentieth-century version of the Arc de Triomphe, which was begun in 1995 and completed in 1999. This “Arche” is an almost perfect cube (width 108m, height 110m, depth 112m) in which government offices are housed (figure 29). It was inaugurated in July 1989, with grand military parades that marked the bicentennial of the French Revolution. It completes the line of monuments that forms the “Axe historique” running through Paris. In addition, the “Arche” is positioned to form a secondary axis with the two highest buildings in Paris: the Tour Eiffel and the Tour Montparnasse.
With the design of the two arches, separated by two and a half centuries and the length of the Parisian “Axe historique”, the French expressed their magnificent sense of history and urban design.

**The National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, United States of America**

Financier Andrew W. Mellon began gathering a private collection of old master paintings and sculptures during the First World War, but by the late 1920s he decided to direct his collecting efforts, secretly, towards the establishment of a new national gallery for the United States. Designed by architect John Russel Pope (1874-1937) in a neo-Classical style, the new gallery in Washington DC was accepted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on behalf of the American people (figure 30).

![Figure 30: John Russel Pope, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC (source: public domain internet).](image)

In 1978 the gallery was extended by the addition of the East Building, designed by architect I.M. Pei, which received a National Honour Award from the American Institute of Architects in 1981 (figure 31). The modern extension, linked by means of a passageway to the existing gallery, allows it to retain its individuality. Thus the West and East buildings co-exist as architectural exemplars of their times.

![Figure 31: I.M. Pei, East Building of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC (source: public domain internet).](image)
III The co-existence of old and new architecture in historically unique Western cities

Francesco Bandarin and Ron Van Oers (2012: 21) states with reference to Graz in Austria:

The historic centre of Graz was listed as a World Heritage site in 1999 as a fine example of a Central European urban complex with a harmonious blend of architectural styles and artistic movements that had succeeded each other since the Middle Ages. During the first years of the new century the inscribed property saw a series of contemporary architectural inventions, which touched upon a decades-long debate in architectural and conservation circles concerning building in historic context.

Warsaw, the capital city of Poland, faces the same dilemma as Graz. (endnote: 4) Established at the turn of the thirteenth century Warsaw is presently the ninth most populous city in the European Union. It is widely known as the “phoenix city”, as it recovered from extensive damage during the Second World War during which eighty percent of its buildings were destroyed. Its present mixture of architectural styles reflects the turbulent history of the city and country. After the war most of the historical buildings were reconstructed, while some more or less intact nineteenth century buildings, for example the Leopold Kronenberg Palace were demolished in the 1950s to erect communist style residential blocks. Warsaw’s current urban landscape is one of modern and contemporary architecture (figure 32).

In broad terms, all historical cities in Europe, Russia, Asia, the USA and Africa had to rebuild and extend their urban environments during the twentieth century, a process that will accelerate during the twenty-first century. The problem is mainly how modern architects respect the established traditions of the cities in which they act as second architects. The following examples illustrate some unsuccessful additions in traditional cities during the late twentieth century.

The Palace of the Parliament, Bucharest, Republic of Romania

The Palace of the Parliament, a modern building in the ancient city of Bucharest, was commissioned during the authoritarian rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s during the occupation of Romania by the Soviet Union. It was designed by Anca Petrescu (1949-2013) as the seat of political and administrative power, and work started in June 1980. In Bucharest, an ancient
European city with a venerable architectural history, (endnote: 5) one of the ugliest buildings in Europe, if not on the planet, took shape after June 1980 (figure 33). According to the Guinness Book of Records the twelve story high palace with 1,100 rooms, is the largest, most expensive civilian administrative building on the planet, and also the heaviest. Its ground plan measures 270m x 240m; it is 86m high and its basement is sunk 92m underground.

This building will, as long as it lasts, be a reminder of the Communist ideology that infested so many eastern European and Russian cities with placeless buildings.

Milunić and Gehry’s Dancing House, Prague, Czech Republic

Prague is an ancient city. It was founded and settled as early as the Paleolithic age. Around 200 BCE the Celts established a settlement, followed by various other settlements. Prague has been a political, cultural and economic centre of Europe, especially eastern Europe for more than 1,100 years. For centuries, during the Gothic and Renaissance eras, Prague was the seat of two Holy Roman Emperors and thus also the capital of the Holy Roman Empire. The city played roles in the Protestant Reformation, the Thirty Years’ War, and in the twentieth century, both during two world wars and during the post-war communist era.

Prague which is at present the capital and largest city in the Czech Republic, with a population of about 1.3 million people, is an important historical place in which its architectural styles reflect its varied and turbulent past. Most characteristic is the Gothic Saint Vitus Cathedral began by Charles IV, Holy Roman Emperor and king of Bohemia who reigned from 1346-78. He also built the Charles Bridge and its towers, after the old bridge was destroyed in a flood.6

However, there is a new “sight” in this stately city, namely Ginger Milunić and Frank Gehry’s Dancing House, built from 1992 to 1996, which may be described as an experiment in a postmodern deconstructivist style with pseudo neo-Baroque echoes. Clearly, this building does not suitably blend into Prague’s architectural fibre, but it nevertheless became a tourist attraction (figure 34).
The Gesher Hameitarim Bridge, Jerusalem, Israel

The Gesher Hameitarim Bridge in Jerusalem, commonly called the Chords Bridge, was designed by the Spanish engineer, Santiago Calatrava (born 1951) and completed in 2008 (figure 35). It is a cable-stayed light rail bridge at the entrance to Jerusalem, situated at the traffic intersection of Shazar Street and Herzl Boulevard, and used by trams running to and from outlying Jerusalem neighbourhoods and by pedestrians who cross from Kiryat Moshe to the Jerusalem Central Bus Station. The bridge which spans a total length of 360 metres is constructed of reinforced concrete, Mitzpe yellowish limestone for the abutments, with basalt cobblestone paving, and glass and stainless steel for the walkway. It is 14.82 metres wide, the pylon is 118 metres high, and the longest suspended span of 160 metres has a clearance of 5.5 metres.

What is controversial about the bridge? Its structure is conspicuously futuristic, purposely defying Jerusalem’s entrenched building code, which favours the uniformity of dolomitic limestone, with a varied range of pink, sand and off-white colours, as a construction material.
Conclusion

Various other Pritzker Architecture Prize winners, the so-called international star architects of the present, are inundating cities with sensationally novel buildings that are showpieces on their own, without regard to context or intertextuality. Focussing on six leading contemporary architects – Peter Eisenman, Frank Gehry, Bernard Tschumi, Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas and Steven Holl – Gevork Hartoonian (2013) puts forward a unique and insightful analysis of their “neo-avant-garde” architecture. He concludes that contemporary architecture thrives on spectacle and excess. Sadly, these architects build only for their own stardom or glory, without regard for the tradition that Nietzsche (1988: 7) envisaged when he meditated on the theory of architecture: “For whom does an architect build? ... I think he builds for the next great architect.”

Notes

1 Girard first proposed the notion of mimetic desire in 1961. For a discussion see Paisley (1994).

2 Architectural intertextuality is defined by Kahled al-Sultany (2012: 11) as “a creative process to which the architect willingly resorts in order to enrich his design. In this context, intertextuality does not negate the architect’s individuality, which is intertextualised with the other through his achievement”. In other words, the architect who builds in an intertextual situation is in Edmund Bacon’s sense the “second man”.

3 For a further discussion of the buildings on the Athenian Acropolis, see Maré (2013).

4 For a history of Warsaw, see Ságvári (1980).

5 For a history of Bucharest, see Ságvári (1980).

6 For a history of Prague, see Ságvári (1980).

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