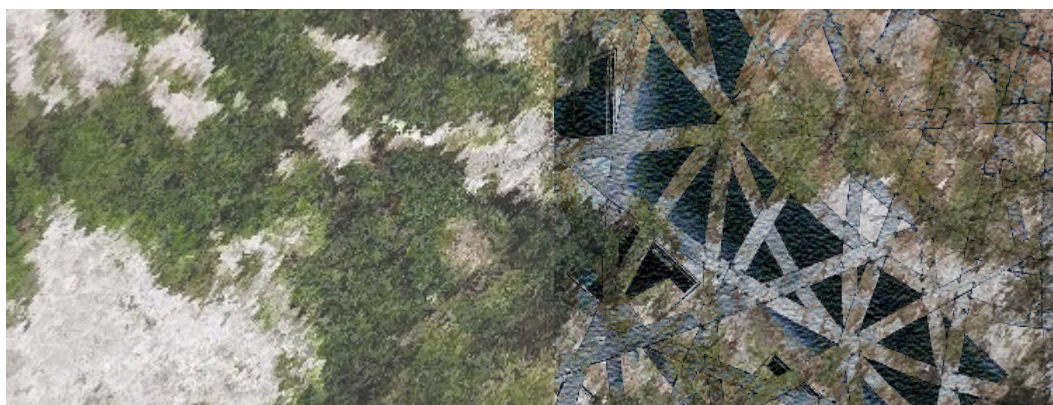


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landscape
cityscape
seascape





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Contents

Research articles on the theme of “Landscape, Cityscape, Seascape”

Nicholas Coetzer

Competing architectural visions of the city: Perspectival tensions between Webb’s *500 Days of Summer* (2009) and Coppola’s *Lost in Translation* (2004) 1

Hendrik Auret

Rescripting colonial landscapes: the Prince’s Rose Garden in Bloemfontein 12

Gerhard Bosman

Art and landscape: a rural *letsema* celebration 31

Gerald Steyn

Sites, shapes and status of some historic forts on Africa’s south and east coasts 48

Meghan Judge

Escaping seascape at the shoreline of Toamasina in Madagascar 70

Competing architectural visions of the city: Perspectival tensions between Webb's *500 Days of Summer* (2009) and Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2004)

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This article engages the discomfort the city presents to architects as an unfathomable and potentially chaotic organism that needs to be tamed through distant visual apprehension – an antiquated, although popular, “view” on the city as exemplified through Webb's *500 Days of Summer* (2009). The article suggests the vista – or comprehensive visual apprehension – as foundational to town planning, but also as necessarily an inflective response of slum clearance activities aiming to bring order and control to the city. The resulting “housing projects”, as objects dislocated from the body of the city, illustrate the problematic drive to totalise and *design* the city. Gordon Cullen's *Townscape* proposes more localised vistas, or place-moments, and suggests a more engaged and embodied comprehension akin to Michel De Certeau's “Walking in the City”. The paper also engages with Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2004) where the unknowable city is again apprehended as a cityscape until a key point where the protagonists inhabit the back alleys of Tokyo by “walking in the city” and overcome their dislocation and ennui. The article concludes, through lessons learnt from these films and theoretical texts, that architects might work tactically through more localised place-moments rather than through totalising planometric or cityscape visions.

Keywords: city as vista, slum, film, Gordon Cullen, Michel de Certeau

Ukukhuphisana bokwakha imibono yesixeko: Imbono iingxwabangxwaba phakathi Webb's *500 Days of Summer* (2009) and Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2004)

Le'artikeli i'thetha nge ukungakhululeki isixeko yabonisa abayili bezakhiwo i'engenakuqondwa kwaye ngokunokwenzeka isiphithiphithi into ephilayo (kudingeka ukuba mbuna nge kude ebonakalayo ukuxhalaba – kudala kodwa ethandwayo, umbono" isixeko ngumzekelo Webb's *500 Days of Summer* (2009). Le'artikeli icebisa ukubona - ebanzi ebonakalayo ukuxhalaba - njengoko isiseko ngenxa ucwangciso lwedolophu, kodwa kwanjalo njengoko ngokuyimfuneko i'ukuguququka impedulo ematyotyombeni imvume imisebenzi injonga kukuzisa ucwangco nolawulo kwisixeko. Isiphumo "iprojekthi yezindlu" njengezinto shenxiswe ukusuka emzimbeni yesixeko, bonisa ingxaki isishwankathelo kunye noyilo isixeko. Gordon Cullen's *Townscape* uyacebisa iimbono ezingakumbi zalapha, okanye indawo-imizuzu, kwaye icebisa a ukuzibandakanya ngakumbi kwaye iqulathwe ikuqonda njegaye Michel De Certeau's "Walking in the City". Eli phepha kwanjalo uyazibandakanya nge Coppola *Lost in Translation* (2004) apho i isixeko esingaziwayo kwakhona ibanjiwe njengembona yesixeko de inqaku eliphambili apho umlinganiswa oyintloko hlala kwi iindledlana ezinagsemva ye Tokyo ngoku "hamba esixekweni" kwaye boyise ukususwa kwabo kunye ne. Le'artikeli iqukumbela, nge kufundwe kwezi filimu kunye nezicatshulwa zethiyori, ukuba abayili bezakhiwo inokusebenza ngobuchule nge indawo-imizuzu kunokube kudlule isishwankathelo iplanometric okanye umbono wesixeko.

Amagama angundoqo: isixeko njengoko vista, ematyotyombeni, ifilimu, Gordon Cullen, Michel de Certeau

5 *00 Days of Summer* (Webb 2009) presents Tom Hansen (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) as a wannabe architect struggling to woo his greeting-card muse, Summer (Zoey Deschanel). At a park bench he draws part of the city of Los Angeles as he would like it to be, across Summer's arm (figure 1). The position he captures his new imagined cityscape of Los Angeles from is Angel's Knoll in what was Bunker Hill and it is significant to note that it was the site of “slum clearance” activities in 1950s Los Angeles. The film is also notable for the complete misapprehension as to what an architect does; however, this misapprehension, unironically, points us to the underexamined ambitions of architects to “design” cities, to draw their edges as

a way of outlining and taming the unknowable. Tellingly then, Tom Hansen is a greeting card illustrator – the work entailing taking the complexities of life and reducing it to a facile feel-good one-liner; “Congratulations on your new baby,” or “Happy Valentine’s Day, Sweetheart. I love you.” This makes perfect sense; the distance between greeting card illustrator and architect is not that great – when considering the city, that is to say.



Figure 1
Stills from *500 Days of Summer* (2009)
(source: Dune Entertainment).

It is this paper’s contention that architects, as evidenced in the delusion demonstrated by Tom in *500 Days of Summer*, have a misplaced desire to *design* cities at a distant objectifying *view*. The origins of this misplaced ambition are complex and are only briefly touched on in this paper. It is obvious that, towards the end of the nineteenth century, architects had limited means by which to apprehend the monstrous, self-replicating organism known as “the city” that the industrial revolution and its attendant rapid urbanisation and migration had birthed. The rise of modern town planning through the Garden City Movement and the likes of Raymond Unwin was through a distinctly picturesque idea of the city that was mirrored in the emergent slum clearance projects that were often enough justified as removing “eyesores” – the result was dislocating city objects called “housing projects”. This paper then, starts with an overview of these ideas of the city as an emerging complex and dangerous organism needing visual apprehension and taming as well as the ways in which architects – including the fictional architect Tom Hansen – set about bringing it to order. The paper then shifts the focus from the distant view of the cityscape to the middle-ground ‘serial vision’ encounters promoted through Gordon

Cullen and the Townscape movement which suggests a more contingent and localised ordering of the city. Sophia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* becomes a useful vehicle to contrast these two "perspectives" on the city, namely the distant, objectifying and totalizing gaze versus the more intimate, contingent embodied and emergent engagement. The paper then refers to Michel de Certeau's "Walking in the City" as a more theoretical lens through which to explain these different modes but also suggests that architects' totalising vision of the city has shifted from elevational cityscape to planometric control. The paper concludes by proposing that architects find it difficult to shake the popular "vision" of the city as an object to be apprehended, designed and totalised rather than understood as an emergent organism. It also suggests that "housing projects" are a peculiar appendage outcome of this desire.

The visual apprehension of the city: *500 Days of Summer*, slums, and housing projects

Architects have battled with the complexity of cities since the industrial revolution brought a mass of disaffected and unfitting multitudinous libidinal energy to the city; an energy that burst beyond the city walls and out of the city gate. Just what costermongers and barrow boys were doing behind the dens and courts and rookeries was impossible to apprehend. With a cell subdividing city – the formation of slums out of the subdivided wholesome flesh of older, salubrious villas – no one could be sure what was going on, no one could *see* what was going on, on the inside.

Robin Evans' "Rookeries and Model Dwellings" (1997) is a beautifully written explanation of why the slums of the East End of London were so problematic to the newly formed middle-class administrators and architects. Whilst the physical health of air and light and sanitary improvements was the focus of state reform in England, the moral degradation arising from slum conditions was the worrying unknowable. Quite simply, there was no way to gain a scopic assessment of the internal workings of the slum which was spatially convoluted. Evans (1997: 102) notes: "Presented with a bewildering, indecipherable network of passages, doors, stairs and rooms, it was as easy to get lost accidentally as on purpose" and thereby escape the moral judgements of priests, administrators and architects and slip outside the clutch reach of the long arm of the law. The experience of Josef K in Kafka's *The Trial* (1925) trying to find the courtroom he will be arraigned in through the labyrinthine passageways and doors of a chaotic and dense city fabric offers a disturbingly humorous inversion of lawyers and the lawless in this illegible spatial confusion. Similarly, I have noted elsewhere (Coetzer 2008) how Cape Town's Wells Square in the first part of the 20th century also presented administrators and architects with a similar internalised and incomprehensible set of spaces that were, in the end, turned inside out.

It is not surprising then, that architects desired to find a position from which they could view the edges and contours of the mysterious and concealed body of the city – the complexities of urbanity reduced as if to the facile outlines of a greeting card one-liner. Unsurprisingly, the fictional architect Tom Hansen gives Summer Alain de Botton's *The Architecture of Happiness* (2006), a book that mentions "space" – what Forty (2000) notes as the key architectural concern of the past 100 years – a total of seven times (with only one being vaguely of architectural concern), and clearly considers architecture to be the sum-total of a pretty picture or a stage-set design to make people feel happy – like a greeting card. Tom is equally as hapless in understanding and taming Summer as he is in understanding and taming the city.

More seriously, we could claim that the vista, as a key concern of the cityscape, is a manifestation of the male gaze penetrating, conquering and objectifying the female body of the city. This is the conceit of Tom Hansen (Lukinbeal 2018). All Tom can do is draw his unfulfilled desire to possess Summer across her arm, dressing her – Summer, *and* the city! – up in lace perhaps referencing Tom’s favourite building (Walker and Eisen’s Fine Art building) and covering over the stark, naked modernism of Los Angeles. The only position for an architect to seemingly apprehend the complexity of a city was a distant, voyeuristic one.



Figure 2
Manhattan skyline, 1908.
(courtesy of the Library of Congress, USA).

In a similar way, Herbert Baker, on visiting America in 1930, tried to make sense of New York City. I imagine he did this on the Hudson River arriving by boat from England, or perhaps from across the Brooklyn Bridge (figure 2). This is what he has to say (1930: 70) of New York’s skyline:

[T]he horizontal lines have been abandoned, and in effect it is all rather, if it is not irreverent to say so, higgeldy piggeldy vertically. There is little attempt in the new buildings to give the steadying effect of cornices or horizontal parapets to the heads of the towers, and they look as though their heads had been torn off or “scalped,” leaving the raw edges.

The violence Baker perceives as having been done to the body of the city is essentially the violence that he apprehends done to architecture when it is understood as the masterful command of form and composition – in this case elevational composition. Indeed, for Baker (1914), when dealing with the city and in line with the City Beautiful Movement, the architect was a “setter of architectural gems”. The city was a stage-set design to be seen from a distance, not something to be engaged in and walked through; it is no wonder that the skyline of Manhattan appears mutilated – to the totalising vision of an architect. There is not much difference in how Baker and Tom Hansen see the city. For both it is a pretty picture designed by architects at a distance; in fact, Tom takes Summer on a stroll through Los Angeles and tells her “Yeah, the street level is not so exciting, but if you look up...” – which cues heavenly scenes of beautiful early 1900s *corniced* buildings, their horizontal lines curtailing the aspirational density of Los Angeles. We know he means *architecturally* not so exciting but by looking upwards Tom and Summer enact an intentional disavowal of the street and its life and urbanity. Their view pulls us out of the excitement of the street into a sentimentalising vision of the city where architects are stage-set designers, pretty picture painters.



Figure 3
Dislocated housing projects: Vasilievsky Island, St Petersburg (top) and
Manhattan's Lower East Side's Baruch Housing Estate (bottom)
(courtesy of Google Earth, October 2022).

But there is another more subtle connection between Baker's piece and the movie. It is hinted at in the violence Baker sees done to architecture and architects in New York. For the capitalist city is bigger than the architect, it is a higgledy-piggledy organism feeding off the flush and flow of finance and the whims of clients, not the masterful hand of a totalising designer – an example of which can be found in the horizontally endless Soviet-era housing at Vasilyevsky Island, St Petersburg, or the transition of Manhattan's Lower East Side into Baruch housing project (figure 3). Rem Koolhaas (1978) notes how the Manhattan grid released the developmental potential of city blocks by partnering ambitious developers with ambitious architects who together could realise their individuated desires within the parameters of a few developmental controls. From across the Hudson River, Manhattan's skyline was the register of this individuated energy. It was only in the 1950s that the city as a whole became a target through the traffic engineering and slum clearance projects of Robert Moses (Berman 1971: 290-312).

If the city was a logically an agglomeration of individuated parcels of ownership and development out of their totalising reach then it is no wonder architects found ways to order and clean up cities through the destruction and erasure of slum areas – such as at Bunker Hill in Los Angeles where Tom Hansen and Summer meet, to enjoy their seat and their view where

the ugly parts of the city have been scraped away. If capital was having its way with the stage-set ambitions of architecture at the top end of buildings – the skyline – then in a mirroring way, architects were having their way with the lower end of the building, the street level of slums. The city as stage-set required the cleaning up and clearing out of what were determinedly called “eyesores” or “unsightliness”. Indeed, the scraping away of “the slum”, the conception of the “housing project” as its replacement, and the design of the city as a vista are exactly the originating concerns of town planning.

If housing reform had begun in earnest in the second half of the 19th century in Britain through the administration and legislation of light, air and sanitation then it was only when Raymond Unwin took hold of the Garden City of Letchworth that the urban design potential of town planning was identified and realised. There had of course been significant urban design moments in England’s history such as at the Royal Crescent at Bath. More numerous however were the reworkings of parts of cities such as London’s Regent’s Park. However, what was significant about the Garden City Movement and Unwin’s designs for places like Letchworth and Hampstead Garden Suburb was that these were new developments of instant urbanity, not tinkering around the edges of Regent’s Park or the slash and gouging of Baron Hausmann’s extreme makeover surgery for Paris; this was an opportunity to form the body of “the city” as a whole.

Lest we lose sight of the slums that were being scraped away it should be noted that the Garden City was imagined as a mirror inversion of the slums; what was introverted, concealed and ragged could be turned inside out and made apparent, legible and ordered, albeit in a new and dislocated part of the city. Marshall Berman (1982: 153) notes of Hausman’s Paris: “The physical and social transformations that drove the poor out of sight now bring them back directly into everyone’s line of vision. Haussmann, in tearing down the old medieval slums, inadvertently broke down the selfenclosed and hermetically sealed world of traditional urban poverty.” In London, all that was foul and diseased in the slums of places such as at Whitechapel and St Giles could be designed away in a totalised environment that even set controls and bans on alcohol. There exists, however, a deep concern in Raymond Unwin’s urban design work to follow the precepts and principles of Camillo Sitte’s *The Art of Building Cities* (1945) which, when first published in 1889, was one of the first attempts to capture the design of the city as a set of what could be understood as interrelated *place-moments* – significant spaces encountered through movement. It is not surprising that Unwin transposed Sitte’s concerns for vista into the picturesque unfolding of new Garden City streetscapes as correlation to the picturesque and unfolding streetscape of the Medieval town. Although we could say that the birth of town planning is also the birth of the Letchworth as an unfolding stage-set vista, it is far from the static, elevational stage-set imagined by Tom Hansen and Herbert Baker.

Gordon Cullen’s Townscapes and *Lost in Translation*

There are other ways in which the city can be drawn and apprehended which are more close up and intimate. This is the squiggly line that links Camillo Sitte to Raymond Unwin mentioned above and the Garden City Movement that proposed the new city-as-suburb to be a Medieval townscape, an unfolding sequence of picturesque encounters that arrives at the desk of Gordon Cullen. As illustrator – like Tom Hansen – and graphic designer for the *Architectural Review*, Cullen did significant work in promoting the modern city as a version of the English picturesque landscape – what was called “Townscape” – as part of the challenge presented by urban living.

Cullen was more than just an illustrator, he defined Townscape through its own language, namely, the picturesque unveiled moment. Words were used sparingly; Cullen noted: “One building is architecture, two buildings is Townscape” (Engler 2013: 123) and illustrations said a thousand words. The interesting thing about Cullen as illustrator is that he was a thousand metres closer to his subject than Tom Hansen’s cool distant apprehension; he lived and loved the city and walked it. This is perfectly encapsulated by Cullen’s most famous illustration of Townscape, namely “serial vision” – a cinematically inspired recounting of a sequential pedestrian movement through the original introverted, complex and unknowable slum, or what we today call the medieval town. Here the vista is contingent and localised, personal and street-level, unfolding and changing, not the product of a global, distant and totalising gaze. Cullen even inspired the science of “strollology” or the study of the city through strolling (Engler 2013: 314). The impact of Townscape and Cullen directly on the work and ideas of well-known architects and academics was huge; Miriam Engler (2013: 316) lists “Kevin Lynch, Jane Jacobs, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Peter and Alison Smithson, Colin Rowe, and Christopher Alexander, to name a few”. Following Engler (2013: 165-6), it is worth understanding the impact that film and a filmic approach had on Cullen’s “serial vision” approach:

The first, filmic trajectory began with Repton’s picturesque landscape garden strolls, passed through early modern film and the works of Serge Eisenstein, and ended in the 1920s with the experimental work of Moholy-Nagy’s conception of “vision in motion” and Le Corbusier’s “architectural promenade”. The second, planning trajectory also began with the eighteenth-century picturesque, but it passed through the nineteenth-century town planning work of Camilo Sitte and Raymond Unwin.

Sophia Coppola’s *Lost in Translation* (2003) offers a helpful vehicle to think through ideas of gaze, cityscape and engaging the city through a Cullenesque embodied walking. To be sure, it deals explicitly with the male gaze and the city; the opening sequence has a notorious 36 second focus on an alluringly veiled female backside, suggestively resonating with the view of couchant New York City as seen from across the Hudson River. Here the dislocated and jet-lagged American characters Bob (Bill Murray) and Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson) find solace from the excess potential of Tokyo in the banal everywhere Hyatt hotel. Their disconnection from the city itself translates into their jetlagged disconnection with themselves and each other, at least in the first half of the film. Apart from their few minor engagements with the rarefied aspects of the city of Tokyo – Charlotte visits Jagan-ji Temple in Shinjuku and Bob plays golf – they retreat from the libidinal potential of Tokyo to the night-time contemplation of a landscape of ghostly forms (figure 4). From up high in the sky-bar great buildings loom in the darkness, brought to form by the pinprick surface of office lights, a rolling, mysterious landscape. Even here, despite being within the space of the city itself – as opposed to the distant views of Tom or Herbert Baker – the city is still represented as unknowable and is apprehended through a sequence of distancing vistas to reinforce the ennui of urban living. Even here, within the heart of Tokyo, the city is represented as a “scape”. But not always, and deliberately so; at a key point in the film the ennui is broken when the potential lovers engage in the intimacy of the backstreets and alleyways of Tokyo’s Shibuya district at night. They live and walk and run the city as a series of Cullenesque encounters and their disconnection is overcome by being at one with the city, by being engaged inhabitants rather than disengaged voyeurs. There is hope that their engagement with the city is a propositional engagement they might have with each other, which alas, is unfulfilled when Bob leaves for the USA.



Figure 4
Still from *Lost in Translation* (2004)
(source: American Zoetrope).

De Certeau’s “Walking in the City” and planometric totalizing visions

We too must return to New York City to tie some of these strands up – in particular we should visit French philosopher Michel de Certeau on top of the World Trade Centre, although he does not tell us which one of the former twin towers he is at the top of. His essay “Walking in the City” (1988) uses his elevated position as a counterpoint to introduce the real concern of the essay, unsurprisingly, walking in the city. De Certeau (1988: 92) theorises his lofty position looking at what he calls an undulating texturology:

To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city’s grasp... His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more.... The totalizing eye imagined by the painters of earlier times lives on in our achievements. The same scopic drive haunts users of architectural productions by materializing today the utopia that yesterday was only painted. The 1370 foot high tower that serves as a prow for Manhattan continues to construct the fiction that creates readers, makes the complexity of the city readable, and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text.

De Certeau’s description and theorising of Manhattan from on high resonates with the scenes from *Lost in Translation* as seen from the sky-bar at the top of the Hyatt hotel. But De Certeau contrasts this lofty and distancing view with the people who inhabit the city down below, who can barely be seen and who themselves don’t have the all-encompassing scopic vision from

above. The text suggests a link to the intimacy that Bob and Charlotte find at street level in their “blind” and unplanned sequence of encounters with a variety of unfolding spaces and activities (De Certeau 1988: 93):

These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness.

However, De Certeau returns to the objectifying vista positioning as a way of emphasising its totalising potential in the way architects and planners think, draw and act on the city – to bring it into order. The most vigorous drawing is the planometric one of panoptic surveillance that contains the promise held by data and statistics, for example, Charles Booth’s poverty map of London (1889) which compresses all the complexity and struggle of life in London’s East End into a key of six or seven colours that cohere social and spatial types – most notoriously defining those denoted in black as “viscous, semi-criminal” classes (figure 5).

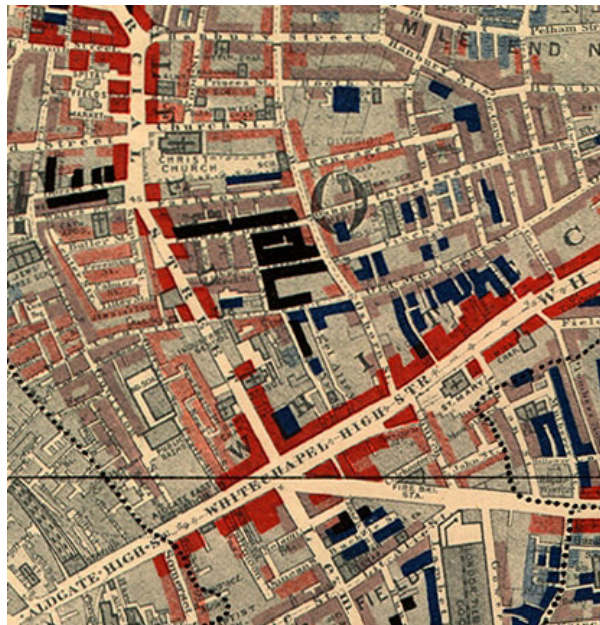


Figure 5
Portion of map from Charles Booth (1904)
(source: *Life and Labour of the People in London*).

This kind of totalising and abstracting analysis is the target of De Certeau’s “Walking in the City”. This he contrasts with the everyday experience of the inhabitant of New York City and their experience of walking the streets and avenues – which, it should be noted by us, bear no resemblance to Cullen’s picturesque “Townscape” and are a rushing river of humanity (1988: 93).

Escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday has a certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible. Within this ensemble, I shall try to locate the practices that are foreign to the “geometrical” or “geographical” space of visual, panoptic, or theoretical constructions. These practices of space refer to a specific form of operations (“ways of operating”), to “another spatiality” (an “anthropological,” poetic and mythic experience of space), and to an opaque and blind mobility characteristic of the bustling city. A migrational, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city.

In some ways, the planometric apprehension of the city and the distant vista or cityscape are the same thing – they apprehend the city as a knowable body that can be measured and outlined in as much as one can measure and outline a plan and an elevation. Perhaps the plan offers more complexity however as it purports to understand the relational functioning of a range of disparate components; the elevation, on the other hand, is literally, “as pretty as a picture”. Most significantly, the planometric apprehension of the city allows the most peculiar of architectural inventions – the housing project – to gain legitimacy. As the architect gazing down on the city and sees it as a geometric entity, “he” is able to act upon it and make a new component that is, nevertheless, endlessly “lost in translation”. In as much as the slum clearance allowed architects to pretend that the city could be cleaned up and made as a pleasant visage, the housing project that replaces it is an allowance that the complexity of the city and its inhabitants can be adequately afforded in a newly inserted “better” chunk. Rather than the fleshiness of the slum – endlessly written about and described by architects and administrators as a cancer that needs to be cut out from the body of the city – the housing project is like an organ, an additional kidney or phallus, that is supposed to integrate itself seamlessly into the life of the city, and yet it is always already set apart through its overwriting geometric logic and objectness. The housing project that replaces the slum fulfils the desire of architects to be able to *design* the city, to view and handle it like an object, a thing to behold, admire, tame, correct and to put right.

Conclusion

Cities are trouble for architects; they are unknowable, incomprehensible and proliferated. *500 Days of Summer* offers us a laughable, but then again, serious, view of what architects are thought to do – design vistas, create pretty picture stage sets – that have the same apprehension of complexity as a greeting card capturing the complexity of a life lived. As architects, our apprehension of the city is as a silhouette, an outline drawn on an arm or a disturbing and disordered jagged skyline seen at a distance. Architects seize parts of the city to have their way with them in making order; they have historically acted on the slums of cities as eyesores – literally visually offensive entities that needed to be scraped away such that the city might be better designed and re-ordered. But architects can’t *design* a city, although some think they can. Architects design objects called buildings, cities make themselves out of objects called buildings, of which there are thousands of random and accreted parts. Cities are messy and disordered, made in time and space; decaying, condemned, redesigned, rebuilt, reinhabited. However, in architectural imagination, the city is made in an instant, and it is made to fulfil the desire as a vista looking onto a seductive object; the net result of this is the dislocated socio-spatial object called a housing project.

Cullen’s *Townscape* and its “serial vision” – originating from Unwin and the medieval Romantic reimaginings of the Garden City Movement – have been a powerful addition to how architects can think of the city that does not necessarily promote a totalizing vision. This is a localised version of the cityscape, as one constructed out of a set of small place-moment vistas encountered by pedestrians as they live their lives within the fleshy substance of the city. It is exactly the sequence of encounters that allow the protagonists of *Lost in Translation* to become intimate and engaged rather than lost and jetlagged. This too is the point that De Certeau makes in “Walking in the City”, that the planners and architects look down – literally – at the body of the city, surveying and measuring and thinking that they can better order its complexities, irrationalities and rhythms. As any architect who has watched *500 Days of Summer* knows, Summer is unknowable and untameable and slips away from Tom’s clutching grasp. But for architects, deluded with their sense of destiny to control and totalise cities, surely, after Summer, there is always an Autumn?

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Rescripting colonial landscapes: the Prince's Rose Garden in Bloemfontein

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The historic Prince's Rose Garden in Bloemfontein was a much-admired venue within King Edward VII Park and contributed to the settlement being nicknamed the City of Roses. However, despite hosting important historical events, the fortunes of the rose garden dwindled along with the larger park due to growing levels of spatial fragmentation, commercialisation and neglect. In 2014 the last rose bushes were removed to host an international beach volleyball tournament. What does the conservation, commemoration and rescripting of colonial landscapes entail within the contemporary democratic reality of South Africa? In response to recent suggestions regarding the decolonisation of urban landscapes, this article will present and interpret two attempts to creatively re-engage the memory of this colonial landscape through interpretive *poietic* acts that focused on densifying the colonial memory with indigenous motifs derived from the *Litema* decorative system of the Basotho people. Beyond mimicking this indigenous design language, the goal is to engage inceptually with the *disciplines* that sustain colonial and indigenous practices. Ultimately, this article will suggest that the decolonisation of colonial landscapes implies a rescriptive process in which inceptual disciplines are venturesomely questioned through acts of listening *poiesis*, resulting in the broadening and densification of the heritage landscape.

Keywords: care, colonial landscapes, decolonisation, Bloemfontein, inceptual thinking.

Herskrywing van koloniale landskappe: die Prins se Roostuin in Bloemfontein

Die Prins se Roostuin in Bloemfontein was 'n historiese onthaalarea in Koning Eduard VII Park. Dit is deur baie bewonder en het bygedra tot die feit dat Bloemfontein steeds bekendstaan as die Rosestad. Ongelukkig het die roostuin en die park met die jare agteruitgegaan weens toenemende vlakke van ruimtelike fragmentasie, kommersialisering en verwaarlosing. In 2014 is die laaste roosbome verwyder om 'n internasionale strandvlugbaltoernooi aan te bied. Wat behels die bewaring, herdenking and herskrywing van koloniale landskappe binne die hedendaagse demokratiese realiteit van Suid-Afrika? In antwoord op onlangse voorstelle rakende die dekolonisasie van stedelike landskappe, interpreteer hierdie artikel twee *poietiese* ingrypings wat op kreatiewe wyse poog om die herinneringe aan hierdie koloniale landskap te herskryf en te verdig, deur te verwys na die *Litema* dekoratiewe sisteem van die Basotho. Eerder as om hierdie inheemse ontwerp taal bloot na te boots, was die doel om op aanvangsvlak die dissiplines te bevraagteken wat beide koloniale en inheemse praktyke onderskraag. Die artikel voer aan dat die dekolonisasie van koloniale landskappe 'n proses van herskrywing impliseer waar aanvangsdissiplines waagmoediglik bevraagteken word deur skeppingsdade van luisterende *poiesis*. Die uiteindelijke doel is die verruiming en verdigting van die erfenislandskap.

Sleutelwoorde: sorg, koloniale landskappe, dekolonisasie, Bloemfontein, aanvangsdenke.

The historic Prince's Rose Garden in Bloemfontein was inaugurated on 25 May 1925 by the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, and is located in the heart of King Edward VII Park – an expansive cultivated landscape laid out in 1902 on the edge of Bloemfontein. In the wake of the Treaty of Vereeniging, ending the Second Anglo-Boer South African War, the park was intended as a “gift of empire”. As such, the park embodied a range of colonial aspirations. It was an “ornament” standing in contrast to the “bleak” surrounding landscape. The park was always seen as an “improved landscape” and there was never any intention of fitting in with the local ecology. The reports of the Parks Department testify to the fact that it needed constant intervention to keep up appearances. For many decades these efforts have resulted in little more than a losing battle in the face of steady decline, and the last rose bushes of the rose

garden, which had deteriorated along with the larger park, was removed in 2014 due to the hosting of an international beach volleyball tournament. For a weekend the rose garden was turned into a beach, an event even more foreign to the Free State ecology than a rose garden.

The rose garden is a significant, but absent colonial landscape. Aside from its absence, and despite appearing slightly tone deaf due to its associations with “lavishness” and “luxurious excess” amid the pressing socio-economic concerns of South Africa’s current democratic dispensation, the garden’s trace remains recognizable, and it is an important part of the city’s heritage. One could even argue that it offers a promise of delight that Bloemfontein is in dire need of. Is it possible, from a heritage perspective, to reinstate and conserve this garden, while creatively rescripting it to form a more inclusive and appropriate addition to the contemporary democratic reality of Bloemfontein?

This article will try to answer this question by first considering the general nature of colonial landscapes, and then positioning the Prince’s Rose Garden as a prime example of *colonial discipline*. Next, contemporary suggestions for ways to decolonise such landscapes will be studied, before interpreting two recent attempts to creatively re-engage the memory of this particular colonial landscape. Throughout, the goal will be to engage *inceptually*; understanding people as beings of care, landscapes as regionings of concern subjected to various kinds of discipline, and the heritage landscape as a socially constructed accord open to *poietic* reinterpretation in the sense that it can be broadened and densified.

Inceptual thinking and colonial disciplines

To engage inceptually, is to attempt the kind of thinking that the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) called *das anfängliche Denken*, or inceptual thinking; a kind of radical (and subversive) thinking that values “openness” over “correctness” and dispels “claims to certainty” for the “rigorousness of restraint” (Heidegger 1938: 261, 52). Instead of studying origins, inceptual thinking questions the assumptions which substantiate origins. In this case, inceptual thinking offers creative access to the disciplines that sustained colonial decisions in such a way that future action may be liberated from the kind of calculative thinking and measuring that enforced these disciplines in the first place.

This kind of “access” is safeguarded by at least three rescriptive transformations related to inceptual thinking: The first being Heidegger’s transition from the “thinking subject” of the Cartesian subject-object division to considering people as beings of care (*Sorge*) interwoven with the world (Heidegger 1927). For Heidegger, inceptual thinking is a particularly “human way” of thinking; the kind of thinking which belongs to, and is own to, the being of care. Secondly, inceptual thinking carries within it the resonating, interplaying, grounding and leaping capacities (Heidegger 1938: 51) that are able to engage the place itself as an unfolding event sustained by a fourfold “appropriating mirror-play” between earth, sky, mortals and the divine (Heidegger 1950: 177). This is not to refute the steadfastness of place, but to rescript its grounding capacity as an open (more dynamic) kind of region, or regioning; a relational way to take the measure of places. Beyond offering a stable reality, place becomes, from a mortal perspective, an appropriative regioning of concern. Lastly, due to its appropriative nature, inceptual thinking finds itself uniquely entangled with *poiesis* (the Ancient Greek word for making) in that the act of making accompanies the same kind of resonating, interplaying, grounding and leaping movements own to this kind of thinking. In its restraint – in Heidegger’s

insistence on understanding making as the responsive “gathering-appropriating staying of the fourfold” (Heidegger 1950: 172) rather than wilful acts of “*assertion*” (Heidegger 1938: 51) or “calculative planning” (Heidegger 1938: 389) – inceptual thinking is a form of “creative withstanding” (Heidegger 1938: 30), able to measure places in less calculative ways and kindle the venturesome “carrying out” (Heidegger 1938: 51) of preservation that is own to the being of care.

Colonial landscapes and disciplines

Whether the goal is assertion, extraction or imposition, matters related to colonialism converge on the question of land. However, beyond this physical reality there lies an inceptual reality, a core foundational expression of discipline that sustains colonial control. As the Canadian landscape architect Tiffany Dang (2021: 1009) put it: “The core tenet of colonization is access to and control of territory, and this is achieved through not only the physical seizure and occupation of land, but also an ideological process of cultural engineering, which fits land into a colonial imaginary, projecting settler value systems onto Indigenous lands”. Dang (2021: 1004) has argued that the real plight surrounding colonial landscapes lies in the way in which “landscape has been used as a disciplinary tool to facilitate the control of land and to naturalise colonial hegemonies, including the cultural framing of landscape through art and architecture”.

The Palestinian American postcolonial scholar, Edward Said (1935-2003) regarded these kinds of discipline¹ as a regulating order – an “exacting” force – meant to silence the indigenous into being “industrious and subordinate” (Said 1994: 246). The enforcement of discipline ensures that “control” and “productivity” reign over the colonised, while assuring “domestic tranquillity and attractive harmony” in the world of the coloniser (Said 1994: 87). Canadian art historian Charmaine Nelson (2017: 51) extended Said’s interpretation to forms of “spatial discipline” which refers to “the ways in which various actors (soldiers, geographers, etc.) used cartography and processes like mapping to exert control over geography, nature, and human inhabitants...”. In order to move beyond “metaphorical decolonizing discourses” (Dang 2021: 1004) there is a need to question the inceptual spatial disciplines sustaining colonial landscapes.

King Edward VII Park and the Prince’s Rose Garden are the tainted fruit of such forms of discipline; forms of mastery that subject the landscape to the realm of the colonial “ought”.² Making can therefore be used to entrench disciplines, but *poiesis* inspired by inceptual thinking may be able to provide meaningful alternatives when freed from previous assumptions?

Dang (2021: 1011-2) proposed “uninscription” and the “re-growing [of] living landscapes damaged by centuries of colonial control”. But this approach becomes questionable when faced with an urban landscape. There is also the question of heritage to consider. While it is true that heritage efforts, no matter how well-intentioned, may merely “maintain settler hegemony

¹ Said (1993: 42) attributes the initial insight into the role of discipline within the colonial project to Indian American scholar and educator Gauri Viswanathan (b. 1950), who identified the role of colonial discipline, particularly in education, as “the ideological pacification and re-formation of a potentially rebellious Indian population...”.

² It could be argued that the notion of the colonial “ought” is related to the metaphysical “ought” which Heidegger identified as the final “restriction” of Being, following on the established patterns of flattening Being in Western thinking by positing it against (and as something other than) “becoming”, “seeming” and “thinking” (particularly as a form of calculation) (Heidegger 1935: 98-9).

through the promotion of settler-centric histories”, it is also true that decolonization should not merely present a new form of univocality. The preferred outcome should surely be, as the South African urbanists Karina Landman and Kundani Makakavhule (2021: 553) suggest, “the co-evolution of multiple stories of different worlds in various public spaces”, in other words, places dwelling on “dialogical relationships” (Landman and Makakavhule 2021: 549-50). For urban colonial landscapes the process is more a question of ‘rescripting’, than ‘uninscripting’; the intended result being the broadening and densification of the heritage landscape. It follows that the most pressing questions surrounding the decolonisation of urban landscapes in South Africa often revolve around finding inclusive ways to “subvert the project from within and [deciding] which parts to discard or adapt?” (Landman and Makakavhule 2021: 545).

It should be pointed out that the notion of “discipline” has another facet that this essay draws upon. While the term can indicate acts of assertion and subjugation, it can also be used to describe the inceptual precision guiding and sustaining the internal *poietic* potential of any practice. In the same way that Heidegger (1953) saw *poiesis* as the “saving power” (Hölderlin cited in Heidegger 1953: 333) latent amid the “ordering” imposed by technology (Heidegger 1953: 324), the notion of discipline also harbours a redeeming inceptual potential. Before going any further, it is necessary to interrogate the inceptual forms of discipline that substantiated the proclamation and design of King’s Park.

The disciplines of King Edward VII Park

Figure 1 shows the landscape intended to host King’s Park at about the time it was proclaimed. It may appear that it is a rather typical stretch of Free State veld, composed of wild grasses and small, hardy shrubs, but it had by then already been severely altered. First, one can see the white tents of the No. 8 General Hospital of the British Army on the horizon. Second, there is the clump of trees to be seen on the left; the result of a venturesome act of gardening by Carl E. Fichardt (1816-1889) and Dr C.J.G. Krause (d. 1889) who decided, in 1860, to plant between thirty and forty willow trees around a spring west of Bloemfontein. The spot became a favourite recreational space for the residents of the young town (Schoeman 1980: 49). These disciplines are easy to discern, but there are other forms of latent discipline that the photographed moment overlooks.



Figure 1

A photograph of the area west of Bloemfontein (c.1902) showing the veld, willow trees (on the left), and the white tents of the No. 8 General Hospital of the British Army on the horizon (source: Collection of the photographer of *The Friend*, Free State Provincial Archive Repository (FSPAR), Box no. A566/443).

When Major Henry Douglas Warden (1800-1856) arrived at Bloemfontein in 1846, the area west of the dolerite ridge stretching between Fort Hill and Signal Hill was a *vlei*, or wetland, feeding and containing the fountain that persuaded Warden to establish his garrison headquarters there. E.N. Roberts, who grew up in Bloemfontein during the latter part of the nineteenth century, recollected that the area (including The Willows, as the area was called) was a paradise for the children of the settlement and that “the *vlei* was so wet that [they] were only allowed to go there *kaalvoet* [barefooted], to save boot leather” (Roberts 1950: 16). Roberts (1950: 16-7) further explains how the area was changed from a “morass of waterlogged reeds and sedges” to the picnicking spot of his youth; how the 1875 flood disturbed the watercourses east of the barrier ridge and led to the fountain being “enclosed in a rectangular sunken building”; and how the flood of 1904 irreparably damaged the water system of the Bloem Fountain. Essentially, the floodwater gouged a gaping hole through the dolerite ridge, effectively “lowering ... the outlet of the great *vlei* sponge of the upper basin probably fourteen feet [4,3m] below where it had originally been ...” (Roberts 1950: 25). The lowering of the water table instantly turned the *vlei* into veld.

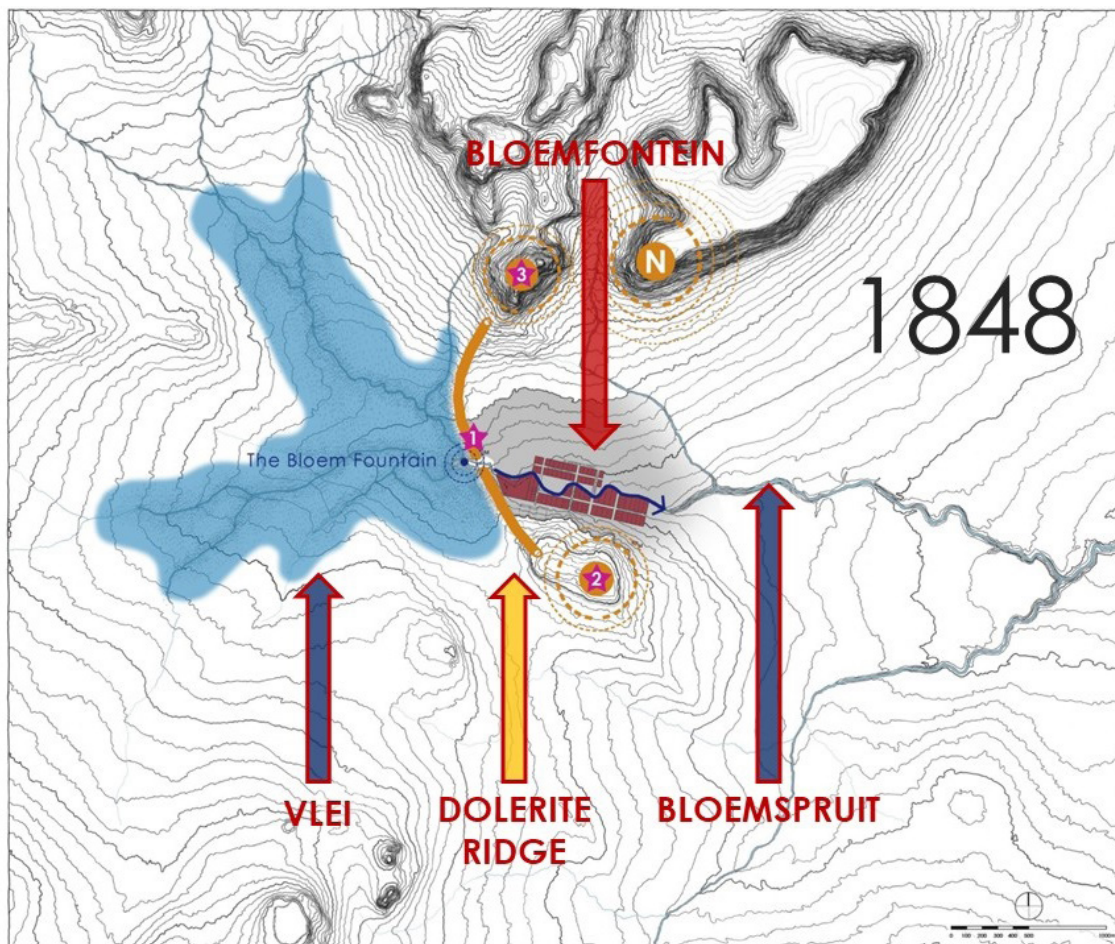


Figure 2
Bloemfontein in 1848 with the *vlei* ecosystem still contained behind the dolerite ridge.
 The ridge also played a prominent role in the military disciplines imposed on the town, with Fort Drury (c. 1846) (number 1), Queen’s Fort (c. 1849) on Fort Hill (number 2), and an unfinished fort (begun in 1899) on Signal Hill (number 3) constructed along its course (map by the author).

However, this dramatic transformation of the landscape was not purely an act of nature. According to E.N. Roberts, the real reason for the devastation caused by the flood of 1904 was the fact that Lord Roberts' (1832-1914) British occupying forces, consisting of 32 000 troops and their horses, were stationed at Bloemfontein from 1900 to 1902. The horses severely overgrazed the area, and soldiers cut down many of the willow trees for firewood. According to E.N. Roberts (1950: 23): "For a radius of ten miles the veld was trampled to dust". Of course, the lack of surface vegetation caused a dramatic decrease in the ability of the *vlei* to absorb stormwater which amplified the effect of the cloudburst on 17 January 1904 to catastrophic levels. Thus, latent in the 1902 photograph (figure 1) are the bleak consequences of more than fifty years of settler discipline, exacerbated by an ecological disruption caused by the indiscriminate disciplines of an occupying colonial army.

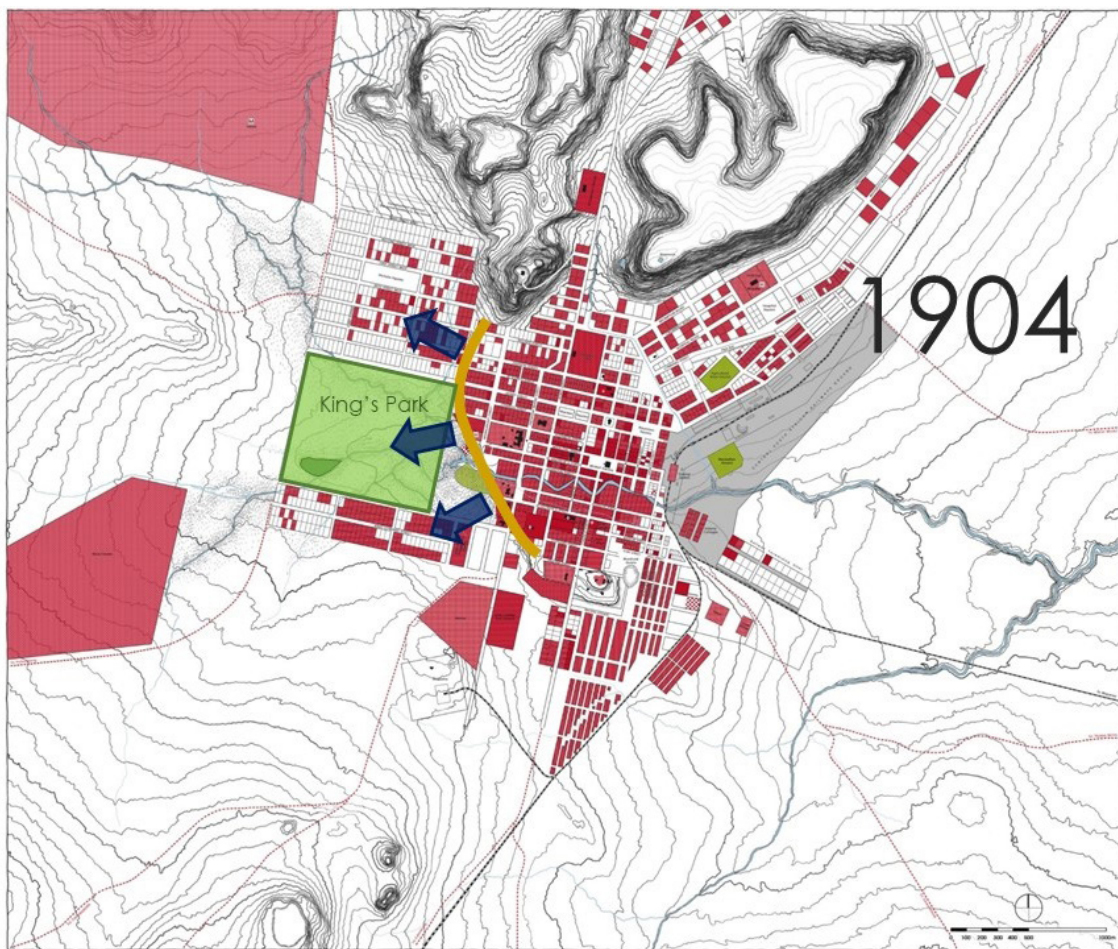


Figure 3
Bloemfontein expanding beyond the dolerite ridge towards the west after the 1904 flood
(map by the author).

Not only did the lowering of the water table destroy the water system of the area west of the dolerite ridge, but it also made it habitable for humans, and Bloemfontein began expanding beyond the ridge. Consequently, domestic urban disciplines were inscribed on the landscape, except for King's Park, which was subjected to the discipline of formal gardening (figure 3).

After the proclamation of King's Park, the Town Council once more recalled the venturesome spirit of Fichardt and Krause and planted more than 125 000 trees in the park between 1904 and 1910.³ A series of intrepid gestures followed that enforced a range of colonial disciplines. In 1906 a zoo was established and a large fountain⁴ was introduced as the main feature in the ornamental east-west axis that stretched through the park. This Beaux Arts discipline was later adorned with manicured landscaping, reflecting lily ponds, and two commemorative monuments. In 1922 construction of a "large lake", recalling the English Landscape Garden tradition, was completed.⁵ Despite initially being called King Edward's Lake, it soon became known as Loch Logan, in honour of J.P. Logan, who was Town Clerk of Bloemfontein from 1905-1926 and one of the main drivers behind the initiative (Schoeman 1980: 183). Three years later, the Prince's Rose Garden, comprising a reception area and three thousand rose bushes, was officially opened.⁶



Figure 4
The opening of the Prince's Rose Garden on 25 May 1925 by the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII
(source: FSPAR, no. VA 7616).

³ Mayor's minutes (MM) of Bloemfontein. Collection of the Free State Provincial Archive Repository (FSPAR), reference numbers MBL 3/1/1 to MBL 3/1/67 (1910: 103).

⁴ MM 1906: 32.

⁵ MM 1922: 8.

⁶ While the origin of the three thousand rose bushes remains unclear, it should be pointed out that the cultivation of roses had a long history in Bloemfontein. The flowers and formal gardens of Bloemfontein was one of the most prominent aspects that early visitors to the town remarked upon (Schoeman 1980: 142-3). In fact, according to Schoeman (1980: 23), Andrew Murray (1828-1917), who served as minister in the Dutch Reformed Church of Bloemfontein from 1849 to 1860, in his old age remarked that the smell of his rose garden in Wellington reminded him of the roses of Bloemfontein.



Figure 5
The Prince's Rose Garden and the pergola that traced its edges, c. 1925-1934
(source: FSPAR, no. VA 5806).



Figure 6
The opulence of the Prince's Rose Garden in 1930
(source: FSPAR, no. VA 5989).

The rose garden was a much-admired venue within the larger park. However, today, besides the central reception area, there is basically nothing left of the original rose garden. What did the original layout look like? At the time, people described the rose garden as being laid out in an irregular “jazz fashion” (Schoeman 1980: 259).⁷ It seemed as if the layout of the old rose garden was another part of Bloemfontein’s history lost to the forces of progress since, in the Mayor’s Minute of 1938,⁸ it is mentioned that the Prince’s Rose Garden was re-designed in 1938 “the old paths done away with” and “planted up with lawn”.

During the year the Rose Garden has been re-designed and the old paths done away with. These have all been planted up with lawn, which now gives the roses a beautiful setting. It might be well to add here that when this garden was laid out in 1924, no known suitable grass was then available, but now after years of experimenting, the Parks Department is in a position to plant and supply grass for any purpose.

This is the problem with enforced disciplines. They require constant vigilance. When it became too hard to “keep up appearances”, new disciplines had to be asserted. Fortunately, the original layout of the rose garden was not lost, but merely hidden in a box of uncatalogued photographs. The box, part of the collection of the Free State Provincial Archives Repository, contained 108 small aerial photographs of Bloemfontein taken along overlapping flight paths between October 1935 and January 1936. These photographs were digitally stitched, stretched, lens corrected, blended and re-aligned in order to formulate (what is currently believed to be) the oldest complete aerial survey of Bloemfontein. Only two years prior to being redesigned, the original layout of the Prince’s Rose Garden (figure 7), and its position within the larger park (figure 8) was captured for posterity.

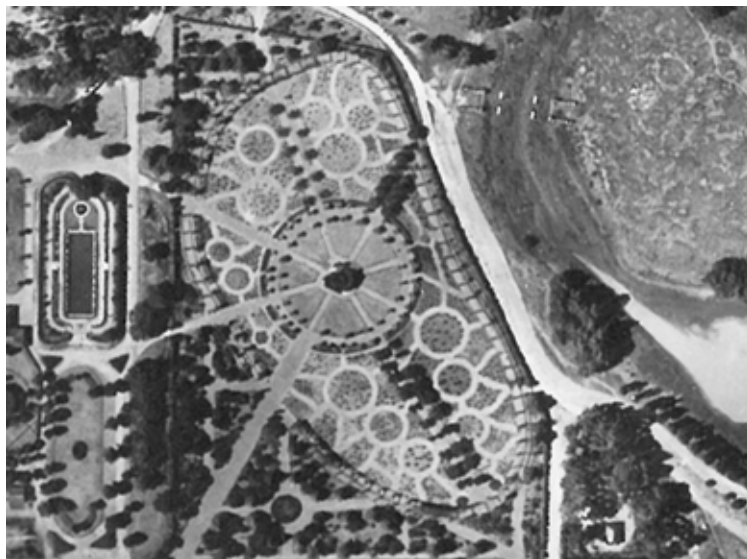


Figure 7

**An aerial photograph of the jazz fashion layout of the Prince’s Rose Garden, c.1936
(source: Collection of the FSPAR).**

⁷ While Schoeman (1980: 259) explains the use of the term, “jazz fashion” merely by referring to the “onreëlmattige beddings” or irregular flower beds of the garden, it should be noted that this term bears wider relevance. The decade between the end of the First World War in 1919 and the Wall Street Crash of 1929 is commonly referred to as the “Jazz Age”, a phrase popularised by the American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940).

⁸ MM 1938: 13.

In this aerial photograph (figure 8) the forms of discipline are laid bare for all to see. The lake in the English Landscape Garden tradition, the Beaux Arts axis, the animals relegated to curiosities in the zoo and the rose garden, a pinnacle of aestheticised nature.

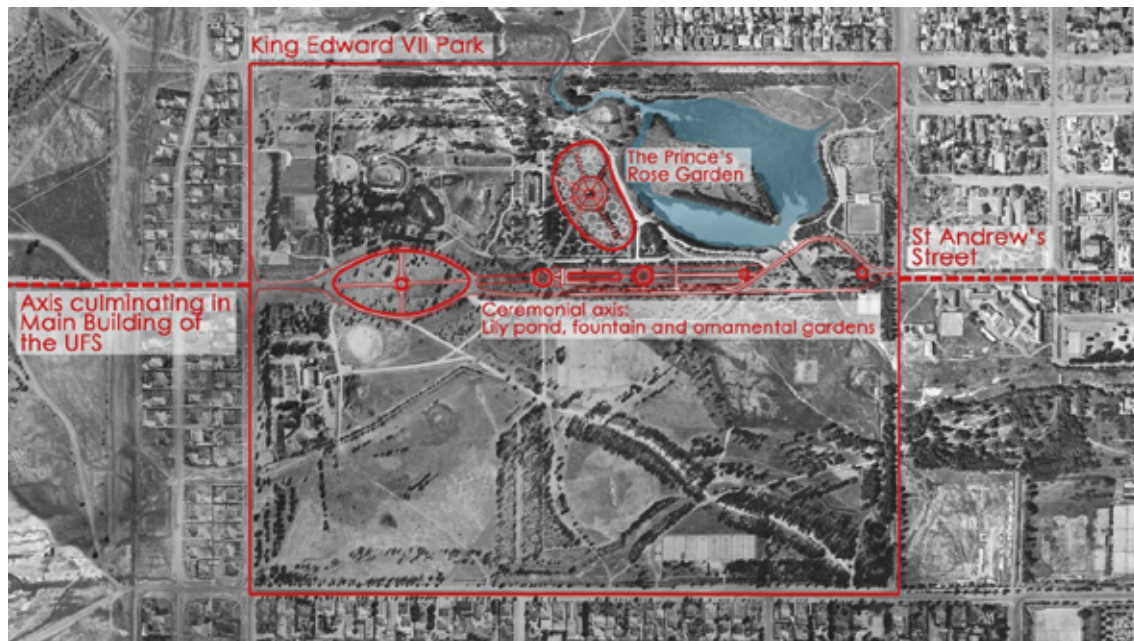


Figure 8
The colonial disciplines of King Edward VII Park
(source: Collection of the FSPAR).

In the following years, disciplines enforced by the Apartheid regime further undermined the inclusivity of the park. These disciplines are evident in signs from the previous dispensation which prescribed very limited visiting hours for Black people (specifically excluding public holidays) and later efforts to rename portions of the park to President Swart Park, in honour of Charles Robberts Swart (1894-1982), the first state president of the Republic of South Africa and a prominent member of the Nationalist Party.

Decolonising landscapes

How then, should colonial landscapes be decolonised? Specifically, in which ways can acts of *poiesis* question the disciplines inscribed in places? According to Landman and Makakavhule (2021: 543), within the South African context it is very important that any efforts should be place-specific and inclusive. While these seem like overly generic principles, they would have alleviated many of the unfortunate choices associated with the Prince's Rose Garden. After studying various proposed methods for decolonising urban space, and after considering the matter from a South African perspective, Landman and Makakavhule (2021: 545) propose the following three-step process: first, "remembering and recognition", second, "re-imagining and transcendence" and lastly "transformation and renewal". In the light of this three-step process, the following section will interrogate two recent events organised in King's Park, that aimed to initiate a dialogue for speculating on the potential decolonization of the Prince's Rose Garden.

The Prince's Rose Garden rescripted

For the first event, the decision was taken to chalk the outlines of the old rose garden.⁹ Beyond merely clarifying the extent of a colonial relic, the new vision of the rose garden, while following the jazz fashion layout of the original, had to incorporate a contemporary place-specific awareness and be more inclusive. On closer inspection it became clear that the geometries of the old layout harboured the possibility to be creatively fused with the *Litema*¹⁰ decorative language developed by the Basotho people in Lesotho and central South Africa. The chalked rose garden would be a fusion of design languages – disciplines in dialogue.

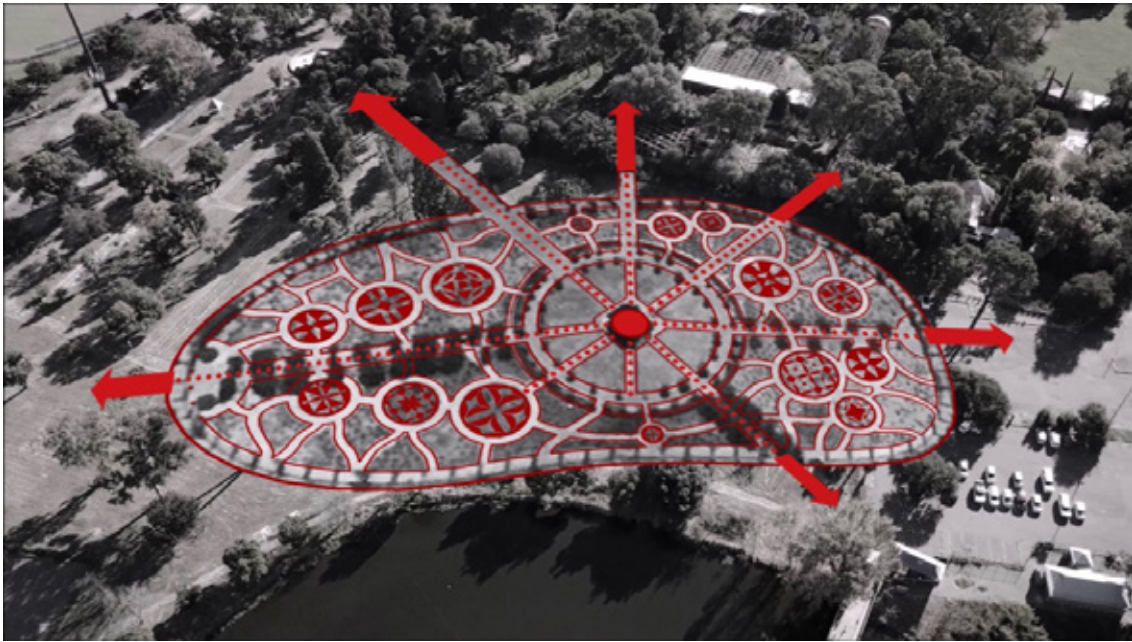


Figure 9

Disciplines in dialogue. Superimposing *Litema* motifs on the historic jazz fashion layout within the current situation
(base photograph by Christie-Ann Groenewald, used with permission and adapted by author).

⁹ The first event took place on 16 April 2021 and 30 architecture students in the honours design studio from the University of the Free State participated. The aim of this article is not to consider the pedagogical outcomes of this activity, even if the general experience was very positive. The event became an important reference point within the larger design assignment, which challenged students to re-envision the urban future of King Edward VII Park. The group did not represent the broader demographics of South Africa and was predominantly composed of white students. While the activity managed to expose students to the principles and practice of a different form of creative discipline, and while no measures were taken to prohibit broader public participation, it had little direct impact on other urbanites.

¹⁰ *Litema* here refers to an indigenous, decorative mural art practised predominantly by Basotho women in the Free State province of South Africa and in Lesotho. The murals are scraped into wet plaster which is why it is known by the Sesotho word, *Litema*, designating the activity of ploughing or cultivating. The application of *Litema* is usually associated with seasonal celebrations or to commemorate important events (Beyer 2014: i). Instead of merely copying the “design language” or acknowledging the artistic merits of this artform, the goal of using *Litema* as inspiration is to engage ineptually and draw on the activity’s event-quality and its associations with care and cultivation. Since it is, amongst other aspects, associated with ploughing, there is also an implied overlap between colonial and indigenous disciplines enscenced in the term, which holds out the alluring potential for using this kind of activity to express the common humanity latent in mortal care.

The second event encouraged a more sustained engagement with the *Litema* design language.¹¹ One of the goals was to explore the capacity of this design language – that is usually confined to two-dimensional wall applications – to inspire three-dimensional structures. Rather than again looking at the whole ensemble, it was decided to focus on one of the round planting beds. The challenge was to construct a temporary structure (figure 10) that could give a compelling voice to the embedded disciplines of *Litema*. In concert, contemporary *Litema* designs were painted and exhibited as part of the new three-dimensional presence. The insights derived from these events can be discussed in terms of the three stages of decolonising urban landscapes identified by Landman and Makakavhule (2021).

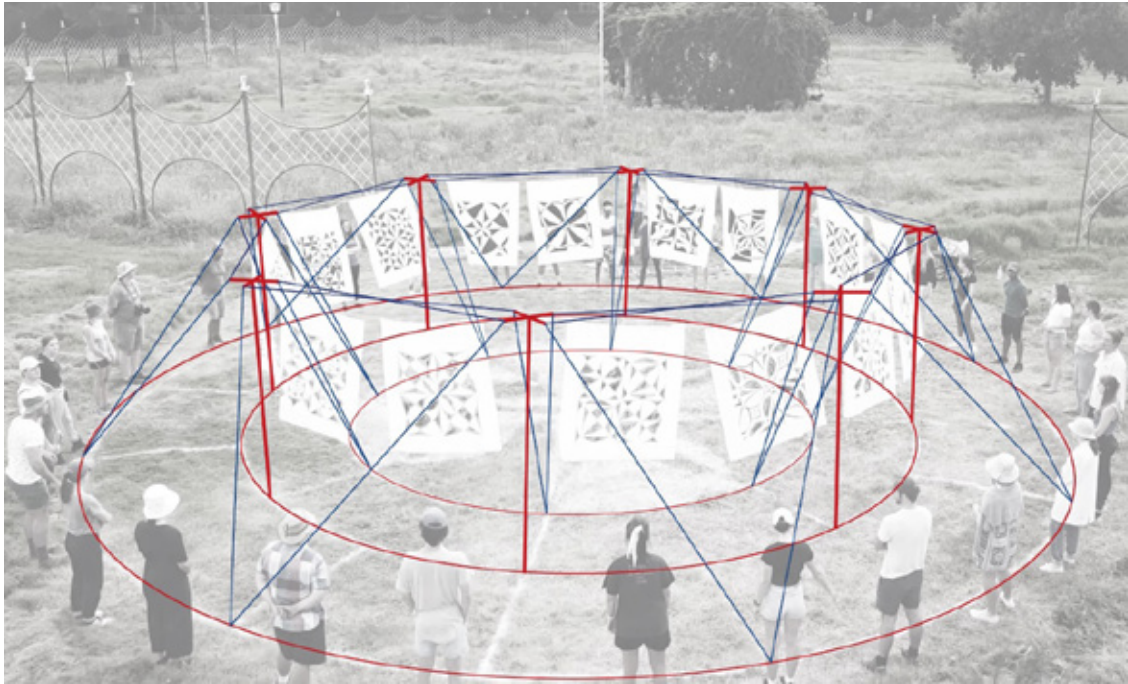


Figure 10
The temporary three-dimensional expression of *Litema* disciplines
used to exhibit contemporary *Litema* motifs
(base photograph by Christie-Ann Groenewald, used with permission and adapted by author).

Remember and reconnect

The first stage asks practitioners to make sense of the situation by “delving into the past to remember, reconnect and heal in the process” (Landman and Makakavhule 2021: 546). The goal is to inquire into the latent disciplines inscribed on the land and question the inceptual reality sustaining these disciplines. The discussion of the disciplines that led to the proclamation and design of the park and the rose garden formed part of this process. From the disdain for the natural ecology, to the imposition of foreign gardening disciplines, to the abandonment of the initial jazz-scheme in favour of yet another foreign gardening discipline, namely the planting of a lawn.

¹¹ The second event took place on 18 March 2022 and 37 architecture students in the honours design studio from the University of the Free State participated. The group did not represent the broader demographics of South Africa and was predominantly composed of white students.

Indeed, it was this failure of “strong moves” that made it clear that, whatever one did as intervention, it should be ephemeral in nature – a fragile move, chalk in the wind. While the events were characterised by their own kind of robust precision, it was a very restrained discipline rooted in a very different cultural tradition. Re-drawing the vanished lines in chalk powder clarified the vast extent of the old garden but rescripting the old shapes with *Litema* infill made it possible to look beyond the prescriptions of the old layout and re-imagine the situation.



Figure 11
Measuring with ephemerality and precision
(photograph by Christie-Ann Groenewald, used with permission).



Figure 12
Measuring and making
(photograph by Christie-Ann Groenewald, used with permission).

Re-imagine and transcend

The second stage encourages the establishment of an inclusive dialogue between old and new. During the two events this intention was enacted by creating conditions for questioning and inviting the blossoming of more ways of knowing; an opportunity to acknowledge that it has once again become too hard to “keep up appearances” at the rose garden. When this happened in 1938, it is interesting to note that the irregular layout of the circles in the original design (figure 13) – what could be argued to be the main “jazz” component – was removed and only the axial radiating lines remained. The resulting layout (figure 14) reminds of the absolutist power systems of the Baroque, but maybe one could even go so far as to read into this the rise of Afrikaner nationalism during the late 1930s and 1940s that contributed to the electoral victory of the National Party in 1948 and the cruel disciplines of the apartheid regime that followed.¹²

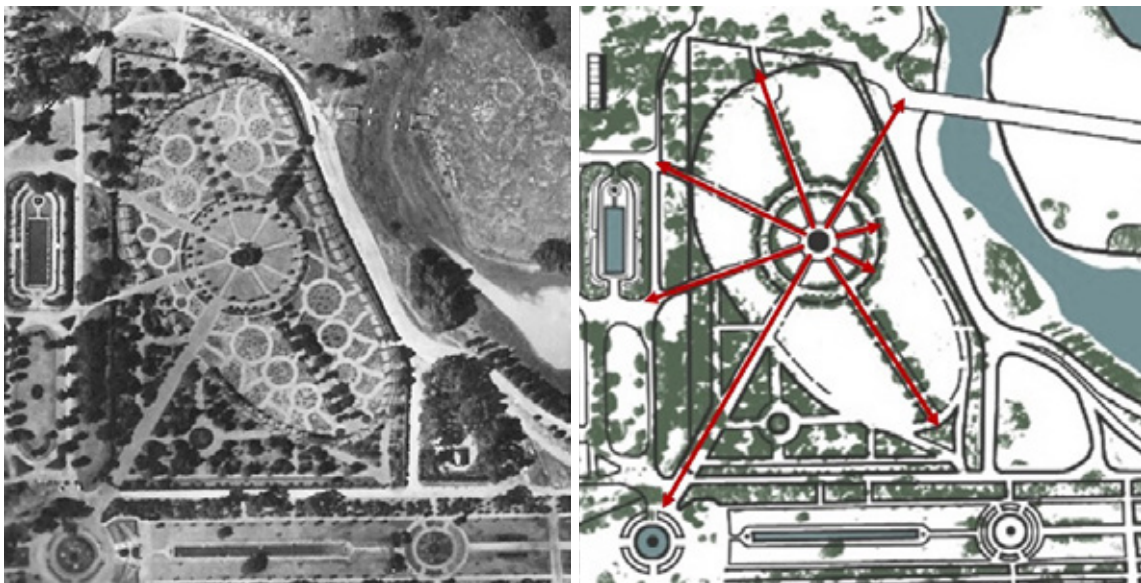


Figure 13 (left)

The difference between the original layout (left) and the design of the 1970s on the right (source: Collection of the FSPAR).

Figure 14 (right)

The Prince's Rose Garden in 1971 (drawing by the author).

Searching for an inclusive dialogue implies searching for inceptual overlaps (figure 15). The fact that the geometry of the original rose garden geometrically “fits” with the disciplines of *Litema* has been mentioned, but it is also important to point out that, from an inceptual perspective, *Litema* offers a different kind of geometric discipline; from the mirrored symmetry and axuality of colonial organisation systems to *Litema*'s inversed symmetries (figure 16)

¹² In this sense, it is interesting to note that the general political groundswell of the time was also having a marked effect in Bloemfontein. Despite the town being the capital of a predominantly Afrikaner-sympathetic province, the Town Council was historically dominated by English speakers. However, the balance of power was slowly shifting during the late 1930s and early 1940s. This trend culminated in the Afrikaans-speaking Nationalists winning the 1946 town council elections, a hundred years after Bloemfontein was founded by a British Resident (Schoeman 1980: 299-302).

governed by a deep-seated circularity and a more sympathetic engagement with the lay of the land. Thus, the goal was to acknowledge the potential for overlaps, but also to venture beyond the pitfalls of cultural appropriation by inceptually drawing on the alternative ways of knowing embedded in the cultural practice.



Figure 15
Finding overlaps while engaging in alternative disciplines
(photograph by Christie-Ann Groenewald, used with permission).



Figure 16
The alternative discipline of inversed symmetries and implied circularity inherent to *Litema*
(base photograph by Christie-Ann Groenewald, used with permission and adapted by author).

In this interstitial space, between the disciplines of colonial expression and the indigenous disciplines of *Litema*, dwells fertile ground. For any rescriptive process to be successful, it is necessary to draw near the new discipline, and let it address one from within its own ordering sway. How does one gain access to this *address*? While participating in the two events, it emerged that the discipline of *Litema* contains its own methodology for appreciating its bodily and *poietic* disciplines. It appears as if the South African architect Heinrich Kammeyer observed the same emergent method in his description of someone practicing *Litema*:

Layer by layer a coat of mud plaster covered the rough surface, and was smoothed over by her hand in rhythmic sweeps as if a child is pacified, the sweep of the hand remained as a pattern of care and reminder. She learnt as child while observing her mother doing the same, and through the touch and feel of the material she understood just when the correct amount of water made her material useful, it will not fall off or crack after application. New layers of plaster applied seasonally to prevent erosion gave the wall its thickness and it's reading of solidity. (Kammeyer 2010: 239)

Kammeyer goes on to make the deliquescent role¹³ of this kind of *poietic* activity even more explicit: “During a process of making, all her senses were combined in an intense bond between herself and the task at hand...” (Kammeyer 2010: 243). It was only when engaging in *poiesis* on the site that participants could willingly subject themselves to the emergent sway of the *address* emanating from alternative disciplines. The act of making is itself a pathway to the openness of listening. Without this kind of engagement, the old disciplines maintain their unchallenged dormant dominance. Without careful making and the resultant need to be saturated with the “content” emanating from the making process – letting it dissolve one’s stony convictions to fluidity – without this gradual deliquescent openness, the intense, inclusive bonds that could be seen as the goal of decolonised landscapes remain inaccessible. In this case, it was primarily amid emplaced *poiesis*, specifically the kind of venturesome goal-defying temporary acts of making described here, that designers could transcend the univocality of colonial landscapes and become open to more inclusive and transformative dialogues.

Transform and renew

The last stage calls for a provocative process aimed at stimulating awareness and the broader participation of stakeholders. This stage has not been achieved in the rose garden events, since the individuals who participated in the events shared a very specific background, namely architecture students; a group that did not represent the broader demographic or economic realities of the urban situation. As such, the two forays into the rescripting of the rose garden are potent, but preparatory work, for a more inclusive participatory process. At the very least, these events reveal that such processes will need more than what is normally described as “public engagement”. It will need public *poiesis*. In the words of CS Studio Architects, a South African firm with many years of experience in public participation projects: “In the process of participation, roleplayers are empowered and they take ownership of their design decisions. However, participation is generally seen only as a social process. This is when it fails. It needs to be underscored by

¹³ Deliquescence usually refers to a chemical reaction in which an exposed material dissolves in the moisture it absorbs from the air, leaving behind a saturated solution. Here, the term is used metaphorically to refer to a kind of *poietic* activity that is deeply open, empathetic and situation-specific in that it absorbs key aspects of the context, dissolves (through exposure and engagement) in it, and leaves a trace as a dense, or saturated, experiential event.

making”.¹⁴ The rose garden events suggest that inclusive, dialogic moments of *poiesis* are very effective at undermining established disciplines in such a way that the heritage landscape may be broadened and densified in acts of venturesome rescription.



Figure 17
Preparatory explorations as inspiration for a process of broader public *poiesis*
(photograph by Christie-Ann Groenewald, used with permission).

Conclusion



Figure 18
Listening, making and measuring as acts of creative rescription
(photograph by Christie-Ann Groenewald, used with permission).

¹⁴ CS Studio Architects, n.d. Our philosophy: participation – empowerment – sustainability. Retrieved from <https://csstudio.co.za/Philosophy.html> on 6 June 2022.

The two events show that, in this case, relying on an ephemeral approach was more appropriate than a permanent intervention, and yielded more evocative outcomes. It made it possible to draw parallels between the short-lived physical impact of the events and the temporal rhythms and more accommodating disciplines embodied in *Litema*. Simultaneously, the evanescent “traces” offered by chalk and temporary structures speak of the restraint and openness of inceptual thinking. These events were acts of listening as much as acts of making; ephemeral marks aiming at new ways to take the measure of an urban memory, while broadening the accessible horizon of associations. For the being of care, it may be most appropriate to measure places through *poiesis* inspired by inceptual thinking. The resultant *poietic* appreciation of the situation is own to the place, but undermines the disciplines previously imposed on the place, which might make it possible to simultaneously preserve and rescript complex regionings of concern. While the activities described here have not managed to engage the broader social reality, and should therefore be seen as preparatory, the hope is that such acts of measuring will make it possible to once more dream about the potential gifts of these kinds of places and invite *more* voices to enter the conversation.

The events described above suggest that the *poietic* measuring and appreciation of place, inspired by inceptually engaging with the disciplines of the place, and cognitive of the disciplines and disciplinary overlaps embedded in proposed interventions, will cultivate the deliquescent openness needed to guard against future acts of univocal assertion. Making as a way to listen, measure and draw near. In rescripting colonial landscapes, the goal should be to expand the heritage landscape by drawing on the intense, inclusive bonds embedded in the care-infused humanity of overlapping disciplines. Absent colonial landscapes, like this nearly forgotten rose garden, constitute shimmering regionings of concern. Hovering between obscurity and recollection, they may entrench our indifference or call forth our care. Indifference can be avoided.

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Art and landscape: a rural *letsema* celebration

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Small rural communities in central parts of South Africa that share social and cultural values thrive on collaborative work, volunteerism, and coming together with acts of *letsema*. The main question is: How can *letsema* celebrations establish pride and accomplishment for rural *litema* wall decoration artists to support the architecture of care and engagement in central parts of South Africa? Past efforts to upgrade traditional earth building by introducing new developments around self-help dwellings can promote contemporary earth-building techniques but seldom provide celebration settings where teacher and learner roles change. Participatory Action Research (PAR) design provides experimental workshops and semi-structured surveys to produce qualitative data with new insight into participants' perceptions of the value and significance of their wall-decoration art. Preliminary findings on perceptions of *litema* artistry value (art) and the social and rural context (landscape) will be discussed as a rural *letsema* celebration (care and engagement). This ongoing Architecture of Care and Engagement (ACE) research project at the University of the Free State (UFS) provides a slow resistance to the eventual disappearance of *litema* practices from rural landscapes of central South Africa.

Keywords: celebration, *letsema*, *litema*, rural wall-decoration

Botaki le mahaeng: mokete oa mahaeng oa letsema

Metse e menyenyane e arolelanang mekhoha ea setso e ile ea atleha mosebetsing oa tšebeliso, boithaopo, le ho kopana hammoho ka diketso tsa letsema. Potso ea bohlokoa ke hore na mekete ea letsema e ka theha motlotlo le katleho joang bakeng sa moetsi oa litema oa mahaeng ho tšehetsa meralo ea tlhokomelo le boitlamo likarolong tse bohareng ba Afrika Boroa? Boiteko ba nakong e fetileng ba ho ntlafatsa moaho oa lefatše ka ho hlahisa dintlafatso tse ncha mabapi le libaka tsa bolulo tsa batho ba ikemetseng li ka khothaletsa mekhoha ea sejoale-joale ea ho aha lefatše, empa ha se hangata lithophiso tsa mekete moo likarolo tsa mosuo le baithuti li fetohang. Moralo oa Participatory Action Research (PAR) o fana ka lithuto le lipatlisiso ho hlahisa lintlha tse nang le kutloisiso e ncha ho lipono tsa bonono mabapi le bohlokoa ba bonono ba bona ba mokhabiso oa lebota. Liphuputso tsa pele mabapi le maikutlo a bohlokoa ba bonono ba litema (bonono) le maemo a sechaba le a mahaeng (sebaka) li bitsoa mokete oa mahaeng oa letsema (tlhokomelo le boitlamo). Morero ona o ntseng o tsoela pele oa lipatlisiso oa Architecture of Care and Engagement (ACE) sekolong sa Yunivesithi ya Freistata (UFS) o liehisa ho nyamela ha mekhoha ea litema libakeng tsa mahaeng a Afrika Boroa.

Mantsoe a bohlokoa: Mokete, *letsema*, *litema*, mokhabiso oa lerako la mahaeng.

Acts of volunteerism are as old as humanity. Individuals have used these acts to show their basic need for association and care towards a group. The group provides relationships around intangible notions such as values with shared meaning. Over time these notions can develop into cultural significance to that group. Traditional homesteads of rural groups in central South Africa, including Lesotho, still depend on a solid relationship with neighbours. Individuals call on the group with the act of *letsema*. The word *letsema*, used in both South Sotho and Setswana languages, explains the act of coming together or working toward a common goal. Traditional home decoration is often a shared act in rural areas, unlike in urban areas of South Africa.

Synonymous to *letsema* is the isiZulu word *ilima*, which is rooted in *uhulima*, which means cultivating the land (Twala 2004: 186). The word *litema* (pronounced: di-te-ma) originates from

the South Sotho term *ho lema*, the verb meaning “to cultivate”. This act is associated with a seasonal landscape in which food crops are produced. If this describes the relationship between nature and man, does *litema* still describe the relationship between South Sotho women and their rural households? According to David Riep (2014: 26, 28-9), *litema* aids in spiritual and ceremonial ventures. This art form’s annual or bi-annual creation has reflected visible facets of life in South Sotho society, aesthetic beauty that creates powerful conduits for *seriti*. This word translates as energy or life force.

This Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) research project called Architecture of Care and Engagement (ACE) at the UFS was conducted to establish if past established notions around *litema* are still associated with seasonal changes (reflected in a predominate rural agricultural landscape), belief systems (ancestral relationships) and the traditional role of women as home (art) makers. Past studies (Gay 1980; Motsepe 1999) and more recent studies reflected on the energy and position of women as art and space makers in domestic earth-constructed dwellings (Kammeyer 2010; Riep 2011, 2014). The ACE project used semi-structured interviews to test whether past findings still offer valid reflections of artists’ traditional associations but also provides qualitative feedback to give insight into the social and self-value of the artists’ practice in context (social landscape). This article discusses the existing and the forming of new relationships with these practices as celebrations of *letsema* found in small, tight-knit communities that share values and beliefs. Values are inter-generational, shared by peer groups from the same class or social standing. The hypothesis is that rural *letsema* (engagement) combined with *litema* can create more positive attitudes towards artists’ practices as part of domestic life.

Early data feedback presented the associations of *letsema* as a *litema* celebration as the result of UFS students’ engagement workshops (service-learning workshops with three groups of 10-18 architecture students per group) aimed at acknowledging the skills of *litema* wall decoration artists. For this article, observations of the rural landscape, seasonal changes, and the social landscape influenced by the rural-urban differences will be made to establish the current associations between art and landscape. Earth building dwelling typologies (architectural), mainly affected by the roof construction with roof finishes, were and still are influenced by the physical and social landscapes. The walls of earth-constructed dwellings are more affected by social landscapes (shared values and culture) linked to perceptions but also reflect the rural landscape’s season, topography, and character (the differences between dry winter and the rainy spring or summer months). Celebrations and festive seasons, of which Easter (Passover) and Christmas are most prominent, also reflect on the character of rural earth-constructed walls.

The following sections will give the background of the Earth Unit (EU) concerned with the neglected earth-constructed heritage of *litema* in the Free State Province. A brief overview of the architecture, community engagement, and perceptions around earth construction will explain why the EU promotes contemporary earth construction. This will be followed by the past studies’ contribution to explaining the links between architecture and landscape, art and landscape, and art and the spiritual world associated with *litema* practices. Artists’ feedback during the workshop activities will be discussed before a short conclusion that reflects on *litema* art, landscape, and architecture as care and engagement to support relationships held within rural acts of *letsema*.

Background

Hassan Fathy (1973: xi) encouraged architects to partner with indigenous earth-building knowledge to contribute by solving technical issues in aesthetic and affordable ways. However, a challenge for educators and researchers in architecture is not only the technical, economic, and aesthetic but also the connection to community involvement (engagement) and perceptions (Hamdi 1985: 45–50).

... if we consider the order (the idea) to be the outer perception and phenomena (the experience) to be the inner perception, then in physical construction, the outer perception and inner perception are intertwined (Holl, Pallasmaa, and Peres-Gomes 2006: 1).

The architect's ability to address communities' perceptions is developed by taking up the challenges of working with people from different backgrounds, cultures, and ages (Jordaan 2011). Sustainable communities need engaged acts that support culture and identity within the economic, social, and ecological spheres. Some South African higher education institutions have taken on this challenge. The ACE project is concerned with the disappearing skills of local traditional earth building, including earth wall decoration art forms such as *litema*. Now in its second year, the study highlights the cultural and architectural significance and the fragile existence of art forms such as *litema*, still practiced by domestic rural women.

Basotho women's role in making domestic spaces in rural parts of the eastern Free State and Lesotho has been documented previously (Casalis 1861; Tyrrel 1971; Knuffel 1975; Motsepe 1999). Furthermore, the cultural value, meaning, and techniques used to make *litema* have been highlighted (Van Wyk 1998). The disappearance of earth-constructed homesteads, as part of the evolution of earth-constructed houses with *litema* decorations in rural areas, shows that this indigenous knowledge system has come under threat (Gay 1980) even before the first popular publication, *The African Mural* by Paul Changuion (1989) appeared. This popular and known visual source briefly mentions the temporal nature of *litema* and earth-constructed dwellings in Lesotho and central parts of South Africa. However, a more substantial contribution from 2008, titled *Litema- Mural Masterpiece A Design Manual* by Carina Mylene Beyer (2008), leans on the 1976 publication by Benedict Lira Mothibe. Mothibe was an art lecturer from the National Teachers' Training College of Lesotho, which documented twenty-nine *litema* designs at the time. In 2003 Mothibe further shared with a booklet donation of an updated contribution of documented *litema* designs to the Central University of Technology.

The most recent studies and literature on the role of Basotho women in rural homesteads briefly mention past *litema* practice, associations, and symbolism (Kammeyer 2010; Riep 2011) but does not provide new data on perceptions associated with *litema* practices. Observation and descriptions of *litema* skills in the eastern Free State and KwaZulu-Natal are mentioned by Heinrich Kammeyer (2010) from 1999 and David Riep (2011) from 2005 to 2010 for Ph.D. studies. Kammeyer investigated the role of the Basotho female in making homes as artefacts through lived experiences as phenomenology in vernacular space-making for architecture. He visited a small selection of homesteads near Ficksburg and Qwa-Qwa in the eastern Free State Province, but no comprehensive mapping of residences was done. Art historian Riep (2011) investigated the role of stylistic artefact characteristics in South Sotho identity. In their investigations, both authors referred to *litema* but did not investigate attitudes linked to contemporary social perceptions of this decorative wall art form.



Figures 1 and 2
UNESCO Chair in Earth Architecture workshop activities in Leh, Ladak, Himalayas India,
attended by Earth Unit staff in 2017
(photograph by the author).

The EU at the UFS has promoted earth construction since 1996. The EU is a UNESCO Earth Architecture member (2003 to date) and often attends international conferences hosted by other UNESCO partners. The UNESCO Chair in *Architectures de terre cultures constructives et development durable* is a network in architecture, constructive cultures, and sustainable local development, which was established in 1998 at CRAterre-ENSAG in Grenoble, France. This network often supports and shares heritage, training, and curriculum development with eight African, nineteen Latin American, six Asian (figures 1 and 2), and six European partners in training centres and technical and academic universities. The EU is concerned about conserving the art and architecture of a colourful earth-constructed heritage in South Africa. Recent projects and research have not provided insight into the current situation or state of earth-constructed homesteads and wall decoration in central parts of South Africa. The UNESCO Chair's heritage advocacy reminded the EU not to just focus on developing and promoting earth construction but to continue research on local earth-constructed heritage.

The study investigates social perceptions influencing traditional *litema* unique to Lesotho and rural parts of the eastern Free State Province. The disappearance of this indigenous knowledge is of great concern from a sustainable built environment and a cultural identity viewpoint. The study aims to establish the state of relationships (current and new) between 1) the social and self-value of *litema*, 2) the context (rural and social landscapes), and 3) the meaning of *litema* practices (past and present). Artistry holds value through its symbols and designs expressed using patterns, relief, available material, and the use of colour. This value is reflected through relationships. These relationships hold guidelines and recommendations for rural heritage and local culture development strategies. These strategies can support the application of contemporary earth construction in all landscapes and are not limited to rural and natural landscapes.

Preliminary findings of the first two aspects (landscape and art) will be discussed in this article under the theme of a rural *letsema* celebration to reflect on engaged relationships formed through the art skills of valued women held by the rural landscape (context).

Landscape, rural dwellings, and *litema*

Influences on dwelling typologies

The South Sotho building culture and dwelling typologies developed over centuries (Frescura 1981, 1985). From an ancient early organic hut shape (*mohlongoa-fatsi*) and a round floor plan with a dominant timber roof structure with reeds and thatch typology, it further evolved into a rectangular plan with a pitched timber pole roof structure with thatch. Decades later, the roof structure became less prominent because of corrugated iron introduced by early colonists. Later galvanized corrugated iron continued to provide a low-pitched roof with an exposed parapet roof detail and more exposed earth walls that needed more maintenance. This highveld type had load-bearing walls, with several pole beams or just overlapped corrugated sheets, which were placed directly onto the load-bearing-earth walls that helped anchor the roof (with a slight overhang to the back of the dwelling). Figure 3 shows a small rural homestead with three dwelling types of different house typologies, developed over centuries and influenced by the availability of building materials, both natural and manmade, introduced to southern Africa by the northern hemisphere. Other landscapes previously associated with the development of dwelling typologies are considered within this investigation.



Figure 3

Rural homestead with three different Basotho houses typologies in Magolokweng near Harrismith (photograph by the author).

Several aspects still influence the typology of a rural dwelling and different types of landscapes: (a) the natural landscape influenced by available thatch grass and reeds and timber poles for structure roof and roof covering, and (b) the socio-economic landscape influenced by employment, ownership and land tenure, and (c) the cultural landscape where homeowners choose their preferred house typology based on preference, traditional beliefs and social norms. Other aspects of the physical landscape, geology, and morphology also influence house typologies. An important factor will be soil properties suitable for making earth walls. Furthermore, soil types and colours influence block making, plastering, and decoration in different colours and textures. This connection or relationship is translated into where to find suitable material for building and decorating purposes.

Rural or urban landscapes influence the building culture and material stabilization

Rural dwellings constructed with local sands and natural clays, and stabilized with cow and horse dung, are traditionally perceived as both a male and female domain of house construction, with the decoration mainly performed by females. These humble dwellings associated with poverty (Bosman 2015) stand in contrast with the preferred and aspiring “modern” burnt brick dwellings stabilized with cement and dressed in chemical paints (traditionally perceived as a male-only domain of house construction). These traditional building culture notions are still influenced by the type of stabilization used. If clay and dung stabilization is used, women will take responsibility for it. If cement stabilization is used, men will be responsible for the construction. The seasonal changes reflected in the landscape should also be considered with the building culture.

Seasonal changes in the landscape



Figure 4
Rural houses in a dormant winter landscape in Magolokweng near Harrismith
(photograph by the author).

In the winter rural landscape of the cold interior of central South Africa, the rural houses blend and reflect the mood of the grey and brown colours of below zero-degree Celsius winter temperatures (figure 4). As a blank canvas, the earth-coloured walls await a new and different *litema* design. The canvas is sometimes accompanied by a 200-400mm darker band (*Banta*) in charcoal or black-coloured clay on the splashback (the bottom of all walls) and the corners of the dwelling. The *banta* is at the top of the parapet wall and below the roof overhang on the top of a wall (figure 5). This canvas reflects on the time before an event or celebration or indicates a recent change in the season. Then within a few days, weeks, or months, the character of the walls can change dramatically (figure 6). *Litema* can be prepared in a relatively short time of a few days, depending on the scale of the dwelling and the complexity of the *litema* patterns. These patterns are colorful and change once or twice a year depending on events, availability of material, and paint, but also on the energy and mood of the artists. It also serves as a reminder of the passage of time (Riep 2014: 28). Time is reflected in the seasons and changes in nature, seen in the landscape. This can be used to announce a birth in the family, the death of a loved one, an upcoming wedding, or the arrival of Easter or Christmas weekends. These celebrations are associated with preparations by women in households.



Figures 5 and 6
Rural houses in the winter landscape in Magolokweng near Harrismith
(photograph by the author).

Litema and the female artist

In many cultures across the African continent, women are associated with domestic practices and are closely tied to domestic traditions. Artistic focus in many African cultures revolves around women’s connection to fertility and the cycle of life and birth. This connection is further emphasized when one considers the earth a “mother”, which is inherently female. Women’s ability to provide and gather resources has been addressed throughout history and is often expressed through contemporary African art and architecture (Riep 2014: 32-3). The *litema* artists utilize four primary techniques of engraving, creating relief mouldings, mosaics, and painting murals. The geometric patterns appeared inside dwellings, and only in the 19th century did they appear on the exteriors of dwellings (Frescura 1981; Riep 2014: 28).



Figures 7 and 8
An example of different natural clay colours used for *litema* wall decoration on a rural homestead,
Clear Water Farm near Warden
(photographs by the author).

Litema works are performed upon a 2-5mm wet (plastic) plaster, called *dagha*, made from local sand, clay, water, and manure and hand smeared onto the previous and faded design. Figure 7 shows the mixing of cattle manure with yellow clay soil from a nearby source. The dwelling in figure 8 has a *litema* scratched surface finished and in a light-brown and red-brown clay with a

prominent black band top and bottom in clay mixed and coloured with burned-out tire ash. The side and back façades have a lighter two-tone contrast with no relief or textured patterns. The yellow soil was transported and collected for the artist by carrying it over a distance. *Morella* refers to all different natural clay (figure 8) or brightly painted designs (distemper or commercial acrylic paints) (Figure 10); depending on supply and individual choice, it is reserved or restricted to the main façade of a dwelling. Distemper powder is limited to five colors (figure 9) mixed with and stabilized thin maize porridge (starch), while other artists use cow's milk to stabilize it (fatty acid). The dwelling in figure 10 shows the short side façade in the distemper. White acrylic water-based paint is also mixed with a much wider variety of coloured tints, as demonstrated by the more extended façade of the dwelling in figure 10. Artists can seldom afford to buy these paint products.



Figures 9 and 10
An example of *morella* distemper stabilized with soft maize porridge or milk on a rural homestead, Clear Water Farm near Warden (photographs by the author).

The colours with patterns or the absence of decoration are evident in the earth-plastered walls of mainly, but not exclusive to, South Sotho dwellings in rural homesteads. Many women keep sketchbooks of photos of the designs for the murals they have created. New designs are recorded, often consisting of historical symbols developed by past ancestors or *badimo* (Riep 2014: 18). Even though much attention is put on the *litema* techniques and designs, the initial step of resurfacing the home to make a smooth surface is essential. The plaster mixture resurfaces the exposed earth blocks in two rough layers of clay and cattle manure (figure 11).



Figures 11, 12 and 13
An example of a rough layer (*parra*) to key well with the following smoother layers before *litema* can be designed with or without *morella* on the dry final layer (photographs by the author).

A second or third smoother layer of a coloured clay mixture (if available) is added before the final thinner, and a smoother layer (figure 12) is applied to the dry walls. For the last layer, a plaster of coloured clay plaster with horse manure (if available) is preferred for its more refined texture. If paint or distemper is available, then colourful patterns are painted on the facades (figure 13). Riep (2014: 28) believes these materials not only create a smooth surface for artistic decoration but are also embedded with decisive spiritual significance. This ongoing study must test if generalized literature notions are widespread.

Land, landscape, and Letsema or Ilima as collective participation

Collective participation in communities is traced back to the period when African people lived in agrarian societies (Twala 2004: 186). Land was the main factor of production, and the growing of food crops for subsistence was a significant social and economic activity. Each family had a piece of land they lived on and could cultivate. An early finding of the study provided a respondent's comment on the *letsema* group type of participation associated with working together, which shows care and celebration (*mokete*). During *letsema* or *ilima*, members of different families would move from one family's land to the next, collectively cultivating it. This act of rural participation is not limited to food production but is also visible in domestic tasks and *litema* practice. The following section will explain the method of the study.

Method

This social study is experimental and practical and is concerned with the current perceptions around the disappearing art of *litema* on vernacular earth-constructed dwellings in central parts of South Africa. The study supports and celebrates the role of women in rural areas as a conservation effort of local traditional art using experimental research on architectural place-making (phenomenology).

The research method with a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design inquiry involves researchers and participants working together to “understand a problematic situation and change it for the better”.¹ This method includes activities such as service-learning workshops (experienced as a *letsema* celebration) between staff and students with artists.

On arrival, a short introduction meeting presented the aim of the workshop activities to artists and participants. Shortly after, engaging workshop activities started with the staff, students, women, and children of the community. The earth-constructed wall of artists' dwellings, in most cases also the owners, were used to decorate in *litema*. The artists (respondents) instructed the staff and students. Afterward, the artists were interviewed by staff and students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Sesotho, IsiZulu, and English. Questions included demographic information, the background of the artist, earth-building skills, knowledge of available material for earth construction, and the meaning of *litema*. The language barrier was a challenge. Only a few staff and students could understand or speak Sesotho or IsiZulu. Despite this, communication was done with body language, facial expressions, and through the children who spoke English.

¹ IDS. 2022. Institute of development Studies. *Participatory Methods*. [online]: 1. <https://www.participatorymethods.org/glossary/participatory-action-research> [Accessed: 12 January 2022].

Specific questions on the perceptions around the future of the artistry were asked. It utilizes critical theoretical constructs based on the Social Learning Theory (the concept of modelling or learning by observing behaviour). The process is modelled on past experiences of the EU.

Eastern Free State homesteads at Duikersfontein Farm (near Paul Roux), Clear Water Farm (near Warden) and Sekgutlong Farm situated in the Slabberts district, 25km south of Bethlehem, were visited. The workshop activities and surveys conducted in June 2021 at three different sites strengthened and confirmed the cultural significance of *litema*, intergenerational knowledge, and skills.

The discipline of architecture is fortunate because it provides tangible experiences that sensitize researchers to work *with* rather than *in* the built environment. The EU's primary aim or main project is to promote contemporary earth construction techniques and environmentally produced innovations through research, teaching, and general training.

The ACE project specifically promotes indigenous building practices elsewhere in South Africa since it addresses the loss of local heritage while reflecting on the use of local materials, the cultural significance, symbolism, and the identity of the Basotho people. The dissemination of the ACE project makes provision for a future exhibition consisting of text narrative and photos of activities as posters together with plaster panels prepared after *litema* practices were completed on the earth walls. In some cases, the plaster panels reflect the *litema* designs on the dwellings on which the female students worked together with the *litema* artists (home-owners). The following section reflects on three homestead households at Duikerfontein Farm as short case studies descriptions and discussions.

Findings and discussion

The semi-structured interviews could not find any of the eighteen respondents that linked or associated the art of *litema* (SeSotho) or *ndima* (IsiZulu) to cultivating the land *ho lema* or the verb meaning "to cultivate". Not all respondents knew or used the word *litema*. To describe the art, some Sesotho-speaking artists used different words to describe it as, a) *patrone* (in Sekgutlong) borrowed from the Afrikaans word for patterns; b) *ukusinda* (applying earth and manure mix to walls used in Warden); and *litema* was used by most artists at Duikerfontein.

The word *morella* as painted parts of *litema* was not used by all respondents. It is unclear if the reference to *diranta*, *rantha*, or *rands* (as in Duikersfontein) is the same as what most referred to as the colourful *morella*-painted patterns. *Litema*, in all cases, explained the relief scratch work without brightly coloured painted parts. Some used the word *belt* or *banta* to describe the dark or black strip at the bottom and the top positions around dwellings. The following sections will give short descriptions and discussions of engagements at three artists' homesteads in Duikersfontein, where the reference to *letsema* was observed.

Study: House Faso



Figure 14
House Nhlapo, Duikersfontein Farm near Paul Roux
(photograph by the author).

House Faso belonged to an IsiXhosa-speaking artist, Zandiwe Faso, living within this predominantly South Sotho community. The Faso homestead provided a glimpse of a robust multilingual and multicultural society. The women and children of the homestead, who were slightly reserved on day one, welcomed all back on the second day with open arms. On the first day of work, the cold, shivering hands were met with an invitation inside to sit by a fire with a cup of coffee. The homestead had a large yard, the main house (figure 14), and a backhouse shed. The main house consisted of rooms accessed only outside in a linear arrangement. The house was made using only earth construction techniques and consisted of a large plinth, thick exterior walls, and a sheet metal roof anchored down with rocks.

As a child Zandiwe learned *litema* from her mother and has continued practicing the skill during the holidays. The chosen *litema* patterns were explained as an homage to the artist's mother. However, the creative process was intuitive, testing out the colours on a piece of timber. The wall plastering was done with a mix of clay, soil, and cow manure, and the *litema* patterns were drawn with a fork. The *morella* paint was applied with conventional paintbrushes. The joy that the *litema* and *morella* activities brought to the homestead was evidenced when the ladies broke out in spontaneous dance upon its completion.

The interviewers did not ask respondents specific questions about the landscape. A strong association exists between the surrounding landscapes' topography and artisans know where to find suitable material. The clay is necessary to bind the sand particles together. Without enough clay, earth plaster cannot be plastic or reach dry strength to stick to other earth elements like earth blocks. If too much clay is in the plaster, it will form too many cracks. The manure fibres will control the number of cracks forming since it stabilizes the plaster between the wet and dry states. The questions asked on where the raw material for earth construction and *litema* practice could be found, in all cases, referred to specific places in the landscape where different coloured clays, manure from cattle, or horses were collected. The artists mentioned sites within 1 to 10

kilometres of their homesteads in all cases. Some artists explained that the sources are “... more than 10km ... it is very far ... we walk ... we take buckets and wear them on our heads” to get the material back to the homesteads. This reflects on well-informed raw material sources for the art and practice associated with earth-building and *litema*.

Study: House Nhlapo

Suzan Nhlapo, a young wife and mother, has lived in this beautiful homestead for four years. The homestead consists of a few small earth-constructed and corrugated iron buildings. A one-bedroom house is also used for traditional ceremonies. The house was freshly dressed in an intricate floral *litema* pattern (figure 15). After it dried, the participants helped to paint *morella* colours to change the house’s character. Most of the decorated earth-constructed homes in Duikersfontein had two-tone clay plastered *litema* on the back and side façades and *morella* on the front façade surrounding one or several door entrances. The experience was nostalgic for some participants and reminded them of a past with rural smells and sounds.



Figure 15
Two different earth-constructed dwellings at House Nhlapo, Duikersfontein Farm near Paul Roux (photograph by the author).

For Nhlapo, *litema* still has a spiritual function. She has a house within her homestead where the *litema* art is more intricate than the other homestead buildings. The house is a sacred structure where she performs her spiritual practices and communicates with her ancestors. Her intricate *litema* designs on this structure create a sense of hierarchy and are the heart of the homestead. In this building, flowers are drawn on the walls, which she said embodies femininity and beauty. On another dwelling in the homestead, family member Mary Nhlapho used her pots, pans, and spoons (as templates) as inspiration (Figure 15), which she painted on the façades. She states that these images symbolize everlasting nourishment. She is a spiritual figure within her community and helps disclose messages between individuals and their ancestors. She believes she is a link between the realms of the living and the dead.

Study: House Molikidi



Figure 16
House Molikidi, Duikersfontein Farm near Paul Roux
(photograph by the author).

At the time of the survey, Linah Molikidi was one of the most respected elders in the Duikersfontein community (figure 16). At first, the whole family was shy but welcoming. Most participants used body language and facial expressions to overcome the language barrier. The caring women ensured they were warm and comfortable in the cold and wet conditions on the first day. Everyone laughed and chatted on the second and third days while working on the murals of the houses. Participants reflected on a unique sense of community. All talked and looked at each other's work, helping where they could. The children would run around excited and gathered in small groups to see how the women and students progressed with the decorations.

The workshop activities created an excellent mood for celebration. One respondent Alina Mokoena in Duikersfontein referred to “the thing that happened just now, is more like *letsema*, ... you call upon the people and prepare meals. After that, the people begin working when they did all the work, then they feast.” This helped the research team define the engagement with students and artists as working together (*letsema*) and as a celebration (one aim of the project formulated) even before sites were investigated for the project.

Leach (2002: 1) reminds researchers that the first level of interpretation is on the surface, which is the product of “deeper underlying forces” to be understood later. The ACE project aims to acknowledge *litema* as an opportunity to connect student training (service-learning) to the workshops as a *Litema Letsema Mokete (a working-together celebration)*.

South Sotho religion and spirituality

South Sotho peoples, much like other African cultures, believe that one's ancestors (*badimo*) provide a link (Riep 2011: 356) between mortals and God (*Modimo*). Many contemporary South Sotho individuals still perform activities that involve various arts like singing (*koma*), dancing (*mokete*), performing poetry (*dethoko*), and creating mural art (*litema*). Many South Sotho believe that if these practices are not fulfilled, dysfunction and misfortune are invited into society and can affect the fertility of the land

Among South Sotho, women are considered one of the portals between the mortal and supernatural. The study's preliminary findings partially supports this notion. In the past, *litema* murals could be explained as prayers in paint (Riep 2014: 28). The study's preliminary findings could not support this, unequivocally.

All respondents confirmed that their practice reflected *seriti*, defined by "dignity" that holds the character of the place as reflected in the care that the owners instil through *litema*. This description for some Sesotho-speaking artists referred to cultural "spiritual gifts". If interviewers had to explain *seriti* to IsiZulu and IsiXhosa artists, then they confirmed that their practice showed care and dignity with their practice, for their dwellings. Most, but not all, associated their practice with *balimo*, which holds a memory or connection with their ancestors. Keep in mind that some respondents were not Sesotho speaking. Most artists learned the skill from their mothers, aunts, or grandmothers, but not all confirmed a continued link or relationship to past relatives or ancestors. For three artists (also Sesotho speaking), *litema* is just beautiful patterns still used to decorate their dwellings for the aesthetic values reflected in Basotho culture.

The cycle of life and death in South Sotho culture

Many South Sotho people say "his house has fallen" after a man's wife dies (Riep 2014: 26, 28). This concept, among many others, exemplifies how strongly women are connected to their homes. South Sotho dwellings can be considered microcosms of women's bodies. According to one of the key ideas, the house is a symbolic womb. The entryway of a rural South Sotho home is often marked with a reed when a baby is born in the dark interior. The baby has only truly entered the physical realm when brought out of the doorway (the symbolic birth canal). The child first sees the light of day by passing through the reed threshold. All respondents confirmed their wish to pass on their practice to their children or a younger generation, not just family.

Lineage and Tradition

The practice of creating *litema* is rooted in the frameworks of lineage and tradition in a multifaceted way. The method and specific designs one may make with these processes are often passed down from generation to generation. Many women will learn the art of creating *litema* murals from their mothers at a young age. During the workshop activities of the ACE project, the artists were pleased to teach the art to other young women of different cultural groups (figure 17). The learning that occurred through the design, replication, and creative making process of *litema* made a lasting impact on the students. The project and workshop's theme of care and engagement strongly impacted the students, reflected in their attitudes, actions, and formal feedback. These reflections from students will not be discussed in this article.



Figure 17
A *litema* artist that shares her skill with a young Afrikaans-speaking participant
Sekgutlong Farm near Slabberts
(photograph by the author).

Conclusion

Hendrik Auret (2019) states that care is not a “good deed” but about how we, humans are. This engagement can make a difference by caring for the natural, social, and human-made environments in Southern Africa and Africa as a continent. Traditional home building (craft and decoration) in South Africa is well documented throughout our different cultures’ long and colourful history. New findings on the current state of perceptions around *litema* practices in central South Africa will be reflected in an exhibition (Figures 17 & 18). The PAR design method focuses on social change that promotes democracy and challenges inequality to “liberate” participants to have a greater awareness of their situation and to take action.

A South Sotho homestead is explicitly built for a family. Women are appropriate artists for this practice, which serves as a link to historical female roles as cultivators. It is then passed down from generation to generation, like other culturally significant practices. The existing indigenous knowledge of working with sun-dried earth blocks and earth plasterwork is celebrated (figure 18).

Furthermore, this project method and activities support local vernacular domestic art and cultural engagement. African vernacular architecture and domestic art should be conserved and celebrated as valued skills of rural women artists whose *litema* and *morella* practices are slowly disappearing from the Free State landscape. In so doing, the art is kept alive and provides more resistance to the evolutionary disappearance from the Free State landscape.

Future investigations on the impact of these workshops and the establishment of formal relationships (public-private partnerships) on practical promoting guidelines around the relevance of *litema* art can be conducted.



Figure 18

A litema artist with a participant that shows a plaster panel as part of a future panel exhibition that complements the house design, Clear Water Farm near Warden (photograph by the author).

Many families will continue living in an earth-constructed indigenous-built homesteads in rural parts of South Africa for some time. The conservation of earth construction heritage using environmentally friendly building techniques, including wall decoration, should be formulated in regional strategies. These strategies can protect and develop earth building and mural decorations while celebrating the artisans and artists who sustain these earth construction skills in South Africa. This dynamic architectural practice is evidence of the continuity and change found in Basotho-visual culture (explained as *letsema* or *ilima* in the eastern Free State) that can become more than a rural but a national celebration of art and landscape for South Africa. This *Litema Letsema*, as a coming-together celebration, can establish pride and accomplishment for rural wall decoration artists that will support the architecture of care and engagement in central parts of South Africa to contribute to contemporary applications and the development of earth-building practices.

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Sites, shapes and status of some historic forts on Africa's south and east coasts

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In this study, the spatial relationships of five forts located on Africa's eastern and southern seaboard are investigated in terms of landscape, cityscape and seascape. Constructed between 1560 and 1820, the five forts in chronological order are Fort São Sebastião (Ilha de Moçambique), Fort Jesus (Mombasa), Castle of Good Hope (Cape Town), Zanzibar Fort (Zanzibar) and Lamu Fort (Lamu). A review of relevant literature supports in-situ observations. Except for the Castle of Good Hope, which is under application, the other case studies are on the World Heritage List, which is an indication of their value as architectural artefacts.

Keywords: Castle of Good Hope, cityscape, Fort Jesus, Fort São Sebastião, Zanzibar Fort, Lamu Fort, landscape, seascape, World Heritage List

Terreine, vorms en stand van sommige historiese forte aan Afrika se suid- en ooskuste

Hierdie studie ondersoek die ruimtelike verhoudings van vyf forte op Afrika se oostelike en suidelike seekus in terme van landskap, stadsbeeld en seelandskap. Die vyf forte in kronologiese volgorde, wat tussen 1560 en 1820 gebou is, is Fort São Sebastião (Ilha de Moçambique), Fort Jesus (Mombasa), Kasteel van Goeie Hoop (Kaapstad), Zanzibar Fort (Zanzibar) en Lamu Fort (Lamu). 'n Oorsig van relevante literatuur ondersteun in-situ waarnemings. Behalwe vir die Kasteel van Goeie Hoop, wat onder aansoek is, is die ander gevallestudies op die Wêrelderfenislys, wat 'n aanduiding van hul waarde as argitektoniese artefakte is.

Sleutelwoorde: Kasteel van Goeie Hoop, stadsbeeld, Fort Jesus, Fort São Sebastião, Zanzibar Fort, Lamu Fort, landskap, seelandskap, Wêrelderfenislys

One of the first identified cities, namely Jericho, already featured “massive defences” as early as 8000 BCE (Morris 1994: 19). These massive defences are an indication that communities have relied on fortifications for almost 99% of the time since the beginning of urbanisation. The fate of communities – sometimes even societies – was determined by whether fortifications prevailed or failed. Therefore, it is not surprising that, over the past two millennia, some of the most prominent intellectuals engaged with fortifications. In circa 27 BCE, the Roman military engineer and architect Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (c. 90–c. 20 BCE), better known as Vitruvius, wrote the first known treatise on construction entitled *De Architectura* (*On Architecture*). In Chapter V (The City Walls), Vitruvius recommends that towns should have a circular form (1960: 20). Morris (1994: 169) suggests that the illustrator's interpretation of the fortified town's plan depicted in figure 1 (originally from an unpublished treatise dated 1598) might have been influenced by “emerging Renaissance theories”.

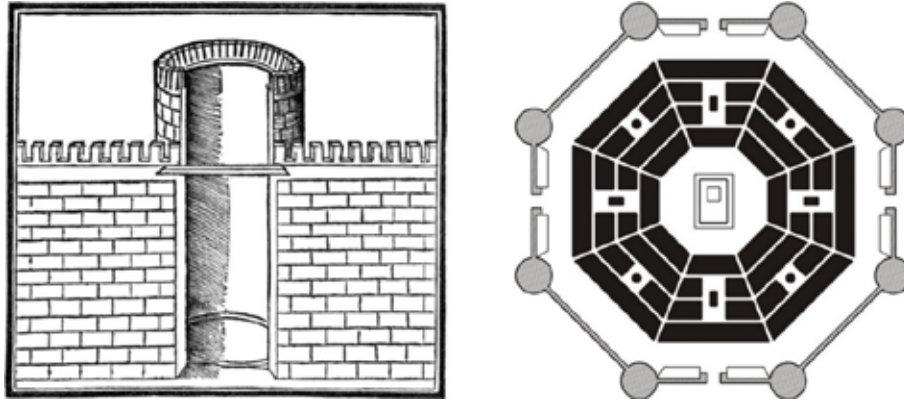


Figure 1
Vitruvius' detail of city walls (drawing by Fra Giocondo, Venice, 1511,
in the public domain from wikisource.org)
and Vitruvius' ideal city plan (drawing by the author).

Vitruvius' guidelines are evident in castles such as the Krak des Chevaliers, a Crusader castle in Syria and one of the most important preserved medieval castles in the world. During the mid-fifteenth century, the invention of the cannon changed the form of fortifications from high and compact, to low and sprawling with greater use of ditches and earth ramparts that would absorb and disperse the impact of cannon fire. This form is called the bastion fort, also referred to as a star fort or *trace italienne*. Kaufmann and Kaufmann (2019: 198) credit Leon Battista Alberti's (1404-1472) treatise for describing this form. However, although Alberti was apparently the first to describe the elements of fortification formally in "precise mathematical terms: shape, measurements, relationships, proportions", Bevilacqua and Williams (2014: 523) point out that all these patterns were present in earlier designs by Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446). The bastion fort was dominant from the mid-sixteenth-to mid-nineteenth centuries (figure 2). Medieval compact, high forms are generally referred to as castles, and the low, spread-out Renaissance types, as forts.

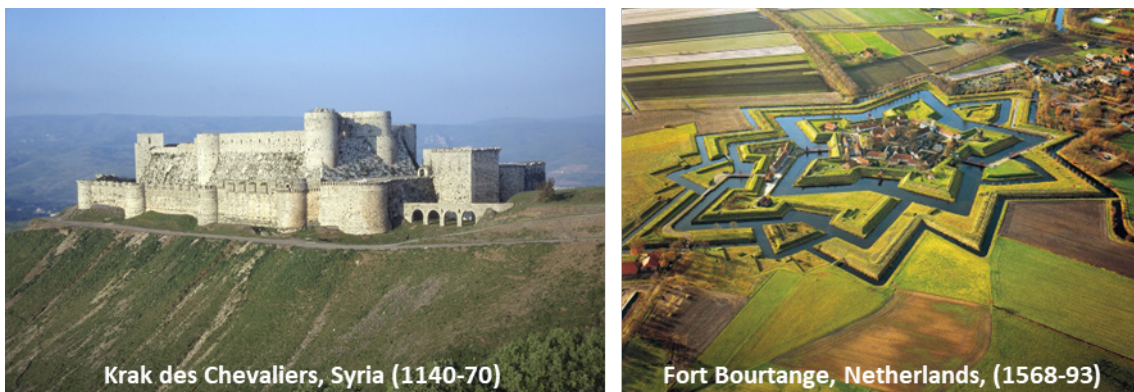


Figure 2
Krak de Chevaliers (photograph by Gianfranco Gazzetti from
Wikimedia Commons in public domain)
and Fort Bourtange (from Wikimedia Commons in public domain).

Some of the best-known architects of the Middle Ages contributed to the development of forts. In 1507, Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) designed and built a Renaissance fortification called Rivellino in the Swiss city of Locarno (figure 3). It is still intact today and features technical innovations – theoretical and tactical – that remained broadly relevant for about 400 years until the introduction of airplanes and mechanised warfare. Michelangelo (1475–1564) took from 1528 to 1529 to design the fortifications of Florence. Vincenzo Scamozzi (1548–1616), who completed many of Palladio’s projects after his death, in 1598, designed what is arguably the definitive Renaissance fortress town called Palmanova. Even Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), one of the greatest figures in Western Philosophy, lectured on the science of fortifications at the University of Königsberg (Grayling 2019: 258). In 1879, the architect, theorist and writer, Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879), who restored the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris in 1844, published his treaty on fortifications, entitled *Military Architecture*, which was a lavishly illustrated review of the history of fortifications. It is perhaps because of the involvement of so many well-known figures that Hirst (1997: 15) suggests that “[t]he Renaissance fortress is therefore of considerable interest in terms of architectural form”.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century, developments in artillery technology and firepower made even these low forts obsolete. A new generation started to appear, mostly underground now, with retractable cupolas housing the cannon.



Figure 3
Model of Leonardo’s Rivellino of 1507 in the Swiss city of Locarno
(in the public domain from Wikimedia Commons).¹

The fortresses under study are situated on Africa’s eastern and southern coast (figure 4). Merchants from the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf – traveling with the seasonal monsoons – had been visiting the coast of Eastern Africa since early CE, trading in slaves, leopard skins, tortoiseshell and ivory. In the tenth century, they started to build a chain of settlements. Eventually, the Swahili culture emerged from contact and intermarriage with the

¹ Model built by Ermenegildo Menighetti in 1952–1953. In the Museum of Science and Technology of Milan, dedicated to Leonardo da Vinci.

indigenous population, probably in the Lamu region, which was predominantly African, Islamic and urban. Other Swahili settlements included Pate, Mombasa, Malindi, Pemba, Zanzibar and the Mafia Islands. By 1498, Vasco da Gama reached the coast of Eastern Africa and by 1507, the Portuguese controlled trade in the region around Muscat and along most of the Swahili coast. After recapturing Muscat in 1650, the Omanis continued to pursue the Portuguese. Zanzibar subsequently came under the Sultanate's control in 1696 and when Fort Jesus finally fell in 1698, the Omanis controlled all of the East African coast. After that, Mozambique was the only Portuguese stronghold in the region. Further south, the Dutch established a supply station for their merchant ships at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. The British annexed the Cape in 1806, and Oman and Zanzibar became British Protectorates in 1890.



Figure 4
Locality plan of the case studies. The numbering indicates their sequence in the discussion (drawing by the author).

Sources of information and research method

As forts supposedly had a common purpose, which was to protect against attack, their sites and shapes inevitably determined their effectiveness. However, the case studies represent a number of shapes and various ways of integrating the buildings to the site. The Dutch, Omanis and Portuguese applied specific codified design principles, but while they were all located near the ocean, they engaged not only with the seascape, but also with the landscape and the cityscape in different ways.

Literature, as well as in-situ observations during site visits, provided this information.² The literature broadly followed three parallel streams, albeit with considerable overlap. One stream constituted the geopolitical history of the area. Here the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) series on *The General History of Africa* (edited by Ade Ajayi 1998 and Ogot 1999), as well as publications, such as *Port Cities and Intruders* (Pearson

² The author visited and photographed all the fortresses that were chosen as case studies.

1998), *Building Colonialism* (Rhodes 2014) and *The Indian Ocean* (Sheriff and Ho 2014), offered background knowledge and informed the short historical overview above. The second stream was locality specific, and the most pertinent sources are cited in the sections describing the case studies. The Zamani project published valuable 3D models, panorama tours, and the plans of some case studies. Zamani will hopefully survey the outstanding ones shortly.³ The third stream pertains to fortifications and weaponry. *Castle to Fortress* (Kaufmann and Kaufmann 2019) and *The Military Revolution* (Parker 1996) are only two of a host of authoritative sources in this field. John Guilmartin's (2020) contribution to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, entitled *Military technology* is particularly comprehensive. The research method was a comparative description and analysis of the five case studies, broadly following the sequence depicted in figure 5. The aim was to determine how the site – and siting – and the shape of each of the fortresses responded to the landscape, cityscape or seascape.

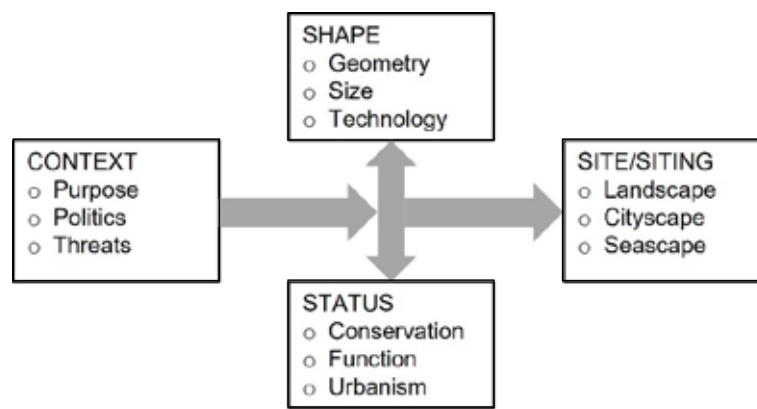


Figure 5
Elements and flow of the study (the author).

Case Number 1: Fort São Sebastião

The Fort of São Sebastião is the oldest complete fort still standing in sub-Saharan Africa. The fort is situated on the northern end of the Stone Town on the Island of Mozambique (figure 6), which is 3,8km from the mainland (figure 7). Construction by the Portuguese began in 1558 and it took approximately 50 years to complete. The Island of Mozambique was settled by the Portuguese, initially as a resupply station for their ships to and from Goa in India. It also had a large hospital. Until the end of the nineteenth century Mozambique Island was the capital of Portugal's East African project, after which it was moved to Lourenço Marques, now known as Maputo (Lavies 2012: 9).

The plan shows four irregular bastions in a form fitted to the outline of the site (figure 8), with the north-eastern bastion having been cut short to allow for an existing chapel. Built in 1522, the chapel is considered to be the oldest European building in the southern hemisphere. A *cordon sanitaire* approximately 400 m deep separates the fort from the Stone Town. The

³ The Zamani Project is a non-profit research group from the University of Cape Town that produces three-dimensional digital documentation of tangible cultural heritage. The imagery is available on www.zamaniproject.org.

Dutch unsuccessfully attacked it three times although they plundered and destroyed the town. At present, visitors must buy tickets at the museum, which is in the Stone Town, and arrange for a guide. It is better to study the fort on one's own beforehand as the guides generally only have superficial knowledge of the fortress (personal experience).

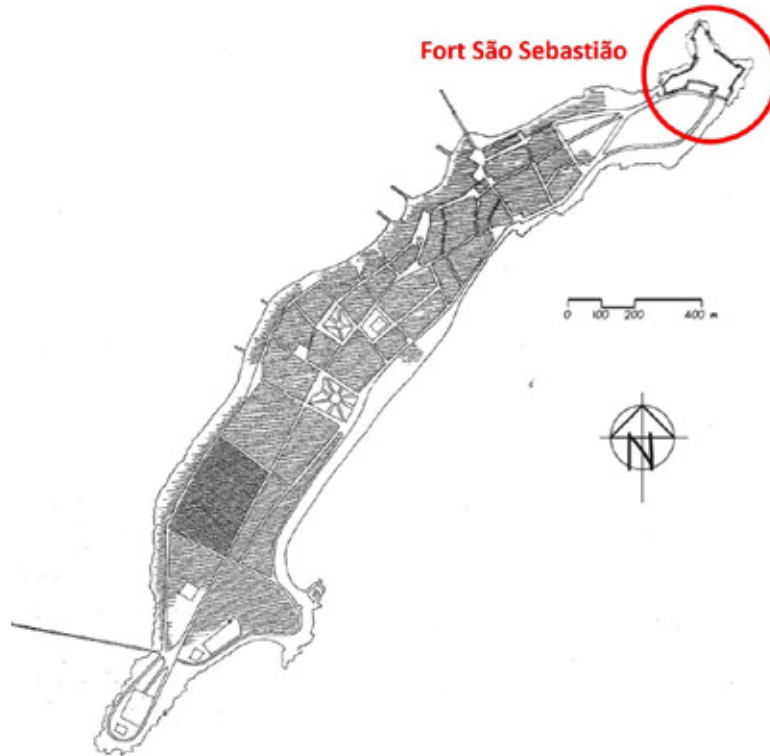


Figure 6
Locality plan of Fort São Sebastião, Ilha de Moçambique
(adapted from Aarhus School of Architecture).⁴



Figure 7
Jakob van der Schley and Jacques Nicolas Bellin. Antique copperplate map, 1747.
Fort São Sebastião, Mozambique Island
(purchased from Alamy on 2021/12/24).

⁴ Aarhus School of Architecture. 1986. Ilha de Moçambique: Report 1982–1985. Denmark: Aarhus School of Architecture. Unpublished report for the Secretariat of State for Culture – Mozambique: 212.

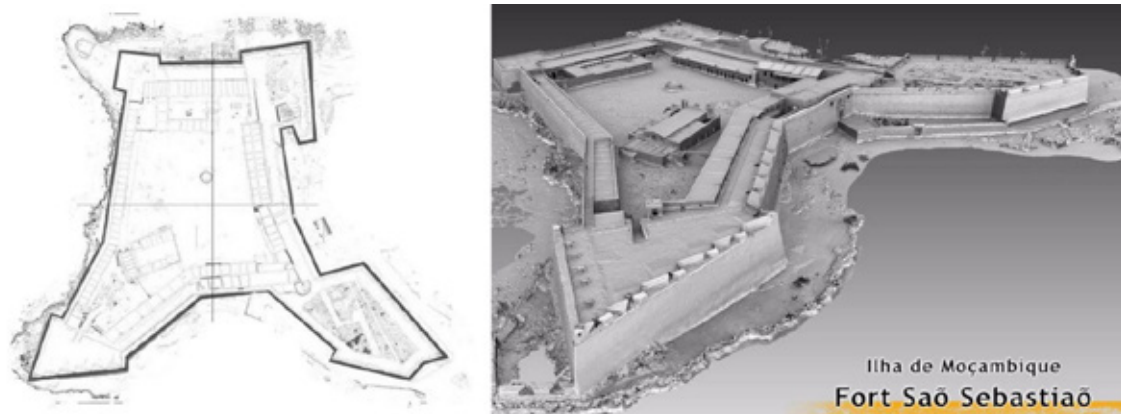


Figure 8
Plan and 3D model perspective view of Fort São Sebastião
 (permission requested from www.zamaniproject.org).

Case Number 2: Fort Jesus, Mombasa

Fort Jesus was not only intended to protect the Old Port of Mombasa, it was also primarily the main base from where the Portuguese dominated the Indian Ocean trade (figure 9). Designed by a Milanese architect, Giovanni Battista Cairati, it was built between 1593 and 1596 (figure 10). Although the design of Fort Jesus is an example of Renaissance bastion fortress architecture, the construction technology was essentially Swahili, but on a much larger scale than any local building at that time.

A few authors pointed out the anthropological shape of the plan, but that is probably pure coincidence. While the inland side was symmetrical, the oceanside was clearly articulated for functional reasons (figure 11). The fort was situated very close to the water's edge and even though it is difficult to see now, it was surrounded by a ditch on the inland side.

Fort Jesus was captured and recaptured at least nine times between 1631 and 1698 when the Omanis finally took it. The capture of the fort marked the end of Portuguese presence on the coast. In 1895, it fell under British rule and was converted into a prison. In 2011, it was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and highlighted as one of the most outstanding and well-preserved examples of sixteenth century Portuguese military fortifications.⁵ The fort is the most visited tourist attraction in Mombasa.⁶

⁵ UNESCO. 2011. World Heritage List: Fort Jesus, Mombasa. Retrieved from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1295/> on 2021 12 19.

⁶ National Museums of Kenya. 2011. Fort Jesus, Mombasa, (Kenya) Nomination Dossier for Inscription on the World Heritage List. Unpublished documentation.



Figure 9
Locality plan of Fort Jesus, Mombasa
(drawing by the author).



Figure 10
Mombasa map by António Bocarro, 1635
(in the public domain at <http://www.colonialvoyage.com/fort-jesus-mombasa>).

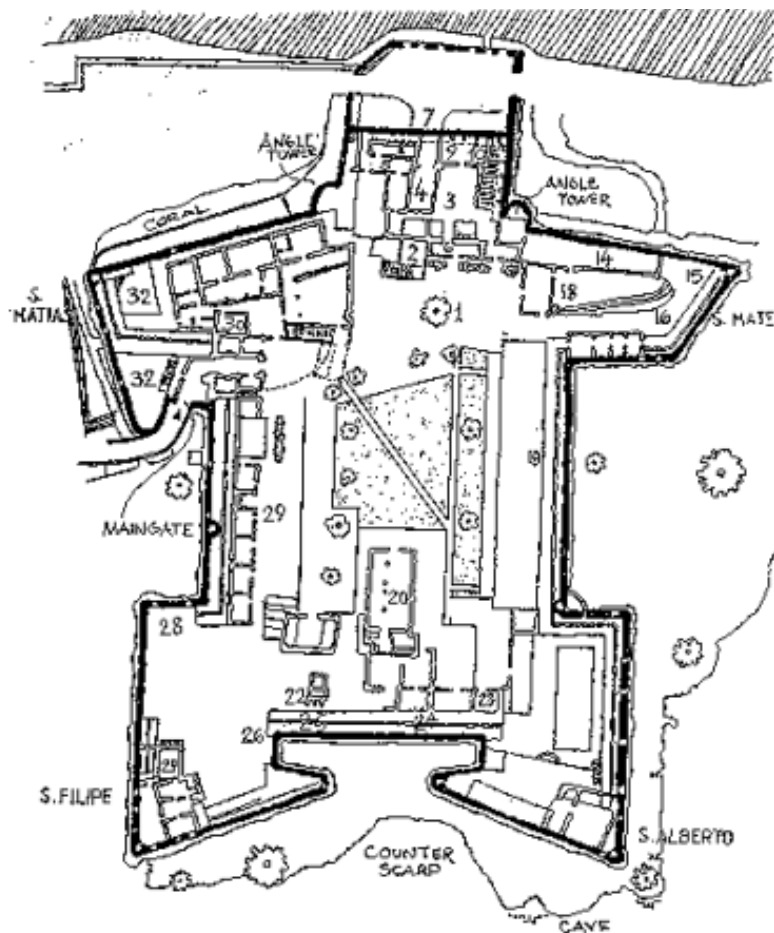


Figure 11
Plan of Fort Jesus (Source: National Museums of Kenya).⁷

Case Number 3: Castle of Good Hope

The Castle of Good Hope is located on the Cape Peninsula near the southern tip of the African continent (figure 12). The purpose of the Dutch settlement in the Cape was to act as a replenishment station for ships passing the Cape on long voyages between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). It was built by the Dutch East India Company between 1666 and 1679, in response to an imminent conflict with Britain, and is the oldest existing building in South Africa (figure 13).

The Castle was designed as a five-pointed stone fortress similar to other such fortifications in Europe (figure 14). In fact, it was nearly identical to the Renaissance template for a pentagonal fortress, such as the typologies proposed by the Italian architect, Francesco de Marchi, in 1565 (Hirst 1997: 14).⁸

⁷ National Museums of Kenya (2011: 10).

⁸ Francesco De Marchi (1504–1576) was an Italian architect and engineer, who focused on fortress architecture.

Unlike Fort São Sebastião and Fort Jesus, it was located a short distance from the shoreline to provide space for protective ditches and ramparts so distinctive of the *trace italienne*. Land has since been reclaimed from the sea and where the Castle was previously approximately 300 m from the water's edge, it is now 1,100 m inland.

Eventually, in 1806, the British attacked the Cape, but they landed approximately 40 km up the coast and defeated the Dutch. Therefore, this state-of-the-art fortress never experienced a direct attack. It currently accommodates the province's military command and various museums and exhibitions. The Castle is considered the best-preserved example of a Dutch East India Company fort.

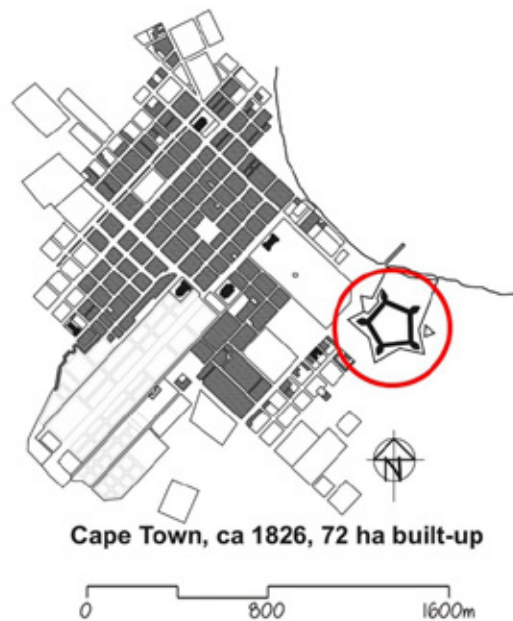


Figure 12
The Castle of Good Hope locality plans
(drawing by the author).

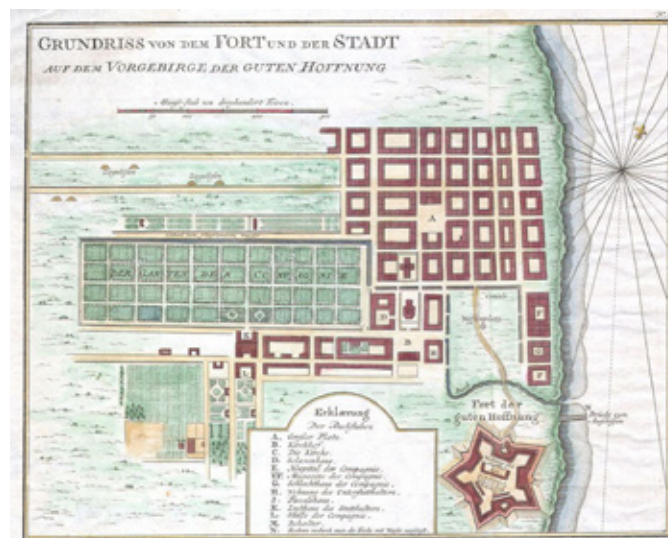


Figure 13
Map by Jacques-Nicholas Bellin, c. 1750
(from Wikimedia Commons in public domain).



Figure 14
A model of the castle as it would have appeared between 1710 and 1790
(photograph by Mike Peel Wikimedia Commons in public domain).

Case Number 4: Old Fort of Zanzibar (Arab Fort)

Built by the Omanis between 1698 and 1701, the Old Fort of Zanzibar, also known as the Arab Fort, is located in Stone Town, the capital of Zanzibar. It is situated on the main seafront, adjacent to another landmark building of the city, namely the House of Wonders, formerly the palace of the Sultan of Zanzibar (figure 15).

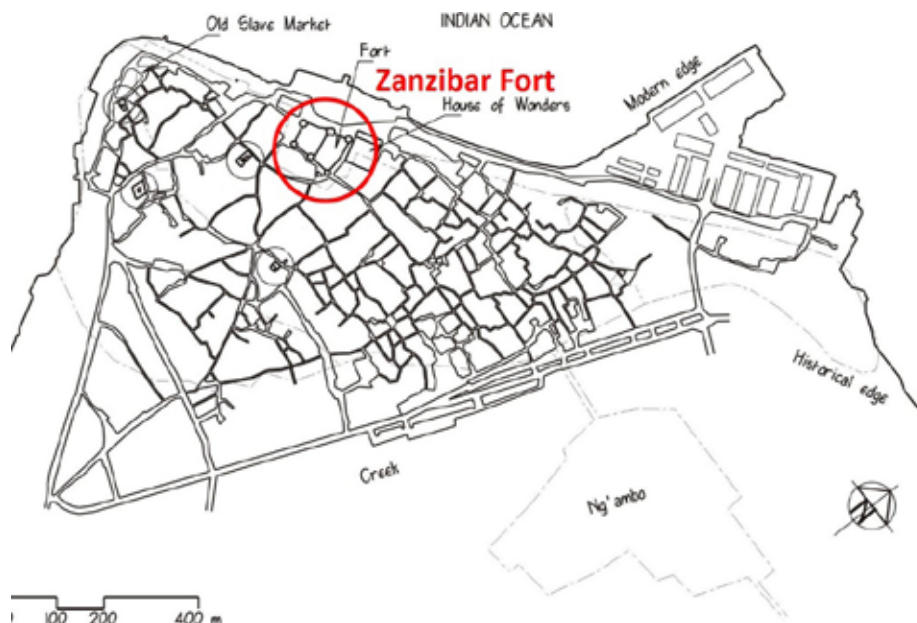


Figure 15
Zanzibar Fort locality plan
(drawing by the author).

The lack of any form of militarised landscaping between the fort and the sea is puzzling; where are the defences? The emergence and role of the Omanis in Zanzibar and their relations with the British in particular gives credibility to the statement of Rhodes, Breen and Forsythe (2015: 341): “[Zanzibar Fort] was not intended as a military structure per se but as a medium for expression of hierarchies of mercantile control” (figure 16).

The plan consists of a rectangular enclosure with four corner towers and a central tower on the inland-facing wall (figure 17). One tower was dismantled in the nineteenth century to make space for the House of Wonders, which is now the National Museum. Zanzibar Fort will be discussed in more detail below.

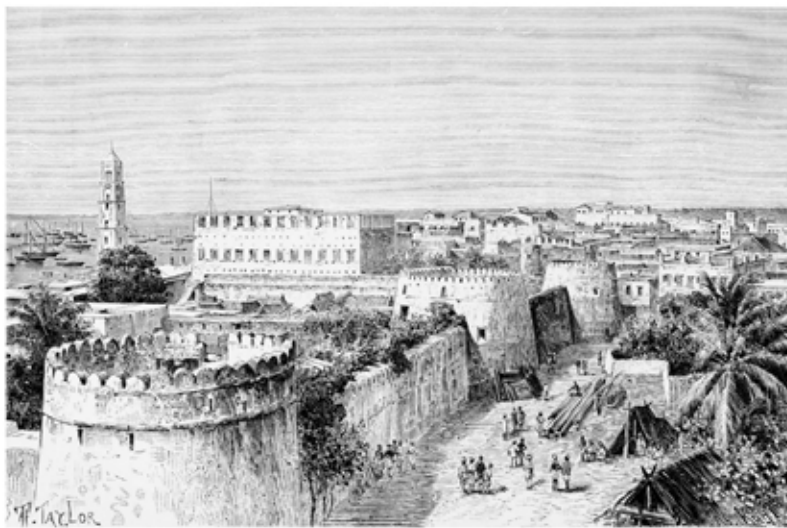


Figure 16
Engraving by T. Taylor of the inland-facing side of Zanzibar Fort, 1888.
(purchased from Alamy.com on 2021/12/24).

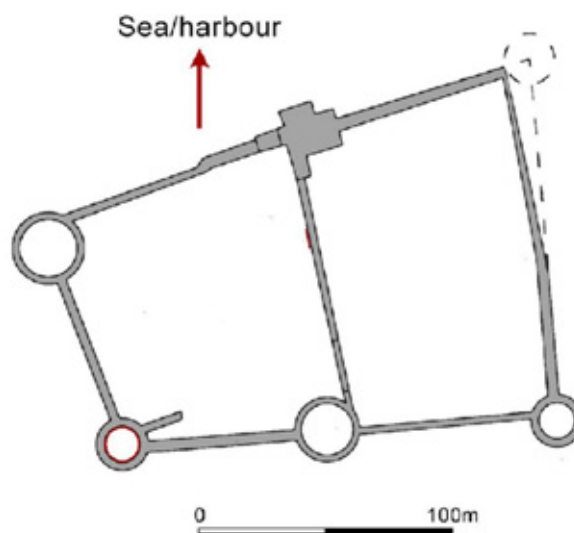


Figure 17
Schematic plan of the walls and towers of Zanzibar Fort at present
(in public domain by Alessandro Ghidoni).

Case Number 5: Lamu Fort

Lamu Fort is situated in the town of Lamu, on Lamu Island, off the coast of north-eastern Kenya (figure 18). Originally situated on the waterfront, today, the fort is located in a central position in the town, approximately 70 m from the main jetty on the shore. Lamu Fort was built by the Omanis between 1813 and 1821. Thomas Boteler (1835: 382), who visited Lamu in 1823, described the fort as “a large square building, with a tower at each corner, but constructed so slightly that in all probability the discharge of its honeycombed ordnance would soon bring the whole fabric to the ground” (figure 19).

Similar to Zanzibar Fort, Lamu Fort has no credible defensive or military value. During the British colonial period, and after the independence of Kenya, the fort was used as a prison. Today, it houses the Lamu Museum. Lamu and its fort are described in detail by Siravo and Pulver in their book entitled *Planning Lamu: Conservation of an East African Seaport* of 1986.



Figure 18
Lamu Fort Locality map
(drawing by the author).

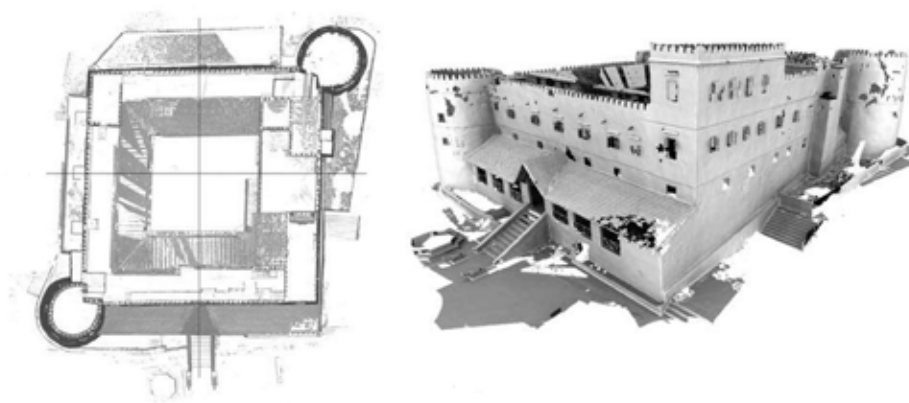


Figure 19
Plan and 3D model perspective view of Lamu Fort
(permission requested from www.zamaniproject.org).

Sites and siting

Few building types rely on their sites and surrounding space for functionality to the extent that forts do. It must ensure early detection of threats, provide an unobstructed field of fire, and keep enemy firing positions as far away from the fort as possible. Locality, topography and the nature of the adjacent area determine their survivability as forts. Fort São Sebastião and Fort Jesus are constructed on the ocean's edge, the former on three sides and the latter on one side. Both forts are draped over the topography along the seascape. This situation is unchanged (figure 20 and figure 21). This arrangement not only made direct seaborne assaults almost impossible, but attacking enemy ships were exposed to cannon fire from these forts. The seascape protected the fort on the oceanside and the landscape on the other, specifically the *cordon sanitaire* of Fort São Sebastião and the ditch of Fort Jesus. The article written by Stéphane Pradines (2016), titled *Portuguese Fortresses in East Africa*, contains valuable information in this regard.



Figure 20
Fort São Sebastião, view from the sea, 2007
(in the public domain from Wikimedia Commons).



Figure 21
Engraving of Fort Jesus, Mombasa, by W.F.W. Owen 1833
(from Wikimedia Commons in public domain);
photograph by Nigel Pavitt, 2009 (purchased from Alamy on 2022 05 29).

The Castle of Good Hope, constructed only about 50 years after Fort São Sebastião, was located a short distance from the shore, perhaps to allow the construction of a fully developed version of the *trace italienne*, complete with earthworks (figure 22). The militarised landscape provided a connection do the seascape, but due to land reclamation that connection was lost.

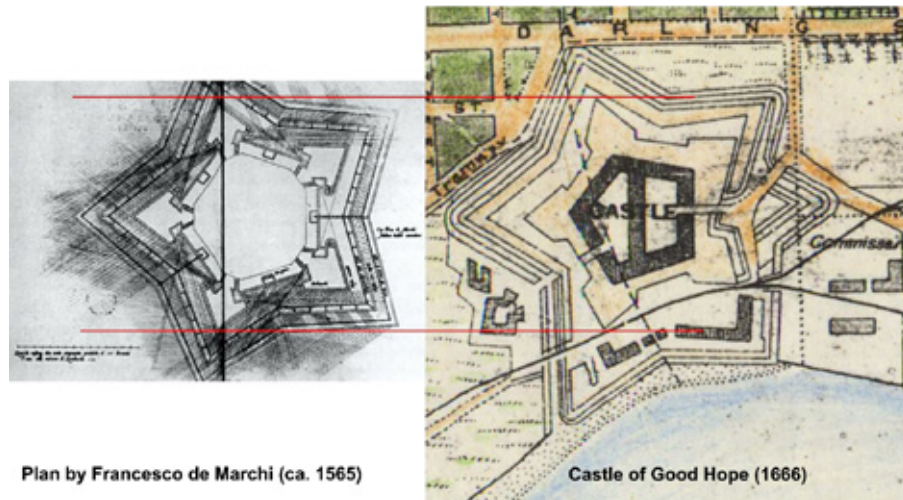


Figure 22
A map of the Castle of Good Hope drawn in 1884
(in public domain at www.castleofgoodhope.co.za/index.php/gallery).

Kaufmann and Kaufmann (2019: 140) state that, in general, castles and forts were designed to “intimidate the enemy, to protect territory, and/or to project social status”. Perhaps the term “political status” would be more appropriate in reference to the two Omani forts; at Zanzibar and Lamu. Historic photographs show that the landscape between these two forts and the sea, by the nineteenth century at least, had been covered with thatched structures serving the dhow traffic (figure 23). As they were (and still are) prominent buildings, their presence so close to the old harbours, complete with the Omani flag flying, most certainly signalled unambiguously who ruled these places. Both Omani forts have been integral elements of the cityscape and the connection to the landscape, and by implication the seascape, was originally not physically articulated.



Figure 23
Engraving of Zanzibar harbour and fort by E. de Berard, France, 1870
(purchased from marzolino/123RF.COM on 2021/12/30);
Lamu Fort in 1892 by Adolph Jacob Hertz
(purchased from Alamy.com on 2021/12/25).

Ironically, their connectivity with the seascape was significantly enhanced during the twentieth century. Arriving by plane at the airport on Manda Island, visitors cross the 1,100 m wide channel by boat, disembark at a jetty and walk along a lane to the small public square in front of Lamu Fort, with the Stone Town behind and next to it on both sides. The landscape–seascape threshold is sharply defined by a seawall. A visitor to Lamu, therefore, journeys along a promenade consisting of a sequence of landscape–seascape–landscape–cityscape.

The thatched structures between Zanzibar Fort and the ocean, which was also the old harbour, was cleared and developed as the Jubilee Gardens, now known as Forodhani Park, to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1936 (Siravo 1997: 27). As in Lamu, a seawall provides a threshold. A road and parking area separated Forodhani Park and Zanzibar Fort, but it is not clear when those were constructed. Photographs of 1946 show a row of canons in front of the fort, but they are merely symbolic. The plan of Francesco Siravo (1997: 127) for the Seafront Action Area would have retained the vehicular traffic and parking, but the plan of Architect Ben Huser of 2011 would have pedestrianised the entire landscape between the seascape and the fort. With Zanzibar Fort on the edge of Stone Town, the progression then would have been an unobstructed townscape–landscape–seascape (figure 24).



Figure 24
Sketch of a portion of Stone Town of Zanzibar in 1846 (after Guillain’s plan of 1846);
Proposal by Architect Ben Huser in 2011
(after benhuser.com/zanzibar-stone-town-forodhani/).

Comparison of shapes

In terms of this study, architectural shape is the two-dimensional representation of the plan and section of a building. Shape describes geometry and construction (walls, openings and roofs). Form is the three-dimensional classification. The form of a high compact Medieval castle is distinct from that of a low spread-out Renaissance fort. The latter is low for a smaller profile, but with space to manoeuvre cannons. Contrary to high relatively thin-walled Medieval castles, from the fifteenth century onwards, Renaissance fortresses used squat thick-walled bastions, which were in fact spear-shaped artillery platforms. Medieval towers, on the other hand, contained rooms, bastions were low and either solid or thick-walled (Kaufmann and Kaufmann 2019: 155).

Since Oman possessed the same naval and artillery technology as the European powers – after all, they chased the Portuguese out of East Africa – it is surprising that their fort construction technology was essentially still Medieval (figure 25).

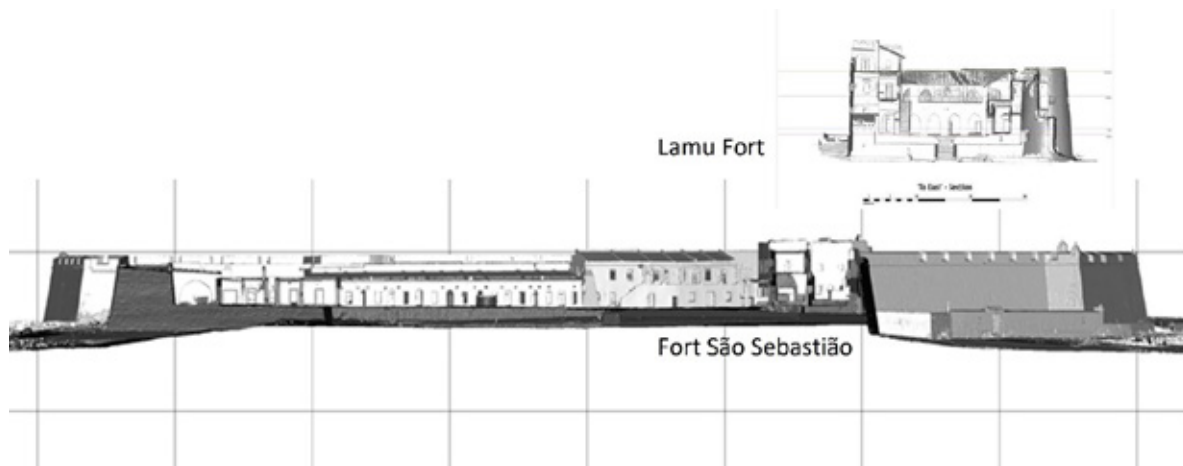


Figure 25
Cross sections of Fort São Sebastião and Lamu Fort compared
 (permission requested from www.zamaniproject.org).

Both the Zanzibar Fort and Lamu Fort were constructed in a style common across Oman at that time. Fort Nakhal, also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is an archetypal Omani Fort. It was initially built to protect a nearby oasis and trade routes, reconstructed in the seventeenth century, and extended again in 1834. Fort Nakhal demonstrates the essential elements shared by all Omani forts, namely the cylindrical towers; often slightly tapered, rectangular plan forms; and the characteristic Omani crenelations of the parapets (figure 26). As such, it is more representative of Vitruvius’ principles for fortifications, than of Renaissance military planning dogma. Pradines and Blanchard (2019) offer valuable insights in their seminal article entitled *From Zanzibar to Kilwa: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Omani Forts in East Africa*.



Figure 26
Fort Nakhal in Oman, 2016
 (purchased from Alamy on 2022/05/29).

This anomaly is illustrated in figure 27. Zanzibar Fort and Lamu Fort are big, but in scale with Islamic civic structures, such as markets, madrasas, caravanserai and large mosques. Their rectangular plans are compatible with the urban fabric, for which they were probably intended; not for defensive purposes, but to control the indigenous population (the Swahili). They were designed to fit into the cityscape. Fort São Sebastião and Fort Jesus have irregular plans as their boundaries follow the shoreline. They derive their shapes partly from the seascape. The Castle of Good Hope has a strictly regular geometry based on the Renaissance template for a *trace italienne*. It is an imprint on the landscape, which was connected to the seascape, but did not allow its shape to be compromised by the seascape.

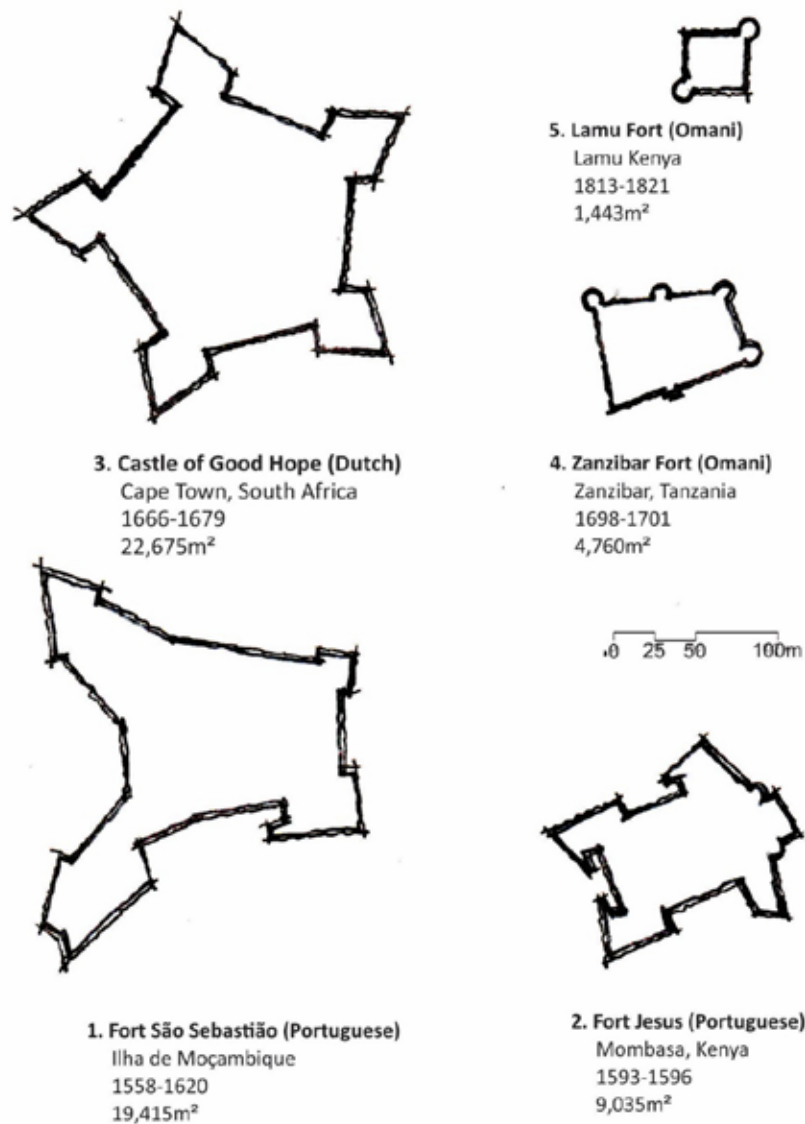


Figure 27
Footprints of the case studies
(drawing by the author).

Status

The histories of the five case studies and their localities roughly span the same 400 years during which Leonardo's principles for the planning of fortresses were valid. There are other forts on Africa's Indian Ocean seaboard too, but they arguably had less of an impact on the history of the region. In addition, most are ruins or remote. The five examples are currently part of living towns and are, therefore, easily accessible and popular destinations for cultural tourism. The four on the East African coast are either on the UNESCO World Heritage List (Fort Jesus) or part of a listed historic town (Lamu Stone Town, Zanzibar Stone Town and Island of Mozambique). The Castle of Good Hope is currently a Grade I National Heritage Site, and the listing application to UNESCO is underway.⁹

Of the five case studies, all but Zanzibar Fort have been museumified. People must pay to get in. In terms of contemporary urbanism, they are spatially marginal (figure 28). Zanzibar Fort was used as a garrison and prison in the nineteenth century, and as a terminal of the Zanzibar railways from 1905 to 1928. A new guardhouse was built in 1947 and used as the ladies' club, with an amphitheatre being added in the 1990s. It is now the headquarters of the Zanzibar international film festival. Only Zanzibar Fort is accessible to the public, with its restaurant and informal traders, and offers entertainment in its amphitheatre (figure 29). If the street can be eliminated and the fort linked to the public gardens in front, it will form an integrated urban precinct on the edge of the ocean. It will then offer urban greenery, social space, as well as a unique cultural landscape. With such a relatively minor intervention, this precinct will truly become the heart of Stone Town of Zanzibar (figure 30).



Figure 28
Four of the case studies (photographs by the author, 2019
except for the castle, which is from www.castleofgoodhope.co.za/).

⁹ Calvyn Gilfellan interviewed by News 24 on 1 November 2016. Gilfellan is the CEO of the Board of the Castle of Good Hope.



Figure 29
Zanzibar Fort in 2009
 (photographs by the author).

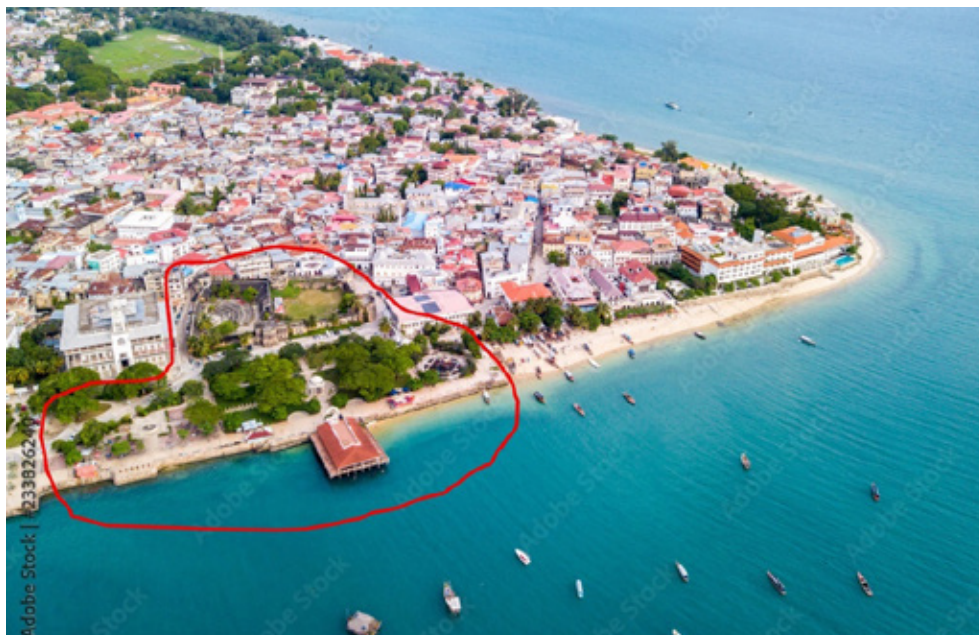


Figure 30
 The Zanzibar Fort–Forodhani Park precinct. Photo by Dmitry Malov, 2018
 (<https://www.globalheritagetour.com/unesco-world-heritage-sites-united-republic-of-tanzania/>).

Conclusion

The physical location of a fort and its strategic purpose are in direct relationship to its shape. These factors conflate to determine the nature of the connectivity of a fort to the space it claims, whether landscape, cityscape or seascape. This article covers these aspects only superficially and provides no more than an overview.

Although a comparison can be very informative, each of these forts could be analysed individually and in depth as architectural artefacts. Explanations of the physical context, locality, site integration, fortress technology and morphology would make more sense if they were related to purpose and mission, threats and defence, and the significance of the fort as a cultural landscape.

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Escaping seascape at the shoreline of Toamasina in Madagascar

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This article interrogates the term “seascape” by looking at human-ocean encounters caught in modernist architectural buildings at the port city of Toamasina, Madagascar. By following the elemental activities at this shoreline such as salt blown in the wind interfacing molecularly with steel, a more oceanic understanding of human-ocean encounters and relationships is proposed. The article argues for an alternative to overly land-based, modernist categorisations and viewpoints of the oceanic. The literature supports sensory modes of address for both grappling with and moving away from the Cartesian divide.

Keywords: elemental media, oceanic relations, seascape, Toamasina, Madagascar, Cartesian divide

Ontsnap van die seelandskap by die kuslyn van Toamasina in Madagaskar

Hierdie artikel ondervra die term “seelandskap” deur te kyk na die mens-oseaan ontmoetings, wat in modernistiese argitektoniese geboue by die hawestad Toamasina, Madagaskar, vasgevang is. Deur elementele media wat langs hierdie kuslyn aktief is, word ’n meer oseaniese begrip van die mens-oseaan ontmoetings en verhoudings voorgestel. Hierdie artikel argumenteer vir ’n alternatief tot die oordrewe, landgebaseerde modernistiese kategoriserings en uitgangspunte van die oseaniese. Die literatuur ondersteun sensoriese wyse van aanspreking om beide te worstel en weg te beweeg van die Kartesiese verdeling.

Sleutelwoorde: elementele media, oseaniese verwantskappe, seelandskap, Toamasina, Madagaskar

The term “seascape” is one that both seems to be void of description as well as charged with descriptive potential. In the oceanic humanities or the blue humanities, the ocean itself is being thought with and through as a way to shift from the imperial notion of an ocean that is a *terra-nullis* which holds the imperial imaginary of a vast and empty void or plain upon which voyages of conquest took place from the fifteenth century onwards. This article takes up wayward turnings from the dominant vantage point of *terra firma* to move toward wetter perceptions for oceanic relations. It does this by taking up the term seascape to notice the ways in which it undoes itself oceanically, by liquefying and trickling back through its own formation.

Undoing seascape through itself

Turning etymologically to the term “scape”, it can be seen that scape stems from scenery or a view, mostly associated with *terra*, or from a *terra* point of view, as exemplified in landscape. But scape can also be understood through e-scape, which, when taken up in mischievous play, proposes an escape from the terra that attempts to frame it. That is, scape might become an escape from what Melody Jue (2019: 20) calls the “terrestrial biases of contemporary knowledge”, those conceptual formations of land that amount to a terminology of the ecological. By querying knowledge biases in this way, the human central to the apparatus for such contemporary knowledge is queried too, and redefined through the escape from a terrestrial stronghold. Thinking with seascape as a figuration, scape, through escape, tilts the human figuration that defined seascape seaward. That is, seascape begins to escape its terra-formations: as scape tilts seaward it becomes fugitive to its formation.

The sea is an admixture of multiplicity, containing in it innumerable organic and inorganic materials, particulates, atmospheric gasses, salts and the molecules of water itself. Within this, the heaviness of history and memory swirl (Deloughrey 2010; Gilroy 2022; Walcott 2014; Glissant 1997). As seascape tilts seaward, as it escapes its definition locked into a terrestrial standpoint, it allows itself to be windswept into oceanic time, drifting with the human and more-than-just-human particles that the salty waters retain for thousands of years in relation with whole earth cycles. Seawater contains opportunities to think across disciplines of knowing, while opening toward what is yet-to-be-known. Paying attention to scape's desire for evasion toward the sea within sea-scape/escape brings our attention to, and opens further, the fault lines through which escape occurs. The escapee escapes from something and, for humans at least, is often guided by a desire for something different, slipping through the cracks of a captive's formation. In this anthropomorphic understanding, a humanist fugitive politics takes shape that moves away from notions of inclusion and integration, and toward difference and multiplicity. Humanist fugatory politics is carefully laboured through by black feminist theorists who seek to redefine the extant definition of a "human" that fails to capture all human beings (Luciano and Chen 2015; Weheliye 2014; McKittrick 2007; McKittrick 2006). In these understandings the definition of the captive is redefined. As the captive (in this case the Anthropocentric term "seascape") seeks to hold the fugitive in a human exceptionalist singularity, the fugitive escapes toward a more-than-human multiplicity (the sea) that exists differently to exceptionalised land-based hierarchies. Escape here (which etymologically conjoins with lewdness through lustfulness), positions the escapee as touching both the countable (the terra- formulated apparatus for knowing) and the uncountable (the as-yet-unknown) through its insistence on being lewd.¹

When such an understanding of scape is brought into relation with the sea (as in seascape) it becomes necessary to grapple with what Isabel Hofmeyr (2022: 20) calls the "elemental politics" or the seanness of the sea, which engages a material oceanic activity – a listening through the politics of land to the yet-to-be-known oceanic that can be learned from. Through this terrestrial formations and understandings of the sea necessarily combine into the lewd, in a desire to move away from *terra*. This is because the escapee touches both what it escapes from and what it is escaping toward, a medium containing the known and the unknown. In seascape, escape exists in an oceanic context, where the contained, namely the categorisation of "sea", becomes undone toward the uncontained, the myriad of oceanic relations that are still to be known. The activities of this sea, then, exist beyond the boundaries of the sea itself as well as beyond the *terra* biases for knowing the sea. What surfaces here is a shift toward sea relations, or oceanic relations, where sensing through the fault within the shaft of terra understandings and categorisations of the ocean, follow the escapee's desire for the uncontained, for relations that cause discomfort to the contained, for lewdness itself. This article argues for an imagination of such uncontained desire as being able to reconfigure terra-biased human knowledge systems. In doing so, it undoes the term "seascape" and churns with the potentials of rearrangement for human-ocean relations.

¹ This is exemplified when considering architecture, wherein scape is understood to be a shaft or column. Scape here is the apophysis of a shaft, as it derives meaning from botany, where scape is a leafless stalk, growing directly out of the root leaving the earth and reaching toward the sun before growing its photosynthetic leaves. And so, scape becomes - it is - both this shaft, this column, and the lewd escape from it. It is the pollen that fertilises, carried by others pollinators on route to an interconnectedness that reveals the plant to be a part of a larger ecological system.

Storying as interface between human-ocean relations

I now turn to storying by looking to the ways that locations of multiplicity could shape stories that are less hegemonic but hold richer relations. This story is set in a Western Indian Ocean shoreline. I first visited the Toamasina shoreline in the “winter”, or what is more commonly known as the dry season in 2012.² Roaming around the streets as a way to become acquainted, I was struck by the pitted walls and the aesthetics of erosion formed through high weathering activity. Having recently voyaged through the Western Indian Ocean in tropical cyclone season to ultimately reach Madagascar from Cape Town I was sensitised to the weathering activities of the region and had heard stories about living on a coastline that is a meeting zone for cyclonic activities that form in the warm offshore waters. Public parks, hotels, the port, shop faces – all existed with holes from this activity. Paint peeled from walls indicated more than a lack of maintenance. It seemed in this context that the walls themselves could not withstand the weather. In some instances, the pitted holes in the walls were echoed in the artistic mark makings on the street as people expanded the aesthetics of holes by chipping more into the walls, drawing attention to images.



Figure 1
Judge, M, *Pitting Madagascar*, 2012. Toamasina
(photograph by the author).

As someone visiting the post/colonial port city of Toamasina who is white and does not speak the Malagasy dialect of the region, my ability to engage in a deeply meaningful way with the social cultures prevalent in the city was limited, and I explored the place through my

² The rainy season lasts around 4 months between mid December – mid April with around 45% of any given day being a rainy day, peaking in February. The wet season is long and hot, wet and overcast. The winters are milder yet muggy and more often clear.

encounters with the materiality whilst roaming the streets. To explore a relational imaginary through such limits, I worked through the material-discursive activity of pitted holes in the surface of modernist architecture that linked colonialist imaginings with the weathering activities in the port city. This approach grapples with the material remains of colonisation in the modernist era that are failing in their attempt to fight off oceanic activity. The holes, pitted by the high weathering activity at the port, exemplify an activity of holing as an active interfacing zone between modernist human figurations and ocean. What interfaces here are, on the one hand, oceanic earth cycle weathering activities, and on the other, assertions of progress that are bound up in modernist architecture in Toamasina, as this architecture is aesthetically and perpetually caught up in erosion, corrosion and repair. In this, it is possible to not only understand the activities of this interface but also the behaviour of assumed surfaces by understanding surfaces as an activity of the in between, as they touch ocean and human together in a materially informed understanding of discursive human-ocean relations.



Figure 2
Modernist building, Toamasina
(photograph by the author).

In Toamasina it seems like this inbetween activity exists at the interface of the hole, and that potentials for sensing with seanness in this hole can rearrange notions of human-ocean relations away from the firmness of human exceptionalist, *terra* positionalities. The hole is made from reconfigured matter shaped through the forces of elemental rearrangement, such as wind, water, salt and concrete. The elemental presences actively and continuously keeps shaping the hole. What haunts these holes are the now missing gaps of the determined surface of the modernist ideal³. This ideal is the terra-centric standpoint that sets up an apparatus for knowing the seascape from its vantage point, reading it as outside and other, something to be kept separate. Escaping through the overdetermined boundaries of this surface,

³ The modernist project in the French colonies is known for driving by a desire to assert specific ideals pertained to a civilised Man that othered cultures outside of its own Eurocentric formations.

seanness can be sensed. The hole allows for a re-storying of the human-ocean relationship in ways that take up Donna Haraway's (2016: 12) provocation to think with what matters. For Haraway,

it matters what matters we use to think matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.

Through the material and immaterial shaping of the hole, stories of surfaces, the active mattering of holes within surfaces and perceptions of presence and absence, mound a telling of human-ocean relations at this shoreline. This storying works through deviance, anti-normality and failure (Jue 2016: 2) of and from imperial, modernist and colonial legacies. The stories that mound escape from the countable toward the uncountable, from the containable toward the uncontainable.

As a way to sense in wayward directions from this terra-standpoint, I have developed a praxis of inquiry that combines research with art making. This approach is largely unmethodological, or post qualitative (St.Pierre 1995), as it inquires into the as-yet-unknown relational potentials that elemental activity can offer my own human-ocean relations. In this process of inquiry, oceanic activity experienced on the voyage through the Western Indian Ocean in tropical cyclone season wells up as I dip into the pitted holes that this activity has left in my own surface. The works that mound through this praxis tell a story of desire for movement toward the oceanic, whilst locating through a position of opening toward the unrealised, and how that opens toward the unknown. This practice is a storying of acting through the countable toward the uncountable, of attempting to contain the uncontainable.



Figure 3
Judge, M. *Ecotones*, 2021. Johannesburg: Edition Verso.
(photograph of print by the author).

I find this storying by noticing the imagination and related performance of the Cartesian binary line as it attempts to separate nature/culture or intelligibility/material. The storying takes place through paying attention and attending to what escapes at this binary's edges. At the shoreline in Toamasina, this binary is active between the modernist architecture and the ocean's weathering systems. Looking closely into the imaginings of a boundary here, I zone into an activity of relations that shift notions of the singular into states of multiplicity. Inside holes, perceptions of emptiness, nothingness, *terra nullis* and the void are rearranged into spectral realms of vital activity. Such rearrangements story relations outside of colonial, human-exceptionalist overdeterminancies. This spectral activity is brought into formula with the two main relational interlocutors (human and ocean). The activities of the hole, the passage or channel between, generates a three-point formula of relations as the hole pits into and rearranges the surface of the overdetermined human. This rearrangement is ongoing and constant, storying multiplicity, a story that amounts to more than the parts as it opens to potentiality.

There has been much theoretical progression on the issue of colonialism and the particular image of a Man that it centres. For this article, I am working through storying multiple potentialities that rise from entanglements which combine in and work through what Elizabeth A. Povinelli (2016: 16) calls the legacies of racial and colonial histories. To notice what the potentials for this are, it is important to understand entanglement through these legacies legacies by tracing the human entangled, whose surface is being rearranged into the potentials for reconfiguration. Sylvia Wynter (2003: 317) has traced and located an exceptionalised Man that is at the heart of the formation of a civilised man, born from within the enlightenment period. It is this Man that has defined the surface of the modernist architecture in Toamasina, and who has taken up the figure of the universalised "Man" becoming the overdetermined human in the Anthropocene. It is thus this figuration of a human that fails to keep a divide with the ocean. From this figuration, as spoken to above, fugitory escape occurs in the reformulation of "seascape". By proposing that the view of the sea leaks through it's own cracks toward the sea itself, I am proposing that the surface of this Man is mailable, that it be grappled with, stayed with, so that the troubles that it presents can be moved through and rearranged (Haraway 2016).

Through my praxis of inquiry I seek out these rearrangements by sensing into the churning activity in the hole. The rearrangements occur through colliding temporalities. Kathryn Yussof (2019: 107) writes about the extractive economies of the Anthropocene and the direct lines to colonialism and slavery, positing the specific aforementioned figuration of Man at the apex of a temporality of progress so present in Modernist architecture in the colonies that is disjoined from and disrupts deep time earth cycle activities⁴. In this, modernism as a historical "event" that has since passed fails to stand. What stands is the upkeep of progress and the temporal shifts occurring in relation to the ocean. My praxis explores the dysrhythmia of temporalities (Lefebvre 2017: 16), returning again and again to the openings toward the unknown to build a sense for them. Through this I understand Modernism to be an ongoing phenomenon, it's narratives remaining in the materials left behind. Within the failures and conditions of power as they meet different temporalities, the loudness of the Anthropocene can be heard. I inquire into this temporal clash through analogue print making to notice the noisiness of silencing.

⁴ Swati Chattopadhyay (2019: 235) writes in the Routledge Companion to Art Deco that the particular motifs brought into this modernist style of architecture that is the same style that proliferates the streets of Toamasina is a style gleaned from vernacular and indigenous imagery. For Chattopadhyay, the modernist project at work here, "may be read as particular conjunctions of imperialism, nationalism, and modernity" as the style portrayed imperialism as sleek, fast, associated with international travel and progress.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995: 118) reminds that power shapes narratives and history's storytelling. He calls for us to spend time with the material remains of history in an attempt to find meaningful "authentic" engagements with the history to story from a place of closer knowing. I explore this provocation by spending time with materials that act as portals to these walls and the weathering activities I have experienced at the shoreline and in the ocean. In these portals my sense of the temporal is always shifting seaward. Here, anthropocentric and colonial narratives of the sea soak and flop into embodied experiences of alternate oceanic encounters.



Figure 4
Judge, M, *Cyclonic Sensing*, 2021, print. Johannesburg: Edition Verso.
(photograph by the author).

The shoreline is an ecotone. In it, ecologies exist in tension, resulting in a plus, the plus being the "tone" of eco parts as they encounter one another in relational activity. High weathering activities from the Indian Ocean and beyond, rushes through the Toamasina shoreline. This weathering includes tropical cyclones that, in their rhythmical seasons, often pattern strong winds (recently recorded just a bit further along the coast from Toamasina at 165km/h peaking at 230km/h), pulling in torrential rain, large waves and storm surges, sometimes resulting in coastal flooding. From a modernist human perspective, the tonal range of this ecotone has been perceived as a "noisy" one – as noise itself – wherein noise is othered in a process that composer John Cage calls "the reign of harmony" in modernist architecture (Joseph 1997: 82). The tones that make noise result from the silencings that modernist architecture produces as it over asserts itself at the shoreline. The modernist architecture here is not amphibious – it does not work with the weathering activities. The temporalities of singular focused progress for the civilised Man alone bound up in modernist imaginings erect columns and shafts with reinforced steel and

concrete that attempt to strike through, and stand against the weathering activity, its unwanted enemy. However, the temporality of the weathering activities at this shoreline is bound within deep time, even as it scales in rapidly changing climates. Deep time is a geological phenomenon described as unimaginable from within the time scale of human lives and human plans.⁵ Unlike the imaginings of singularity within modernism, deep time is an uncountable, uncontainable phenomenon of which humans are but a tiny part. The modernist architecture on the Toomasina shoreline stories the failure of amphibious imagination and potential.

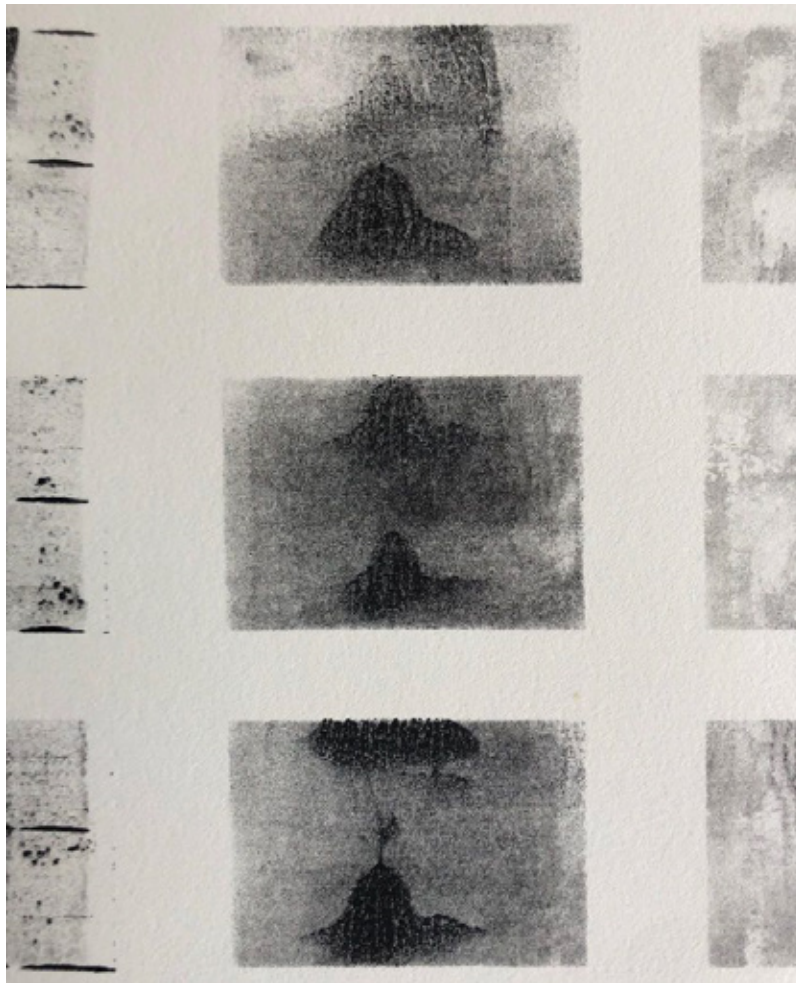


Figure 5
Judge, M, *static re-turn*, 2021, print. Johannesburg: Edition Verso
(photograph by the author).

⁵ There has been much work on the unimaginable in relation to the overdetermined Man and perceptions of formations outside of itself, notably in relation to the Haitian revolution (that took place between 1791-1804) which determined the first black state (wherein “state” is understood as the western European notion of organise political communities in government, and not as in the condition that someone or something is). Of interest in this line of scholarship is the question of the “unimaginable” and how it entrains the question of “unimaginable for whom?” Please see Scott (2000: 136) and Buck-Morss (2009: 16).

From walls to Seazones

As a way to lean into the important uncertainty of what it means to be in relation with oceanic forces, I propose taking up the points of disruption to linear progress as a way to think a larger zone of contact. As mentioned, in Toamasina, water rushes into tone with *terra*, as it has done for longer than humans can imagine,⁶ but is received as an unwanted noise by the *terra*-asserted walls of modernist architecture. In this way, the walls become a sensory column for the binary line of the imaginary. Through the holes that pit in their surface, these sensory columns contain the potentials for escaping themselves, shifting from singularity toward a multiplicity of amphibious relations. What is received as “noise” by the walls is everything that has been pushed outside of the modernist project’s imaginary. In the heightened weathering zone this includes water itself, as it cycles through its reservoirs on a planetary scale, from the largest reservoir in the ocean, which contains around 97% of all the water on earth, where it can remain for as long as 3200 years, before moving back to terrestrial and atmospheric storage activities. In this, the temporality of the ocean as watery weathering activity is ongoing, or at the very least caught in tension of deep time and changing climate.

The modernist buildings erected in this ecotone, however, bound in their temporality of linear progress, determining the “civilised man” onto what was already there. Frederick Cooper (2009: 339) was understood by French colonists as being “useful primarily to French interests, to a ‘civilized man’, at home and abroad”. Cooper (2009: 336-45) goes on to demonstrate how modernist architecture, as an experiment in the colonies, was redefined by its own backwaters. Malagasy lawyers who studied in France found fault lines and cleverly manipulated and mutated the patterning of modernism so that it was forever changed. This deviance from the over-asserted project of modernism disrupts its progress, breaking from its linearity and circling instead to collect what is important to those who were othered by the exceptionalism of that civilised man. The lagrangian⁷ pathways formed here were formulated by not only stepping in stride with such progress, but also by diverting it, derailing it, making it leaky with its surrounds, a sort of circling that becomes a swirling-with, eroding at the limits of the modernist project.

Leakiness that occurs around modernism in Toamasina results in sites that leak in multi directions into and out of binary surfaces. This leakiness patterns within the entanglement of temporalities that are caught in between interfacing surfaces as they perform binary lines, attempting to set apart, to cut singularity into a phenomenon of multiplicitous relations. These interface surfaces or binary lines, host and are hosted by difference. Here, difference disrupts surface-linearity. The difference caught in activity at such surfaces pit, and therefore open, holes. These portals sense into what has become repatterned in the excess of parts as they clash in a temporality of (dis)rhythmia, or what Lefebvre (2013: 13) calls arrhythmia, wherein “rhythms break apart, alter and bypass synchronisation”. This rupturing of the time-space continuum in

⁶ It is possible to think of water *and terra-firma* through the mass extinction and oxygen survivors of the Great Oxygenation Event that occurred some 2.4 billion years ago largely through our ancestors of cyanobacteria, who generated oxygen through photosynthesis, providing the opportunity for biological diversification. This also had major geological consequences that resulted in collision belts wherein mountains rose out of the seas, eventually shaping the Proterozoic supercontinent names Nuna or Columbia.

⁷ From the flow field in classical field theories that allows for observances of fluid motion, wherein the path of movement is traced through space and time, generating a path line.

temporal dimensions, differs depending on subjective cuts into it.⁸ It is within this realm of subjective understandings, of the impossibilities of subjective attempts to see objectively and the resultant perceptions of time-space, that the notion of clashing temporalities and rhythms are worked through here. The modernist architecture in Toamasina, reinforced with concrete and steel, attempts to stay ever-present and always determined, its walls represent the polished imaginings of asserted ideals of singularity so bound up in modernism and colonisation. They cut a perception of spacetime that exceptionalises a certain subjecthood. And yet their temporal-imaginary of singularity is continually undone by the multiplicity of the surroundings within which they exist in time, yet attempt to dominate.

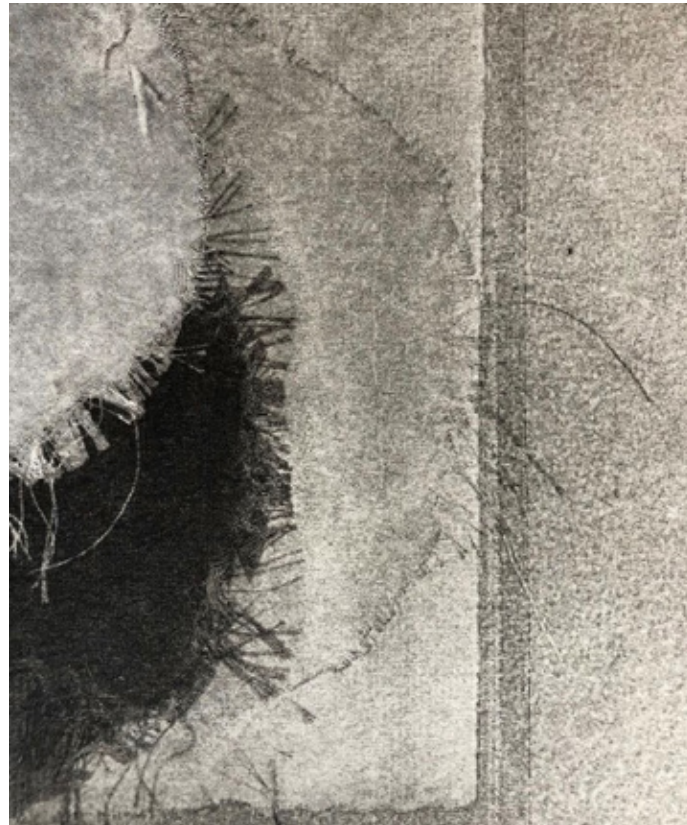


Figure 6
Judge, M, *Corrosive Desire*, 2021, print. Johannesburg: Edition Verso
(photograph by the author).

The elemental activity pitted within the holes in this surface reveals the micro-activity of this surface as it exists outside of singular framings. This multiplicity of holing activity within these holes and at this surface-line becomes an uncontainable container as the singular trajectories of the modern encounter the multiplicitious activities of the oceanic. Here, it is not possible for the surface to be separated from its surrounds. The hole in this surface reminds us of this. It reminds us that the surface exists as an activity of tensions that are in a state of

⁸ Karen Barad's (2007) insights into quantum physics and philosophy is compelling in this regard. Their book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* deals with the ongoing-ness of spacetime. It outlines how the cuts that are made into this phenomenon can only ever be performances for our own meaning makings and should therefore always be understood through the apparatuses that do the cutting, never objectively.

relation with one another. Activating here are the material imaginings of a modernist civilized Man *and* the materialized agencies of water, salt and weathering activities at an Indian Ocean shoreline. The pitted hole in the surface holds these bodies together as they rearrange, be-coming differently through an ontological, relational zone. In this way, the hole contains many different materials and abstract senses together, across differing material and figurative registers. It is here that the activity of this multiplicitous relationing can be seen escaping the stability of the terra-bound notion of a “point of view” which favours a point on land that gazes out toward the “scape”. Instead, relational zones of activity are found in the figuration of the viewer, in their own binary lines, wherein the senses through which they come to perceive, are challenged and expanded. This zone cannot be contained in a singular point; it spreads with perceptibility and requires sensing to be noticed. The zone opens toward oceanic contact⁹ wherein perceptibility for modernist ideals and terra over-assertions can be explored; as seascape escapes terra and becomes *with* seanness through such contact, the seazone is activated. Seazone departs from the notion of a horizon line. It enters into the ongoingness of cyclic, hydro-weathering activities that, through the impossibility of containment, shape perceptions of the oceanic that escape singular framings.

The term seazone offered here is not an attempt to eponymously generate yet another oceanic neologism. Combining sea with zone proposes instead relational space for thinking human-ocean entanglements through the uncontained and tonal qualities of an active zone of contact. The shift is from sea “scape” toward a “zone” that is in contact with more than the terra-centric viewpoint can contain. Thinking with seazone helps to pay closer attention to the speculative realm of that which vibrates within the tones of holes pitted in seazones. Seazones ask that we take up what is doing the pitting as well as the surface that is being pitted into. Furthermore, these zones look to the relations between these two points of tension, to find the potentials of patterns within their combined difference. Listening closer, the elements that activate at this relational interface reveal a surface that is in flux. The elemental activity at the binary line sound materials that intra-act (Barad 2007: 33) with and in weathering conditions. Compositionally, they scale and pivot as they find orientation within the activities of the oceanic as it rearranges the modernist human surface.

Elemental amphibiousness

The elemental activities animate through the ongoing activity of water infiltration into the walls at the shoreline due to this ecotone being a part of a much larger activity of oceanic water (and weathering) cycles. The movement of water that cycles is the hydrological cycle, and the infiltration of water into the modernist walls in Toamasina touches a particular part of this hydrological cycle. This is the part where water is moved from the oceanic reservoir to the atmospheric reservoir. It is at this critical zone where a purification process of water occurs. Here, various molecules make up the oceanic waters generating a great mixture that becomes seawater. Some of the molecules that have been dissolved in seawater are minerals that have been carried from rocks on land. Some are pollutants arriving through the hydro social cycles from inland cities that dump into river waters. And some are the molecules that weigh the waters with histories and memory of dumped bodies such as drowned slaves (Sharpe 2016: 13-4). During the water purification process where water molecules are lifted into the atmosphere from

⁹ I use the term “contact” here in line with feminist thinking of contact zones that result in locating difference.

their long residency in the ocean, the molecules that clung to water, or that water broke down, separated and then bound into itself, are freed and left behind to drift in the winds. Within these molecules are transmogrifying ionic salt compounds. Through their movement, it is possible to notice the separate parts of a seawater mixture, as it activates elementally. And within this, the inseparability of the seawater phenomenon is also highlighted as water activates through earth and air, through dissolution, containment and release. Seawater becomes through such cyclic activities. When seawater is pulled apart, different varying phenomena come together again. As salt ions drift in sea spray and winds, they find each other once again and when water separates into further evaporation, they enter into states of compounding crystallisation. Out of the ocean now, they cling onto and coat surfaces, pitting into them as they expand through the addition of more salts that dissolve and then remain through the medium of water.

Continuously expanding, these ion particles flow with water, permeating below surfaces, finding their way down columns, through faults and into reinforced steel. Active and activating, they layer between architecture and ocean, between stagnation and movement, liquifying surfaces that are erected in their path. Between salt, water and metal, this layering generates a behaviour of the in between that is a result of difference encountering in a zone of contact. This behaviour generates matter that creates a new autocatalytic chemical substance, acting in a self-sustaining system: rust. Rust generates self-replicating molecules and mutates surfaces. As it opens holes, rust makes surfaces porous to water activity that invites additional liquids in. Here, the temporality of linear progress associated with the walls is disrupted into dissonance with the presence of another. The holes in this surface activate through *plus* – through a mutation that leaks in and grows with the activities of hydro cycles as they move water through everything in varying temporalities so that what is touched may touch (in turn) planetary modes of existence. Activating in the holes of such walls is a temporal shift from linearity to multiplicitous ongoingness. The holes contain the activities that result from this very shift. They become a site to notice the surfacing of potentials that emerge from rearrangement within seazones. In this way, the hole not only contains activities, but it opens toward the un containment –the *plus*– of human-ocean rearrangements as they form amphibious breathability within the seazone.

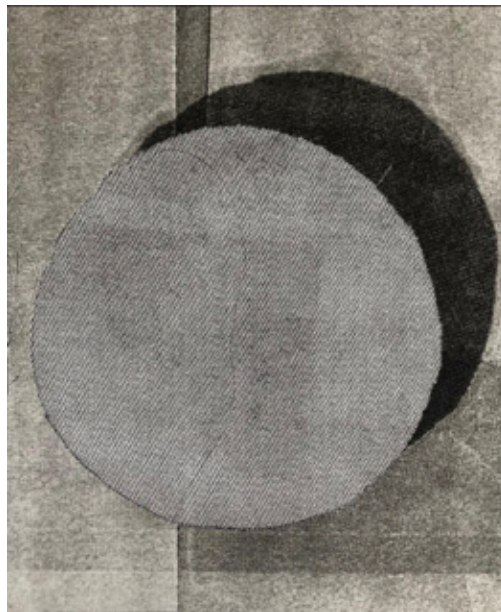


Figure 7
Judge, M, *Inquiry into Void*, 2021, print. Johannesburg: Edition Verso
(photograph by the author).

It is the autocatalytic, self-replication of the in-between substance rust that mutates the interface of solid and liquid. Rust opens the pores of this in between, activating within them to generate climates of breathability. As seemingly solid surfaces become porous, additional liquids are invited in and the hole, the pore, breathes in an unfathomable difference entrained in deep time. In the milieu that is this oceanic weathering relation, binaries of linearity are touched into relations outside of themselves. Through this touch they become bonded, like wet crystals, to temporalities of oceanic activities that far outstretch, that can only be imagined, that can never be imagined, that sit elsewhere from what is determined. Transmogrifying within wayward temporalities of tension and release, the unruly edges of precarious time (Tsing 2013: 142) are opened for sensing. Such sensing deviates from the overdetermined, linear storying of the modern. Seazone allows for stories and storying that, at their end, can open to more. This zone works at the potentials of interfacing edges by reading them through their relational activity in uncontainable and uncountable ways, asking that the perceptions of these edges and binary lines be perceived differently and through difference. It is here that a point for viewing (from point of view) undoes itself into the breath of multiplicitious climates wherein there is no overdetermined “point” of stability from which to view, and no sense that dominates (such as sight). Such undoing is not an emptying of what is. The rearrangements of perceptions expand into and from what crystallises in the hole at binary lines, softening after into amphibious potentials. As these potentials breathe and move, they reconfigure the shape of the human in oceanic relation with and through difference.

Conclusion

Working with and through the elemental activities of the ocean offers radically interdisciplinary ways for considering difference in human-ocean relations. Wayward paths lead from a desire to escape the binaries erected between the human and the so-called “natural world”. While walls on buildings form a necessary protection layer between weathering elements and bodies, the wall as an apparatus for modernist ideals proposes a rich thinking ground for considering how less binaried and more amphibious relations may be considered. Seeking out faults in the walls and in the naming of terminology is not a means to simply work erosively into notions of categories, property, ownership and presence. Faults open toward something else, both in a liquid sense, where running from one part to another occurs, and also within the presumed emptiness that a “hole” suggests. This emptiness challenges perceptions of what is present, and it is this perceptive shift that is being taken up in the article and argued throughout. The positionality of perceptiveness, moving from being firmly on land looking out to a distant sea to lifted feet drifting in between the known and the unknown, is what is at stake. Human-ocean relations remain within the figurations of the human while coming to know the ocean, which, if the figuration of the human is rooted in the Cartesian form, is a one-directional knowing. However, attempting to know the ocean through relations grown through elemental activities and deep-time cyclic temporalities can shift perceptions away from dominant Man-centred perspectives that have been at the root of the Cartesian divide. Listening to the activities of the hole, the inability to hear or the stirrings of a sense for what is present make a difference in learning to be with difference. Attempts to do so re-story through matter while combining in an immaterial perceptive sense-experience of the material activities in ways that speak directly to the apparatuses for knowing. Through the intersecting parts in zones of activity, a re-storying occurs alongside the reconfiguration of dominant assertions of Man, dampening overly determining surfaces or, perhaps, escaping toward something far more multiplicitious and relational, and with some hope joining the already present figurations of a human in relation that exist outside of the confines of the enlightenment.

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