Christian Ernsten

Following the Ancestors

In this essay, I try to map some of the important colonial inscriptions of Cape Town. I speak of moments or features that are deeply invested in the everyday life of Cape Town and its struggles. I suggest that the fort, the garden, the grid, the slum, the ruin and the cemetery are six such moments. They condition this city's transformation, as they provide a vehicle for ideas, images and the praxis of power. These moments are the backdrop against which Cape Town presents itself, for example, as the World Design Capital (2014).
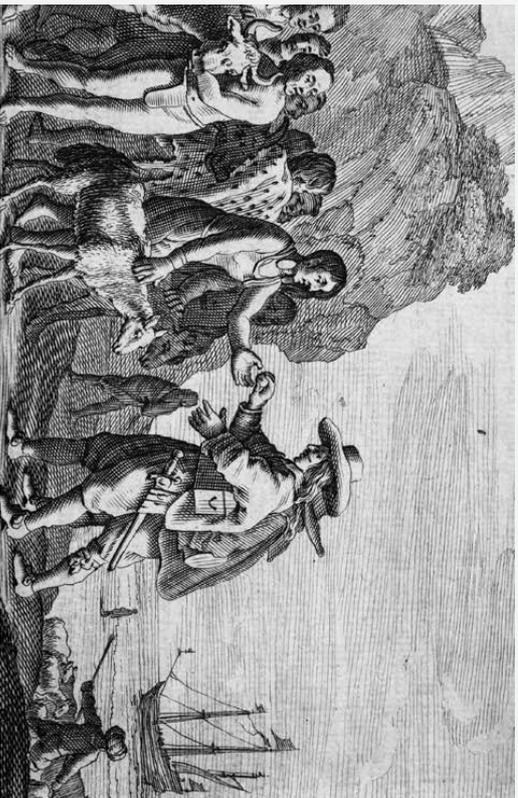
I will show how, through acts of top-down spatial coding, a coloniality of time and place is demarcated. I address the myth or the dream of the Cape landscape and how this gives content to the colonial archive. I point to the counter-voices, acts of translation, play, irony, destruction and obstruction.

I'm interested in ways to redirect our attention from the colonial archive, towards a history of place that does not reinforce Cape Town's repetitive features. I try to hint at narratives that contain angles, routes, subjectivities, styles and an appreciation of time outside the realm of colonial re-enactment.

Hunters and gatherers, likely the first inhabitants of the Cape, followed in the footsteps of their dead ancestors and as a result memories were generated. As such, their knowledge of the world was the result not of a construct of the mind but of a bodily engagement. Anthropologist Tim Ingold writes that "the forms which people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity".[1]

I'm interested in following the Cape ancestors.

Fort

The colonial inscription of the landscape of the Cape, as well as the dominant historical narrative, begins with the arrival of Van Riebeeck's ship in 1652. As we know, the Cape was no empty land. Yet, the men of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) had a rather distorted idea of the place. Africa, according to them, "was replete with legends of cannibals and one-footed creatures".[2] The local Khoi society, made up of the Gorachoqua and the Goringhaicona, was well aware of the explorers and traders from Europe long before the Dutch arrived.[3]

The Dutch called the Goringhaicona – who lived in the vicinity of the coast – 'Strandlopers', and Autshumao was their leader. Historians who studied Van Riebeeck's journal, a central part of the colonial archive, concluded that the VOC settlement intersected with a seasonal herding route of the Khoi and, thus, led to regular contact. Yet the Company ordered only a fort and a fruit-and-vegetable garden to be built; it had no real interest in engaging with the Goringhaicona or the Gorachoqua.[3] The Dutch commanders, as Europeans elsewhere in the 'New World', believed in their right to rule.

Interestingly, all buildings of the Cape settlement were strictly managed and controlled in order to facilitate the VOC monopoly. The commanders tried to engineer an orderly image of the hamlet at the African frontier.[4] Architectural historians characterised and categorised the settlements of the Khoi in relation to these early colonial buildings. As such, Nick Shepherd and Noeleen Murray speak of "the first trope in South African space-making, the idea of the 'primitive', 'indigenous' or 'vernacular'".[5]

In the context of this neat official picture, the Khoi woman Krotoa represents a counter-memory or a hidden voice. The VOC's journal gives an account of how Van Riebeeck relied on Krotoa for regular supplies of meat. Indeed, Krotoa was a go-between for the Dutch and

the Goringhaicona. Her role as translator gave her authority and, baptised as a Christian, she became the first to be buried in the new castle. Novelist Karel Schoeman points to the biographies of another six Khoi: namely, Doman, Sousa, Oudasoa, Ngonnemoa, Sara and Dorha. All of them were individuals who familiarised themselves with a foreign culture and a changing reality. Their everyday misbehaviour challenged the official authority. They tilt the colonial archive and make us think about the paths, routes and sites that held significance beyond the fort. In so doing, they draw our attention to the frontiers of the colonial archive.

Moreover, these Khoi reveal that the need for "a repetitive insistence on the superiority of European civilization [actually] represents the nervousness among colonizers of the potential for failure in the outrageous enterprise of conquering the world". Schoeman suggests that the more potent images of the first 154 years of European presence at the Cape relate to issues of "shelter, enclosure, keeping together, shutting out, protecting, defending, establishing presence and ensuring its survival". Dutch rule amounted to continuous and desperate improvisation.[6,7]

Garden

The VOC's focus on a fort and a garden "was to provide the basis for Cape Town's later physical layout and the key symbols of its early function". As such, a *myth of origin* became physically constituted. Author J.M. Coetzee writes that the calm stability of the garden or of the freeburgher farms was an idealised and utopian moment between "the wilderness of lawless nature and the wilderness of the new cities". It was a moment outside of history.[8] This myth proved influential in social histories of how the establishment of farm households extended the frontier of the VOC settlement into the Liesbeek Valley and further.

An archaeologist described, for example, how there was a "general Eurasian flavour to all ordinary freeburgher house layouts and their contents", inhabited by whites, free blacks and slaved inhabitants.[9] The thatched and gabled manor houses with their "whitewashed walls, sash windows, inner shutters, floor of flagstones or broad yellow planks and exposed beams [...] preserve memories of the seventeenth-century Netherlands".[10]

A second spatial trope – the Cape Dutch style – resonates with this garden myth. Cape Dutch signifies VOC rule at the Cape as well as the most authentic form of South African architectural heritage.[5] In response, it is possible to point to the deeper complexities at work beneath the relative stability of the freeburghers' lives in their Cape Dutch mansions. In 1658, the first two ships with 228 slaves arrived, and many ships followed. Indeed, freeburgher life was based on intensive use of slave labour. The slave owners at, for example, farms such as Groot Constantia, Rustenburg or Vergelegen, as well as other members of the colonial elite, "were scared to the point of paranoia about the possibility of rebellion against their domination".[10]

The resurfacing in 1991 of the remains of Flora, a slave woman at the Vergelegen farm, and the contestations surrounding her

re-burial and its representation are perhaps an entry point for a different reading of the colonial archive.[11] What if we try to give a voice to Flora as a Cape ancestor? I would like to suggest though that Flora's remains, previously buried under the tiled floor of the slave lodge, challenge the historical value of official records of the Cape farms, such as household inventories, maps, charts, plans, panoramas, tax returns and censuses. They raise the question: how can Cape Dutch life be understood if not in relation to historical slavery?

Coetzee remarks how the time of the freeburghers' farm was "an exemplary age when the garden myth became actualised in history". As such, the Cape Dutch style points to the robust silences, the disavowed violence embedded in this colonial archive.[8]
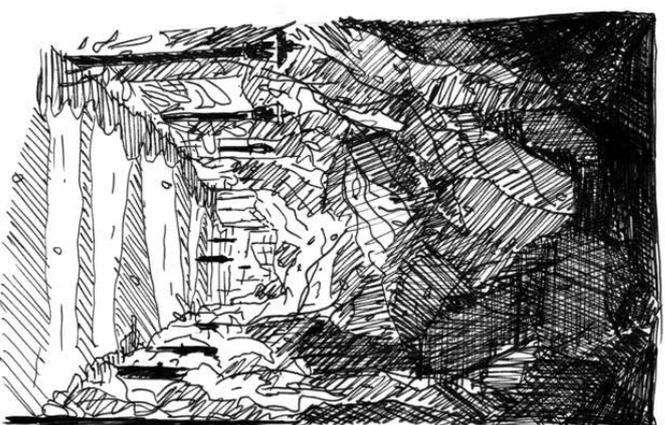
Grid

A representation of orderly colonial authority was established via the military geometry of the grid. Historians describe how "[m]oun-tain streams were channelled into water courses alongside the Company Gardens, down the main 'Heerengracht' (currently named Adderley Street) and around the parade into the sea, in an imitation of the Dutch urban canals" and of the high culture of Amsterdam and the Hague.[3,12]

Through naming, a nascent culture of public spaces, ascribed value and intensified authority was established. Moreover, VOC or Batavian regulations–since the Dutch invented them in present day Jakarta – applied to the Cape; its clauses sought to regulate everything from the use of carriages to the use of parasols, from men and women's clothing to "the number of slaves permitted in a retinue". The grid of streets is a system of spaces that coded power set against the backdrop of the wild and threatening landscape of Table Mountain and Africa.[12]

From 1795, British rule slowly perfected the formal aspects of society by means of ornaments, rituals and regulations, and subsequently degraded the informal. The rules of colonial society, its ideas and styles, became connected with industrialising England. Empire is the spatial trope for this period, according to Murray and Shepherd.[5,13] With Victorian buildings, botanical gardens, monuments, Anglican churches and schools, and public buildings, the British systemically reinforced the colonial geometry of power-coding.

Yet, these constructed colonial spaces proved difficult to control. Urban slaves actively protested through physical escape and organised attacks on the property of the city's elite.[14,15] After the abolition of slavery in 1834, counter-practices take on a different, perhaps more ironic, character. A contested figure, the *coon* embodied the acts of breaking with conventions, comm-unity building and associating with over-seas cultures. The festival, also known as New Year's Carnival, represents a moment of ridiculing and challenging power and order. On several occasions, the Carnival has literally resulted in riots.[16]

Slum

Fear of the protests, revolutions and violence incited by the urban poor formed the backdrop of the public-health debates around 1900. In combination with nationalist sentiments, these debates gave rise to racial anxieties. Maynard Swanson described this ideology as "the sanitation syndrome".[17]

In Cape Town, this led to a municipal and media focus on the impoverished suburban quarters close to the harbour and bordering the colonial grid. District One (around Chiappini and Rose streets), District Two (on the slopes of Signal Hill) and District Six (on the slopes of Table Mountain and Devil's Peak) were increasingly referred to in connection with the influential public-health service and sanitation discourse, and were subjected to building regulations and bylaws.[3,18]

The cosmopolitan communities of these districts, which were mostly inhabited by mixed-race descendants of the Cape's slaves and European immigrants, were considered as slum hotspots. Their buildings were standing in the way of progress. Discourses on the architecture and the inhabitants of the slums "became a key founding layer in the construction of apartheid". The garden-city ideal was a design scheme based on the medieval English village, which was hoped to "induce inhabitants to become their better selves, to duly perform assigned roles on the perfect stage-set of a happily settled community". It thus inspired South African architects to design the first racially segregated housing projects – notably Ndabeni, Langa, Pinelands and Maitland.

Protests against these increasingly sophisticated forms of exclusion became more and more organised. In the first decennia of the twentieth century, emanci-patory organisations, such as the African People's Organisation and the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, produced a more institutional version of resistance.[3] Spontaneous outbursts that challenged the discriminatory spatial and heritage politics of Cape Town are the fragments that make up Cape Town's ruined counter-archive.

Ruin

The 1948 whites-only election won by the National Party (NP) gave rise to an increas-ingly combative and heritage-conscious municipality in Cape Town. The 1952 Van Riebeeck Tercentenary, a festival that took place at the recently reclaimed foreshore, the new gateway to Africa, was a historical re-enactment of unseen proportions. It offered a window into Cape Town's near future.

The spectacle portrayed Van Riebeeck as the single founding father and symbol of white rule. Moreover, it modelled Cape Town as the founding city of a white nation. A procession through the city's streets told how dark Africa had benefited from Western civilisation.[19] The African National Congress (ANC) and the Non-European Unity Movement mocked the tercentenary and called it a Festival of Hate.[20,21]

The festival juxtaposed the performance of civilisation: the industrial and scientific might of the white settlers' society that started

Visual otherness, which was regarded as undermining, was both the presence of black people as well as residual *urban* Cape Dutch structures.[18] A rising interest in heritage coincides and is intertwined with an increas-ingly functionalist approach to the design of the built environment. Shepherd and Murray argue that the Union of South Africa in 1910 symbolises the beginnings of the tropes of nationalism and apartheid. Indeed, in this period, a growing governmental power of controlling and conserving a spatial and cultural order was established via a myriad urban and heritage legislation.[5]

with Van Riebeeck with the presentation of the primitive – a Bantu pavilion and a display of the South West African Bushman. According to historians Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, the manifestation functioned as a way to legitimise the implementation of the 1950s Group Areas Act as an evolutionary consequence.[21]

Indeed, through the racialised legislation of the NP – administrating and controlling non-white people's movement in urban space – in combination with an assertive town planning, an apartheid city came into existence. In fact, social engineering in the Cape took a particular form: it attempted to construct a region with only whites and coloureds, and with no permanent African black population.

Traffic circulation became a key spatial trope. The opening in 1959 of De Waal Drive and the Table Bay Boulevard, as well as the 1968 opening of the Eastern Boulevard and the buildings of foreshore reclamation, notably the 1970s Civic Centre, with such intimidating streets as Hertzog Boulevard, and finally the Western Bypass, penetrated into inner-city streets, communities and vistas.[19]

These violent high-modernist interventions were officially accorded by the 1969 National Monuments Act, which formalised the influence of Afrikaner folk historians, architects and town planners on conceptions of heritage.[22] These urban projects were impossible without the technocratic approach that allowed for property destruction following forced removals. The foreshore area became a 'dehumanised cityscape', the literal ruin of District Six became a spatial monument to social engineering and the townships of the Cape Flats became sites of black resistance.[19]

The demise of the apartheid state happened alongside and because of growing mass street protests and community actions. Besides the ANC, the Black Consciousness Movement and the United Democratic Front organised marches as well as demonstrations, consumer and school boycotts, work stay-aways, street barricades and the stoning and petrol bombing of vehicles, properties and persons.[23,24] These acts provoked different imaginations of places and persons as well as practices that constituted a counter-discourse of the Cape. The demonstrations of the 1980s effectively used segregated spaces and bodies to disrupt colonial technologies and eventually led to a retreat from apartheid policies.[19]

The performativity of the politics of the streets became an important tool for the reconstruction of space, identity and citizenship. Moreover, District Six's protest organisations and especially the Hands of District Six campaign developed ways of establishing a counter-discourse through oral histories and stories of community protest and celebration.

Cemetery

In post-apartheid Cape Town, when issues of restitution and reconciliation became a central part of the official discourse, the disassociation from the colonial archive is a key challenge.

Interestingly, recent urban-renewal projects in the former District One and District Six have produced counter-memories. Taking place in the context of global events such as the FIFA World Cup as well as the World Design Capital project, these contributions to Cape Town's gentrification have led time and again to the unearthing of forgotten or silenced pasts of racial slavery and forced removals. The memories of these suburbs link into every moment of this genealogy but, nevertheless, they are not (yet) officially recognised as significant national heritage. The contestations concerning the unearthing of the informal slave-burial place at District One's Prestwich Street function as a palimpsest of the post-apartheid urban problematic.[22]

In fact, the resurfacing of the dead challenges the trope of national unity and alerts us to the failure of urban transformation. Yet, these instances also allow for new ways of following the Cape ancestors and new ways of transforming the colonial archive.

As a mirror image to the World Design Capital, an increasingly fierce set of counter-practices addresses the long-overdue issues of historical and social injustice. It is interesting to note that the unresolved issues of Cape Town's past have turned into what Steve Robbins coined – in the *Cape Times* – the city's 'Great Stink', referring to the use of human faeces in protests by social activists.[25]
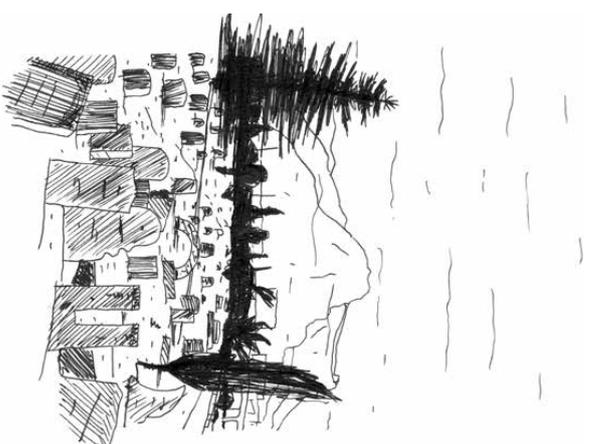
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Freedom
Pages 8 & 9 Nelson Mandela addresses South Africans for the first time after his release from prison, from the balcony of the City Hall on the Grand Parade, Cape Town, Chris Ledochowski / South Photographs / Africa Media Online

Page 14 *Chapungu - The Day Rhodes Fell* 2015 by Sethembile Msezane

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Page 27 Illustration by Michael Tymbios, map courtesy of the District Six Museum Archive

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Page 52 Rex Trueform's second factory opened in 1948, Cape Town Guide (1951)

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URL of satellite image: http://wikitravel.org/upload/shared/a/a7/Astronaut_photo_of_Cape_Town_STS081-738-23.jpg

Pages 132 & 133 Gugulethu aerial view, photographs by Bruce Sutherland

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Oven Mitts Become Boxing Gloves
Pages 139 to 141 Watercolour and crayon on Fabriano by Laura Windvogel aka Lady Skollie

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Page 161 Afreaks by The Haas Brothers in collaboration with Monkeybiz, photograph by Hayden Phipps

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Pages 180 & 181 Nelson Mandela Released from Prison, Graeme Williams / South Photographs / Africa Media Online

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Zahira Asmal, illustration by Megan Taljaard

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Chapter 16
The Gathering
Jade de Waal is a saxophonist with a big heart and a love for cooking for people. She started Food Jams in 2010 as a social get-together and a way for people to learn how to cook in the way that she learnt music.

Chapter 17
Seasonal Flow
Dylan Culhane is a multidisciplinary artist and writer. After tenures as editor of local pop culture magazines like one small seed and VICE, he has emerged as a thought leader in the creative landscape of South Africa, and will talk your ear off at the bar if you bring up the topic.

Chapter 18
Moving Through the Scene
Malibongwe Tyilo is a journalist who is primarily focused on design, fashion and culture. He is the Editor-at-Large for Visi magazine as well as a contributing editor for Elle magazine and founded the popular fashion blog Skattie.

Chapter 19
Maker Movement
Trevyn McGowan is the co-founder of Southern Guild, the foremost collectable design gallery in South Africa; showcasing at the top design fairs around the world, Source, the leading export agency supplying local design product to the international retailers around the world; and GUILD, Africa's only international design fair.

Chapter 20
Transition, Transformation
Albie Sachs played a prominent part in the struggle for justice in South Africa. As a result he was detained in solitary confinement, tortured by sleep deprivation, exiled and eventually the victim of a car bomb, which cost him his right arm and the sight in one eye. He was instrumental in drafting South Africa's post-apartheid Constitution, and served as a member of the Constitutional Court for 15 years.

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela is a senior research professor in trauma, memory and forgiveness at the University of the Free State in South Africa. She received her PhD in psychology from the University of Cape Town and served on the Truth & Reconciliation Commission. She is the author of the award-winning book A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness.

Lucie De Moyencourt is an artist and architect living in Sea Point. She loves drawing people and the urban environment, particularly the Atlantic Seaboard, where mountains meet buildings and meet the sea in dramatic compositions.