CHAPTER THREE

Theory

3.1
INTRODUCTION

The following chapter introduces the theoretical platform to substantiate design decisions throughout the dissertation.

The first section aims to clarify the theoretical concept that supports the central argument of the dissertation. The concept is expressed metaphorically through the use of a folktale. The tale acts as the supportive 'backbone' to which the theoretical premises are attached.

The second section explores the design opportunities that arise from the theoretical studies and proposes possible architectural solutions.

The chapter concludes with definitive aims thatwill drive architectural resolution.

3.2
THEORETICAL CONCEPT

As discussed in the introductory chapters the principle aim of the dissertation is to reunite Marabastad with its intangible heritage. The reasons for the dislocation may be summarized as:

• The forced relocation of the citizens of Marabastad to outlying locations such as Atteridgeville, Laudium, Claudius and Eersterust.

• The demolition and decommissioning of the physical loci (theatres, beerhalls and dancehalls) that once hosted the cultural practices.

• The physical recontextualisation of Marabastad as a transport interchange.

• Cultural recontextualisation due to changes in the socio-political environment. Changes such as the end of Apartheid and increased exposure to external cultural influence through mass media (leading to cultural homogenization).

• The effects of time on memory.

For the purpose of this dissertation Marabastad acts as an example of an "intangible heritage landscape" as put forth by Liana Muller in her 2008 study on Intangible and Tangible Landscapes wherein she stresses the importance of interpreting the intangible aspects of place and its relation to its tangible fabric with specific reference to the role of memory (Further discussed in Section 3.3).

Informed by Muller's premise of intangible landscapes, the primary theoretical concept of the dissertation is the following:

The intangible qualities of place (eg. memory, meaning, cultural history, lived experience) are 'buried alive' beneath a number of temporal layers (time, socio-cultural and physical recontextualisation and/or dislocation from its practitioners)

This dissertation argues that architecture can assist living heritage to 'exhume itself' from these layered phenomena by providing the physical habitat for cultural reproduction in the form of 'open-ended' heritage places (Further discussed in Section 3.3.2).

The abovementioned concept is illustrated by way of a folktale. The 'tale' is intended to act as the unifying thread between individual theories in support of the primary theoretical concept.

The title of the tale:

Ringing the dead man's bell

The title refers to the 14th century device used to aid victims of premature burial to signal their being alive from the grave. The architecture of the proposal aims to provide the same service in aid of living heritage that has been 'buried alive' beneath the temporal layers as discussed above.

The configuration of the story is based on that of a traditional African folktale. Traditionally these tales include anthropomorphised animals, plants, objects or gods as the actants in the tale (often as metaphorical representations of other phenomena). The interaction between the actants is used to express embedded motifs (both simple and complex).

In the case of "Ringing the dead man's bell" the actants are anthropomorphised versions of the primary participating elements of the dissertation. Their interaction is metaphorically expressed in the narrative of the story as well as in accompanying graphics (abstractly illustrating the interaction). The theoretical implications of the interactions are indicated below each page of narrative.

The cast:

• Folklore (the main protagonist) : Represents intangible heritage (In the context of Marabastad: the 'Marabi' culture).

• Community (the wife of folklore) : Represents the people of a specific community (Inhabitants of Marabastad).

• Anthropology (the loyal dog) : Represents current endeavors to engage with intangible heritage.

• The Public Sphere: Represents Muller's intangible landscape (Remaining historical fabric of Marabastad).

• Cultural Homogenisation (the witch): Represents the effects of external cultural influence (Explained by Fig. 3.1 and Fig 3.2).

• The Realm of Memory: Represents the perception that 'heritage' is a function of the past rather than an active contributor to the present.

• The Dead Man's Bell: Represents 'open ended' heritage architecture that facilitates cultural reproduction (The proposal for this dissertation).
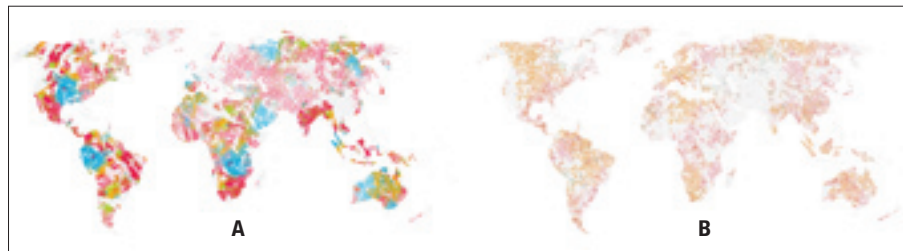

Fig 3.1
A- Diverse cultures with a strong sense of regional autonomy
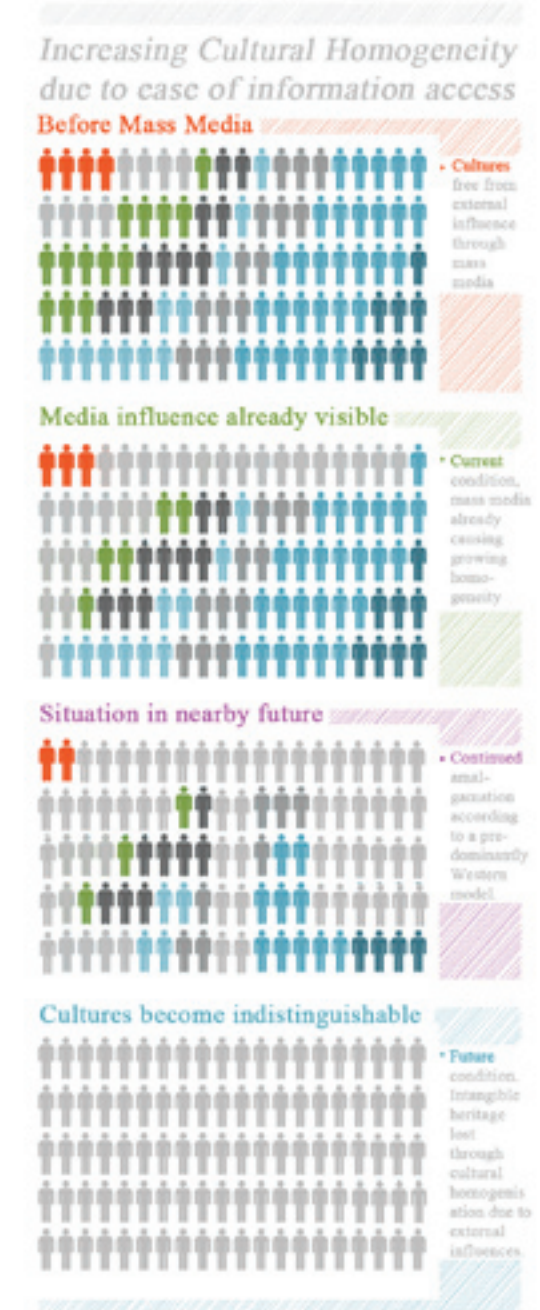*B- Homogenised cultures, loss of autonomy due to external cultural influence*
Author

Fig 3.2
Increase in cultural homogeneity
due to ease of information access
Author

RINGING THE DEAD MAN'S BELL

A folktale by Leon Grobbelaar.

There once was a man named Folklore. He lived happily with his wife, Community and their dog Anthropology in the magnificent land of the Public Sphere. Folklore had a tremendous memory and he was an exceptional storyteller. He knew every story ever told by the people of Public Sphere and he would spend hours entertaining Community and Anthropology with his fables and tales. He told his tales in the most uncommon and splendid fashion. With each telling a different twist would emerge! Community too would chime in, adding anecdotes, alterations and permutations to his ever evolving narratives. Life was grand and all was well until, one day, Community and Anthropology disappeared...

* Theoretical implications:

In "The City of Collective Memory" Christine Boyer (1996:67) states that collective memory is a "current of continuous thought still moving in the present, still part of a group's active life, and these memories are multiple and dispersed, spectacular and ephemeral." According to Professor Dan Ben Amos of the University of Pennsylvania intangible heritage is the "repository for collective memory," (Ben-Amos, 1971: 3) thereby illustrating the value of intangible heritage as a crucial (active) part of community identity. As discussed in earlier sections, Marabastad has suffered a dislocation from it's intangible heritage and it is the intention of this dissertation to restore that connection.

Fig 3.3 Adjacent page
Introducing folklore (intangible heritage)
Author

{Once upon a time}

Folklore looked everywhere for his beloved Community, but she was nowhere to be found. After years and years of looking, Folklore gave up his search. He was so devastated that he isolated himself within a box made of misperception and had a witch curse it so that it may only be visible in her phantasmagorical world, the Realm of Memory. The seasons came and went, years began to go by, and yet folklore remained alive inside his box of misperception...

* Theoretical implications:

This frame illustrates the [mis]perception of heritage as a function of the past and not an active contributor to the everyday environment. Muller (2008, 18) argues that there exists an "interrelationship between the intangible and the tangible landscape and that they are inseparable. The tangible landscape guides, informs and shapes the intangible landscape, and vice versa." Therefore it is crucial for any development dealing with historical matter address the intangible qualities of place with the same amount of rigour as the physical.

 "Within the development industry in South Africa, the concept and realities of preserving intangible heritage are still misunderstood or ignored. Most development projects in South Africa show little or no recognition of the role of memory and meaning of place in present or for future conservation policies " (Muller, 2008: 2).
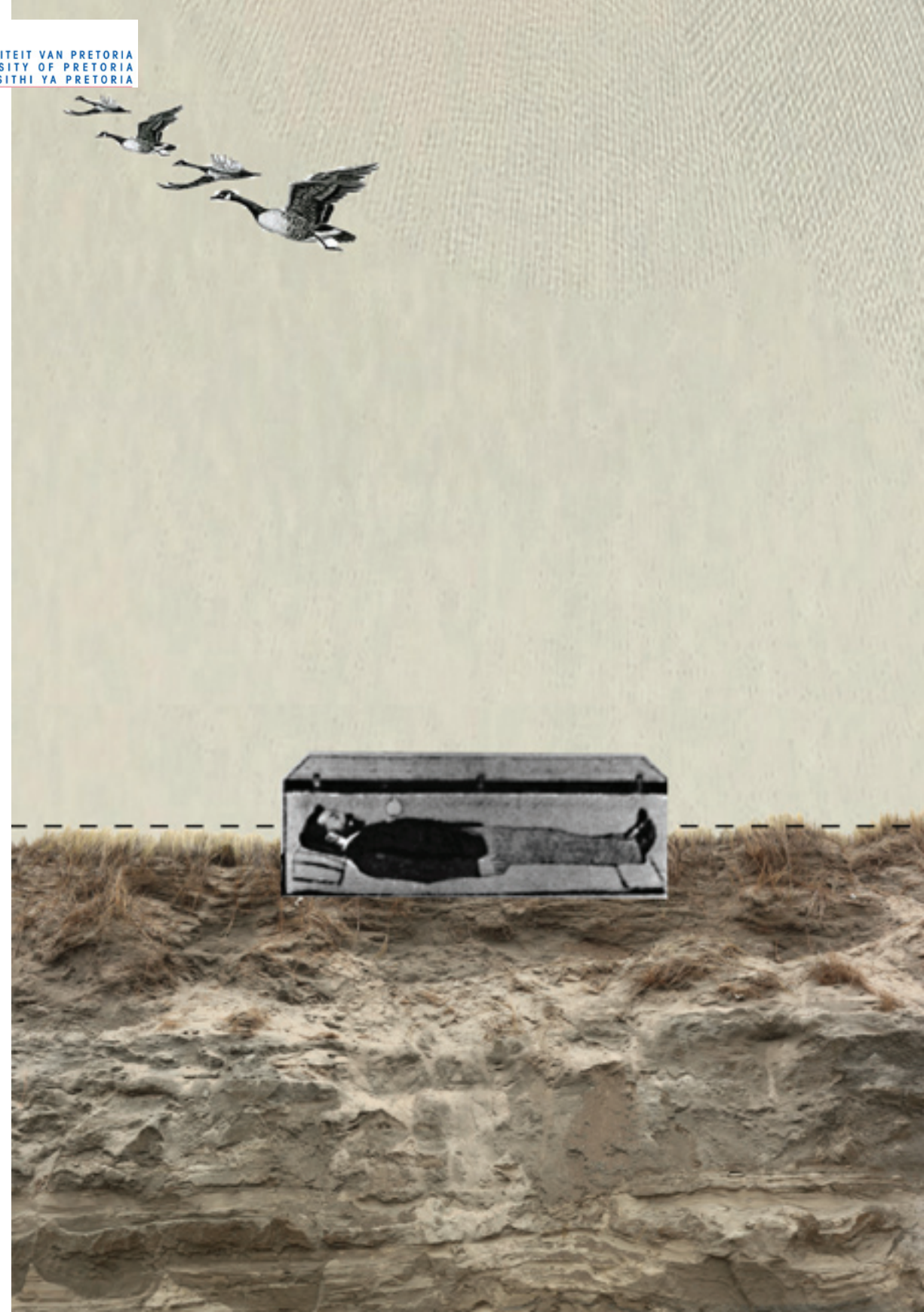
Fig 3.4 Adjacent page
Isolation through misperception
Author

With it's passing, time shed its layers upon Folklore's box. Ever deeper he became buried beneath time's abhorrent strata. Oh the wretchedness! The unspeakable woe! To be buried alive is beyond any doubt the most horrendous lot that can befall mortality! Since his banishment to the Realm of Memory the entire populace of the Public Sphere has forgotten about Folklore as he lay buried.

* Theoretical implications:

As time passes and shifts in social and political context occur a historical cultural practice has to adapt to these changes in order to mainatian societal currency. Bakker (2011, 2) explains it in terms of an ecosystemic view: "systems [culture] are continuously evolving in interaction with other systems [social, physical, political] in a process of co-evolution" so if one system fails to adapt, it loses its meaning in terms of the whole. He draws parallels with Gergen's Social Constructionism which holds the view that "knowledge and [heritage]meaning are social constructs" (Gergen,2001: 47) and that a "continuously evolving process of re-discovery, decoding and adding of layers to existing constructed meaning" is necessary for the continued survival of a cultural practice.
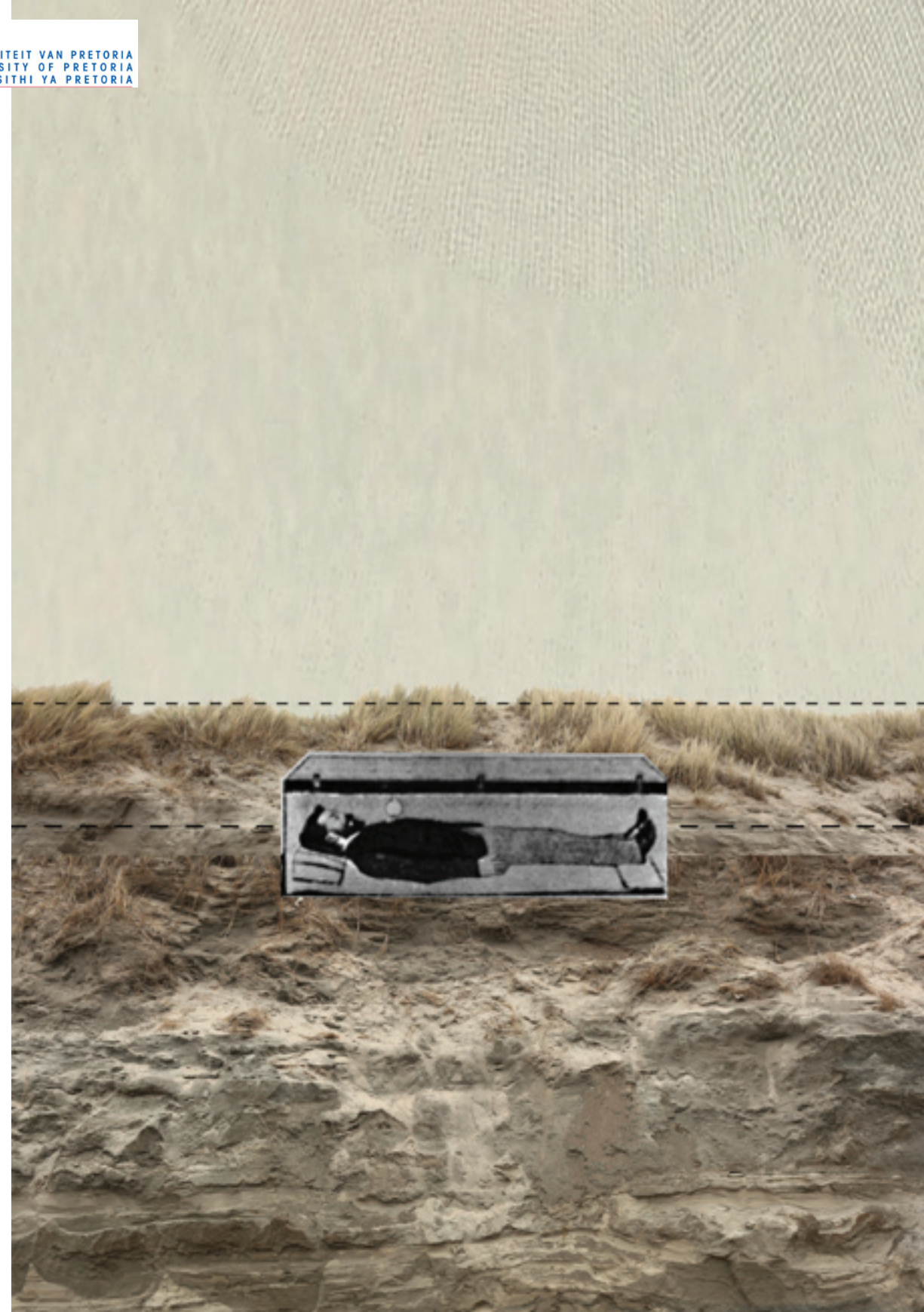

Fig 3.5 Adjacent page
The effects of time
Author

The years continued to go by and time mercilessly buried Folkore beneath its sediment. How he missed his beloved Community, how he wished he could be free once again to tell her his delightful tales! Hopelessly he lay buried, but still Folklore remained alive within his box.

    * Theoretical implications:

South African heritage initiatives "where commemoration of intangible heritage is exclusive, static and/or monovocal" (Bakker & Muller, 2009: 51) do little to allow historical cultural practices a life in the present , thereby isolating it in the past where it has no significant value to its community. This dissertation argues for the implementation of heritage initiatives which allow for critical engagement with intangible heritage so that new layers of meaning may be added.
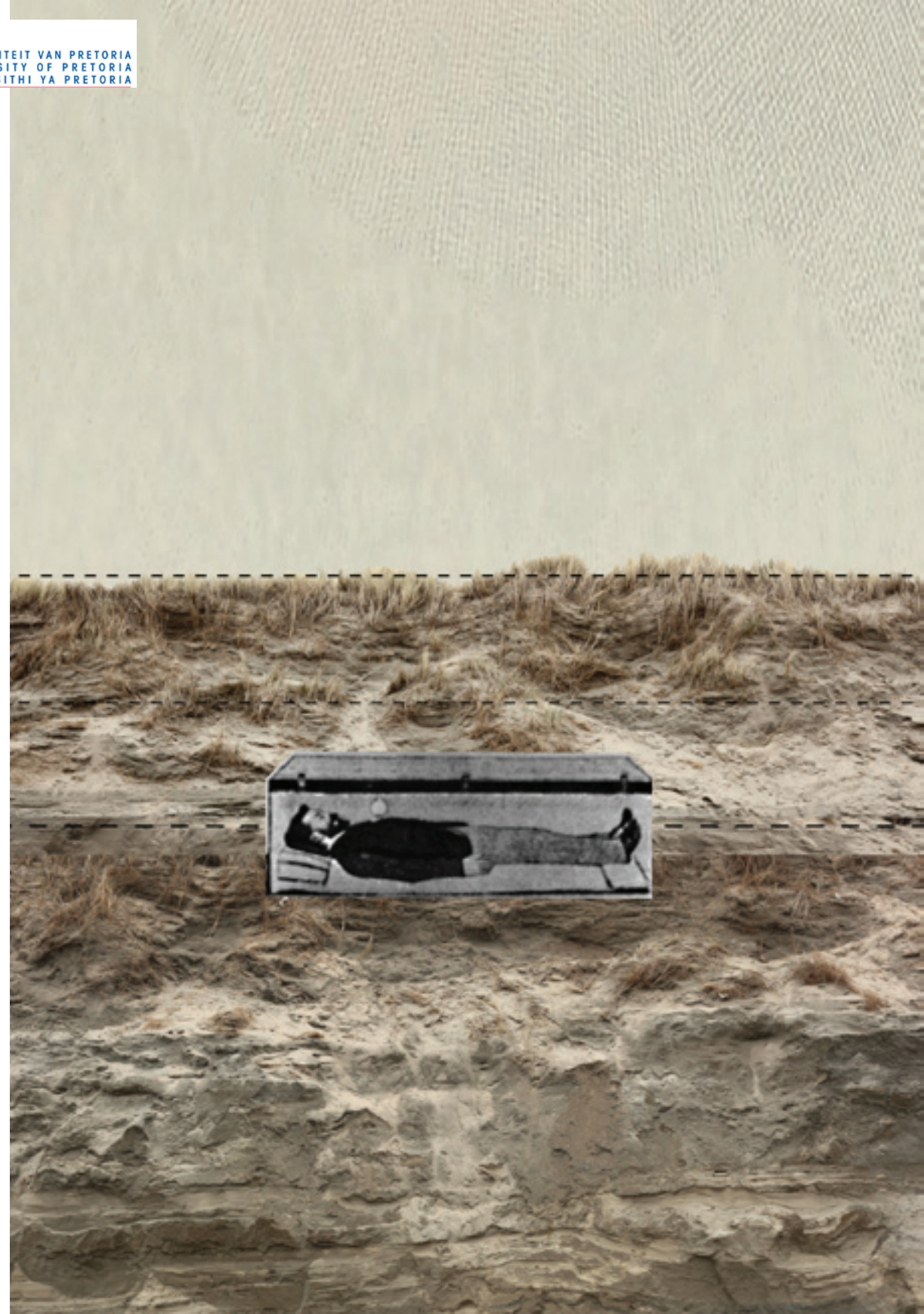
Fig 3.6 Adjacent page
Losing touch with the everyday
Author

One fateful day along came an Archaeologist called Architecture. He had met Community along his travels and she told him her woeful account of how she had lost her beloved husband, Folklore. A wicked witch of the West by the name of Cultural Homogenisation had lured her away from Folklore using her spells of Mass Media. Community explained to Architecture that the witch then returned to the grief stricken Folklore and deceived him into isolating himself in a box of misperception.

Architecture felt great pity towards Community, and being an archaeologist, took it upon himself to uncover the mystery of where Folklore lay buried.

Resolutely the archaeologist sought. Single mindedly he fought. He battled his way through the entangled and dissonant Realm of Memory until, just as he was about to terminate his futile quest, he found what he was looking for.

With the help of anthropology and his astutely fine tuned archaeological comprehension he located the exact position of Folklore within the witch's uncharted realm. But he alone could not rescue Folklore from the Realm of Memory. The witch's curse meant that only by his own hand could Folklore be rescued...

* Theoretical implications:

The current Zeitgeist of the so called "information age" has many social ramifications. Communities across the globe are increasingly exposed to external cultural influence (predominantly Western) through information channels such as the media, the arts and the internet. Although hugely beneficial in terms of the sharing of knowledge, it has the side effect of a growing cultural homogeneity.

Architectural theorist Juhani Pallasmaa (2000: 82) states that "the task of the responsible architect is to provide resistance to cultural erosion and to replant buildings and cities in an authentic existential and experiential soil." In support of Pallasmaa's notion, this dissertation attempts to resist the effects of cultural homogenisation on the cultural heritage of Marabastad by supporting the conditions necessary to unearth the cultural practices unique to the area and allow it a life in the present.

Fig 3.7 Adjacent page
Architecture as archaeology of memory
Author

But the cunning and artful Architecture had a plan of how to outsmart the witch. He devised a device through which he could allow Folklore to communicate to Community and all the inhabitants of the Public Sphere from the Realm of Memory, thereby contributing to his own emancipation.

Architecture got to work in constructing his device. He gathered numberless knickknacks and countless trinkets, all sorts of bric-a-brac and scores of gimcracks, he took hundreds of gewgaws and rusted old thumbtacks and, working through the night, he assembled the most incredible contraption the world has ever laid its eyes upon... He called his device: The dead man's bell.

The next morning before dawn, he took his device to the site where he knew Folklore lay buried and stuck it through the layers of time until he heard the distinctive 'clunck' of anti-burial device against misperception. He initiated the drill to bore through the roof of Folklore's coffin after which he lowered a string into the coffin for Folklore to grab hold of. At the other end of the string he attached a magical bell that could be heard across all of space and time. The rest, he said, is up to Folklore...

* Theoretical implications:

This frame illustrates the implementation of an open-ended heritage initiative which embraces "complex and minor narratives, thus accepting the evolving nature of identity construction and inviting the unlocking of more levels of interpretation." (Bakker & Muller, 2009: 52) The dead man's bell is a metaphor for the architectural proposal of this dissertation.

Fig 3.8 Adjacent page
The dead man's bell is introduced
Author
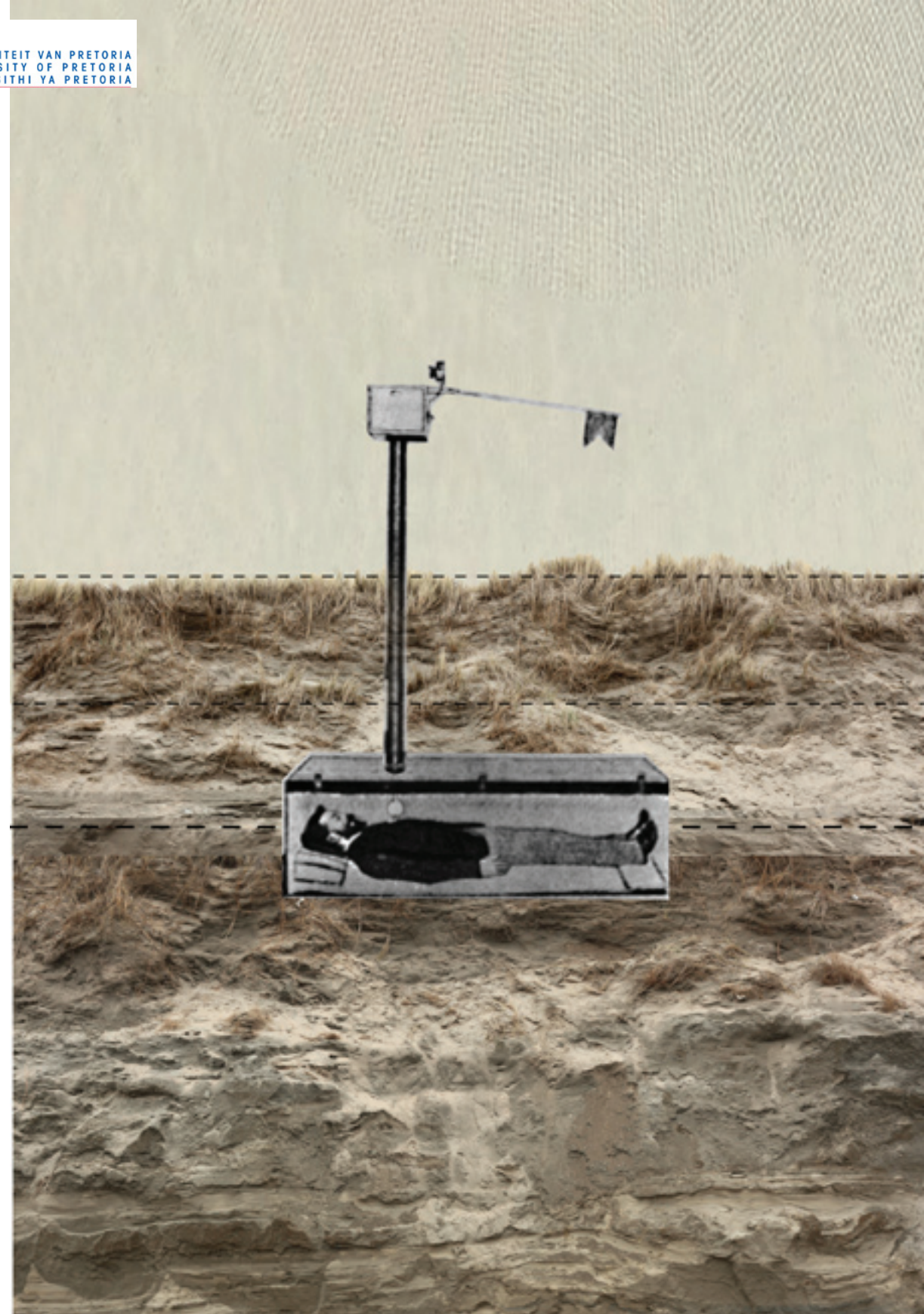
Folklore was astounded! He pulled the string with all of his worth. He pulled and pulled and rejoiced at every magnificent clang of the bell! The sound of the bell echoed across all of space and time, and Folklore knew his means of escape would soon be at hand.

* Theoretical implications:

The ringing of the bell implies the process of metacultural production whereby the culture "acts as an exhibition of itself" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004: 56).
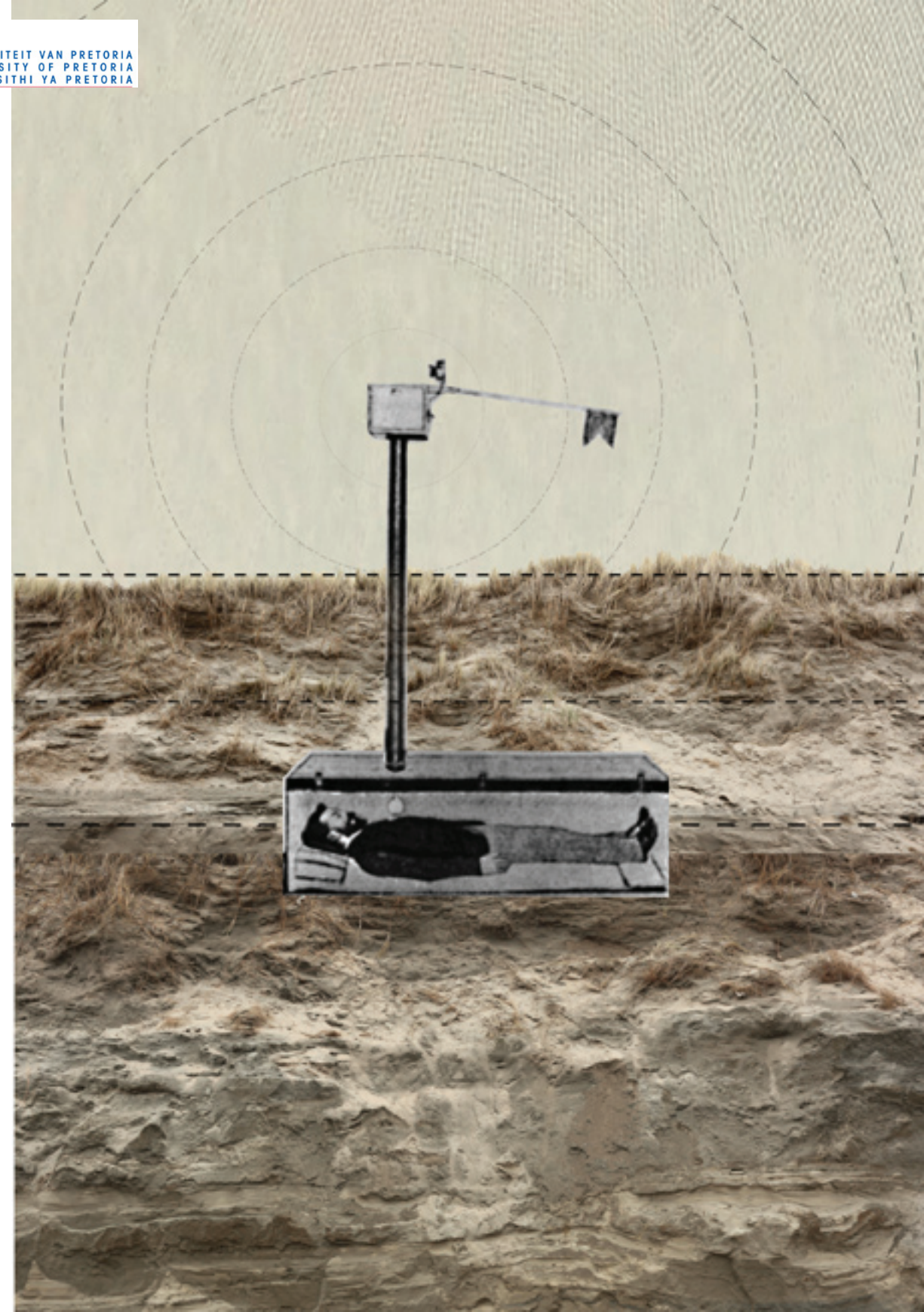
*Fig 3.9 Adjacent page
Ringing the dead man's bell.
Author*

In no time at all, scores of people swarmed towards the bell. Architecture had long since left, for he knew that he had completed his task, it was now Folklore alone facilitating his rescue through the device the archaeologist had left him.

* Theoretical implications:

By providing the habitat necessary for metacultural production architecture allows the cultural system to sustain itself . This approach to commemoration contrasts with the "thin, exclusive or hegemonic forms of memorialisation" (Bakker, 2011: 5) where the experience is pre-packaged in the form of a controlled narrative. The proposal for this dissertation employs an open-ended heritage approach where the visitor learns through engagement with the subject from their own social framework.

Fig 3.10 Adjacent page
Re-introducing the public to their intangible heritage.
Author

The citizens of the Public Sphere began to dig fervently through the layers of time in order to unearth their entombed hero. They dug for what felt (to Folklore) like an eternity until, finally, after enduring decades of solitude and excruciating pensivity...

* Theoretical implications:

This frame illustrates the importance of critical community engagement in the conservation of intangible heritage. Only by creating an "abstract space to which a community could attach their own heritage narratives and management initiatives, including multivocal interpretation and presentation" (Bakker & Muller, 2010: [4]) can architecture provide the necessary habitat for cultural reproduction.

In reaction to the 2005 Faro Convention Professor Gabrielle Dolff-Bonekamper discusses the importance of participation in the process of cultural reproduction:

"heritage is a societal relationship, an attribution of meaning and value to an object; we shall refer to a process of heritage building. Exercise of the right to a heritage thus involves access to a site, the right to interpret and the right to take action, alone or with others, in a joint process of building heritage" (Dolff- Bonekamper, 2009: 70).
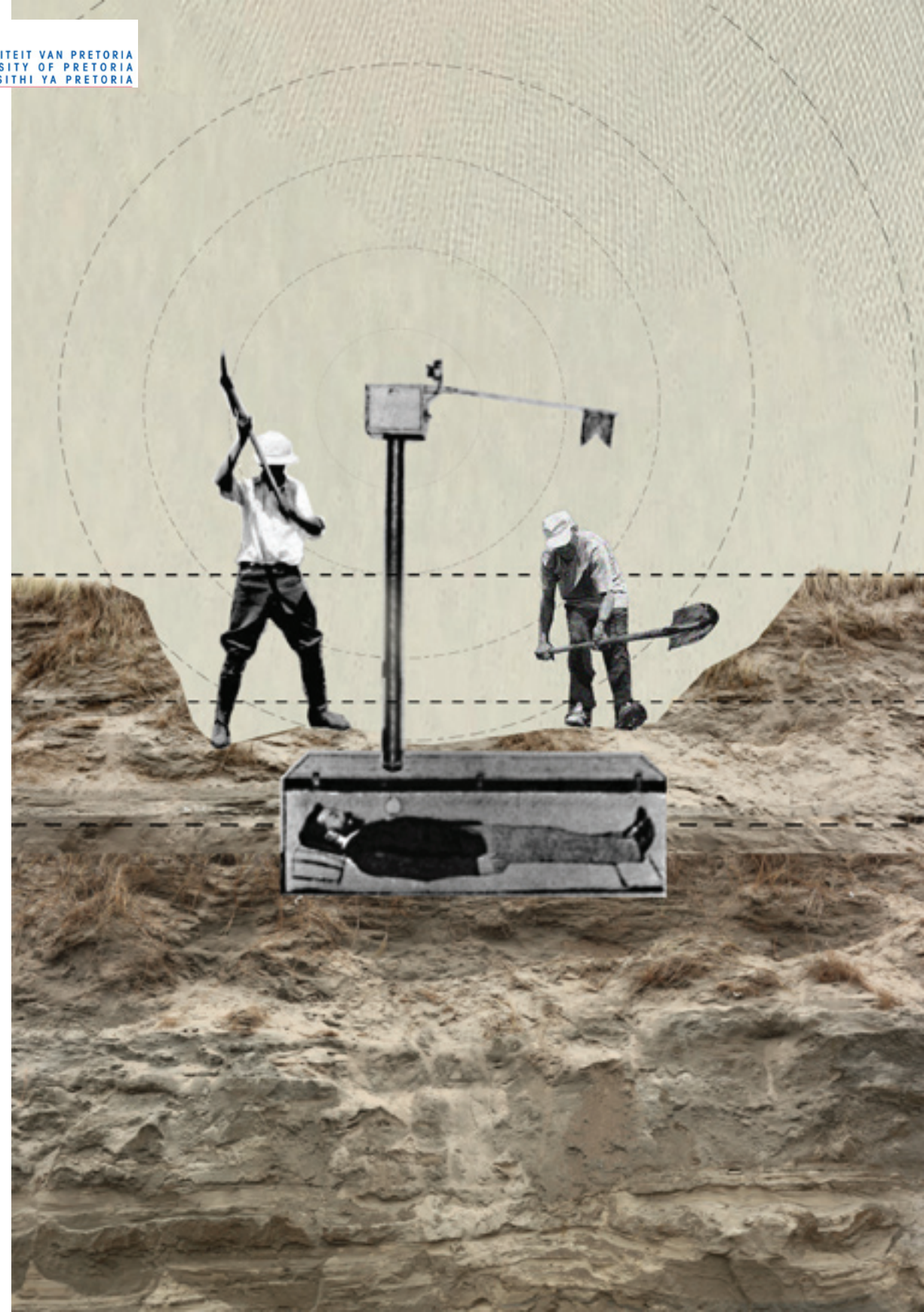
Fig 3.11 Adjacent page
Critical public engagement
Author

*Folklore is reunited with his beloved Community.*

* Theoretical implications:

The 2007 ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites states the importance of 'interpretation' in the conservation of intangible heritage. The proposal aims to address each of the following objectives (ICOMOS, 2007: 4-5)

1. Facilitate understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage sites and foster public awareness and engagement in the need for their protection and conservation.

2. Communicate the meaning of cultural heritage sites to a range of audiences through careful, documented recognition of significance, through accepted scientific and scholarly methods as well as from living cultural traditions.

3. Safeguard the tangible and intangible values of cultural heritage sites in their natural and cultural settings and social contexts.

4. Respect the authenticity of cultural heritage sites, by communicating the significance of their historic fabric and cultural values and protecting them from the adverse impact of intrusive interpretive infrastructure, visitor pressure, in- accurate or inappropriate interpretation.

5. Contribute to the sustainable conservation of cultural heritage sites, by promoting public understanding of, and participation in, ongoing conservation efforts, ensuring long-term maintenance of the interpretive infrastructure and regular review of its interpretive contents.

6. Encourage inclusiveness in the interpretation of cultural heritage sites, by facilitating the involvement of stakeholders and associated communities in the development and implementation of interpretive programmes.

7. Develop technical and professional guidelines for heritage interpretation and presentation, including technologies, research, and training. Such guidelines must be appropriate and sustainable in their social contexts.

Fig 3.12 Adjacent page
The 'anti-monument'
Author
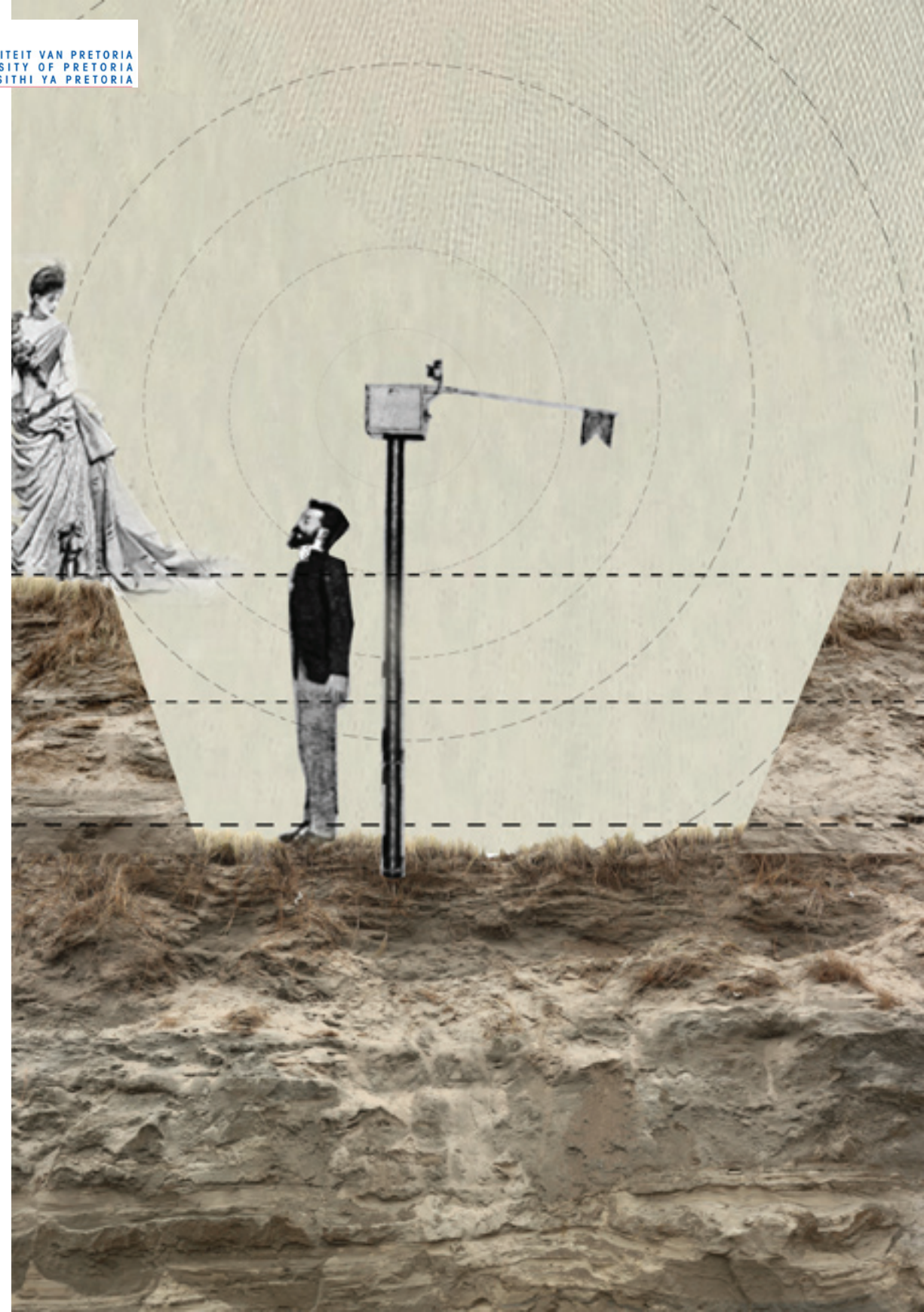
After a disbelieving gaze she jumped into his arms and vowed never to leave him again. Folklore merely replied: "let me tell you the story about the time I was buried alive..."

Theory in support of the arguments expressed above are available in Addendum B: Supportive theory.

Fig 3.13 Adjacent page
The end (is the beginning)
Author

3.3

TRANSLATION INTO ARCHITECTURE

The theory discussed in this section is translated into architecture as follows:

The architecture of this proposal establishes a platform for both spontaneous and rehearsed event through the provision of freely appropriatable space in correspondence with a formalised arena for performance and activity in the form of an adaptable multi-form theatre.

The proposal employs a "past-orientated meaning framework" (Olick & Robbins, 1998: 108) in the form of a reinterpretation of the old Royal Theatre and what it meant in terms of the cultural production of Marabastad (Further developed in Chapter 5).

3.4

CONCLUSION

"People cannot maintain their connections with the past if the physical world they live in does not also sustain these connections."

(Alexander, 1969: 132)

If "buildings are the ornament of cultures" (Brand, 1994 : [s.p]) then it stands to reason that architecture has the moral imperative to respond to cultural development, thereby "index[ing] the process by which life becomes heritage"
(Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004: 56).

This dissertation aims to support the notion that architecture has the moral imperative to act as a custodian of living cultural heritage. Through the amalgamation of living memorials and community initiatives, architecture can allow history to remain an active contributor to the quotidian social environment.

Rambhoros (2009:10) reasons that commemorative architecture that is realigned with the commonplace responds more meaningfully to societal plights than "grand monumental accounts". He continues to state that these "catalytic interventions are fusions of practical functionality and symbolic representations of memory, which steer the South African socio-spatial landscape progressively into the future" (Rambhoros, 2009:11).