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# NORMAN EATON — SOME INFLUENCES ON HIS INSIGHTS

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## Norman Eaton — sekere vormende invloede op sy eie insigte

Eaton, wat Pretoriase Regionalisme — 'n plekgebonde argitektuur — tot stand gebring het, het sy vormingsjare binne 'n uitkenbare konteks, naamlik Pretoria, sy mense en landskap, deurgebring. Sy verhouding met sy mentor, Gordon Leith, sy vriendekring van kunstenaars, veral Alexis Preller, en sy kennismaking met die natuur, plattelanse volksnedersettings, volkskuns en tradisionele konstruksiemateriale dra alles by tot 'n beter begrip van die invloede wat hom gevorm het. Sy persoonlikheidseienaardighede en innerlike self word ook ontbloot.

Eaton, as progenitor of Pretoria Regionalism — a place-specific architecture — spent his formative years within an identifiable context, namely Pretoria, its peoples and its landscape. His relationship with his mentor, Gordon Leith, his circle of artist friends — Alexis Preller in particular — nature, and his investigation of traditional rural settlements and traditional and crafted construction materials all contribute to our understanding of his formative influences. The manifested idiosyncrasies of personality — his inscape — are also revealing.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Norman Musgrave Eaton (1902-1966),<sup>2</sup> architect, is the progenitor — and still the most important representative — of what has come to be called Pretoria Regionalism, a style expressed

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1. Based on a talk presented as "Norman Eaton — the Scars of -Scape", inaugural Norman Eaton Memorial Lecture on the occasion of the launch of the Pretoria Institute for Architecture on Saturday, 28 October 1995 at 19:00 in the Library Hall, Sammy Marks Square, Pretoria.
  2. D. Greig, Eaton, Norman Musgrave, in *Standard encyclopaedia of South Africa 4* (hereafter *SESA*) (Cape Town, 1971), p. 190; C. Harrop-Allin, *Norman Eaton, architect* (Pretoria, 1975). Born Pretoria. Graduated in 1928 under Pearse from the University of the Witwatersrand. Recipient of Herbert Baker Scholarship. Attended British School of Architecture in Rome from 1930-1932. Travelled in later years to Europe, Middle East, North & South Americas, Japan and frequent traveller to the east African seaboard. Awarded Institute of SA Architects gold medal posthumously.

in his use of stockbricks thickly whitewashed, or his masterful employment of facebricks; in his use of low-pitched roofs, generally of corrugated iron; in his traditional plan forms, sometimes even with pillared verandahs; in his use of small sun-shy windows and deep over-shadowing eaves; in his sensitivity to landform and planting, light and shade, wind and sky.<sup>3</sup>

## Regionalism and the Modern

Regionalism was the empirical offshoot of the Modern Movement. The Modern Movement was a world-wide reinvention of the underlying tenets of architecture in order to generate an aesthetic for the materials of industrialisation, namely steel, large areas of glass and steel-reinforced concrete. It can be considered to have become institutionalised with the founding of the *Bauhaus* (1919-1933) under the leadership of Walter Gropius (1883-1969), with a curriculum designed to address the aesthetic of machine-made and mass-produced consumer goods. Le Corbusier (alias Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, 1887-1965), Swiss-born autodidact, became the chief apologist and exponent of the aesthetic, his *Vers un architecture* (1926) — soon translated into English as *Towards a new architecture* (1927) — its manifesto. He, with the American Frank Lloyd Wright (1867[9?]-1959) and the German, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), became the leading architectural exponents of the style.

Regionalism, while accepting the tenets of Modernism — Functionalist<sup>4</sup> planning, a Purist<sup>5</sup> aesthetic and an honest expression of the use of the new materials of the early Twentieth Century, namely steel, glass and ferro-concrete — was stylistically a tempered version of the aesthetic and, by being place-specific, not linked to the International Style.<sup>6</sup> Each region would manifest its own interpretation since the aesthetic was guided by

- \* an acknowledgement of the constraints of prevailing climate with the requisite devices of shading and sun control, hence dispensing, for instance, with the flat roof and "taut skin" façades
- \* an employment of the skills of local craftsmanship as sacrifice to the crisp styling of the machine aesthetic
- \* the use of traditional materials, so encouraging an innovative use of what was locally

3. G. Herbert, *Martienssen & the international style. The modern movement in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1975), p. 167.

4. Functionalism is a Twentieth Century movement, the followers of which cite the dictum "form follows function" as creed, that is that the purpose of use of a building should reflect directly in its shape and planning — theatres and auditoria being the most easily recognisable examples — deriving from the Nineteenth Century writings of the Frenchman, Eugène Emmanuèle Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), both architectural practitioner and theoretician.

5. Purism was an art movement founded in 1915 by Amédée Ozenfant and Charles Edouard Jeanneret (to become better known as an architect by his assumed name Le Corbusier). It was meant to reform the decorative "corruption" which had crept into its precursor, Cubism, and return the arts to simple shapes and forms, in architecture plain surface and elemental forms such as the sphere, cube, cone and pyramid.

6. The term 'International Style' was used by Hitchcock and Johnson for their book, *The International Style: architecture since 1922* (New York, 1932) and so gained general currency as designation for the Modern Movement aesthetic.

available to mimic the performance of industrially produced materials

- \* a sensitivity to the characteristics of the existing landscape and a response to site-specific topography, hence creating earth-bound buildings as opposed to the white boxes freed from the ground by pilotis (concrete stilts or pylons).

But to know the characteristics of a style is not necessarily to know how to emulate it. As adjunct to the preceding concerns the Regionalist architect usually displays a strong empiricist bent and intuitive invention, often interpreted as "wayward" or "irrational".

It would be useful to discover what it was of Eaton that fitted him for originating a regionally responsive style.

### A genealogy of personalities — Leith and Eaton

The importance of the professional genealogy of the personalities, namely Gordon Leith (1886-1957)<sup>7</sup> with his circle of friends and his protégé Eaton and his younger circle, and their connection to place, that is Pretoria, cannot be underestimated.

Leith was the son of an immigrant Scottish attorney who had settled in Pretoria in 1889. He was educated at the *Staats Model School*, Pretoria, where he was tutored in drawing and modeling by Anton Van Wouw<sup>8</sup> (1862-1945, the Dutch-born sculptor who immigrated to South Africa in 1882) and painting by Frans Oerder (1867-1944, the Dutch-born artist, particularly landscapist, who had emigrated to the Transvaal Republic in 1890).<sup>9</sup> In 1903, at the age of sixteen, Leith had worked briefly as a draughtsman for the Public Works Department [hereafter PWD] but left to become assistant to Van Wouw. In 1905 he went back to architecture, which he studied in London at the Architectural Association. On his return to South Africa in 1908 he again briefly joined the ranks of the PWD, only to be invited to the office of Sir Herbert Baker (1862-1946) to work on the Union Buildings project (1910-1914). In 1911 he was the first to receive the Herbert Baker Scholarship, so to spend two years at the British School in Rome. In 1920 he set up private practice in Pretoria and in 1924 he became mentor to the young Eaton when he joined Leith's office.

Eaton declared his own debt to the role of his mentor, Leith:

[an] unfolding acquaintance with the inner workings of our profession ... became for me an unforgettable experience deeply infused with impressions of an attitude towards the art and practice of architecture of the most elevated kind gathered almost entirely from the opinions, enthusiasms and general

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7. K.E.F. Gardiner, Leith, George Esselmont Gordon, in *SESA 6* (Cape Town, 1972), p. 580; W.D. Howie, Leith, George Esselmont Gordon, in *Dictionary of South African biography III* (hereafter *DSAB*) (Pretoria, 1977), pp. 506-507.
  8. G. D[ekker], Van Wouw, Anton, *DSAB I* (Pretoria, 1968), pp. 841-844. Van Wouw was given various public commissions of architectural significance, for example the coat-of-arms on the Raadsaal (Pretoria, late C19) and the Paul Kruger statue (Pretoria, 1895), the *Vrouemonument* (Bloemfontein, 1913 in association with the architect Frans Soff) and 'The Voortrekker woman with children' (Pretoria, Voortrekker Monument. Designed by Gerhard Moerdyk, 1933).
  9. K. Kempff, Oerder, Frans Dawid, *DSAB VI* (Pretoria, 1981), pp. 418-420. Oerder was South Africa's first official artist to the Boers in the Anglo-Boer War. His depiction of the Highveld was distinctive and influential on the development of Pierneef's style. Later he established himself in Pretoria.

behaviour of the highly individual personality who became my chief mentor for those few introductory years, giving direction to the mysterious thought processes which slowly built into my mind beliefs

and criteria which have continued to influence my own particular interests and judgement to this day.<sup>10</sup>

Through his friendship with Leith, Eaton gained, at tender age, introduction to the intellectual 'aristocracy' of Pretoria:

young pupil though I was, [he] not only had me on occasion to stay at his home but often included me in his party of friends.<sup>11</sup>

### An Afrikaner heritage

Eaton and Leith each had strong Afrikaner ties. Leith, not known for an extensive literary contribution, had written on matters architectural in Afrikaans<sup>12</sup> and could speak Afrikaans fluently:

Gordon Leith was a true son of South Africa, fluent not only in the mere grammar of two languages but — which is so much more important — in their idiom and rhythm.<sup>13</sup>

Eaton's mother, widowed early in her marriage, was born an Afrikaner, née Brand, and relative of Christoffel Joseph Brand (1797-1875) — first Speaker of the Cape Legislative Assembly — father to President Johannes Hendrikus Brand (1823-1888) of the Orange Free State Republic, and Eaton thus related to both. Meiring<sup>14</sup> recalls:

The discovery that there was a Cloete, and a Brand amongst his forebears helped him to identify himself not only with the people of the Cape, but also with his Afrikaans-speaking fellow citizens (I rarely spoke anything but Afrikaans to him).<sup>15</sup>

Amongst the circle he befriended were Van Wouw and Henk Pierneef (1886-1957). Pierneef

10. N. Eaton, Gordon Leith, *South African Architectural Record* (hereafter *SAAR*), May 1965, p. 12.
11. N. Eaton, Gordon Leith, *SAAR*, May 1965, p. 12.
12. [G.] Leith, Die Afrikaanse boer as argitek en boumeester, *Die Boerevrou*, September 1928, pp. 4-6.
13. N. Eaton, Gordon Leith, *SAAR*, May 1965, p. 12.
14. Meiring, Adriaan Louw (1904-1979). Born Johannesburg, schooling in Paarl. Graduated from UCT with BA in Philosophy and Languages. Studied at Liverpool School of Architecture 1929-1932. Worked for Louw and Louw in the Cape. Formed Meiring Naude partnership in 1938. Appointed to first Chair of Architecture at UP in 1943. Did pioneering studies on Ndebele published as *The Amandebele of Pretoria*, *SAAR*, April, 1955, 26-35. Retired 1968. J. Walker, *Architects and buildings of South Africa to 1940*, (Pietermaritzburg, 1995 — Human Sciences Research Council and National Monuments Council [hereafter *HSRC & NMC*] electronic database) [Meiring slide archive - Peter Rich, private collection].
15. A. Meiring, Memories of Norman Eaton, *SAAR*, February 1967, p. 17.

had been born of a Dutch immigrant builder. He was educated with Leith at the *Staats Model School*, Pretoria. He left in 1900 for Holland, where he attended drawing classes at the *Akademie vir Beeldende Kunsten* in Rotterdam. He could not complete his architectural studies for financial reasons. Once back in South Africa he was tutored in painting by Oerder and drawing by Leith.<sup>16</sup> Pierneef became a professional artist in 1923, although he continued to dabble in architecture, for example his articles in *die Boerevrou[w]*,<sup>17</sup> one depicting his own design;<sup>18</sup> while the rondavel house on the southern slopes of Meintjieskop, recently restored as part of the Malawian Embassy complex, is ascribed to him. His oeuvre comprises many sketches and linocuts of the traditional houses in and around Pretoria. The University of Pretoria bestowed on him an honorary Doctorate in 1935. Eaton acted as executor to Pierneef's estate.

Artists were obviously amongst Eaton's cherished inner circle. He was to assist the two senior artists, Van Wouw and Pierneef in the design of their own houses, the Van Wouw House in Clarke Street (1937-1938)<sup>19</sup> and Elangeni in Brummeria (1939-) respectively. Pierneef bought "The Kraal" (so called because it was built on the ruins of an old 'kraal', supposedly an initiation complex) where Eaton was to lodge for a time. His influence on the design shows in the innovative use of bluegum poles and split-pole ceilings covered in waterproofing and plastered over, a device used again for constructing the mezzanine floor in Alexis Preller's (1911-1975)<sup>20</sup> studio built at a later date some half a kilometer away.<sup>21</sup> His intimate friendship with the Pretoria-based artist is well known.

Preller, like Eaton, was Pretoria born, bred, and educated, his high schooling at Pretoria Boys' High School. Norman Eaton recognised his self-taught artistic talent and, in 1934, encouraged him to go to London where he met up with Pierneef, who in turn advised him to study at the Westminster School of art under Mark Getler.<sup>22</sup>

### A Pretorian's sense of place

Pretorians, coming largely from migrant farmer stock, have a strong sense of *genius loci* — spirit of place — because of direct ties to the land both through their history and by their enterprise. The landscape and climate of Pretoria make a strong impression. This is a recollection of Pretoria district in November 1857:

A grand and magnificent panorama was before us, which beggars all description ... The background was filled by a limited peep of the blue

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16. A.J. Werth, Pierneef, Jacob Hendrik, *DSAB IV* (Pretoria, 1981), pp. 458-460.
  17. J.H. Pierneef, Ons Boerehuise in Transvaal en hulle karakter, in *Die Boerevrou*, April 1920, pp. 3-5.
  18. J.H. Pierneef, Ontwerp, *Die Boerevrou*, Julie 1924, pp. 4-5.
  19. Purchased by the Rembrandt Foundation and entrusted to the University of Pretoria as the Anton van Wouw Museum.
  20. F. Van Schalkwyk; J.R. Deichmann, Preller, Alexis, *DSAB V* (Pretoria, 1987), pp. 607-609. Alexis Preller was given various civic commissions of architectural significance, for example murals for the Offices of the Johannesburg Receiver of Revenue (1953) and the Transvaal Provincial Administration (Pretoria, 1959-1963), where, through employing African motifs, he explored a personal mythology.
  21. W. Smit & E. Smit, Pierneef and his architecture, in P.G. Nel (ed.), *J.H. Pierneef. His life and his work* (Cape Town, 1990), pp. 190-207.
  22. H. Jeppe, *South African artists 1900-1962* (Johannesburg, 1963), p. 75.



mountain range, which here assumed a remarkably precipitous character [the Magalies] and completed a picture at once soul-stirring and sublime!<sup>23</sup>

The memory of Church Square, Pretoria, created a picture so evocative that Meiring<sup>24</sup> felt obliged to quote, years later, that it

had been lent as a whole the appearance of a park by indigenous trees, where "wag-'n-bietjie" and white "buffelpeer" blossoms loaded the air in summer with their wonderful fragrance.<sup>25</sup>

The local architect, Rees-Poole<sup>26</sup> described Pretoria thus:

Nature has been generous in many ways ... Upon entering the City through the fountains Valley, a picturesque panoramic view is obtained of the surrounding hills and general outlay, stretching towards the eastern suburbs and away beyond for miles.<sup>27</sup>

The indigenous vegetation of Pretoria varies as considerably as the topography with the combined factors of north and south ridge faces, diverse systems of geomorphology and distinct rain belts and climatic zones, becoming ever more subtropical with every northward change of ridge. Thus one moves from the white stinkwood (*Celtis africana*) forests flanking the source of the Apies River in Fountains Valley (where Pretoria had its origins) to the glossy grey-green-leaved *stamvrug* (*Bequertiodendron magalimontanum*) spread gnarled and sparse on the northern slopes of the Magaliesberg.

Eaton's circle, young and old, must have shared in the experience of one of the most powerful forces of local circumstance which moulds the creative mind — the African landscape. Preller<sup>28</sup> in his obituary to Eaton, speaks of his particular relationship with nature (Fig. 1):

It was a fixed rule of his [Eaton's], when driving in the country, that one should stop at any appealing view or site and leave the car to walk freely into the country, down or up the hill, and allow the trees and plants and rocks and streams to reveal themselves.

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23. Harris as told in G. Preller, *Old Pretoria. Brief story of the city's Voortrekker period* (Pretoria, 1938), p. 30.
  24. A. Meiring, Stadsbeplanning en boukuns in Pretoria: 'n terugblik, in S. Engelbrecht (ed.), *Pretoria (1855-1955)* (Pretoria, 1955), p. 8.
  25. Maria Minnaar memories as related to G. Preller, *Old Pretoria. Brief story of the city's Voortrekker period* (Pretoria, 1938), p. 14.
  26. Rees-Poole, Vivien (1883-1965), pupilage in Baker's office (1898-1910), joined PWD, Tvl. Did layout of Church Square (1911). Appointed by Kirkness to design his own home (1929): J. Walker, *Architects and buildings of South Africa to 1940* (Pietermaritzburg, 1995 — HSRC & NMC electronic database).
  27. V. Rees-Poole, The Architecture of Pretoria, in South African Railways, *The City of Pretoria and districts* (Johannesburg, 1913), p. 83.
  28. A. Preller, Norman Eaton. Ave atque vale, *SAAR*, February 1967, pp. 15-16.



**Figure 1.** Norman Eaton (seated) and friends (unidentified) in the country.  
Photographer unknown, SAA, UP, Eaton Collection.

Tree portraits and landscape became a typifying aspect of local art, most importantly that of Pierneef,<sup>29</sup> under the influence of Oerder and Erich Mayer (1876-1960)<sup>30</sup> the German-born painter and graphic artist who had studied architecture from 1894-1896 at the *Technische Hochschule* in Berlin-Charlottenburg. He then emigrated to the Orange Free State in 1898. His early field experience in the employ of a land surveyor developed a particular sense of the South African landscape and its trees. He was befriended by Betty Clarke,<sup>31</sup> the tree portrait artist, for whom he erected a memorial fountain of piled stones on her family farm at Twenty-Four Rivers, Waterberg District. They were to meet on his East African trips, undertaken on visits to his sister in Kenya. These broadened his familiarity with the arts and crafts of the African continent, well documented, as evidenced in his collection of photograph albums, diaries and sketches.<sup>32</sup>

Eaton's commitment to local art is demonstrated by his founding contribution<sup>33</sup> to

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29. See N. Coetzee, *Pierneef, land and landscape. The Johannesburg Station panels in context* (Johannesburg, 1992).
30. Projects of architectural interest are the tapestries he designed which were woven by his wife, two of which are in South Africa House, London: the murals in the personnel restaurant of the Johannesburg Post Office done on commission, as were the frieze of the women's hostel of the Johannesburg College of Education and the fresco in the Monument High School, Klerksdorp (*DSAB III*, 1977), p. 589.
31. Elizabeth Frances Clarke (née Davidson, 1912-1954).
32. School of Architecture Archives, University of Pretoria (hereafter SAA, UP).
33. A. Preller, Introduction, in C. Harrop-Allin, *Norman Eaton: architect. A Study of the works of the South African architect Norman Eaton 1902-1966* (Cape Town, 1975), p. 10.

*Fontein*, the little quarterly magazine devoted to art in Southern Africa — which seems to have run only to a first few issues with contributors such as Walter Battiss,<sup>34</sup> Anton Hendricks,<sup>35</sup> Anna Vorster<sup>36</sup> and Cecil Skotnes.<sup>37</sup>

### Nature and metaphysical stance

We now come to another influence to which the Pretorian intellect would have been subject in his understanding of the natural environment. These were the writings of Eugène Marais,<sup>38</sup> which, as has been noted by Ryke, were, almost without exception, in Afrikaans, although Marais himself was to protest his preference for and fluency in English. Of importance was that the writings were in an accessible, almost childlike, Afrikaans, published regularly in the popular press, particularly *Die Huisgenoot* (a periodical) and *Die Vaderland* (a daily newspaper).<sup>39</sup> In the first thirty years of this century the Afrikaner was privileged to ideas about nature which would only later gain general currency. Marais propagated an understanding of nature as being a web of interconnections — what we would now term 'ecosystemic' — with the individual viewed as part of a larger natural organism,<sup>40</sup> a philosophical stance adopted by Smuts<sup>41</sup> in his contemporaneous writing 'Holism and Evolution'.

Eaton, too, would seem to have held such views, reflected, by way of example, through his use of Pierneef's tree portraits to illustrate the "wholeness" of the natural order:

In painting, for instance, there is here near home, the case of the "Pierneef" trees, and clouds and sunset skies of our own Transvaal.

This pinnacle of revelation has, however, seldom been achieved without some kind of subtle 'orchestration'; without some deep sense or understanding of the complex nature of things; without using as a basis for all creative effort all elements building up to that harmonious synthesis, that flowing, interweaving wholeness which is Life itself.<sup>42</sup>

### Brick aesthetic and Calvinist frugality

We now look at some of Eaton's works, or rather the materials of their making in order to

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34. W. Battiss, Wanted: A history of art in southern Africa, *Fontein* 1(1), 1960, pp. 4-8.
  35. A. Hendriks, Adolph Jentsch, *Fontein* 1(1), 1960, pp. 29-33.
  36. A. Vorster, Abstrakte rigtings in die Suid-Afrikaanse skilderkuns, *Fontein* 1(1), 1960, pp. 36-39.
  37. C. Skotnes, An exhibition of urban African art, *Fontein* 1(1), 1960, pp. 51-54.
  38. See Eugène Marais' biography by L. Rousseau, *Die groot verlange. Die verhaal van Eugène N. Marais* (Pretoria, 1974), translated into English as *The dark stream* (Johannesburg, 1982).
  39. P.A.J. Ryke, Eugène Marais: Natuurkenner en -navorser, *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* 12(4), pp. 219-230.
  40. E. Marais, *Die siel van die mier* (Pretoria, 1934), and E. Marais, *The soul of the Ape* (Pretoria, 1969) published posthumously, having been expurgated by his son.
  41. J.C. Smuts, *Holism and evolution* (Cape Town, 1987 [1926]).
  42. N.M. Eaton, Art in architecture, *Fontein* 1(1), 1960, p. 17.

discover, in their choice, the resonance of the mind of the maker.

### Norman Eaton

although an adherent of the contemporary school, retained his sensitive appreciation of materials and detail, and displayed an independence in his attitude towards design which he later described as an endeavour to achieve visual quality and character which bears reference to the general "feel" if not the actual form of man-made things, peculiar to the African continent.<sup>43</sup>

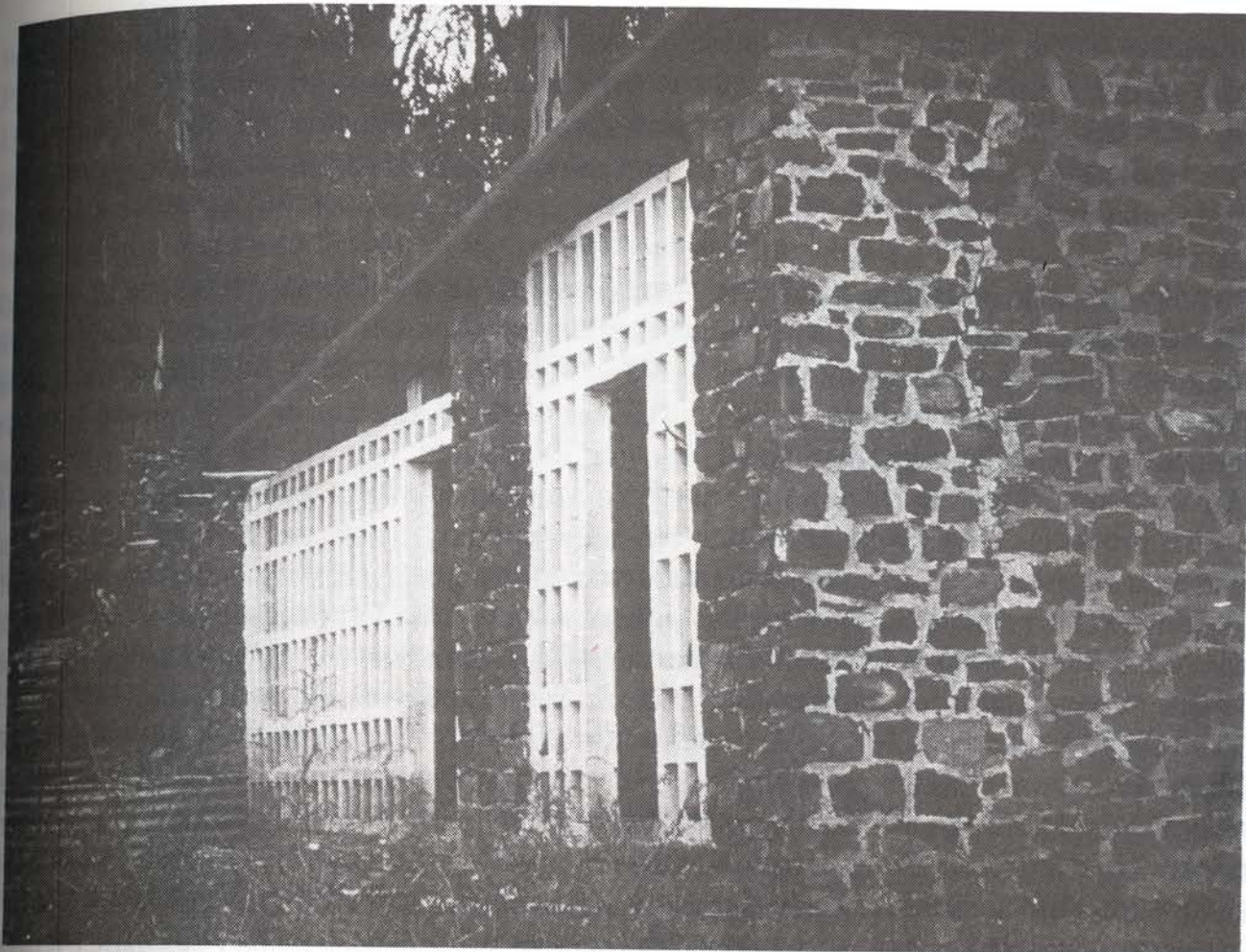
Yet it took some time for Eaton's contemporaries to appreciate the direction his architecture was taking. Bernard Cooke, one of what was to become known as the Transvaal Group,<sup>44</sup> recalls that on enquiring about the designs of Eaton one of the members said in a derisively dismissive way that he "was doing strange things with gum poles in Pretoria"<sup>45</sup> (Fig. 2). Not only was it strange things with gum poles, but with brick and other masonry as well. Preller<sup>46</sup> praised Eaton's innovative use of the humble brick:

His outstanding use of the simple brick is already legendary. It was he who revolutionised the concept and quality of the wall surface in South Africa by placing the brick on end. Anyone who examines the architecture in Pretoria, domestic or commercial, will come across a pervasive preoccupation with the use of brick in this simple and original way in all its variations.

It must be borne in mind that he was inventing from the base of an established tradition. When Eaton bullied the Dutch into accepting brick as the material for their headquarters building, the Netherlands Bank in Church Street,<sup>47</sup> he was paying respect to a place and a heritage.

Pretoria established a brick aesthetic through the PWD. The architectural legacy of Public Works can be traced through the close ties, particularly in the affairs of state, between Britain and Prussia through the blood relationships of royalty, to Karl Friedrich Schinkel

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43. W.D. Howie, Influences on Modern design, *SAAR*, December 1965, pp. 40-45.
44. G. Herbert, *Martienssen & the international style. The modern movement in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1975) p. 184. A group of young Turks and militant Moderns under the tutelage of G.E. Pearse at the School of Architecture, University of the Witwatersrand, contemporaries of Eaton. Amongst others: John Fassler (1910-1971), Norman Hanson (1909-1990) [H.M.J. Prins, Obituary. Norman Leonard Hanson, *Planning III*, September 1990, pp. 52-53], Gordon McIntosh (1904-1983), Rex Martienssen (1905-1942). In this context McIntosh is of particular interest. Born Glasgow during parents vacation. Son of PWD architect, F.G. McIntosh. Schooling in Pretoria Boys High. Graduated under Pearse from Wits in 1928, as the second SA qualified architect. Close friend of Martienssen. Became part-time lecturer in Engineering at Transvaal University College, later UP, in 1929. Designed first International Style building in SA, viz. Munro House (1932), Brooklyn, Pretoria (much altered), and first International Style high-rise, viz. Whitecrook (1937), Arcadia, Pretoria (demolished 1985). Later designed the Customs and Excise Building (1950), Pretoria, with Burg, Lodge & Burg, and the Pretoria Art Museum (1967), Arcadia, Pretoria with Burg, Lodge & Burg (ISAA Award of Merit).
- J. Walker, *Architects and buildings of South Africa to 1940* (Pietermaritzburg, 1995 - HSRC & NMC electronic database).
45. E. Hakim, *Norman Eaton: Contextual location (in SA? [sic]) architectural environment*, unpublished M.Arch. proposal, University of Cape Town, 1995, s.p.
46. A. Preller, Norman Eaton. Ave atque vale, *SAAR*, February 1967, pp. 15-16.
47. A. Meiring, Memories of Norman Eaton, *SAAR*, February 1967, p. 17.



**Figure 2.** 'Doing strange things with gum poles.' Unidentified building.  
Photographer unknown, SAA, UP, Eaton Collection.

(1781-1841).<sup>48</sup> This may have led to his influence being carried through to Britain, and hence to the Public Works of the colonies. Schinkel established the importance of the Public Works Department as an institution of architectural learning and excellence. He had studied the brick Romanesque of Italy and the brick industrial buildings of Britain and demonstrated the worthiness of the use of the material for civic structures in Berlin with, for example, his *Bauakademie* (1831-1836; damaged in World War II, and scandalously demolished in 1961). This tradition had reached the Transvaal first through the Dutch architects, for instance Sytze Wopkes Wierda (1839-1911),<sup>49</sup> and later British successors, for example Eagle.<sup>50</sup> Eaton obviously held the past achievements of the PWD in high regard:

48. M. Snodin (ed.), *Karl Friedrich Schinkel: a universal man* (London, 1991).

49. F.J. Du Toit Spies, Wierda, Sytze Wopke(s), *DSAB III* (Pretoria, 1977), p. 842. Born of Friesian Dutch parents. Appointed as first Government Engineer and Architect to the Public Works Department of the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* in 1887 and responsible for major public commissions of that time, for example Raadsaal (1888-1892) and the Palace of Justice (1896-1899), both on Church Square, Pretoria.

50. Eagle, Piercy James (1875-1932). Joined PWD (1903-1912), becoming chief architect. Designed many educational buildings, particularly Transvaal University College, Pretoria (1910), entered private practice after World War I. J. Walker, *Architects and buildings of South Africa to 1940* (Pietermaritzburg, 1995 — HSRC & NMC electronic database).

The PWD, in the days before the private profession became a definite force in this country; at a time, in fact, when it held in its ranks practically all the young and virile brains in the profession, did inestimable service in the promotion and maintenance of an exceedingly high standard of architectural industry throughout the Union.<sup>51</sup>

All about and in Pretoria are good brick-clay pits. Once the Kirkness brickyards were the greatest producers of bricks and fired clay building products in the country. The Scottish immigrant John Johnson Kirkness (1857-1939),<sup>52</sup> with a diploma in Building Construction from the Herriot-Watt Institute of Edinburgh, had come to Durban in 1879, moved as civil contractor to Bethlehem in 1880, finally moving to Pretoria in 1887. He set up a brickyard in Groenkloof. Over the ridge on the northern Muckleneuk slope he built, appropriately of his own products, his own home, a fine red-brick building, (now the Korean Embassy and a National Monument). The name Kirkness was to become synonymous with brick and his fired clay products and used throughout southern Africa, from Grootte Schuur Hospital in the Cape to the Salisbury Post Office in the then Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Because of this tradition of brick-making and brick architecture, Pretoria is still today a city of brick.

Why did the common brick hold so much appeal? Subliminally it sits comfortably with the Protestant conscience — Kirkness, the Scottish Calvinist was to donate the tiles and bricks for the building of St Andrews Presbyterian Church. It was its 'honesty' of material use of which Schinkel, the Prussian Protestant, approved. The Arts-and-Crafts<sup>53</sup> advocates would laud its precedence of tradition; the socialist adherents of the Amsterdam School<sup>54</sup> its classlessness and democratic attributes. The inherent rectilinear geometry resonates with the severity of the Functionalism following.<sup>55</sup>

However the Calvinist frugality of those of Dutch and Scottish descent — Leith and Kirkness being Scotts and the many Scottish artisans who had built their homes in Riviera below Meintjieskop and walked to work on the Union Buildings on the opposite side — who comprised the majority of the population of Pretoria, encouraged a parsimonious use of materials, enhanced by the material shortages of the war years (1939-1945).

Eaton befriended Schmickl in 1936. Robert Schmickl (1903-1977) was born in Vienna, where he studied for a diploma as architect-engineer at the *Technische Hochschule*. He immigrated to Johannesburg in 1935 and worked for Small, whereafter he joined Kallenbach, Kennedy and Furner in 1936 until the demise of the firm in 1938 on the eve of World War II. He then joined Moffat and Hirst in Durban but was dismissed in 1939 at the outbreak of

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51. N. Eaton, P.W.D. ... [sic] the ideal client, *SAAR*, October 1932, pp. 258-259.

52. N.A. Coetzee, Kirkness, John Johnson, *DBSA V* (Pretoria, 1987), pp. 413-414.

53. An English movement soon to find broader acceptance in the United States of America and on the continent founded first by William Morris (1834-1896) with some Pre-Raphaelite painters as a firm of Fine Art Workmen who wished to restore medieval craftsmanship to the decorative arts which ultimately crystallized as Ashbee's Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1888. Much of Leith's domestic work is in this tradition.

54. A Dutch-based Twentieth Century movement of the twenties and thirties formed as break-away from the followers of Hendrik Petrus Berlage's (1856-1934), allowing a greater plasticity in stylistic expression, in contrast to the contemporaneous De Stijl movement, Michiel de Klerk (1884-1923) being one of the exponents. The brick H.V. Bird Building, Prinsloo Street (now part of the Ear Nose and Throat Hospital, architect unknown) shows the influence.

55. See footnote 3.

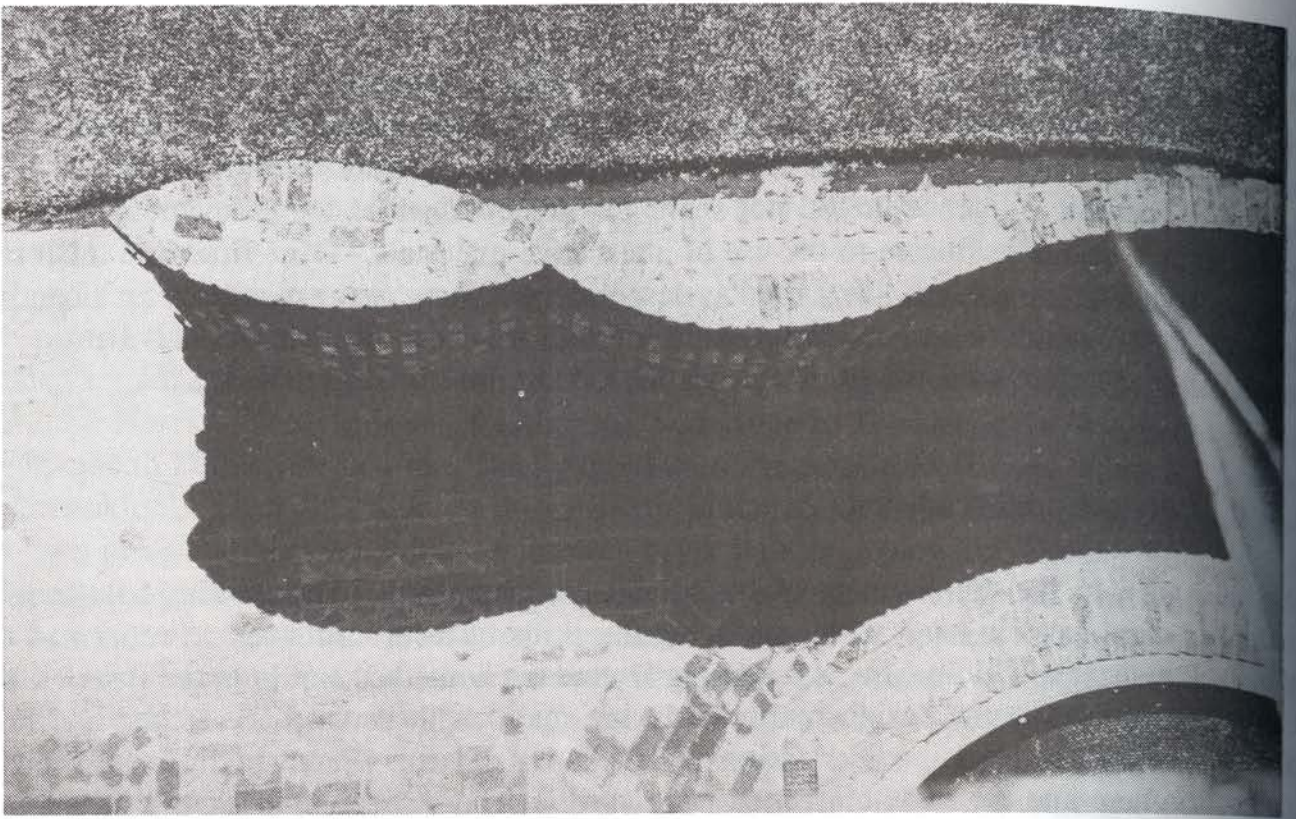
war. He entered the employment of Van Der Werke,<sup>56</sup> an architect of Dutch extraction, in Pretoria, only to be dismissed when the Germans blitzed Rotterdam, Netherlands, in 1940. He remained in Pretoria but was obliged to set up private practice and later had offices proximate to Eaton who employed him as his backroom assistant during the war.<sup>57</sup> While he had a Teutonic diligence he did not share Eaton's enthusiasm for innovation. However he brought a Viennese finesse to the use of alternative materials. Over-fired and misformed bricks, discarded as 'useless', first used as desperate and cost-cutting measures for financially strapped home-builders became fashionable through their use by Schmickl and Eaton. The local Pelindaba slate used rough or cut was likewise raised to respectability.<sup>58</sup>

### Local craftsmen and tradition

We now turn to the employment of traditional craftsmanship. The looking to alternative materials went hand in hand with employing the skills of local craftsmen. Preller had used his Black assistants to do paving and walling around his home and studio in the Brits vicinity. Eaton had advised in the design, particularly the studio with its catenary-arched and brick-ribbed vault. The brick paving design which Eaton did for Greenwood House found its inspiration here and the same craftsmen were used.<sup>59</sup> The serpentine brick wall at the Little Theatre (1950) (**Fig. 3**) — inexplicably demolished and rebuilt in mock facsimile in 1994 — has the same source of inspiration. The more ambitious paving of Polly's Arcade, Wachthuis Building (1955-1960) followed, which drew inspiration from African motifs and for which was used the off-cuts from a local stonemason's yard.

In fact the use of crafted components in buildings was a particular concern of Eaton's as is witnessed by the various fittings and accessories of the Netherlands Bank (1961-1965), done to designs by his sculptor friend Willem Hendrikz,<sup>60</sup> modified by himself and Alexis Preller.<sup>61</sup> Hendrikz's other architectural commissions had been a Vorticist<sup>62</sup> mural panel of sandblasted back glass, "Deur vlytigheid tot manlikheid" in the exhibition hall of Escom

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56. Biographical details not sourced. Drawing collection in SAA, UP.
57. A. du Toit, Robert Schmickl IA LIA argitek, *Argitektuur SA*, Mei/Junie 1989, pp. 37-38. Schmickl's oeuvre comprises houses, schools, offices, factories, etc., drawings all in School of Architecture archives, University of Pretoria.
58. Personal communication, Anton du Toit, P.O. Box 2920, Pretoria, 0001, March 1995.
59. Personal communication, Gunnel Hicks (nee Greenwood), St James, 7951, April 1995.
60. Hendrikz, Willem de Sanderes (1910-1959), contemporary of Eaton. Studied architecture for five years at Wits (H. Jeppe, *South African artists 1900-1962* (Johannesburg, 1963), p. 75). Became sculptor after studying at London School of Art (M.A., Wits[?]). W.d.S. Hendriks, *Art in Architecture, SAAR*, April 1948, pp. 82-91. Further in E. Berman, *Art & artists of South Africa. An illustrated biographical dictionary and historical survey of painters, sculptors & graphic artists since 1875* (Cape Town, 1983). Member of New Group (pp. 307-309); noted sculptor (pp. 395 & 403) & architectural artist (p. 38); lecturer at University of Witwatersrand, students amongst others Gordon Vorster (1947-1949) and Cecil Skotnes (1947-1950) who also worked in his studio (p. 426).
61. C. Harrop-Allin, *Norman Eaton: architect. A Study of the works of the South African architect Norman Eaton 1902-1966* (Cape Town, 1975), p. 97.
62. Vorticism, a short-lived English response to Italian Futurism, founded in 1914 by Wyndham Lewis, a term borrowed by Ezra Pound from the Futurist Boccioni's remark that all art emanated from an emotional vortex.



**Figure 3.** Terminal end of brick serpentine wall (1950-1994), Little Theatre, Pretoria.

Photographer unknown [Dotman Pretorius?], SAA, UP, Eaton Collection.

House<sup>63</sup> (Johannesburg, 1937; architect, G.E. Pearse, — demolished), the bronze doors of the Volkskas Banks of Pretoria, Johannesburg and Bloemfontein and the decorative sculpture of the S.A.B.C. Building in Sea Point.<sup>64</sup> He was considered "the first Afrikaans sculptor following modern trends", and his architectural training and connections significant to his sculptural expression.<sup>65</sup>

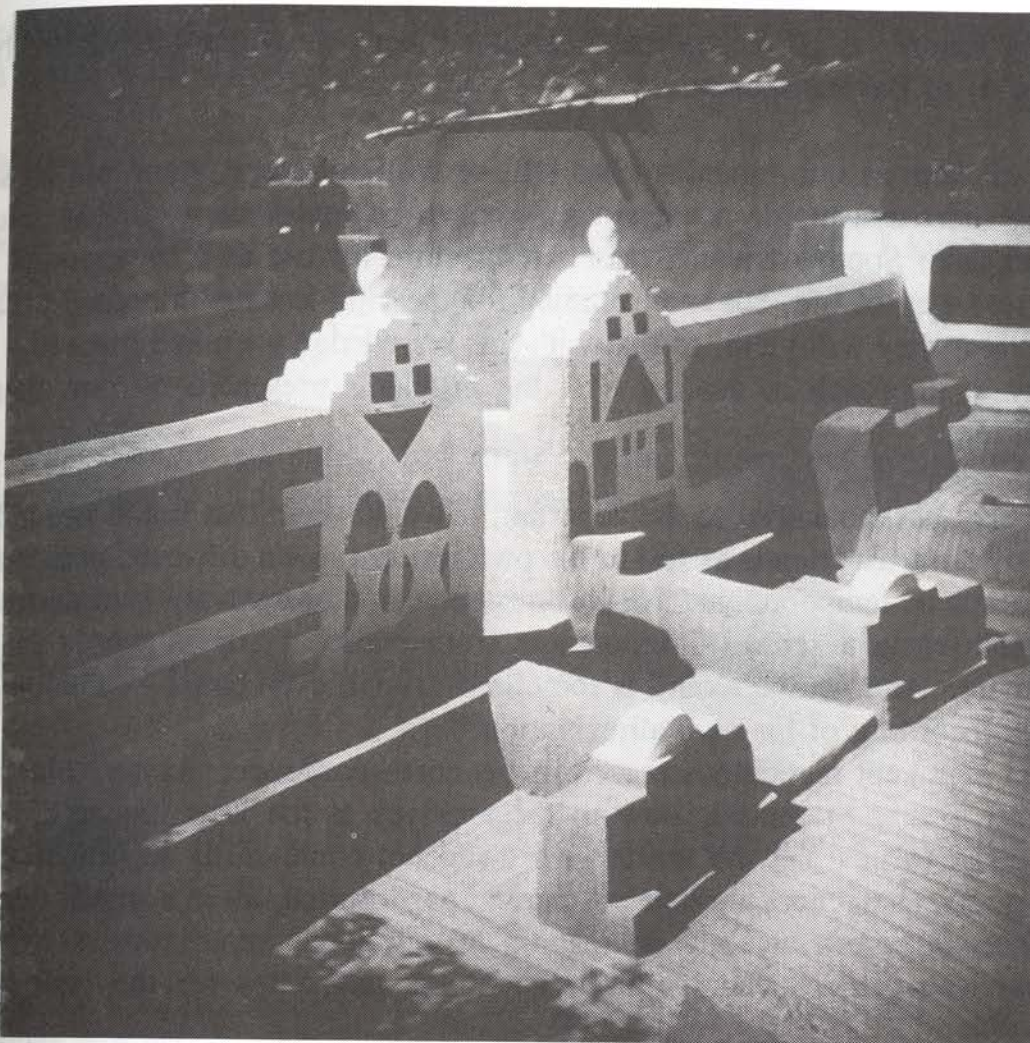
### Some personal intuitions

We have seen how the choices of materials in some way reflects the mind of the maker. Eaton's understanding of rural settlement should not be ignored, for from this emerged his advocacy of appropriate African urban form. Many of the devices which Eaton used were directed at creating spatial qualities derived from his understanding of African places:

I remember my visits from time to time to many little family 'Kraals' scattered in a wide area around Pretoria which had been built by the Mapogga people in whom, for some inexplicable reason, there has become concentrated a strong and special zest for artistic expression in building, decoration, dress and

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63. C. Chipkin, *Johannesburg style. Architecture and society 1880s-1960s* (Cape Town, 1993), p. 148 & fig. 134.
64. H. Jeppe, *South African artists 1900-1962* (Johannesburg, 1963), p. 126.
65. G. Dekker, Willem De Sanderez Hendrikz (1910-1959), *Our art 2*, Pretoria, 1961, pp. 25-30.





**Figure 4.** 'Mapogga kraals', Baviaanspoort [?].

Photographer unknown [Constance Stuart?], SAA, UP, Eaton Collection.

domestic Arts. I remember how beautifully these 'kraals' had combined in themselves all the essentials of simple human living — so beautifully in fact that I was conscious of experiencing a sort of 'revelation' in the art of living in one of its purest forms and in a way that gave — as simple music and the motions of animals often can — a sudden insight into the innermost truths of these things.

...

Self-contained, woven out of and almost wholly dependant upon the earth and the products of nature from which it drew its materials, its food, its colour and its shapes, one was struck by a sense one had of its 'fitness', its inherent 'wholeness'. Time and again these Native ensembles have made me conscious of the same thing; of the quiet grace with which they grow out of and yield to the natural beauties of their surroundings ...<sup>66</sup>

66. T. Louw, private collection: N. Eaton, *Native art and architecture* (unpublished paper, [1953?]), s.p.

Let us turn to Eaton<sup>67</sup> as he recalls the Cape-Dutch heritage while musing on the Mapogga 'kraals' (Fig. 4) of Baviaanspoort:

such of them as our vandalism has left, or will still leave, stand out as some of our most treasurable possessions — not to be copied be it quickly said, in the name of South African Art or Architecture for use as a background to a different way of life, but to be studied for the vital lessons in human creative behaviour they will yield, so that with this knowledge we may return to a new purity of approach in dealing with the problems presented by our changed condition.

If we might play psychoanalyst to the departed, it would seem that Eaton needed the greater spontaneity of his artist friends as foil to his own reticent, even difficult, personality, to help nurture his romantic temperament. He was obsessive and obsessively kept diaries, indicative of a person suffering a sense of remoteness from reality trying in words to fossilise the fleeting moment. And yet the record is sometimes trivial, even banal — what is one to make of a studious recording of his own alimentation?<sup>68</sup>

Eaton also kept meticulous record of his correspondence. Letters plus the drafts of his replies are neatly preserved, now in the archives at the Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria. Yet the written word did not come easily to him if the drafts are anything to go by. Sentences are deleted, paragraphs inserted, all in a small, fastidious hand. His difficulties in communicating on matters of emotional importance is indicated in the exchange between Hendrikz and himself about the maquettes for the Netherlands bank. Hendrikz writes:

My dear complicated friend, Relax on both scores [that he was not achieving what Eaton envisaged and might be hurt by being told so] ...

I am not a sensitive weakling who wilts, sulks or despairs when he is not constantly being patted on the shoulder and praised for his little efforts. Besides having been tempered in the fires of a troubled and complicated life, don't [sic] forget that having also been trained as an architect, I know what you have to go through ...<sup>69</sup>

to which Eaton replies:

Please read this account of what must seem an unnecessarily violent storm in the spiritual teacup as an attempted detached criticism of the cockeyed hypersensitive goings-on in my internal self which I dont [sic] seem able to control — (except outwardly to some extent) — and not as a self pitying plaint which it is decidedly not.<sup>70</sup>

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67. T. Louw, private collection: *N. Eaton, Native art and architecture* (unpublished paper, [1953?]), s.p.  
68. SAA, UP, Eaton diaries [lost?].  
69. SAA, UP, Willem [Henrikz] - Norman [Eaton] , 1953-04-10.  
70. SAA, UP, Norman [Eaton] - Willem [Henrikz] (draft), 1953-04-10.

Architects can empathise with Eaton, for all, to some degree, share his character traits. An unpublished paper is revealing.

He was a fatalist:

even as I enjoyed all this and felt the 'rightness' of it all, I knew it was doomed

a moralist:

lime white simple, honest-to-God white should become the symbol of [the Village council's] firm but unassuming authority

a Romantic:

fresh piped water to simple fountains in the [village] squares

a minimalist:

simple, simple, simple in the way these things are kept simple on farms

conservationist:

rebuild the tumbling houses one by one keeping their established shape and character and merely making them safe and easy to keep clean

visionary:

groups of the more skilled workers of the village should themselves be induced by attractive wages and a supply of the basic materials.<sup>71</sup>

Yet to understand the foibles and fervours of a man is to know only something of the makings of a mind. Eaton's, on this evidence was scarred, yet rugged. Perhaps all architects share something of that mind, a commonality of forces which form the collective consciousness of the moulders of environments. Our understanding of nature and resonance with landscape would seem the vehicle whereby a Regionalism might be constantly rediscovered and renewed.

That is if it is considered important to pursue the Regionalist tradition which Eaton has established.

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71. T. Louw, private collection: *N. Eaton, Native art and architecture* (unpublished paper, [1953?]), s.p.