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part two  
project preparation



# Theoretical Outline

## Anti-building - Pro architecture

***Anthropologic study is “an understanding of other cultures and value systems and how they work; a critical awareness of the importance of social context in shaping thought and action; and recognition of one’s own ethnocentricity and the limits and boundaries of one’s own culture; an understanding of how societies are organised and what that means to people. In a word, a grasp of what it means to be human, to have culture and to live in different kinds of society.”***

***(Cris Shore – “Anthropology’s identity crisis”)***

In the late 20th century anthropologists began to introspectively assess their own study-field and came to the conclusion that it is becoming outdated in terms of modern society and the extreme speed at which the world is changing. Movement to broaden their field of understanding human nature by reaching into other fields of modern life, including architectural theory, was started. After all; within human culture the most evident facilitator is space and the creation thereof.

The world has become a very different place due to extreme population growth and a melting pot of cultures and societies into an emerging global culture. This culture has been described by Clair Melhuish, who is an architectural writer in London, as people hiding in private, inward-looking world of the nuclear family, with no roots and no past, smug, half-cultures and narrow in outlook. During the Modern Movement, a paradigm was created that wiped the basis of creative thought clear of past thinking, aesthetics

and culture to create a ‘new’ pure life.

*“Although the idea of a social programme was central to the modern movement itself, it was a utopian ideal of sweeping away and replacing existing communities, cultural practices and regional identities determined by climatic and topographical conditions, rather than understand and building upon them.” (Melhuish)*

Due to this Movement identity was lost and architects realised that although it was important to be freed from historical styles and mindset, it has now become even more important for humans to find identity and culture within their own modern context. It is still vital that throughout our evolution into a global culture, progression should not be confused with altering and recreation of our own culture; but more to progression within fields of technology and understanding, this within the uniqueness of our own being.

Progression today has become obsessed with economics: Every technological advance made today is directly linked to capital and the growth thereof. Marc Augé, the director of Studies at the Ecole des Hautes-Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, said that for example; by means of satellites, the conquest of space seems today more dedicated to the planet’s technological and economical management than that to exploring the unknown.

Without space technology instant bank transfers and video conferencing would not be able to take place at such ‘necessary’ speeds. Other technologies like cell phones have not simplified our lives, in fact it has done the exact opposite; humans have be-

come busier than ever and are now able to do banking, messaging and long distance communication whilst using the rest room... but in appreciation to all ‘that’ it has to be said that this has raised the problematic question of “Who am I?”. The slow demise of self exploration and progress, and fast development of superficial substance has caused this question to be raised. The crisis of the Identity is born!

*Now the study of anthropology has shifted its focus: “clearly there is no reason why anthropology, the study of social institutions and cultural value systems, should stop in a pre-modern age. Indeed the rise of multi-culturalism, globalism, and tourism in the late 20th century has raised many new and fascinating anthropological issues.” (Melhuish)*

In our current world and especially our own context, South Africa, spaces like motorways, supermarkets, airport lounges, shopping centres are anonymous, sterile environments which appear to be empty of cultural content. Given that they have become fundamental to the contemporary urban and inter-urban infrastructure, they demand an architectural response, (Melhuish).

For example; In a ordinary store within a shopping centre there are two parallel worlds lived and experienced from two different groups. Firstly the group that works there, which has a connection to the space through their everyday life and livelihood. They have a belonging and meaningful function in the store. Secondly the group of individuals that paired or solitarily move through the space brows-



## The Museum

The world has become a place of images and display. These images create an abstract understanding that we have become familiar with and perceive as being our relation to the rest of the world. People across the globe have become part of the same culture in terms of visually connecting to different places and things through the current obsession with displayed content that we find ourselves relating to. (Auge 1996) This could also be said of lost African culture: Without the need to see the cultures themselves we are content in experiencing their way of life through imagery and diagrams. It becomes virtual places and people, which we do not belong to.

A museum is a place you might visit once or twice, but the visitors never become connected or emotionally attached to that space by any means. The visitor does not belong to that space and the space and purpose of the museum is in fact designed to 'transport' the visitor to another realm of history and imagination.

With this understanding, a designer can embrace the fact of non-space and design it in that manner.



## The Mapungubwe Museum

The museum is a series of chambers that lead the visitor in a linear progression through five main cavities that represent specific ways of communication of information and emotion. The journey is very personal and is not an interactive experience.

1. The first chamber, being the introductory chamber, contains images and text showing where Mapungubwe and K2 are and what they were. This background information is to prepare the visitor for the two chambers that follow. This room becomes a departure from current attachment towards past narrative.

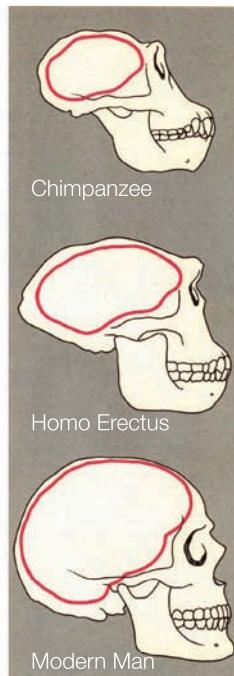
2. The second chamber is a chamber designed to feel and look like a cave like structure of pods in which the visitor can go and stand alone to listen to specific sound directed devices that convey oral accounts of the life and existence of Mapungubwe. This second chamber connects the visitor to virtual people that may have lived there. The purpose of the chamber is to partially disorientate the visitor and heighten their state of awareness.

3. The third chamber is a larger room with rows of benches lined in front of a large screen that visually transports the visitor to the city of Mapungubwe and show a visual account of the life and workings of the community that inhabited the area. This chamber connects the visitor to the surroundings and environment of the Limpopo hills.

4. The fourth chamber is the largest room which is lined with light boxes filled with artefacts from the excavations of the ruins and it also includes artefacts from other South African excavations like rock art and spear heads. The artefacts confirm all information heard and seen through the journey.

5. The fifth and final chamber is a winding space designed in a manner to make the visitor participate in self reflection concerning their own identity and roots. It forces the visitor to 'let go' of the ghosts of Mapungubwe and then to return to their own being.

The museum then ends and progresses into the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology where they move through the Department and out by means of a ramp to campus level.



## Evolution of human

**During the progressive evolution of man it is understood that the most important development is the development of the biological capacity for culture. This unique skill to live in society and using culture became an essential ability to survive and thrive.**

**What is next??**



Fig.27

ing and maybe buying an item, this group has no connection to the space and this becomes a place of non-belonging. In the full sense of the word, a place is a space where relationships are self-evident and inter-recognition is maximal, and where each person knows where he and others belong. (Augé) Thus the place is a non-space within which they only appear briefly on their way to other non-spaces.

The task at hand is for the architect to create the space in such a way that it becomes an experience and place of belonging, to put the visitor in a place of familiarity and comfort, to encourage social interaction and thought. Shopping, driving and walking have become a tremendously mindless task, which is a tragedy because of the overwhelming amount of hours we spend on each of those tasks each day.

The problem is evidently within the understanding of the word "Progression". "Progression" is not only the advancement in economical and technological concepts and products; this is something entirely different to "Progression" as a human being. It almost seems that the opinion of many theorists is directing towards the human race needing to stop and look back at anthropological history and remind themselves what is essential to being a human. With this understanding to be able to fully be in control of the creation of space and social environments in the most humanistic way. Through this understanding a respectful attitude to nature and the origins of human life will also be embraced. "Progressive" space and place is not about what you see, hear or have; but about the understanding, enrichment of knowledge and belonging.

The problem is seemingly simple: According to Peter Jones when people build structures for themselves, as they still do in very rural areas, there is no difficulty

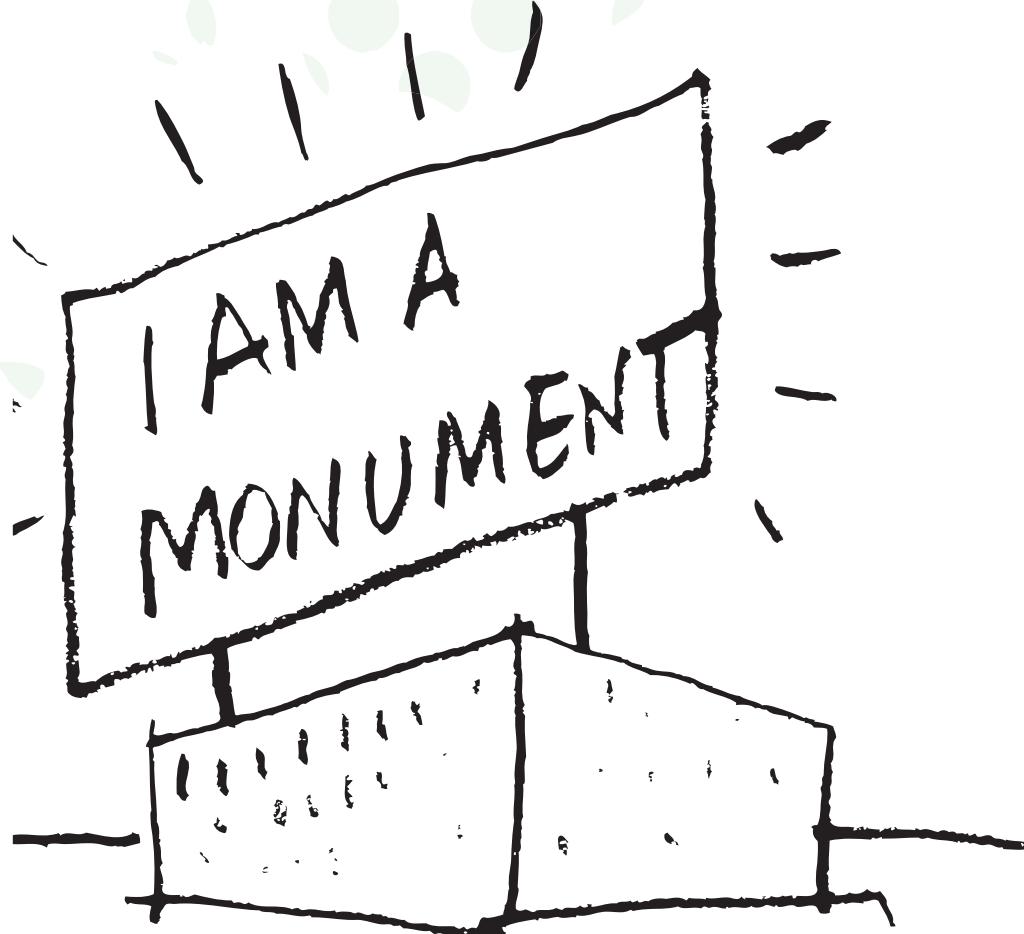
accommodating or reflecting their beliefs and values within their building: it is almost an automatic instinct and the traditional building process strongly encourages it. As a society became more complex, users are finding it increasingly more difficult to make their own habitations by legal, professional, technological and financial pressures. People entrust architects to design and build them the perfect house, no matter what the budget, they expect it to be home – but the ego's of many architects have become so overwhelming because of the tasks entrusted to them of doing such an important act of 'creation of space, life and being', that it is has become acceptable for the architect to convince a client of reducing the program from necessities in promotion of aesthetics. Has architecture lost sight of the core principle and function of spacial creation?

*"The dependence of the clan structure of the Bororo people in Brazil on their circular village, and the social disintegration reported by Claude Levi-Strauss after missionaries compelled them to adopt a grid-plan instead, shows that the village layout was no mere symbol of the social order but its principle mnemonic. Knowing where they lived helped to define who they were. Architecture set the frame for social life. People still 'belong' to a house, a college, a club, a church, a pub: the building is identified with the group." (Jones)*



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# Anti-building



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# Pro-Architecture

It is the people that use the space and their purpose of belonging that makes a pub a pub. It is not the archetypical design or even the actual structure itself. A circle on the ground could become a gathering space for socialising intoxicated men. That circular boundary facilitates the activity that is known to happen in a pub. It is not essential to the building to facilitate this activity – therefore architects have to realise that understandably the space within a pub would need standard equipment, but is not otherwise limited to any boundaries. Place is not created through style or aesthetics, but with the understanding of belonging and identity.

This theory is very much leaning toward a negative 'Anti Structure' point of view...

Through this the point is being made that admittedly structure is as much part of our being human as is breathing, without it we would not have survived and would not have evolved to the point that this dissertation could be written.

On the opposite page is a drawing by Robert Venturi showing his thoery on current architecture. He is trying to communicate through this picture that modern 'economically obsessed' culture has forgotten to create buildings for people. Thus, it is important to note that my point of view is aimed at the notion of Anti-building and Pro-Architecture. Architecture is after all the art of creating spaces, and these spaces should become narratives of activity and guide the structure to become a symbol of function. The building in the picture is only a box with no symbolic form, and the sign acts as a label: it neglects its whole purpose.

Peter Brundell Jones, who is a Professor of Architecture at the University of Sheffield, has a simple view on places and of human behaviour within those places:

Buildings frame human activities by acting as an elaborate stage in an opera for the repeated actions that we call rituals. In everyday life, society uses the word ritual for what happens in dull and scripted spaces like in a bicycle shed. But when it comes to anthropological study, there is NO simple distinction; repeated behaviour and ordered behaviour is everywhere and always has meaning as this is crucial parts of human life. These behavioural patterns are what shape thought and progression. Social processes of a respected and decorated cathedral, for example, are much more elaborated, but that does not mean that there is not any ritual associated with the bicycle shed (it does not reduce the importance of the ritual in the shed). People also come and go from both the cathedral and shed at fixed times, wear special clothes and use special equipment. In fact, if the users were to be cycle-race professionals, the ritual may be very elaborate.

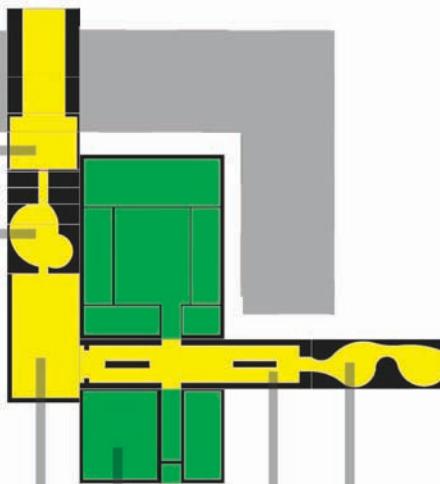
It must also be understood that even a lack of repeated structure is significant, for non-structure contrasts meaningful with structure. The freedom everyday and ceremonial ritual is easily explained using the example of meals- breakfast, lunch and dinner. They have different meanings in human individual existence and provide an order for the day. Ceremonial meals mark anniversaries and birthdays, this contrast with eating a Crunchy chocolate bar on campus; but this is still a more important ritual than eating a dry piece of bread.

In conclusion Clair Melhuish said is best: without debate, deliberation and outrage, Architecture would not thrive -

*"All the same, the purists will doubtless be quick to condemn the way in which the term 'anthropological' is used and understood in this context as being imprecise and even dangerous. But perhaps one should accept that life itself is unclear and full of risks – and it is that arena, not the rational, logical world of academic discourse, that architecture takes its place."*

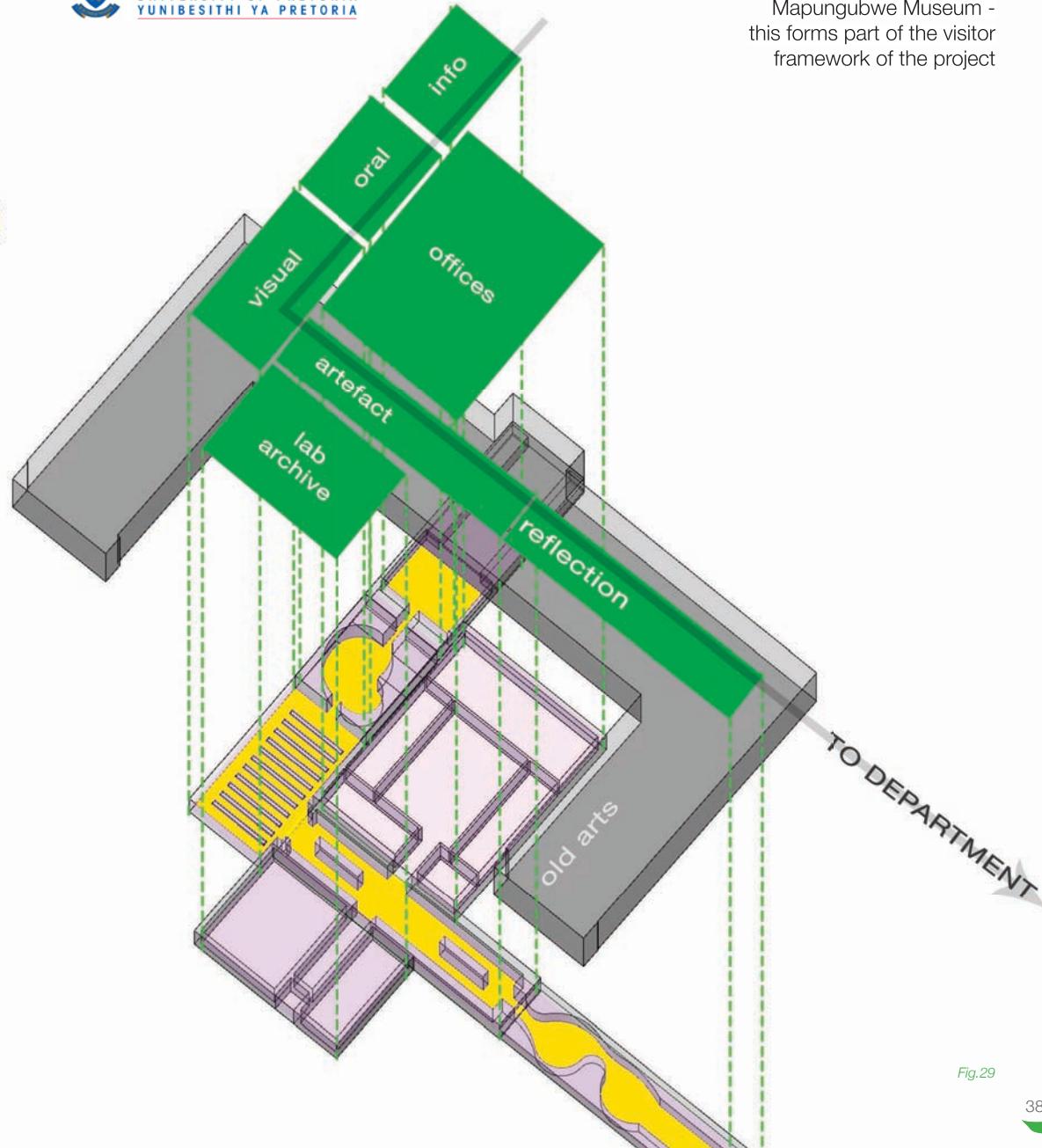


old arts



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Proposal for the new  
Mapungubwe Museum -  
this forms part of the visitor  
framework of the project





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