

# BELOW BORDEAUX

*Hidden Histories  
in Sea Point*

design research project APG5058S  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
Master of Architecture (Professional)

a malan

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper departs from a position that the act of reading can be as inspired and creative as writing or drawing. In this case, the reading of a site and story which have no author. Yet they are defined precisely by this position just outside of a single, greater authority. The decaying architecture has no one creator; the various people who have inhabited and appropriated the site have subscribed to different customs and powers; and the documentation of the site and story is pieced together from a spread of clues left between the lines drawn by passed sponsors of control.

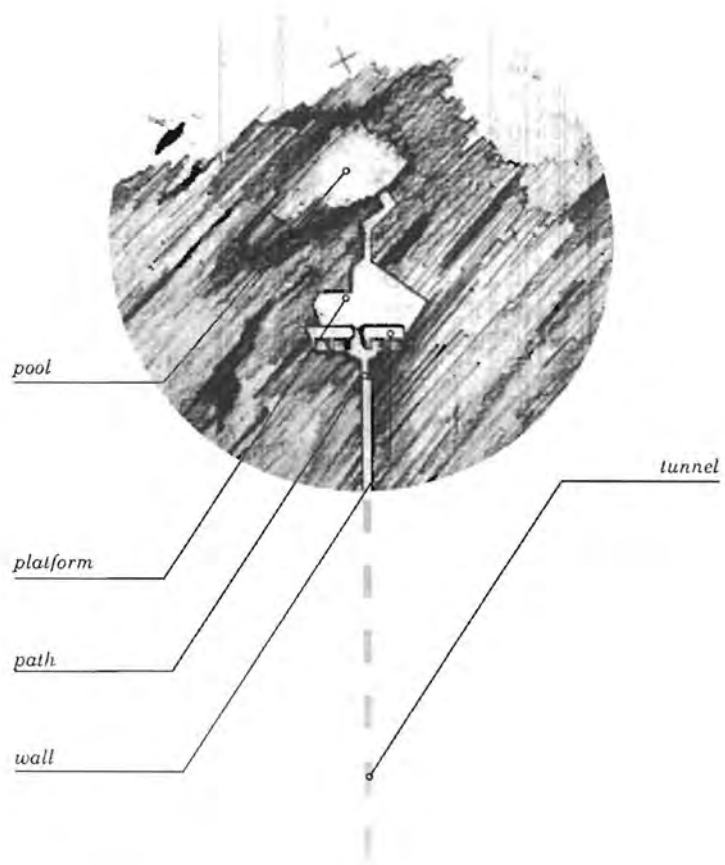
With a history of exclusion or marginalization, this significant site does not represent the country's most public moments. But, in its intimacy, has fostered a breed of diverse practices which could only have grown outside of the public eye. And now these (once) inconsistencies are blooming into the rich and multifaceted identity that we are so often proud of.

The project seeks to embrace this diversity and welcome those, previously excluded or marginalized into the public realm. The richness hidden in this site is coaxed out through rigorous investigation and creative exploration, while simultaneously, the beginning of the next chapter is written in.

Passages that follow present site investigations, historical record and proposed design unfolding concurrently. This reflects the process behind the entire thesis and invites the reader to explore a system of unexpected connections rather than rhetorical hierarchies or serial information *ad nauseam*. Chapter headings are shaped by an understanding of the existing built artifact and spatial experiences the site presents. Passages within each part are thus able to resonate across typical boundaries of architectural thought (theory, design, technology) and contribute to a larger, complex whole.

In *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History* Manuel de Landa asserts "*When we study a given physical system, we need to know the specific nature of the fluctuations that have been present at each of its bifurcations; in other words we need to know its history to understand its current dynamical state.*"

Which is true in this case, yet in order to imagine previous *spaces* we must look beyond physical artifacts. An additional layer of information arrives with the inverse of de Landa's expression: to deeply empathize with a historical narrative, we must develop a sensual understanding of the physical conditions on site -over time. In other words, while placing importance on measured, recordable facts, the project constantly strives to weave a sense of place in to each account. Δ



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[ ]

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Universi... be Town



**ROCK.**

*[pool]*

First a void was created.

People came to the rocks and cut them out to build a railway line.







(image source: UCT archives)

## RAIL!

While railways were being built in and around the city as far back as 1862, it was not until 1905 that a passenger line to Sea Point was opened. The line ran at a loss for many years. In 1927 it was electrified but soon after, in 1929, the line was closed.

*"When the line was lifted, the railway property became public land which could not be built upon. So the wide green lawns along the sea front, of which Sea Point is so proud, are the only memorial to the vanished Sea Point railway." (Burman: 1984) Δ*



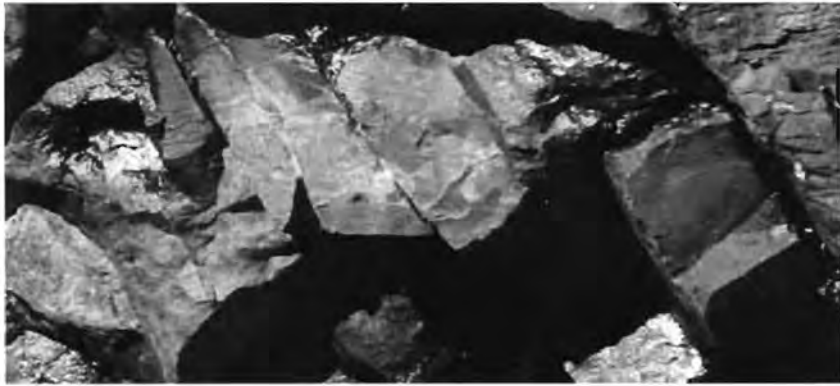


### DARWIN'S DISCOVERY

Rocks along the Sea Point coast are world famous in the field of geology. A site known as the *Sea Point Contact*, was visited and documented by Charles Darwin during a geological voyage from 1832 to 1836. His observations here would later help him to suggest that the world had been around long enough for his *natural selection* hypothesis to be true.

Some 540 million years ago, at the Contact, molten granite magma was injected into black sedimentary rocks of the Malmesbury Group. Today Cape Granite and the Malmesbury Group are two of the most prolific rock type in the country. The extreme heat of the molten granite softened, stretched and delaminated rocks of the Malmesbury Group. This left a complex mixed zone stretching over 150m along the coast.

This contact event however, is not responsible for the distinctly recognizable appearance of the dark angular rocks (of the Malmesbury group) surrounding Graaff's Pool. These are a result of a geological process called *orogeny*. The orogeny in this case, caused by pressure from a collision between the South American, Antarctic and African continental plates slowly colliding, resulted in dramatic deformation of the upper layer of the earth's crust. Thus the dark sedimentary rock was split and folded in along a North West axis. Today, these sedimentary layer can still be observed as in most rocks, only in this case they are not parallel to the horizon but protrude diagonally outward. Δ



## TECHNIQUE AND TOOLING

Drilling and Blasting, the dominant method of quarrying, has changed little since its ancient inception. While manual boring devices have been swapped out for machines and chemical advances made in the composition of explosives, the basic principles have endured. In 1858, around the time railways were expanding the Cape, a local man John S. Hemming published 'A Short Account of Blasting Rocks at the Quarries in the Neighbourhood of Cape Town'. In it, the method lucidly is described as follows:

*The process of Blasting Rocks consists, after selecting the most suitable position, in boring a hole with a hammer and drill; the latter is a straight bar or iron an inch or more in thickness, with a steel point, widened out to the size of the required hole; it is formed like a very blunt chisel. In using it, a man or a boy sits down on the part of the rock to be bored, and holds the drill upright between his legs, gently turning it round whilst it is struck by one or two men with hammers. The hole, whilst boring, requires to be occasionally cleaned out with an iron rod, bent and flattened at one end, called a spoon. When the hole is of sufficient depth, it is charged with necessary quantity of gunpowder to produce the required effect, primed with a safety fuze, tamped and fired. The tamping is the material with which the hole is filled up after the powder is put in; it is usually of stiff clay rammed tight down with a bar (either of copper or of iron, with a copper end), and called a tamping bar.*

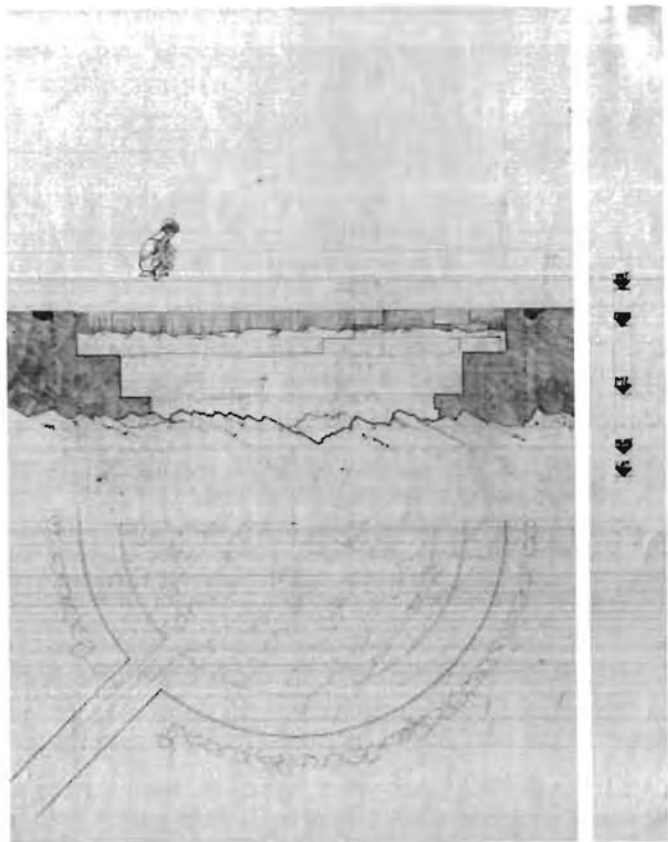
Stone, far stronger in compression than tension, is thus split by forcing it apart from the inside. These splits are most likely to follow the grain of the rock- in this case the pronounced strata. The freshly split faces are characterized by a texture different to that of the outer surface which have endured heavy weathering. Here, the weathered rock is coarsely textured and appears wrinkled with rounded edges; compared to the new faces which are smooth to touch with neat folds, crisp edges and discoloration parts- orange or a dirty yellow. Around the perimeter of the pool many of these blasted faces can be seen.Δ





(photograph: Ronan Steyn, 2012)





## TIDE & POOL

*The objective of the experimental measurements of the inflow due to wave action was to optimize the height of the seawall so as to achieve a satisfactory fresh water replenishment rate without to occurrence of unduly rough conditions within the pool.*

*The lowering of the crest level by 200mm revealed in the experimental analysis virtually no change to the conditions of no-inflow but did affect quite appreciably the total inflow and bathing conditions.*

*A final crest level for construction purposes of 1,40m (above) M.S.L was adopted<sup>1</sup>.*

In his paper 'Design of Coastal Structures for Recreational Purposes', engineer, G H O'Connell, tests wall heights at 200mm intervals before reaching the perfect measurement. Adhering to this sort of model, nearby, Milton's Pool uses man made walls to retain water and a manually operated valve (or plug) to drain the pool at spring low tides. Unfortunately, the unique rock formations dissipate wave energy unusually fast and waves seldom break into the pool. Consequently the warm water is swamped with algae and due to poor management, is seldom emptied.

Compared to typical tidal pools Graaff's Pool sits dramatically lower in the tidal range<sup>2</sup>. Perimeter rocks range in height from about 1,20m - 0.40m above mean sea level. At low tide it is full enough to bath in. At high tide, waves regularly crash into the pool and drain over large portions of the brim. The turbulent in-flow and dangerous suction areas make the pool treacherous at high tides.

With this in mind when designing a new pool, a system of waves and valves used for water circulation is out of the question. Instead, the proposed pool works on the same principle as Graaff's Pool but on the other end of the tidal range. Set in a podium further inland and higher than Milton's Pool, the new pool is protected from most wave action. At high tide, when Graaff's Pool is inaccessible, a gulley in the podium fills the new pool with water. As the tide ebbs, the water is drained completely, exposing the rocks below. Δ

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1. G.H.O'Connell, **Design of Coastal Structures for Recreational Purposes**, Proceedings of 18th Conference on Coastal Engineering: Cape Town (1982).

2. D.E.Bosman & D.J.P. Scholtz, **A Survey of Man-made Tidal Swimming Pools Along the South African Coast**, Proceedings of 18th Conference on Coastal Engineering: Cape Town (1982).

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## DRAWING STONE

*Traits were layout drawings used to enable the precise cutting of component masonry blocks for complex architectural forms... Traits are not illustrations and yield little to the casual observer. They are orthographic projections... required only in exceptional circumstances<sup>1</sup>.*

In *The Projective Cast*, Robin Evan's dedicates an entire chapter stereotomy; the cutting of solids. This is a marginal field of knowledge focused principally on stonecutting techniques. In practice, stone cutting was enabled by a drawing called a *trait* which employed orthographic projection to determine the real length of every edge defining an object. From this a master mason could cut away from a piece of stone until arriving at a precise three dimensional manifestation.

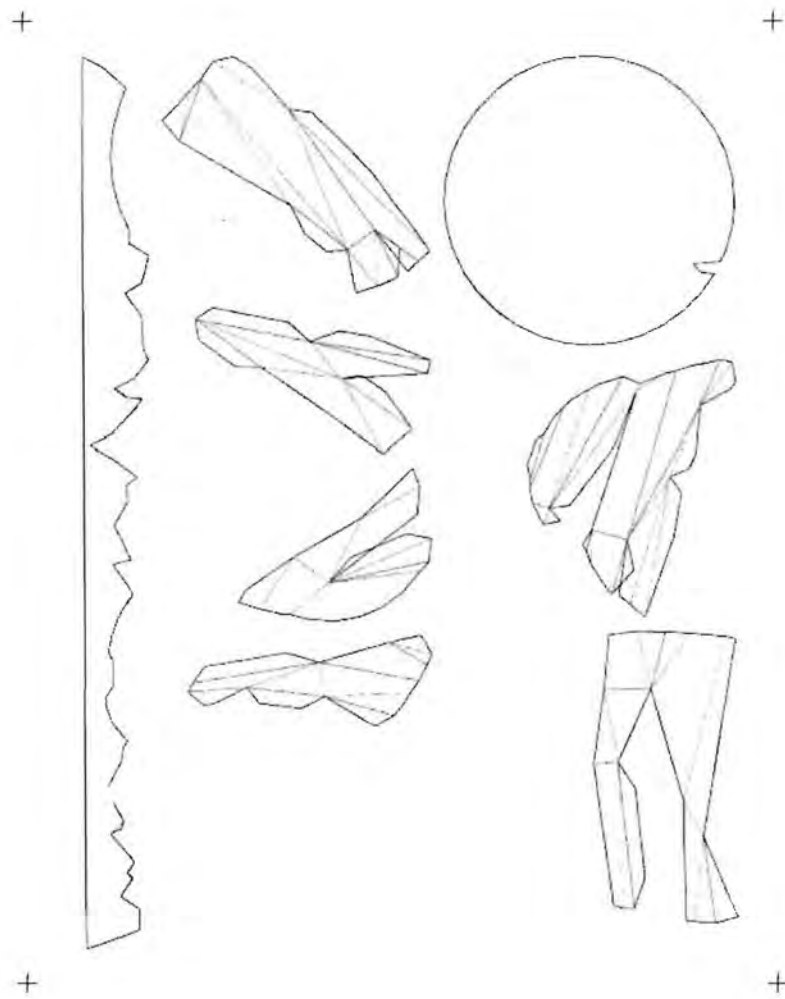
Impelled by this to find a solution to casting complex concrete components, a similar application of orthographic projection yields interesting results. Instead of cutting away at a massive object, mould making requires the definition of an outer shell; a shift in attention from edge to surface. Before arriving at a whole surface, each face of that surface must be flattened out. This is done by determining the real length of each edge corresponding to a single face. By exploiting software used in the design of computer games<sup>2</sup>, the author is able to repeat this for every face describing complex digital model. And, once flattened, group adjacent faces to be more easily identified for manufacturing. Δ



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1. R. Evans, *The Projective Cast: Architecture and its Three Geometries*, MIT press: Caimbridge, Mass. (1995)

2. Autodesk 3D Studio Max's *UVW Unwrap modifier* is typically used to create 2 dimensional templates for texturing low poly models. Usually these are without scale or relative proportions.





**WATER.**

*[tunnel]*

The quarrymen left a pool that filled up with the natural rhythms of the tide. Across from the pool in a wine maker's mansion, the lady of the house was confined to a wheelchair. A wall was erected on the rocks to hide her while she bathed. A path connected the hidden pool to the shore and a tunnel continued underground to her home. The pool became an intimate, private place—an extension of the bedroom.

## RETURNING GAZE

Out of the tall slender top windows of the Villa Bordeaux, the Lady of the House could see out of her room. From this vantage point she could survey the street and the public passersby in concealment. In her practice of voyeurism she established a gaze from the house, over the outside world terminating the pool.

As an audience member in a theatre looks out from a dark concealed position to the open stage (of infinite possibility and expanse), Lady Wheelchair would've looked out upon the pool from her dark house. Hence, if only in her own mind, she would have established something akin to the relationship between the stage actor and the audience. With this in mind it is easy to imagine the anxiety that might arise upon visiting the pool. By crossing over the proscenium, an invisible screen, and arriving on the stage as a reluctant actor – forced into the gaze of an unknown voyeur<sup>1</sup>.

In the 1920's stigmas and misunderstanding about disability would have been far more pronounced than today<sup>2</sup>. Whether from prejudice against her or a personally constructed self-image it is assumed that Lady Wheelchair was self-conscious of her physical embodiment.

The voyeur of course, was herself. The gaze came from a private place, one where she was exposed in her most intimate and vulnerable ways. Δ

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<sup>1</sup>In an essay "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism", theorist Beatriz Colomina embarks on an rigorous analysis of interior spaces created by Aldof Loos and LeCorbusier, respectively. Through strictly spatial and experiential terms Ms Colomina explores notions of voyeurism, the body, the eye, the skin in conjunction with interior domestic spaces.

The reading offered above of the relationship between Graaff's Pool, the Villa Bordeaux, and the Lady in the Wheelchair to is rooted in this mode of investigation.

<sup>2</sup> 'There is a lot of discrimination against disabled people' - Oscar Pistorious in M. Phillips, *Pistorious to Begin Appeal to CAS*, The Gaurdian, (28/04/2008)





## LADY WHEELCHAIR

**We are drawn into cultural recollection by the artifice of secretes, the deciphering of which will always provide an echo of the excitement of the original discovery**

- Robin Evans, *The Projective Cast* (1995)

The story of a lady in wheelchair has been attached to the mysterious, inaccessible tunnel for years. Inherited as folklore in the area, it has been retold, and reshaped countless times.

Exactly how much is truth and how much fantasy is not as important as the existence of the story itself, so tightly bound to these hidden and strange spaces.

The tunnel, and pool is often thought to have been built by Mr Jacobus Graaff's, after whom the pool now take its name. And it is described so in a Lawrence G. Green's *I Heard the Old Man Say*, a key source of histories written about the Sea Point area. It was built, the story goes, so that the wealthy Graaff family could walk down, in silks, from their palatial villa to bath in the ocean without having to interact with common members of society. No doubt at one point this could have been the case but pool is recorded as being in existence as far back as 1910.

A more plausible account denies that the tunnel ever reached the villa Bordeaux. Cape Argus journalist, John De Nobrega wrote an attempted debunking of the *tunnel story* in 1966. *The Tunnel that Never Was*, claims that the partially covered archway served as a subway for the old rail line and terminated on the other side of the tracks.

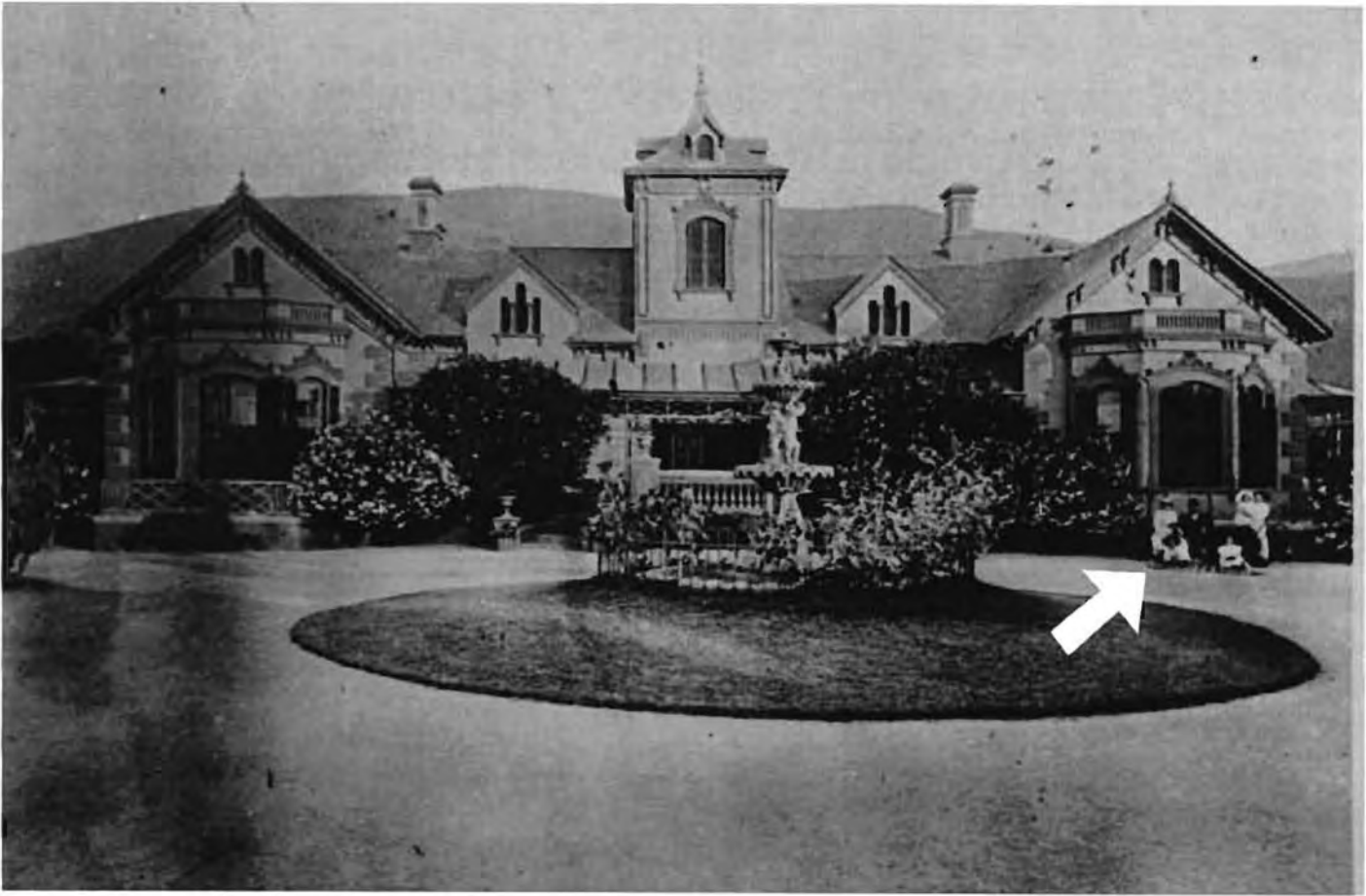
The Lady however, almost certainly did exist, and was certainly the wife of Mr Pieter Marais. Marais, a prominent member of the Round Church in Sea Point was a wealthy man with ties to the wine industry. He is credited with building the mansion at Villa Bordeaux in 1903 and naming it after a popular wine farming region in France.

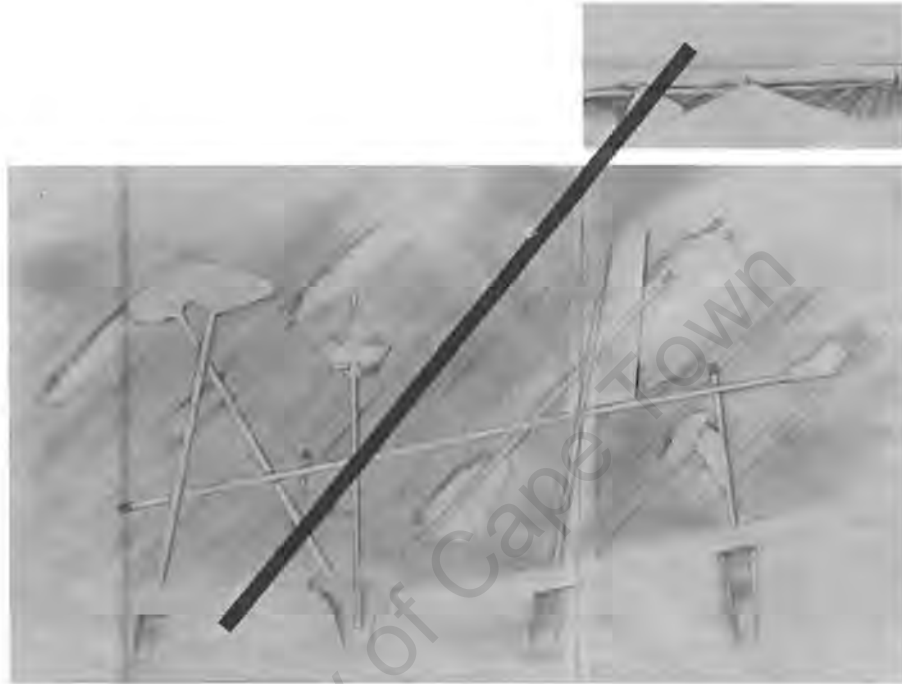
Lady Marais, fell into poor health following the death of her only child shortly after childbirth. Marischal Murray in *Under Lion's Head* writes the following:

*"Mrs Marais for some years remained in poor health. Her husband now arranged for an approach to be made, from the front gates of Bordeaux, leading down to the small pool in the rocks below Bordeaux. Such stones as could be removed were carted away, and during the hot weather the invalid was periodically wheeled down to have sea-water bath."*

In conclusion, the accompanying photograph shows Mr and Mrs Marais, seated. A black object, perhaps handle-bars, appears from between the Lady's knees. A curious shadow to Pieter's left seems, too to have handles extending in front of the standing lady's waist. Lastly, while one mystery is solved three others arrive - whose are these children?

One can only declare that the value of this story is housed in the power of this unknown. Δ





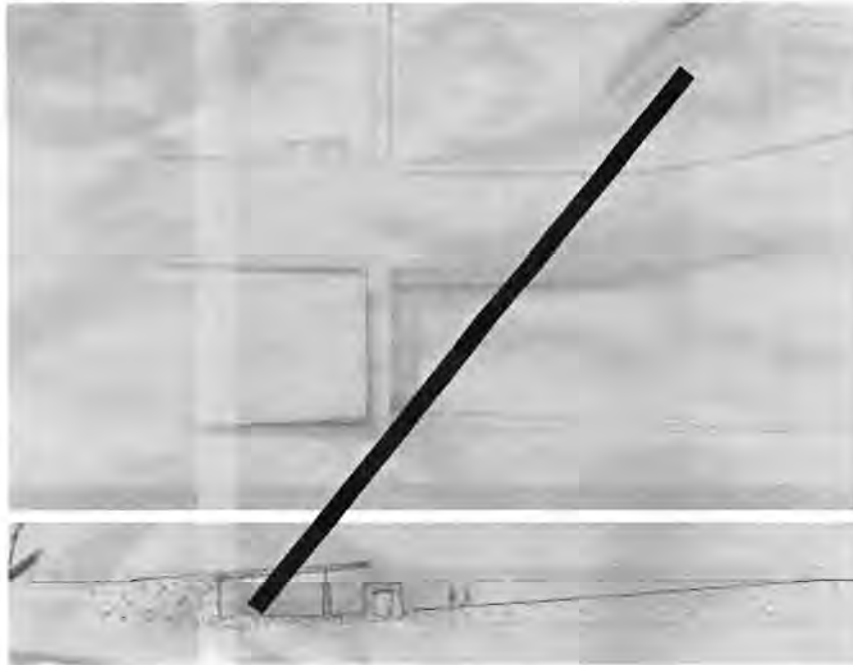
## PART I

There is a sense of ambition and determination against nature pervading the design of Graaff's Pool. Jacobus Graaff served in the 1920's as a Minister of Public Works, Posts and Telegraphs. Here, he would have overseen and maintained vast developments in the Province. His old brother, Sir David Pieter de Villiers Graaff, previously in the same Cabinet position, had been involved in realizing Cape Town's first electric power station at Molteno Reservoir<sup>1</sup>; the Sea Point Sea Wall<sup>2</sup>; and with haunting similarity, Cape Town's pier extending from Adderly street into the bay<sup>3</sup>. Although physically smaller, Graaff's Pool was conceived and built in the same era as these large scale public amenities. And consequently imbued with a similar sense of boldness.

Aspiring to transform Graaff's Pool into a *more* public place, initial urban responses reached out

to the site's dimensional limits through a series of sketches. Building on a satellite location was out of the question; so was building upward, above the promenade or further out to sea. Venturing over the rocks however, would resonate with the previous building techniques. By digging into the earth one could begin to modify the preexistent, creating new meaning and value in the same way the rock void bore the original pool.

The first sketch suggested a sort of endless copying of the pool-platform-path assemblage which would cover the coastline in a mat of accessibility. A move away from one singular object seemed more democratic, but unbridled openness would obliterate the special isolation and intimacy that were so significant here.



The following scheme would bend the earth down, entering the tunnel side-on. Across the tunnel the earth would heave up to accommodate spaces below. Entering becomes a process of repeatedly seeing and not-seeing the pool before getting there. For those familiar with the space, this might heighten the experience but it seems to deny the potential for new uses—trapped in the past.

Attempting to engage with time's passage, the third scheme posits two bold platforms on either side of the past pool. These would witness the decay of Graaff's Pool until it disintegrates completely. In turn, another two platforms would embrace these and so on. The immensity and vastness of time is important but as a driving idea, it steamrolls over the complexity of the pool's social history.

Finally, as an experimental control: a system informative plaques imitate a typical public/historical intervention. These were developed into figurative follies describing view lines, rock forms, wall heights and so on.

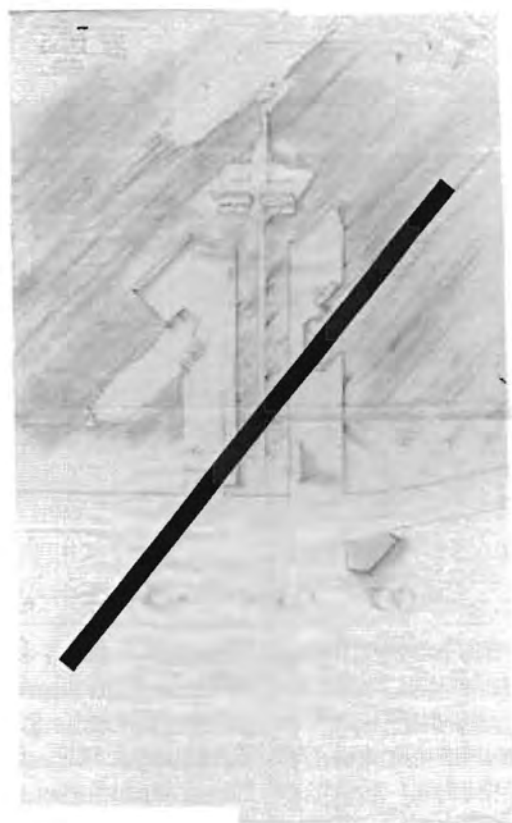
None of the experimental scenarios were successful. But after fair testing they could be confidently excluded, giving the project a clearer bearing. Δ

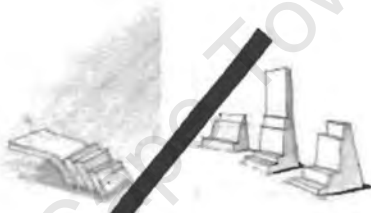
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1.E. Dommissie, *Sir David Pieter de Villiers Graaff: first Baronet of De Grendel*, Tafelberg Press: Cape Town (2011)

2.NASA (3/CT; 4/1/2/18; A294/2)

3.NASA (3/CT; 4/1/1/41; A413/1)





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## BORDEAUX AND BELOW

The Villa Bordeaux was built in 1903 by Pieter Marais whom lived there with his wife and bachelor brother, Arnoldus Marais<sup>1</sup>. Later, after falling on hard times financially, the mansion was sold to Mr Graaff. Who added a second story and extended the tower at the entrance.

Graaff, known affectionately as Koos or most formally as Sir Jacobus Arnoldus Combrinck Graaff was born in Villiersdorp in 1863. He later moved to Cape Town and made his fortune in the Cold Storage industry along with his older, better known brother, David Pieter de Villiers Graaff.

Graaff later took an interest in politics and worked in various positions until becoming minister of Public Works, Posts and Telegraphs.

At Bordeaux he is described as being *graciously hospitable* and *unostentatiously philanthropic*<sup>2</sup>. Around 1929 the pool opposite the mansion was



(image source: UCT archives)

given over to the public and from then on it became known as Graaff's Pool but for many years prior it had been named *Below Bordeaux*.

From then on, the old manor house was converted and used as a hotel. It remained this way for 30 years until in 1959, the structure was demolished to make way for what is still today the largest block of flats in Sea Point.

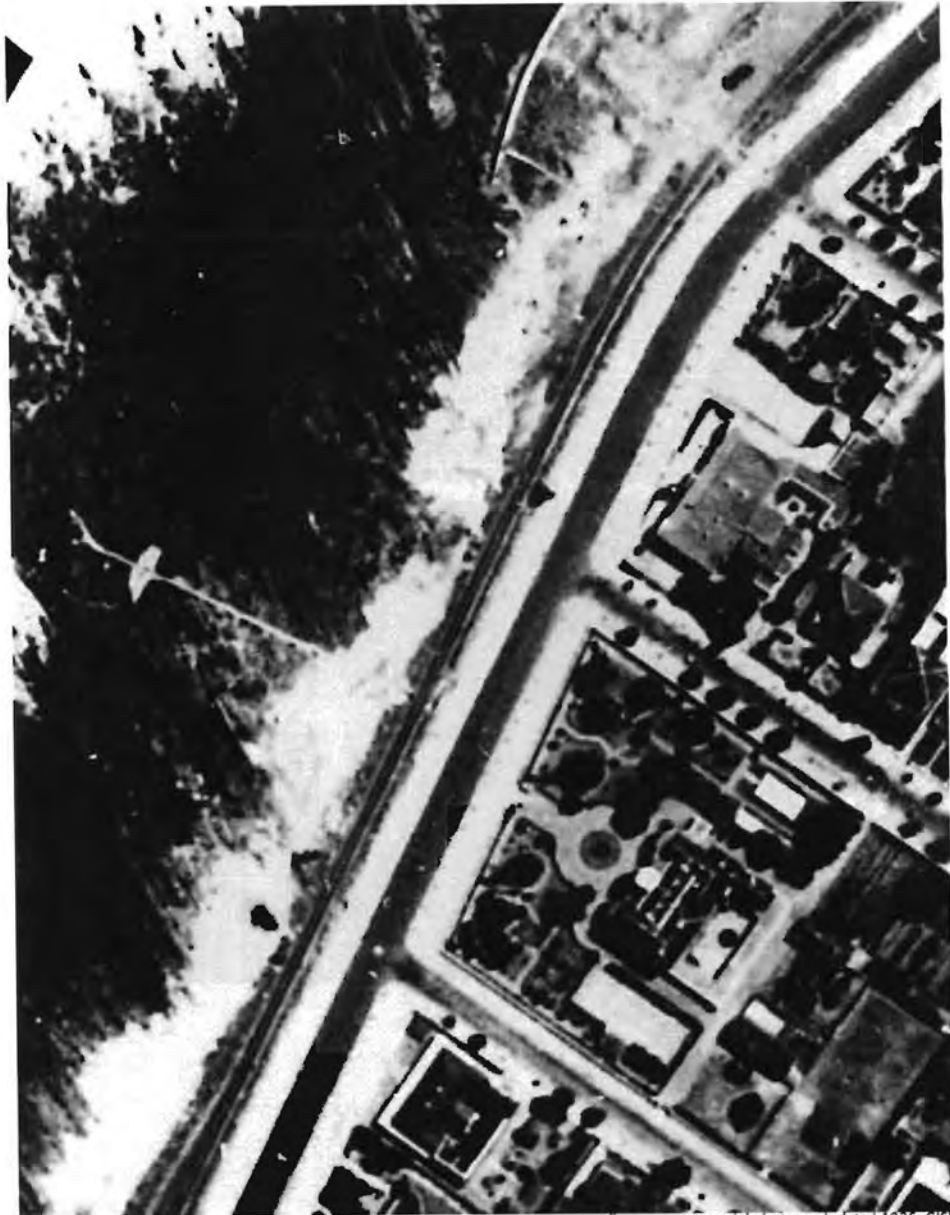
As buildings usually seems to be named after the thing they destroy, this one is no exception. *Bordeaux*, the immense block of flats that looks over Graaff's Pool would later re-shape the way the pool is inhabited and experienced. Δ

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1. Green claims the mansion was built in 1903 by P. Marais but Murray claims the Marais estate was sub-divided and portions sold following the Cape Bank failures of the 1880s and 1890s. Also that Marais died in 1901 on a nearby property named Marseilles.

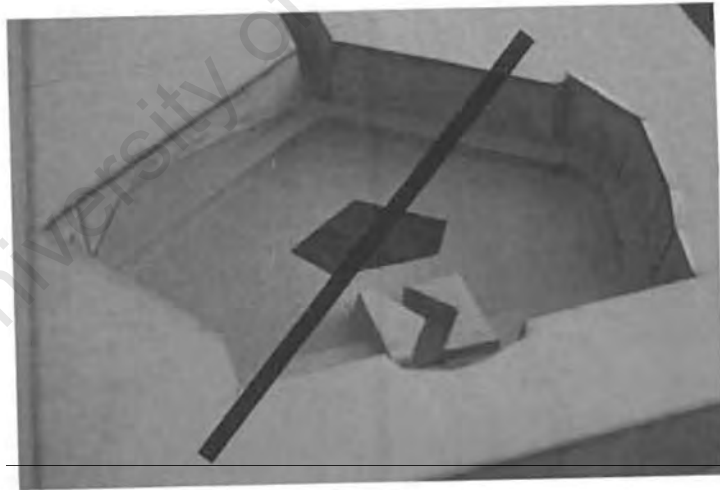
2. W. J. De Kock, *Doctionary of South African Biography*, National Council for Social Research: Pretoria (1968)





(image source: aerial photograph dated 1926, GIS)





## COUNTER POINT

*It is hard to write a beautiful song. It is harder to write several individually beautiful songs that, when sung simultaneously, sound as a more beautiful polyphonic whole. The internal structures that create each of the voices separately must contribute to the emergent structure of the polyphony, which in turn must reinforce and comment on the structures of the individual voices. The way that is accomplished in detail is...counterpoint.*

In a further experiment on a conceptual level, the original pool's massive concrete volume was duplicated, mirrored and subtracted from the earth behind the promenade. The result was a powerful space which would be terribly difficult to use; and to the casual jogger, an annoying enigma.

The value of the experiment was the intervention's position and scale. The axial relationship harks back to the lost Bordeaux Villa although for the first time the pool's anchor is a public entity. The scale is small enough to seem intimate for one or two bodies yet big enough to contribute to a larger order of *pool-intervention-promenade-city*. Δ

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J. Rahn, *Music Inside Out: Going Too Far in Musical Essays*, G+B Arts International: Amsterdam (2000) p. 177.



## COAST

Before the sea wall, Sea Point's coast line was very different. Beach Road sat on a mound of sandy soil which dipped down to the 'bleak rockscape'<sup>1</sup> and into the sea. The wall was conceived to provide a neat edge to the coast, help help return to the water and provide a dumping ground near the city. After the wall was built, refuse and rubble filled up behind it. For some time it was an eyesore<sup>2</sup>Δ

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<sup>1</sup> A. R. Fairweather, *Sea Wall Sea Point*, from the South African Society of Civil Engineering Journal, Vol. 1. (1936)

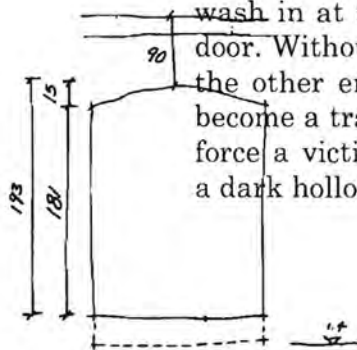
<sup>2</sup> NASA, (T; 1070; 4003)

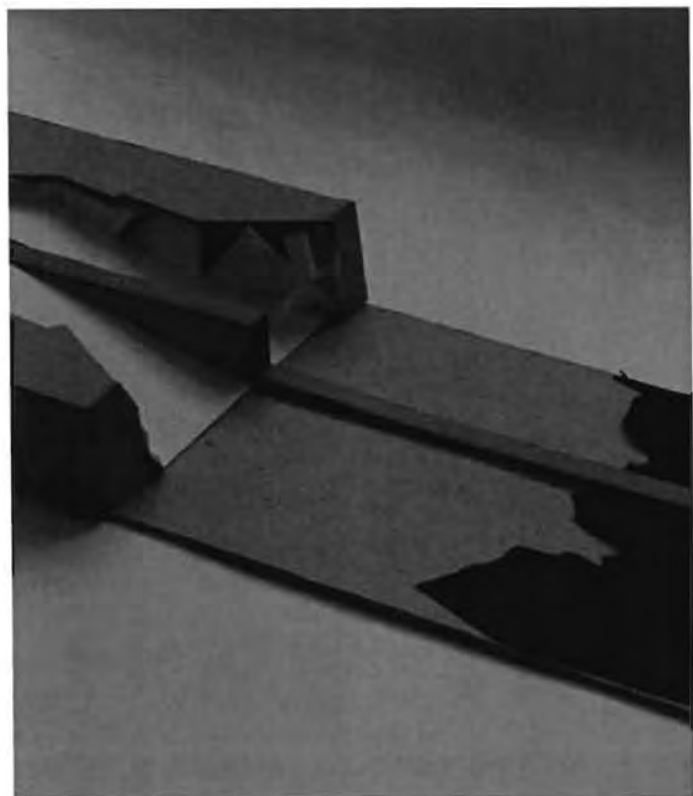
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## MY EXCAVATION

In the spirit of uncovering, the author excavated around the tunnel door. The inside the tunnel, 1930mm high and 1240mm wide, was a tight space, even for one person. This was most likely walled stone work with a vaulted concrete ceiling. The sloped concrete floor ramps down to become the iconic pathway. The high tide sea level is just below the entrance floor. So, if it were opened, swells would wash in at times re-blocking the door. Without a known escape on the other end, the tunnel might become a trap, where rising tides force a victim deeper - locked in a dark hollow, under the world. Δ





## REVEALING

Strategies of figurative re-productions or literal copying of old spaces were both problematic. The problem is one of authority and authenticity. As a space that was (and will be) re-used by many different people over time, to have a single narrative told by a single person seems absurd. Avoiding authorship of a history by simulating the original leads to unanswerable questions of how accurate an imitation the imitation really is.

The clearest way to reveal the sites hidden history is to literally uncover parts of actual artifact. Rather than being trapped in the past, these relics are now forced into the present. Here they can be viewed in a new light, compared to the altered surroundings and imagined as they once were. Thus, the wall is broken to suggest the original coast line and part of the tunnel is revealed. The tunnel remains inaccessible, heightening its mystery and position in myth. This exposure allows the intervention to engage with history and generate radically new spaces without overwriting the old, but enhancing it. Δ





SUN.

*[platform]*

A new owner gave the pool to the public. But the space's exclusivity continued. Obscured from sight, wealthy men sunbathed nude. Liberated by their confines, the group grew larger and expanded the pool too.

For those outside, it was a sign that forbidden practices were concealed here. The excluded were forced to imagine what happened behind the clean white walls. Projections of their forbidden desires overflowed into conversations, novels and newspapers.

The tension from not seeing became unbearable.

## DOODLE.

*Dew a spr ink ling  
dawn's days with dots' still  
so point les sly many  
un wed ways .*

-The definition of 'Doodle' in Lohren Green's Poetical Dictionary\*.

After Graaff's Pool had been opened to the public, it witnessed a large influx of visitors. Around this time it became desirable to expand the pool. Having undergone previous expansions, this was not unthinkable but now the onus was on the City Council. Or rather, it was the duty of the public to insist on these expansions. Below are excerpts from two letters to the Town Clerk. They offer a window into two, or more, fundamental ways in which architecture is framed in discourse.

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*I take the liberty of addressing you in regard to the above mentioned resort at Sea Point. Your Council may not be aware of it, but Graaff's pool, owing to its sunbathing facilities, has become exceedingly popular, and is the resort of men drawn from all ranks of life. Daily you can see there members of Parliament, advocates, medical practitioners, attorneys, civil servants of high standing, architects and council men. I might add that a certain Minister of the Crown is a regular visitor.*

*I know too that last year there was a gentleman from abroad who told us that he had heard of Graaff's Pool in England, and during his visit to the city he spent a great deal of time there. Doubtless too, he has spread its fame abroad.*

*Then recently the representative in Cape Town of a gigantic American tourist concern, was himself a visitor.*

*The place is therefore worth some consideration...*

*...I trust the council will read my letter in the spirit in which it is written. I merely wish to bring to your notice the fact that Graaff's Pool is a far more important bathing resort that is generally recognized...*

*I am prepared at any time to meet a representative of the Council on the spot and explain the position there.*

*- Daniel F. Bosman (28th Febuary 1929)*

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TO THE MAYOR AND THE COUNCILLORS  
OF THE CITY OF CAPE TOWN.

*WE, the undersigned, Ratepayers of and Visitors of the City of CAPE TOWN, hereby address you.*

*We would respectfully direct your attention to the wonderful virtues of SUN BATHING which - according to the consensus of medical authorities, is a most beneficial form of treatment and cure of so many maladies.*

*The City of Cape Town, by virtue of its extensive seafront, and brilliant sunshine, has some of the finest natural advantages in the World for this method of treatment..."*

*- A petition signed with over two pages of signatures  
(11th November 1927)*

*[capitals and underlining as per original]*

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In the 1927 petition to expand the pool, the ratepayers' position is that the pool must be expanded to accommodate more sunbathers since sun bathing has been medically proven to improve one's health.

Daniel F. Bosman's dream is articulated less through practical considerations and more through a description of how much he, and others, like it. They all really like it. He doesn't argue for the pool's usefulness, rather he simply derives pleasure from the space.

While 'I like it' might seem to be a weak position, the argument for pleasure is given great authority by architect and theorist Bernard Tschumi. Preceding a series of written fragments, named *Pleasures of Architecture* (1977) is the piece *Fireworks* (1974). Here the call for pleasure and its consumption is driven to its limit.

*good architecture must be conceived, erected and burned in vain. The greatest architecture of all is the fireworks: it perfectly shows the gratuitous consumption of pleasure.*

*-Tschumi, Manifesto 1: Fireworks (1974)*

Not only should good architecture be pleasurable rather than useful, it must absolutely abandon functionality in order to achieve its maximum capacity to satisfy. This idea is continued in the writing on *The Pleasures of Architecture*,

where architectural notions are linked to bodily experiences through the idea of pleasure. The 'rules' of architecture are paralleled to bondage; knowledge systems form layers like masks; and 'meaning', always out of reach becomes desire.

While Daniel F. Bosman position was far less extreme than Tschumi's. I would like to suggest that he was missing something more important than a polemic attitude. The power of Tschumi's texts, presented here, is not so much in what they argue for but how they are argued. Tschumi, an adept and agile author, steps outside of architectural theory to borrow from literary theory and post-structuralist philosophy. An indication of this is evident in Tschumi's reference to Roland Barthes' short book *Le Plaisir Du Texte*, in the title of his own work<sup>†</sup>. By employing foreign tactics, he attempts to subvert an old way of describing architecture- one that sees architecture from within and uses only architecture to describe itself- and takes the reader on an provocative journey. The text is as much a performance of pleasure as it claims to be about pleasure.

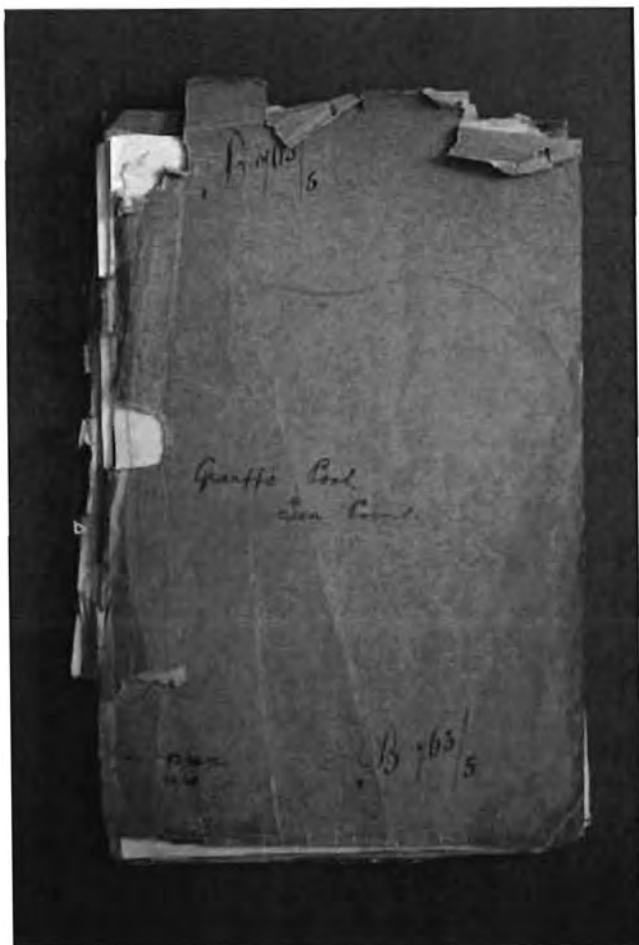
This, one might argue, is where both letters to the town Clerk fell short. In the writing of them, neither letter captured the nature of the space, nor the value of the proposed expansion. They were both condemned by their obedience to strict cultural norms. And ultimately both requests were rejected<sup>‡</sup> by the Town Clerk. Δ

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<sup>†</sup>L. Green, *Poetical Dictionary (abridged)*, Atelos: Berkley, California (2003)

<sup>†</sup>as noted by Kate Nesbit in the introductory passage in "Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture.

<sup>‡</sup>in 1930 extensions were approved and the Pool expanded along with its history.



PLATFORM EXTENSIONS



circa. 1920



unrecorded date



1926



1961

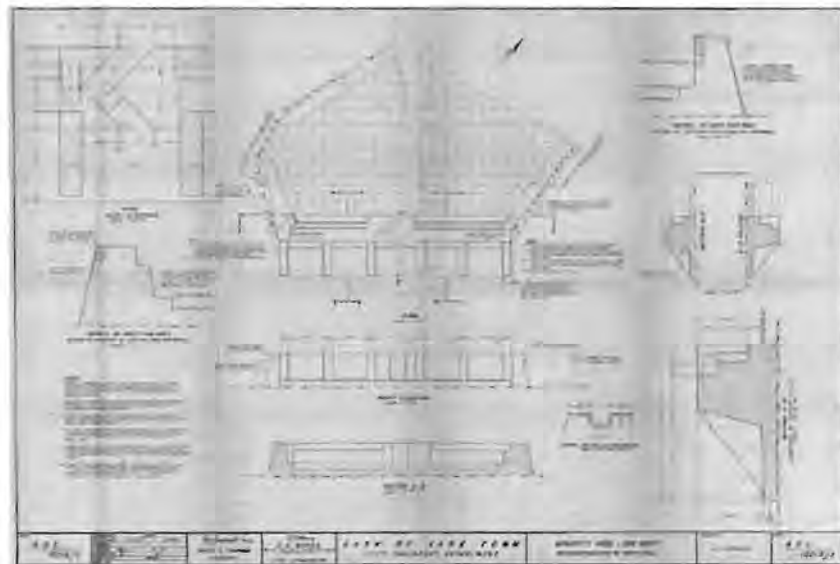


## RE: DRAWINGS

*To translate is to convey. It is to move something without altering it. This is its original meaning and this is what happens in translatory motion. Such too, by analogy with translatory motion, the translation of languages. Yet the substratum across which the sense of words is translated from language to language does not appear to have to requisite evenness and continuity; things can get bent, broken or lost along the way.*

So begins Robin Evan's seminal essay *Translations from Drawing to Building* (1986). Evans continues by suggesting that something similar to the translation between languages occurs in architecture- between drawing and building. In the context of this project both drawings and building (remains) of Graaff's Pool are present.

Previous incarnations of the concrete structure have been documented in three important drawings. These come from the City of Cape Town's Engineers and would have been used in the bureaucratic processes of proposal and approval



(image source: NASA: 3/CT: 4/2/14/226; 6/1/25)

by the Town Clerk and by contractors on site. Other clues to the nature of the past structures can be gleaned from aerial photos and on-site analysis of the ruined pool.

Of the three drawings, two from 1929 and one from 1961, the latter is the most interesting. This document was drafted to recorded repair works done on the pool following a massive storm in 1961. The rear wall suffered the most damage in the storm (Interestingly it was the 1929 height extensions that failed rather than the preceding construction. And still today, after most of the walls were demolished, the surviving uprights are those from before 1929).

Although the drawing for the 1961 repairs is mostly a re-drawing of the existing pool- or an attempt to reconstruct a ruin- this is the most descriptive surviving document of the pool's final state before attempted demolition in 2005.

In this drawing, the plan is limited to strict geometric lines suggesting the limits of cast concrete. Beyond this, where the rocks should be, is an empty space stretching out into surrounding drawings. There is no suggestion of context or grounding medium. In the sections an imaginary datum, or dramatically distorted ground plane substitutes the complex rock forms in and around which construction took place. The characteristic peaks and troughs in the sharp rocks are flattened out by the draftsman into a single wobbly line.

*Note:*

*I. Point j to be at intersection of front face of new wall and top rear edge of existing side wall.*

*II. Point K to be at intersection of outer buttress wall and continuation of top rear edge of existing side wall.*

*III. Pont m to be at intersection of front face of new wall and rear edge of bottom seat of existing side wall.*

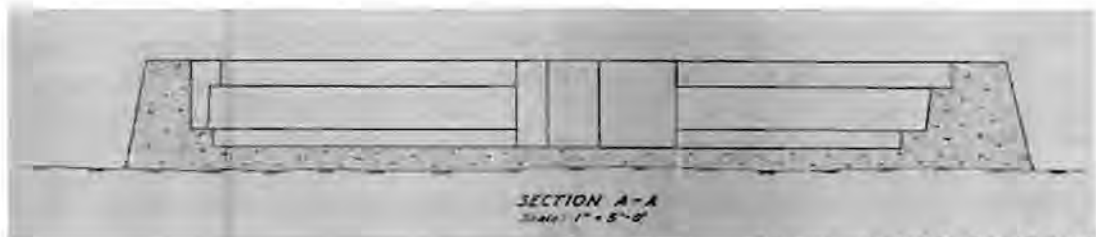
Reading the notes for reconstruction of the rear wall, it is clear that the existing pool has been drawn with a great deal of accuracy, and an internal logic. It is not unreasonable to suggest that such a skilled draftsman could have developed a notation to describe the position and nature of the surrounding rocks if it were deemed important. A possible explanation for the distorted rocks is simply because an accurate re-drawing was not needed for construction. Nothing of the construction method has been documented, but one might assume that shutter boards were



cut on site to form moulds that accommodate the rocks. These could have been cut to find a snug fit through trial and error. Tell-tale signs of this can found today, in the way concrete bulges out along a straight edge where it meets the rock in some of the less neatly finished stretches.

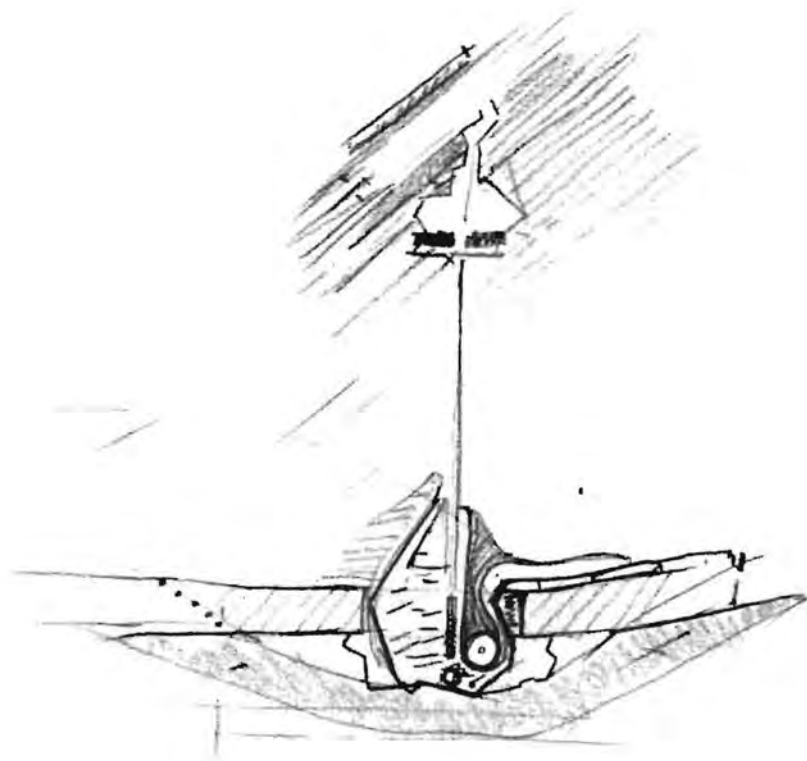
Both in the drawings and in the building the structure's attitude to rocks seems simple - they are denied. In built artefact, the path sails from beach sand to the sunbathing platform in a smooth uninterrupted gesture. The walled platform further divorces the bather from the rocks until four small steps dip into the water (held by rocks), where one might swim across to touch them. Even here, contact with the rocks is not endorsed by the structure. The pool has taken a defensive shape as a response to the uninhabitable rocks.

Had the grounding conditions that were drawn been real - a smooth plane gliding into the ocean - the pool would have been resolved in a completely different way. A system of handrails comes to mind, to help bathers navigate the flat plane. Or a series of walls and gullies to form habitable pools. Because of this incongruity, the rendered path and platform appear incomprehensible on the page. They look more like a household object- a decorative plate or computer part- than a habitable space. The drawings distortion of the building's datum, or natural context translates, in the mind of the viewer, into a distortion of the drawn object itself. Δ



(image source: NASA: 3/CT; 4/21/4/276; 6/1/25)

University of Cape Town



## SITUATION

In addition to revealing historical fabric, the design diagram resolves to accommodate two key spaces within the physical limits of the site.

As a celebratory entrance to the Graaff's Pool, the project stakes a out a public place along the promenade. A small respite from the promenade's constant movement, this is a space in its own right which doubles as an ante-room for the old pool. First time users and casual visitors are likely to arrive here before committing to the ritual of traversing the path, passing behind the wall and onto the old platform.

In contrast to this, the other key space is intimately focused on human activity and the bodies' interaction with water. This place hosts a small swimming hole where the water level rises and falls complimentary to the original pool's diurnal cycle. Towards the ocean, these two spaces are framed by the open ends of the promenade wall. Behind this, the scheme is bound by the pedestrian re-routing which consoles the breakage in movement.

In arranging these elements, the galvanizing gesture is an arm-like barrier reaching out from the promenade toward the pool. It is shaped to enhance the existing effects of localized longshore drift<sup>1</sup>, which will deposit more beach sand outside the barrier and naturally clear out the inhabited areas. The arm-like appendage carries a ramp from the promenade to the old pool. The exposed tunnel forms a central axis separating public open space from public intimate space. This open space is framed by the barrier wall and tunnel in such a way that presents precise views of the old pool and rock formations. Sunken into the ground, views into the intimate space are limited. A single stair slips down here, aligned only with the water hole so that those who choose to enter here have done so with intention. Δ

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1. For a diagrammatic description of the phenomenon, see Appendix A.

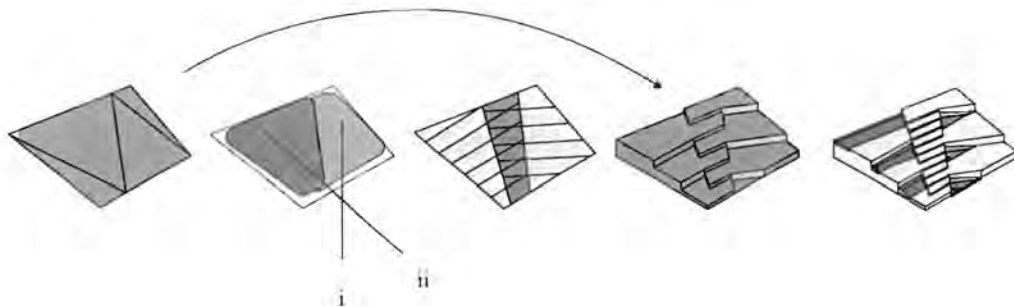
## HUMAN SCALE

A 1:1 scale mock-up of the new pool on site. The circle is 5m in diameter. Concentric steps of the pool will be finished in polished, white concrete with a fine white aggregate. Smooth, filleted edges welcome the human touch. The podium in which this rests in coarser under foot. The joint between the two parts is inset with a circle of large stones found on site -as suggested here. Δ

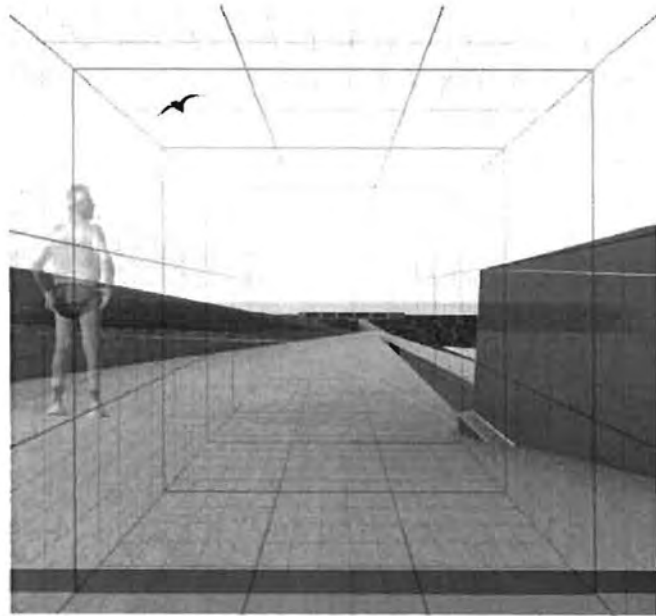


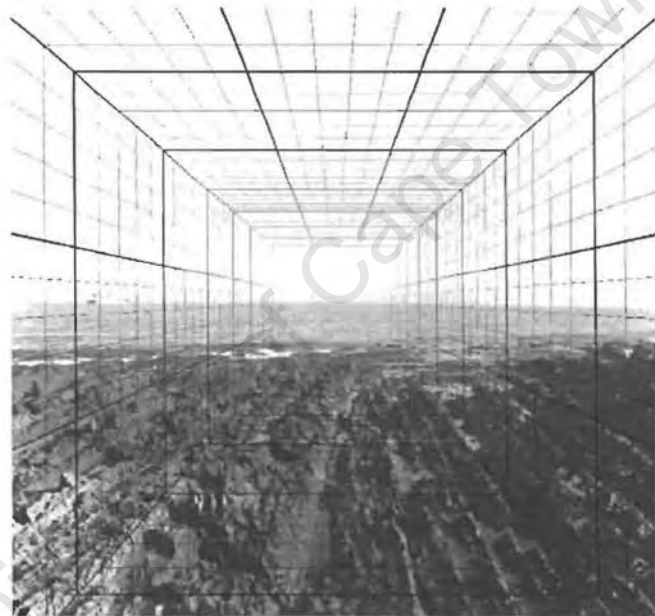
## VIEWING STAIR

1. A surface approximates the original coastline.
2. Two regions: i, view of the pool. ii, view of the rock. These regions overlap.
3. Perpendiculars drawn respective to their view.
4. Stepping seats.
5. The original surface from 1. Intersects the seating at 4. to reveal fragments of beach sand - a glimpse of the invisible past.  $\Delta$











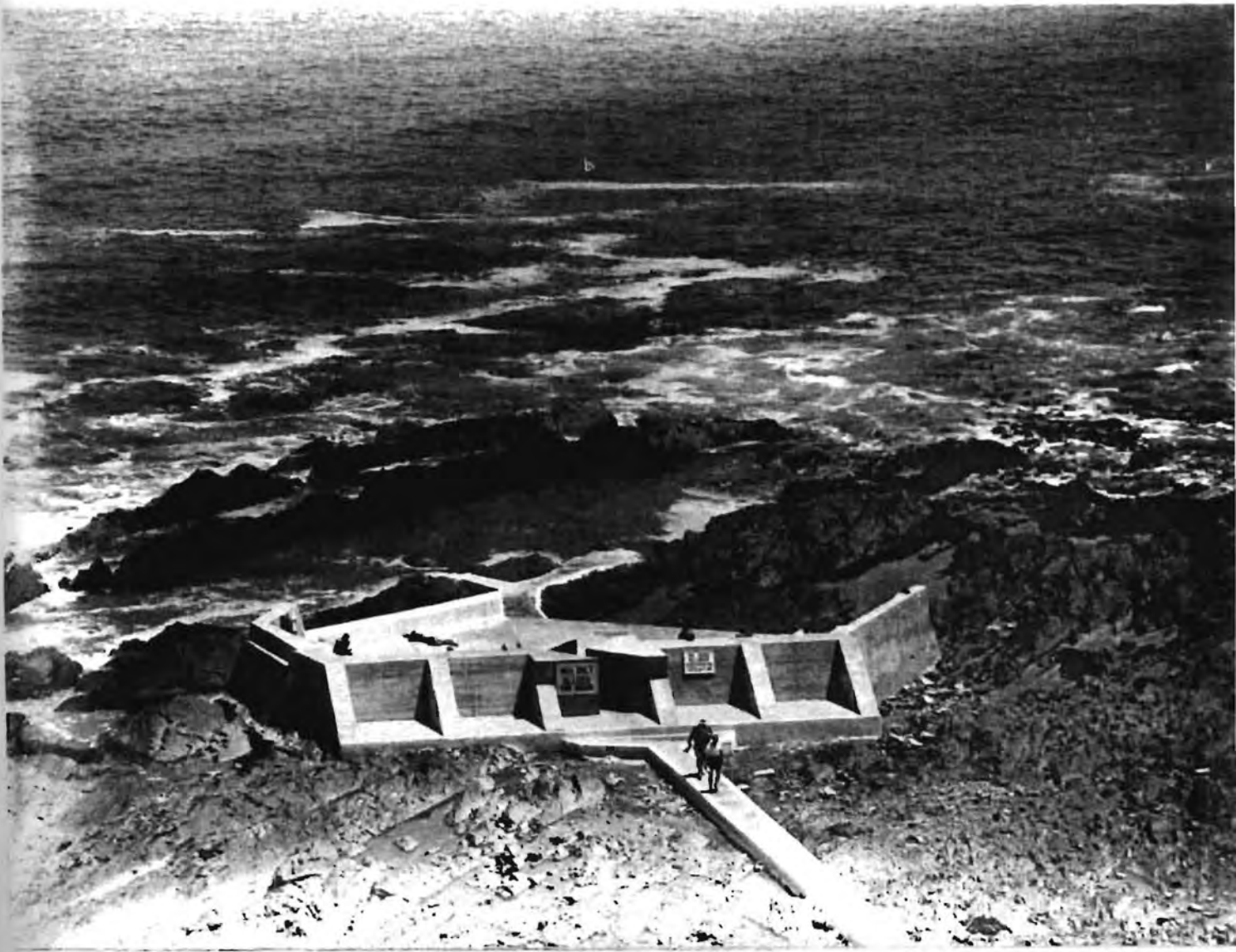
Universit e Town

**CONCRETE.**

*[path]*

Accepted in their intimate space and criminalised in public, some men practiced homosexuality. Other spaces of acceptance where rare, hidden and contingent. This one became a landmark.

University of Cape Town

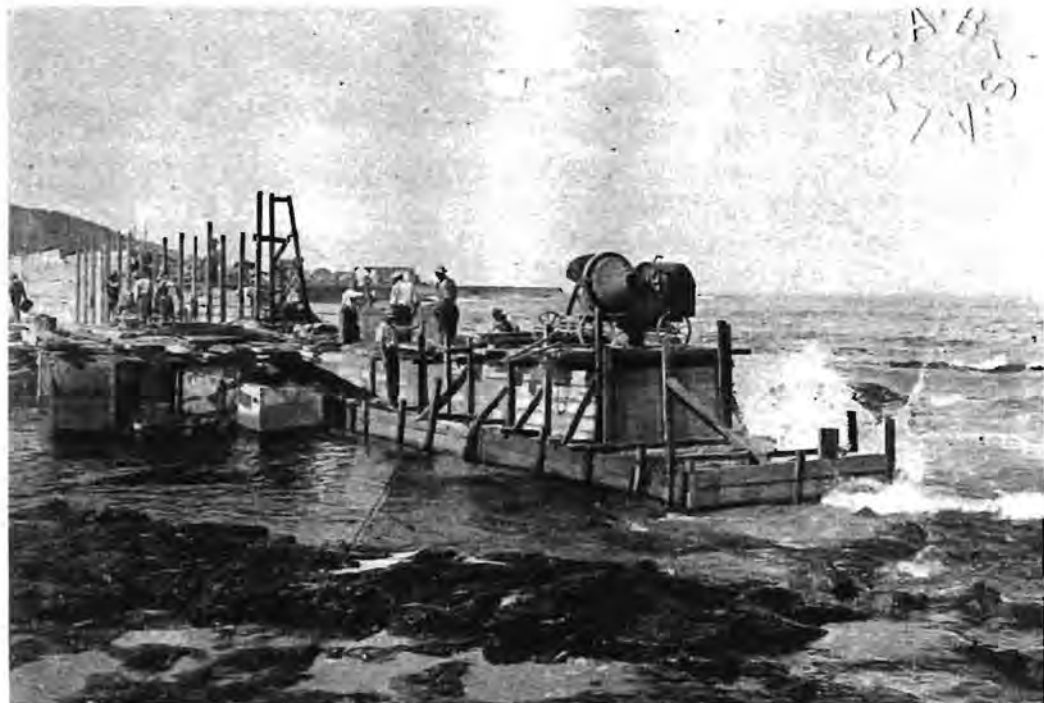




## BUILDING UPON

Moulded, poured and set concrete is the dominant material of Graaff's Pool. And the only operation that involved creating space by adding to the site. In this sense it constitutes the key act of building upon datums.

Besides engineer's drawings and archived letters, this photos is only visual record of the construction process. It was taken at Mouille Point as progress of the sea wall neared the lighthouse. This is the very beginning of the sea wall which was built soon before Graaff's Pool. It relies on a similar mass gravity approach to overcoming wave forces. At the base of the form work, the thicker part shows the extent of the foundations which rest directly upon exposed rock. To the left of the picture frame a buttress has begun to be cast. Δ

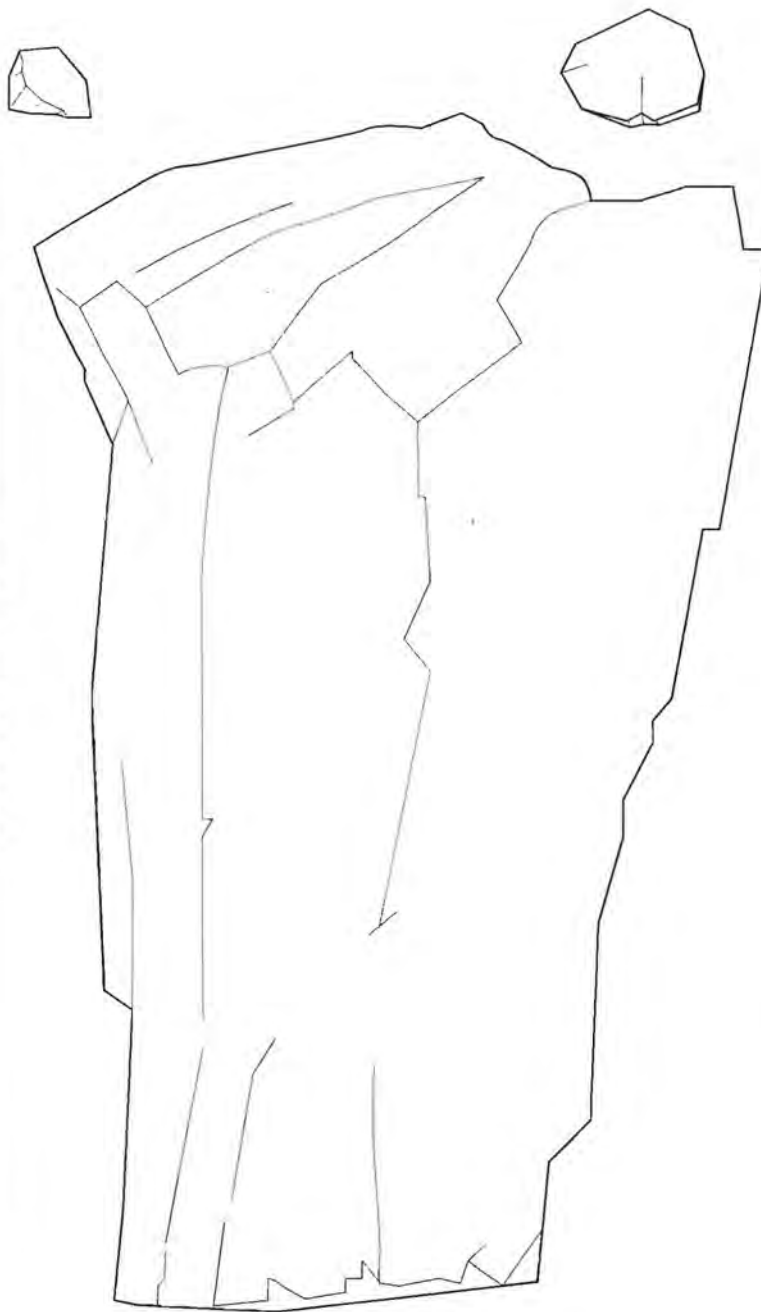


(image source: UCT archives)





140mm (ACTUAL SIZE)



## GRAIN



Aggregates are inert particles that are mixed with cement and water to make concrete. These particles can be fine, such as sand; coarse, such as stone; or a combination both<sup>1</sup>.

At Graaff's Pool, three dominant aggregates can be detected - three stone mixes. The largest stone size is packed into large rock valleys to form a level datum. These stone were hewn off from the surrounds -probably from rock peaks that interfered with the same datum. The smallest stone size was used to shape low walls on either side of the path and along the perimeter of the platform. These are 180mm and 400mm thick, respectively. In both cases the walls act as permanent shuttering into which the third, medium sized aggregate mix, was poured. Δ

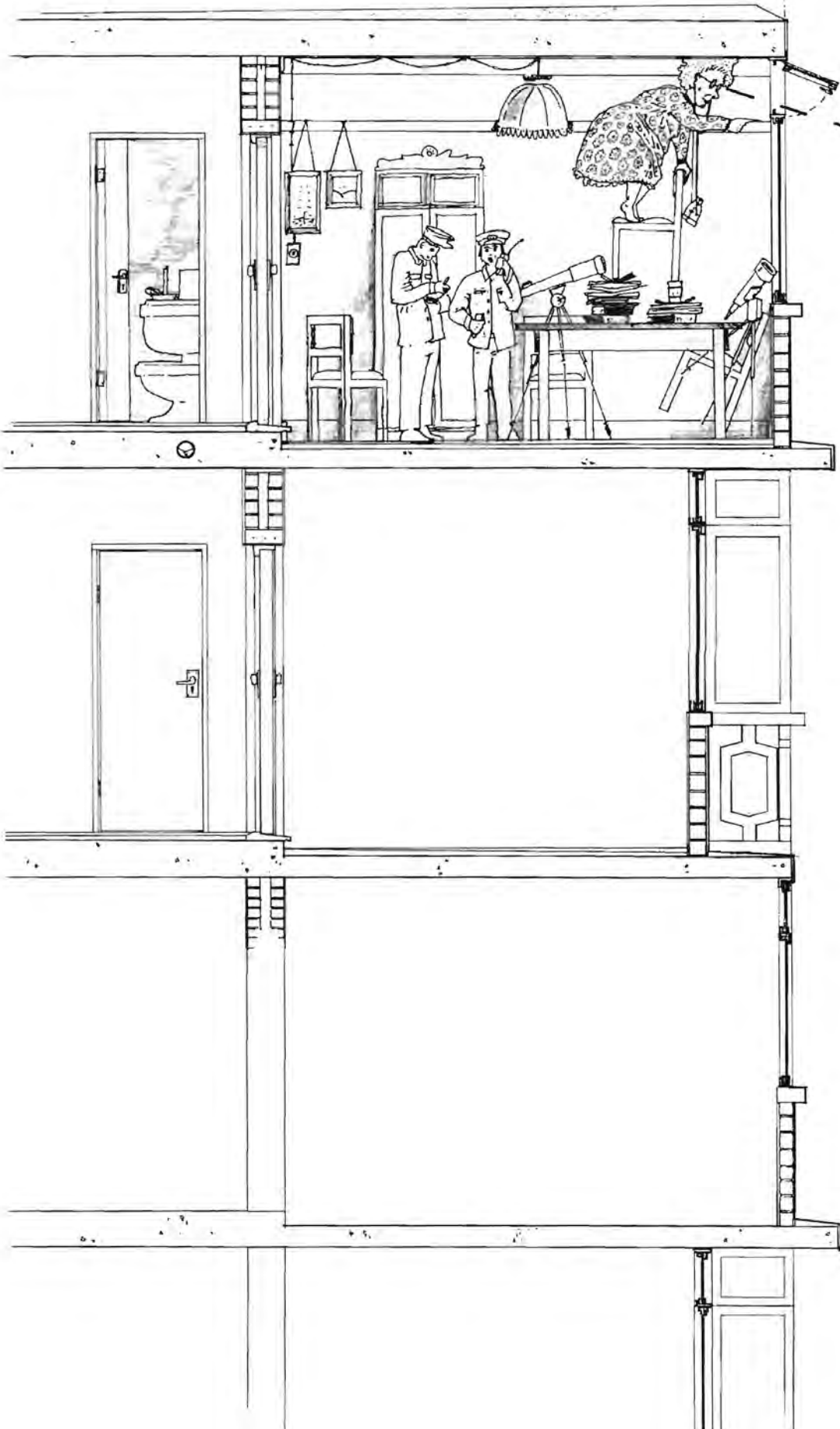
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1. G. Owens, ed., *Fundamentals of Concrete Second Edition*, Cement and Concrete Institute: Midrand, South Africa (2012)





POOL WALL



- ⊕ — + 27 50
- ⊕ — + 27 238
- ⊕ — + 26 830
- ⊕ — + 25 500
- ⊕ — + 24 600
- ⊕ — + 21 700
- ⊕ — + 18 800

7 500  
230  
830

*Many stories told about the nude bathing in Graaff's Pool have captured the public's imagination over the years. One of the favorite fables manages to frame a broader moral question.*

### THE ONE ABOUT THE OLD, PEEPING LADY

500  
4 600

started when the city's chief engineer (and strong supporter of the pool no doubt) Dr S.S. Morris received a phone call from a disgusted lady complaining about nude men exhibiting themselves on the Sea Point coast.

Dr Morris sent a man to meet with the old lady and investigate the complaint.

He arrived at the old lady's top story flat, nearly half a kilometer from the pool, and looking through the window could see nothing but a blurred seaside.

Confused he turned to the little lady who said "*You can't see much now but wait till you climb onto the table and focus through the binoculars!*"

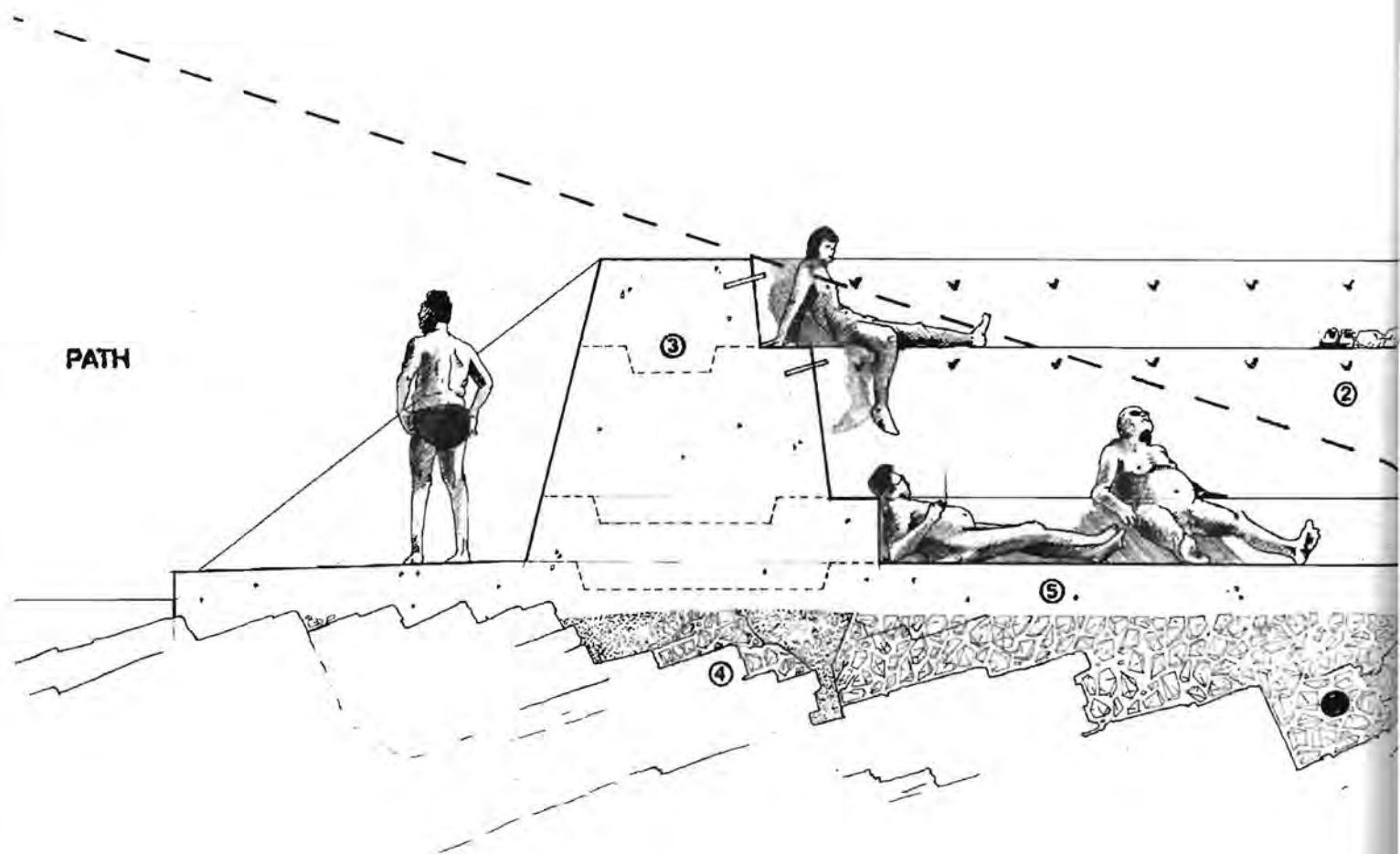
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### QUEER SPACE QUOTE

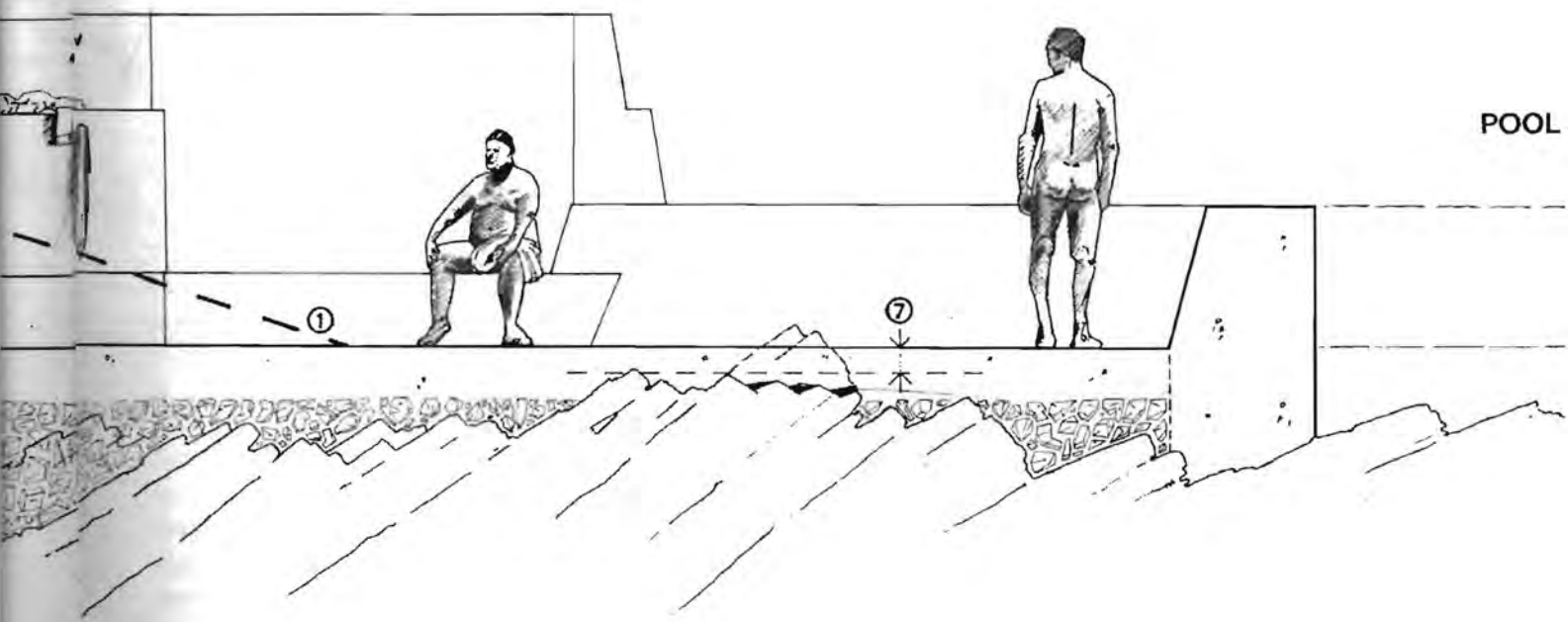
1 700

“It is a kind of space that I find liberating, and that I think might help us avoid some of the imprisoning characteristics of the modern city. It is a useless, amoral, and sensual space that lives only in and for experience. It is a space of spectacle, consumption, dance, and obscenity. It is a misuse or deformation of place, an appropriation of the buildings and codes of the city for perverse purposes. It is a space in between the body and technology, a space of pure artifice.”

Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space*, William Morrow and Company Inc.: New York. (1997)



PATH







### MASSIVE ASSEMBLY

Graaff's Pool is almost a hundred years old and curiously, it is the oldest parts which have weathered most gracefully. Barring the 2005 bulldozing, the main cause of structural failure is steel reinforcement. The structural efficiency of steel is impressive but if compromised by exposure to the sea air, oxidation begins. The steel reinforcing expands within its concrete casing, causing internal fracturing which leads to dramatic structural failures. The most hardy parts of Graaff's Pool which still exist are of course, those without steel reinforcing. Typical walls translate horizontal loads down to their foundations by resisting a bending moment. But here, the mass gravity principle is employed—the structure is simply so massive that it can't be moved. This is aided by broad foundations and a small amount of cantilevering afforded by buttresses but the key to the old wall's resilience is in its proportion: roughly as broad as it is high, tapering to two fifths of this dimension at its highest point, with a footing behind that extends the same distance again. These proportions can be scaled up or down uniformly in the design of new members<sup>1</sup>.

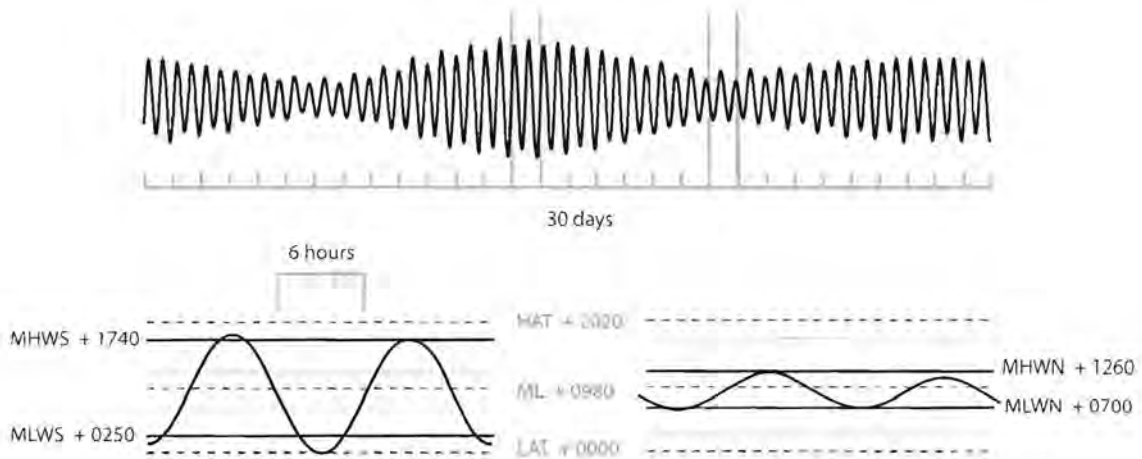
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The hardships of off-shore construction were tackled by head on by the men who built the Sea Point Sea Wall. A.R. Fairweather's report, explains how sea condition data was plotted on graphs in a effort to avoid building in rough seas.

*The Harbour authorities very kindly allow their Log of the Look Out Station to be examined...The sea conditions were recorded according to the Code numbers in Lloyd's Calendar, viz.:-*

0. *Calm.*
1. *Smooth.*
2. *Smooth.*
3. *Slight.*
4. *Moderate.*
5. *Rough.*
6. *Rough.*
7. *High.*
8. *Very High.*
9. *Phenomenal.*
10. *Phenomenal.*

In the project proposed a second consideration—that of tides—will have a substantial affect on construction works. Each monthly cycle brings two



neap tides and two spring tides. Both have their advantages. Spring tides produce the highest sea levels but also the lowest lows, for approximately six hours twice a day. These lows are a good time, for example, to establish a temporary wave barrier wall from industrial sized sandbags. Whereas concrete casting in low lying area would be better suited to a neap tide which is more moderate overall. Thus curing concrete is in less danger of being compromised by high seas.

The engineer's drawings for the 1961 rear wall repairs exclaim "*THERE SHALL BE NO VERTICAL JOINTS*", the importance of this is not overstated. Vertical joints thwart the structure's capacity to act as a single monolithic object. Therefore casting is done in horizontal layers. Each section should be keyed into the volume below and form keys for the layer to follow. A quick estimate concludes that walls for the new pool area, if cast in six hour intervals, will have horizontal joints at 200mm increments<sup>2</sup>. Different sand aggregates in each successive layer will result in a richly stratified finish evoking a sense digging into the earth, excavating and uncovering.

Δ

- 
1. interview with engineer Brian Rihcardson.
  2. Ibid. 1.

# Swimmer's body found in gully

By JOHN VAN DER LINDEN

THE body of a 37-year-old Sea Point man who went missing after going for a swim at Graaff's Pool yesterday afternoon was later found in a gully within 30m of where he was last seen swimming.

According to the dead man's father, former senator Dr Jack Lock, he and his son Louis, of 205 Shirlyn Court, Sea Point, had been strolling along the beachfront about 3.30pm when he urged his son to go for a swim.

His son, who is a regular visitor to Graaff's Pool, took up the suggestion.

"When Louis did not return I assumed that he had gone along with some of his friends."

Later he became worried, and the authorities were informed.

Two National Sea Rescue vessels from Station 1 and Station 3 were launched to search the sea off Graaff's Pool but Mr Lock's body was discovered by a search party on land.

Dr Lock said later that he had recently buried his son's former wife and his daughter who had died in a car accident.

His five-year-old grandson survived the accident but had been badly injured.

"I have just been up-country to see if he was being taken care of and now I have to bury my son," he said.

● Picture, pag 2

## BUSINESS

|            |       |          |
|------------|-------|----------|
| Gold (los) | ..... | \$4      |
| Rand       | ..... | \$0,6 45 |
| Dow Jones  | ..... | 1 32     |

By STEPHEN WROTTESELEY

**MORE THAN 20 men** — some of them prominent businessmen — have been arrested by the police and have paid R50 admisson of guilt fines following homosexual acts at Graaff's Pool at Sea Point.

The undercover police operations at the pool started in March this year after complaints by members of the public. Yesterday police promised further clampdowns on public homosexual acts. Those arrested were all allegedly found in compromising situations.

According to the police, 22 men have already paid admission of guilt

## Flats will overlook men only

30 JAN 1958

The privacy of a 'men only' haven at Sea Point may be threatened by the construction of a new block of flats on Beach Road, the Cape Town City Council was told this afternoon.

Mr. H. Bowman told the chairman of the Amenities Committee (Mr. I. Osipov) that residents of flats being built opposite Graaff's Pool would 'have a view of the sanctuary.'

Mr. Bowman asked: 'What will the Amenities Committee do to protect this sanctuary?' (Many men sunbathe in the nude at Graaff's Pool.)

Amid laughter Mr. Osipov replied: 'When the building is completed I will make an inspection from the eighth floor and then report to the council.'

The building will be on the site of the Hotel Bordeaux which is being demolished.

# 20 fined after

② Sea Point

fines and another case is still pending.

Details of the arrests and fines come at a time when allegations are being made that other members of the Narcotics Squad, of which the vice squad is a division, are clamping down on nightclubs operating on Sunday nights.

However, Captain Barry Uytendogaardt, head of the squad, yesterday denied any persecution of the sailor-orientated clubs and said recent summonses served on owners were part of normal police operations.

The club owners are being

## CLIPPINGS

Hundreds of newspaper articles concerning the Graaff's Pool have been written over the years. Presented below is a small selection showing a range of views through which the Pool has been framed.

### TRENDING TOPICS

The list below recalls the most prominent headlines from or around the year stated.

|                                  |        |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| Sea Weed; Wonder Plant           | (1940) |
| Beauty Pageant                   | (1940) |
| Bopper Disturbances              | (1950) |
| Non-whites in Pools              | (1950) |
| Vagrants at the Food Automat     | (1950) |
| Monstrosity Blocks               | (1960) |
| Slumdanger                       | (1960) |
| Smells; Sea Point Stinks         | (1960) |
| City Hall; White Elephant        | (1960) |
| Apartheid in Sea Point           | (1970) |
| The Servant Problem              | (1970) |
| Draconian Key Law                | (1972) |
| Progs' Verkramppte Attitude      | (1975) |
| Controls Wanted on Mixed Beaches | (1980) |
| Old Age Home                     | (1980) |

# 'Let women into Graaff's Pool'

14 APR 1973

LATE FINAL

A 29-YEAR-OLD <sup>Sea Point</sup> University of Cape Town graduate thinks women should be allowed to sunbathe in the nude with the men at Graaff's Pool, Cape Town. He's got 25 signatures from habitués of the pool for a petition to take to the City Council.

Evan was involved in the 'Graaff's Pool for women' movement when it started in late 1969. It never got off the ground then. But Evan reckons the chances are better this time.

### SA maturing

'The South African population is maturing in morality up to Western standards, and we think they're ready for this now,' Evan said.

He thinks nude bathing helps men to see women as people rather than sex objects.

'When you socialise in the nude the atmosphere is one of purity and freedom. In the nude you lose your material identity; rich and poor are all alike. You have to rely on your personality,' Evan said.

The nudists realise they are unlikely to get mixed bathing. They will settle for a women's pool near to Graaff's.

'It's the cheapest form of amenity. One could be built for about R2 000 if the gullies nearby are used,' he said. 'The council owes us an amenity. They haven't put anything new up here for years.'

The nudists hope to get another 25 signatures before they confront the City Council.

The signatories to date include businessmen, students and professional people.

If nothing happens the petitioners may protest. 'Perhaps we'll have to march in flagpoles or something,' said Evan.

It seems that a lot of the fellows who regularly doff their clothes at the pool have wives and girlfriends. And they'd like to sunbathe together.

Since Sandy Bay is rapidly disappearing as a result of property development, Graaff's Pool seems the next logical place to go.

Tall, tanned, bearded Evan Morkel, the man behind the petition, has been a nudist for 11 years.

# swoop at pool

24 JUL 1981

<sup>Osusimung</sup> summonsed in terms of the Lord's Day Observance Act and given R50 admission-of-guilt fines. A City attorney said yesterday that two of his clients would fight charges laid against them because they were clubs with club constitutions.

The constitutions were originally devised so that nightclubs could avoid prosecution under the Group Areas Act, because many of the women attending them are not white, but some owners believe that sections of constitutions will aid them against the present prosecutions.

In the raids on the area around Graaff's pool, police operated in pairs.

Captain Uytendogaardt said among those arrested were prominent businessmen and many were office workers.

A lawyer, who has acted for one of the men who has paid an admission of guilt fine, yesterday said that "pick-ups" were made on the concourse near the Sea Point Pavilion and that "couples" then graduated to the dark area near the pool.

The captain said his squad's action against public homosexuality was not yet completed and that further prosecutions could be expected.

"The clampdown is still going on" he said.



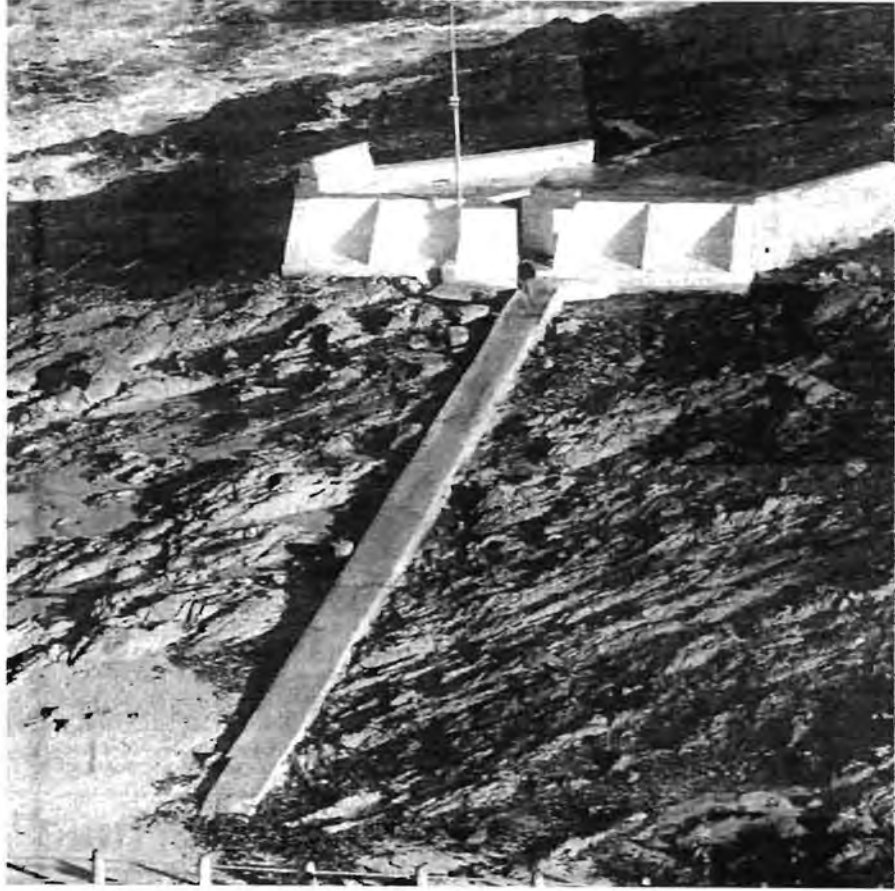
University of the Town

**RUST.**

*[wall]*

Notoriety of these illicit acts encouraged other excluded practices. Homosexuality had been decriminalized but the community's landmark now, regrettably, fostered prostitution and drug peddlers.

Political power responded by attacking the physical artifact. The white wall against a dark ocean was torn down and platform was left to decay.



(photograph by Hannes Thart, featured in "Graaff's Pool to Close at Sunset- for Decency", Weekend Argus, 14/05/1995)





(photograph by Ian Landberg, featured in 'Graaff's Pool Open to View as Wall Goes', Cape Argus, 10/06/2005)





### TIME & TEXTURE

On occasions of unusually large swells or storm surges the lower platforms will flood completely. The materiality of these surfaces seeks to capture the energy of these events.

Relatively round, fist-sized stones found on site will be cast into the slabs along with a fine aggregate. To prevent cracking from expansion the upper portion will need to be reinforced with poly-fibers. A surface hardening enhancer admixture protects against impacting waves<sup>1</sup>. Finally, abrasive damage from water washing of the surface could be retarded with an abrasion-resistant ad-mixture<sup>2</sup>. But, by using only a small amount of this<sup>3</sup> the concrete will gradually be worn down in between the round stones. Hence, areas typically subjected to more wave action will reveal more of the stones over time, serving as a reminder of extreme weather or violent tides when these events have past. Δ

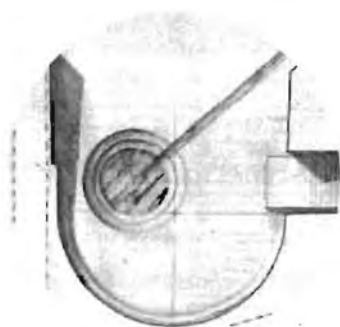
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1. Interview with engineer, Dr. Hans-Dieter Beushausen.

2. Ibid. 1.

3. the exact amount to would be determined by prototype testing



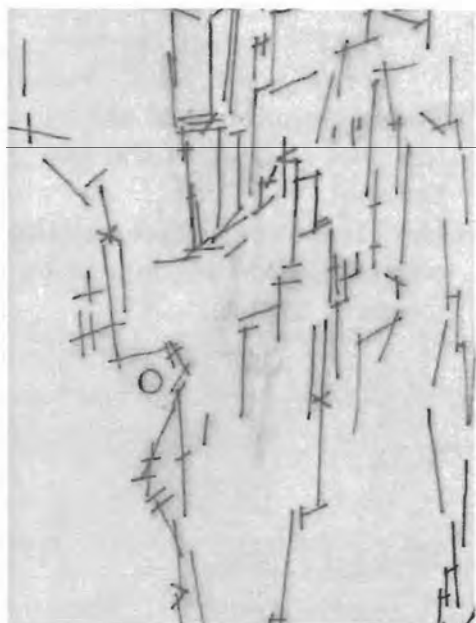


\_\_\_\_\_.

[ ]

Today, remnants of old events exist. Some people swim in the pool or bath in the sun; romantics occasionally meet on the spot.

But these experiences have been stripped of their purpose and potency. And continue to be washed away by the ceaseless forces of the sea.



## CONCLUSION

Originally, this was a place of respite for those excluded in a social landscape of prejudices. Paradoxically, after the transition into an ever more accepting government, this space was destroyed. This derailment can only be set straight by architectural intervention.

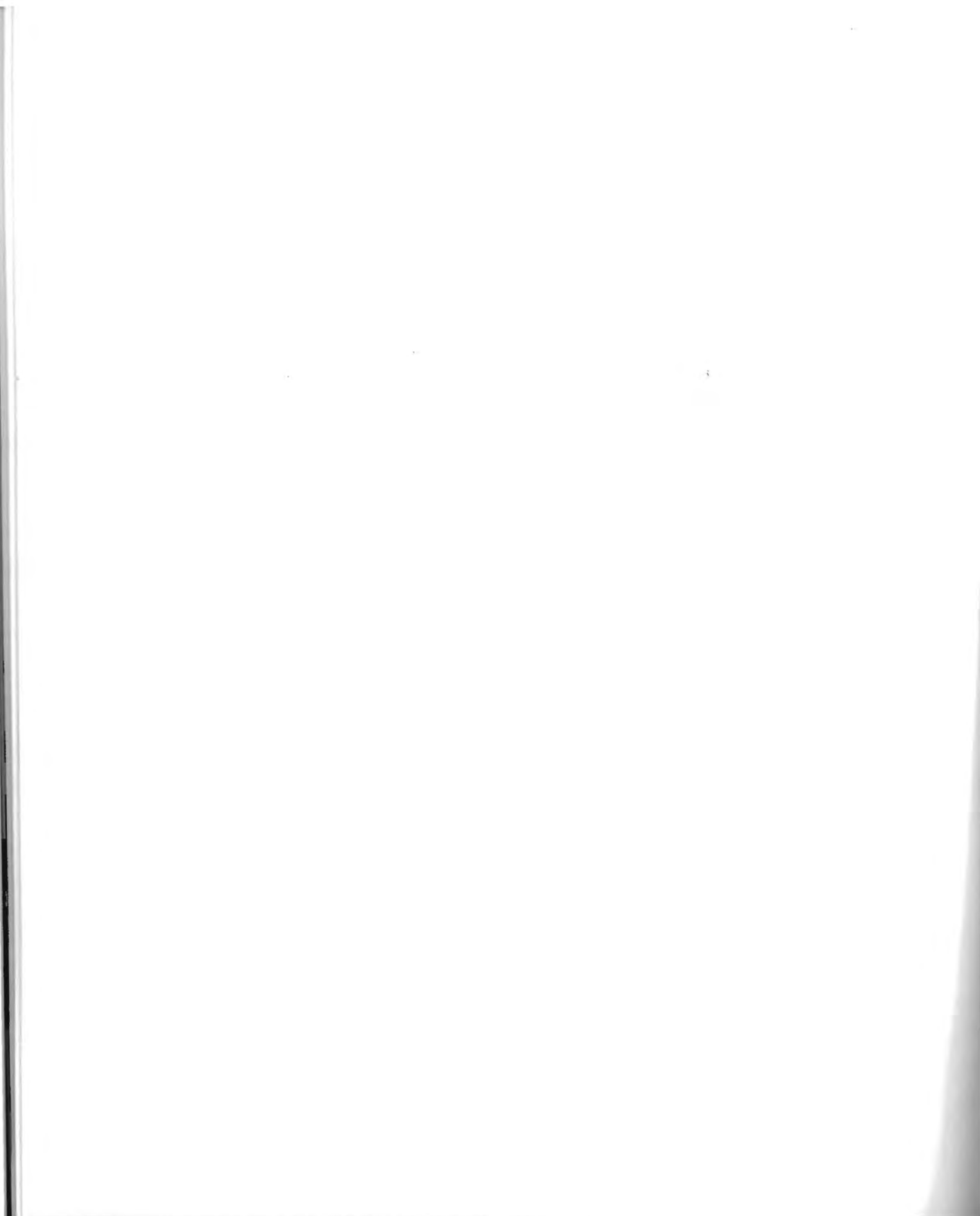
The danger of playing in this field is that one is compelled to resolve conflict, cut through confusion with a clear voice and fix things to their proper position. Rather, the design proposal presented here celebrates this de-centered position by remembering local folk tales and understanding the injustices. The spaces designed are focused on offering new pleasures to the city by springboarding off unique positions of the past. These are pleasures of nature- the ocean, tides, rock..., and pleasures of the body- submersion in water, tactile textures and intimate interactions. Δ

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University of Cape Town

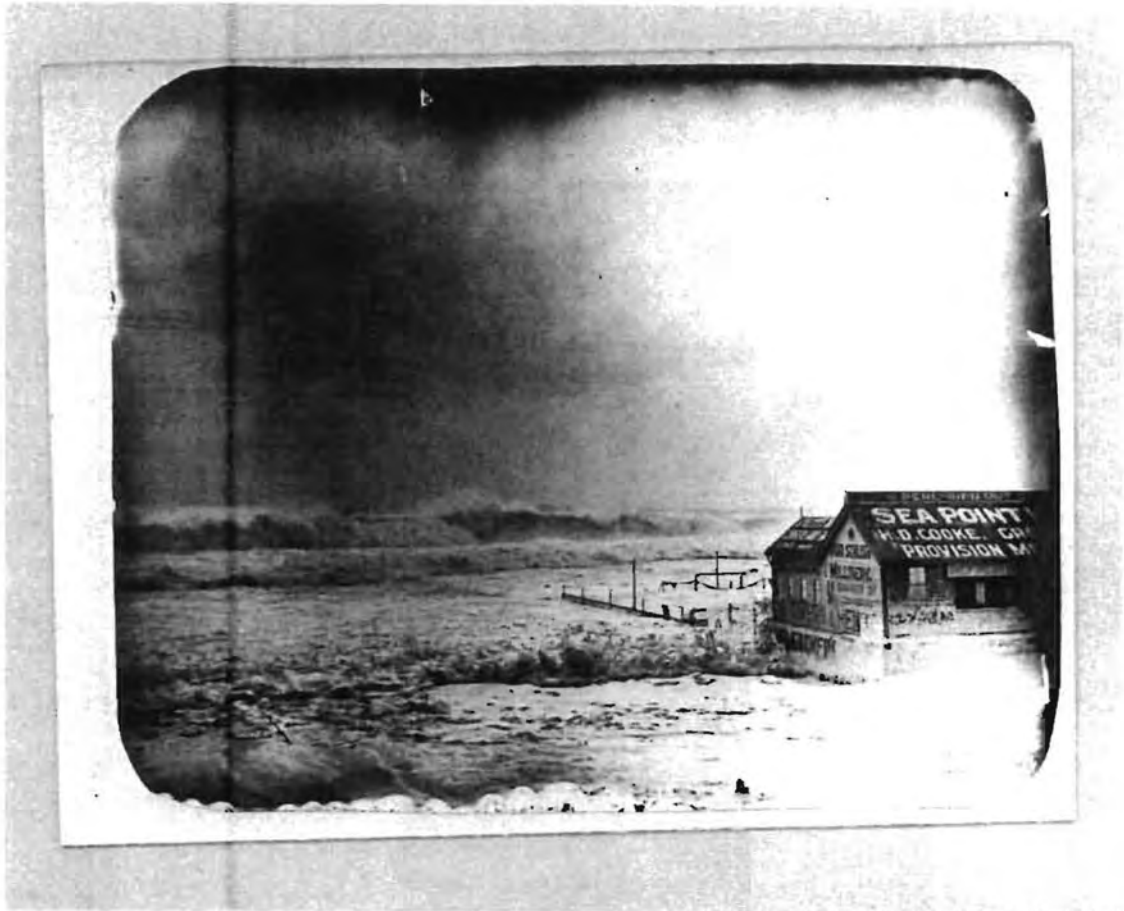




## POST SCRIPT

The author's childhood home:  
2c Edward Place,  
Ballito Bay,  
KwaZulu-Natal.





(image above courtesy of the National Library of South Africa)

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interview with **Bob Smith**, Structural Engineer, Ingerop Engineering

interview with **Gerrit Strydom**, Landscape Architect, City Council

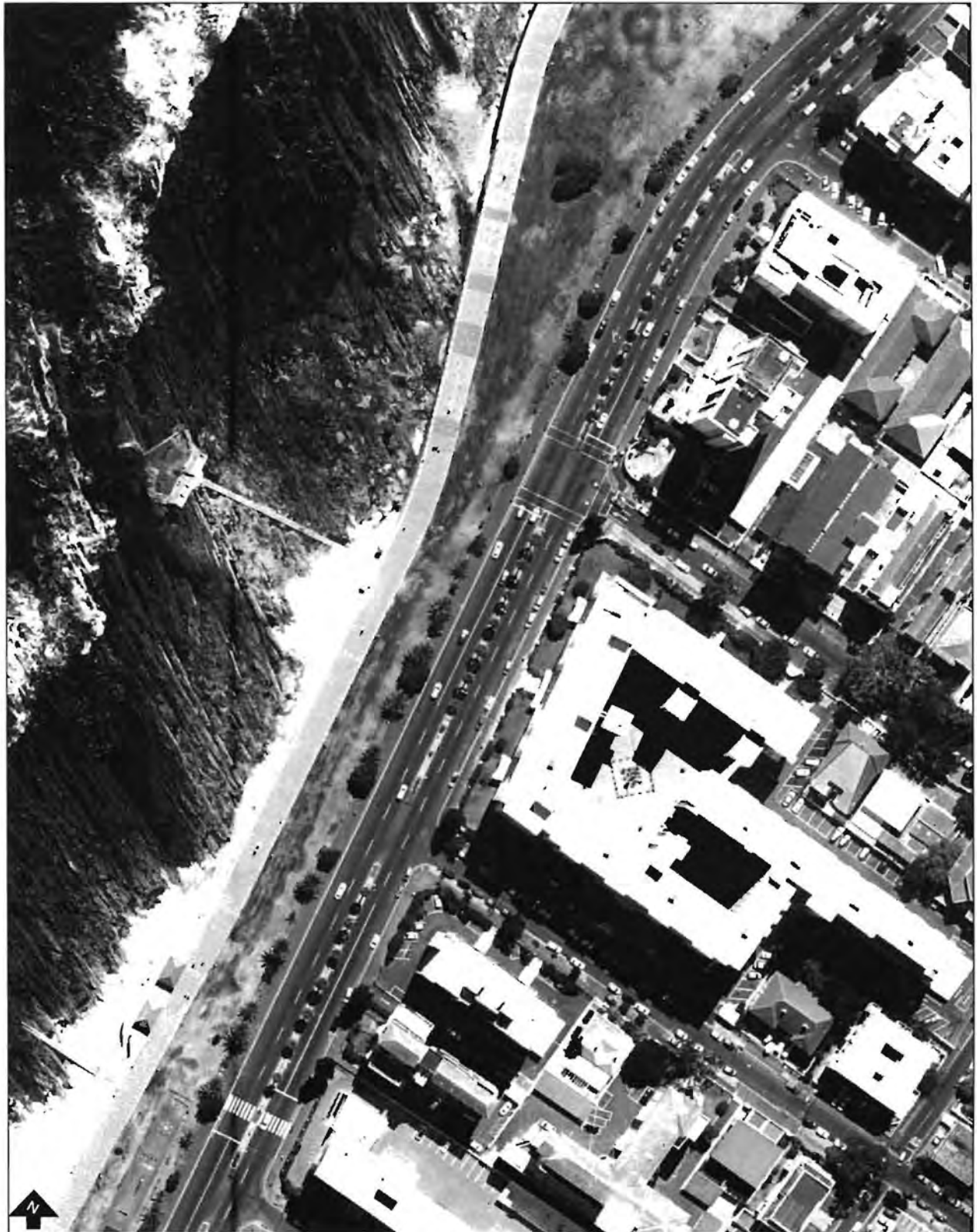
Interview with **Dr. Hans-Dieter Beushausen**, Engineer, Concrete Specialist

interview with **Brian Rihcardson**, Structural Engineer

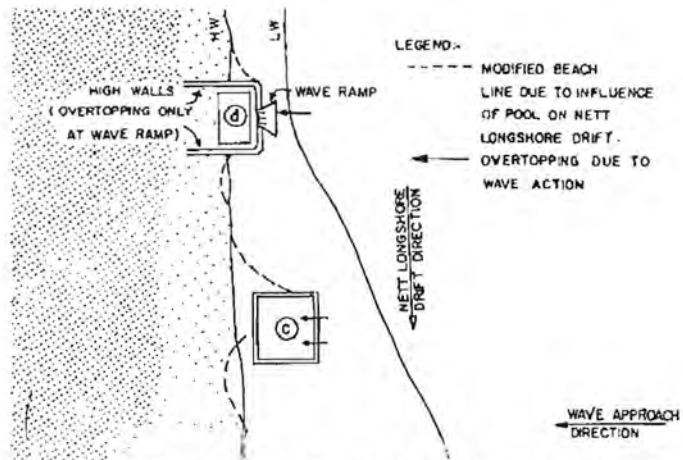
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|       |              |                                                                                        |
|-------|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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| 3/CT; | 4/1/1/41;    | A413/1; - Foreshore improvements,.... interview with Sir Dawid Graaff, 17/2/1911       |
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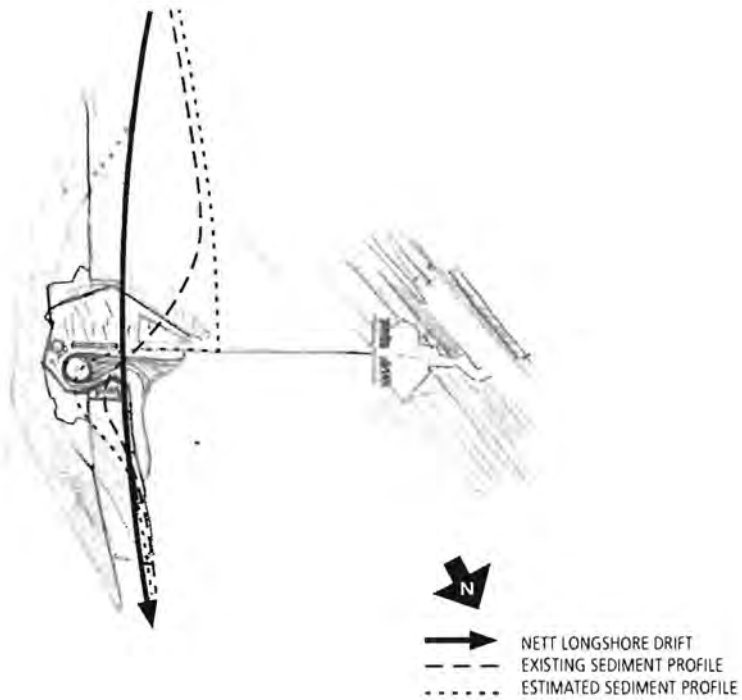
APPENDIX A



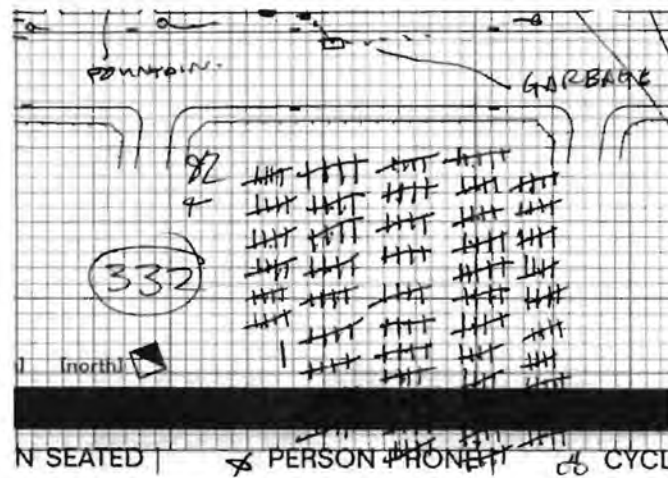
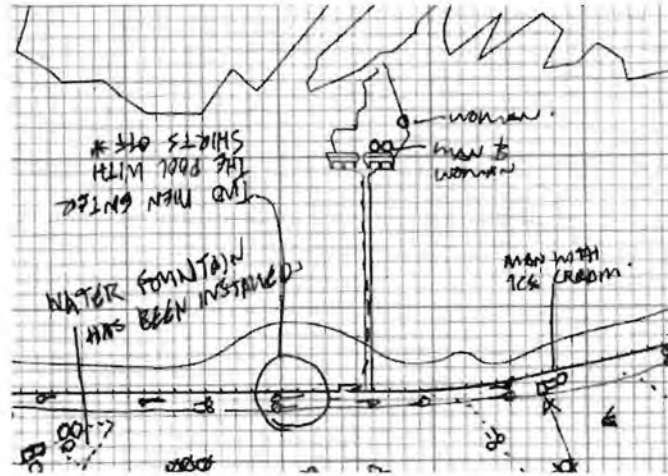
aerial photograph 2010



(exerpt from D.E. Bosman & D.J.P. Scholtz, *A Survey of Man-made Tidal Swimming Pools Along the South African Coast*, Proceedings of 18th Conference on Coastal Engineering: Cape Town (1982).)



longshore drift diagram



site mappings -  
social interactions



