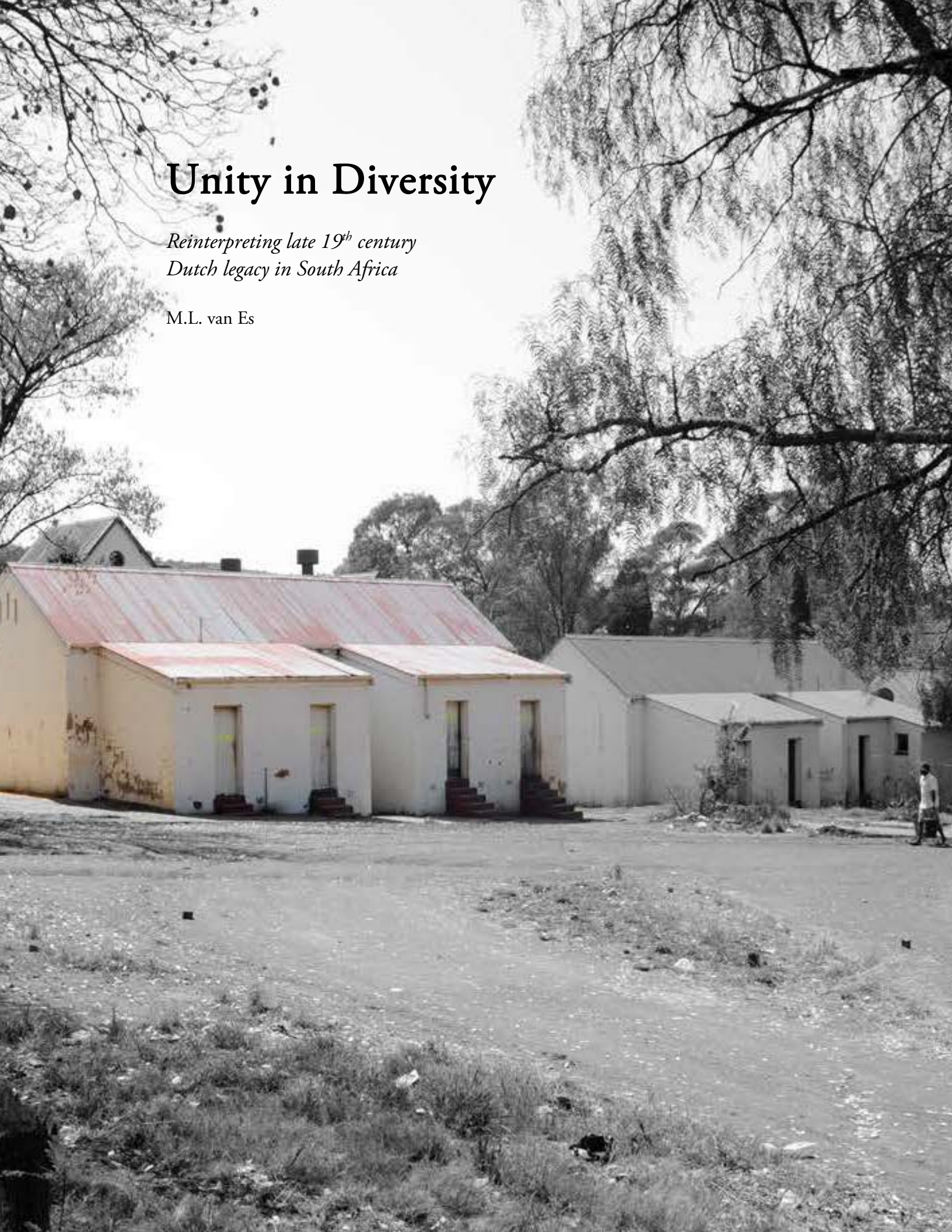


# Unity in Diversity

*Reinterpreting late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Dutch legacy in South Africa*

M.L. van Es





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# Preface

**Abstract:** The treatment of the former leprosarium Westfort near Pretoria shows a similar attitude over time since the founding of the village in 1898. New layers were added in most cases based on the original layout of the architect Sytze Wierda. Nowadays the question occurs how we should use this heritage and in what way new additions and adjustments must relate to the existing structures. The original institutional character has retained its strength over time and this kind of institutions, as coherent entity, are rare on global level. Future interventions must at all times relate to the existing identity of the village, for instance by means of scale, to ensure the villages (cultural) historical and current identity.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the treatment of 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture in the Netherlands didn't always happen with respect. Many 19<sup>th</sup> century urban structures and architecture were neglected, drastically modified or simply demolished in order to create space for new developments. What has changed in our way of thinking in dealing with the past, or has nothing changed? Nowadays the question occurs if and how we can use this heritage for present use. The intention of this research is to obtain clarification on this essential architectural topic, using the redevelopment of a 19<sup>th</sup> century leprosarium named Westfort village as example. In this section I will discuss the present situation of Westfort, its historical context, the relevance, the design brief and in what way this research will guide me with the redesign of this specific heritage.

## Dutch legacy in South Africa

The Dutch 19<sup>th</sup> century legacy is not just confined to our national borders, but goes beyond. In South-Africa, a large number of Dutch-influenced heritage from the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek*

(ZAR) is still present. Under the leadership of President Paul Kruger different Dutch specialists were invited to South Africa to help with the design and identity of the new independent Republic as a movement against the growing British Empire. At that time, South-Africa wasn't a Dutch colony anymore, but the Dutch 'spirit' left his marks on the South African culture. This resulted in an infinite number of public buildings built in a short period of time by the *Department of Public Works*, including Westfort village. Head of the Department of Public Works was Sytze Wierda, who was born and trained as an engineer in the Netherlands, and made the design of Westfort together with his companion Klaas van Rijnse in the late 90's of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Historical and current situation

The former leprosarium Westfort is situated on the western outskirts of Pretoria, the administrative capital of South Africa. The areas adjacent to Westfort are mostly concatenated residential areas with a moderate range of varied services. Westfort itself is an open oasis within these urban condensations. The village is built on the Witwatersberg ridge and forms the interface between the natural boundary and the urban environment. Historically Westfort was separated from the urban environment. This was done deliberately as leprosy in that period was a contagious disease and those affected were often ostracized from society. The first layout of the village was built in the year 1898. Westfort functioned as a self-sufficient village, in which the living units were alternated with communal buildings such as churches, hospitals, shops and so on. It was an isolated spot, tightly secured and separated from the outside world. Those who ended up in Westfort most likely stayed there for the rest of their lives.



1. Black male patient housing in Westfort ca. 1896-1911

The village continued to serve as leprosy hospital until the 70s when it became a lunatic asylum. The asylum was closed down in 1997, after the closure a community formed itself in the historic buildings, which currently consists of 4000 people.

### **Involvement and relevance**

Westfort takes part in the mutual heritage program. The goals of the co-operation between the UP Pretoria, TU Delft, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, city of Tshwane and the Department of Public Works of South-Africa is to achieve the general objective of promoting international relations. The improvement of this mutual heritage forms the link for international cooperation and development.

### **Design challenge**

In the previous decades, the area around Westfort has transformed from a rural to an urban area, and

it will continue to do so. What does this mean for the future of Westfort? When we compare the original design and purpose of Westfort with the current situation there are parallels, but differences too. New developments are being draped across the historic landscape like a quilt. Some places have left the old character of the village almost intact, on the other hand a major part has changed in the recent decades. The former unambiguous character has been replaced by individual preferences and lead to some extent to fragmentation of the village. Despite the fact that Westfort receives automatic protection from the South African National Heritage Resources Act (buildings and structures over 60 years), the question remains how this will work in practice. The deterioration of the area will continue if no change happens quickly. The unique location, design, and history of Westfort can be a nutritious source for future (social) developments.

## Subjective and complex nature of valuating

The perception of our environment has always been the cause of discussion. Whether it concerns landscapes, inner cities or a single building; when decisions have to be made, dilemmas will arise. In his book 'The Dilemma of Style', architectural historian Joseph Mordaunt Crook describes it thusly:

*"Is architecture in a state of crisis? Or are critics simply in a state of confusion? Architectural criticism is scarcely an exact science. In fact our perception of architecture – our idea of good and bad, beautiful and ugly; our very notion of architectural style – has been fairly confused since man first built himself a shelter, then wondered if it pleased his eye".<sup>1</sup>*

Dilemmas will increase with the growth of involved parties; different visions and needs should be merged to create a situation that is useful and satisfying for the variety of users nowadays and in the future. The past often reflects the subjective and complex nature of valuating. Apart from the more personal dimension of valuating, time and place/culture will affect the perception of beauty. Time and place on the other hand will influence the 'personal' taste. For instance what previously didn't get appreciation can be accepted nowadays and vice versa. What underlies this change in attitudes? Maybe it is in the nature of human being to dismiss creations of former generation(s); the superiority of the individual truth. Re-appreciation often takes time. Is it possible to create architecture that is appreciated over time by the major part of a population, instead of being interpreted as 'hype'?

## Research Question

Apparently appreciation for this specific South African architecture is growing, at least from the Dutch side, is this a new tendency or has it always existed? It should be stated that the knowledge of (historical) architectural convictions and theories are of great importance by forming a personal view (observing and valuating) before interfering the existing environment. Different positions have different consequences. Based on previous issues the following research question is formulated:

*What historical and present day architectural views should act as informant in order to safeguard the cultural historical character of Westfort Village?*

## Approach

This question will be answered by setting up a discourse analysis, and positioning Westfort village within the architectural debate, so the consequences of the different perspectives/views and attitudes over time can be critically analyzed, and evaluated. The first chapter provides an overview of the three main architectural views on heritage and architecture in the past 200 years. I will describe the content, the (historical) development, show current and historical examples of architects and will eventually describe the position of Westfort village at different scales. The second chapter shows a personal reflection and valuation on these three visions, dilemmas will be discussed. The personal appreciation of the area will be put forward. The last chapter will discuss the practical significance of the design, explained by recommendations and design principles.

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<sup>1</sup> (Crook, 1987, p. 11)



## Delimitation

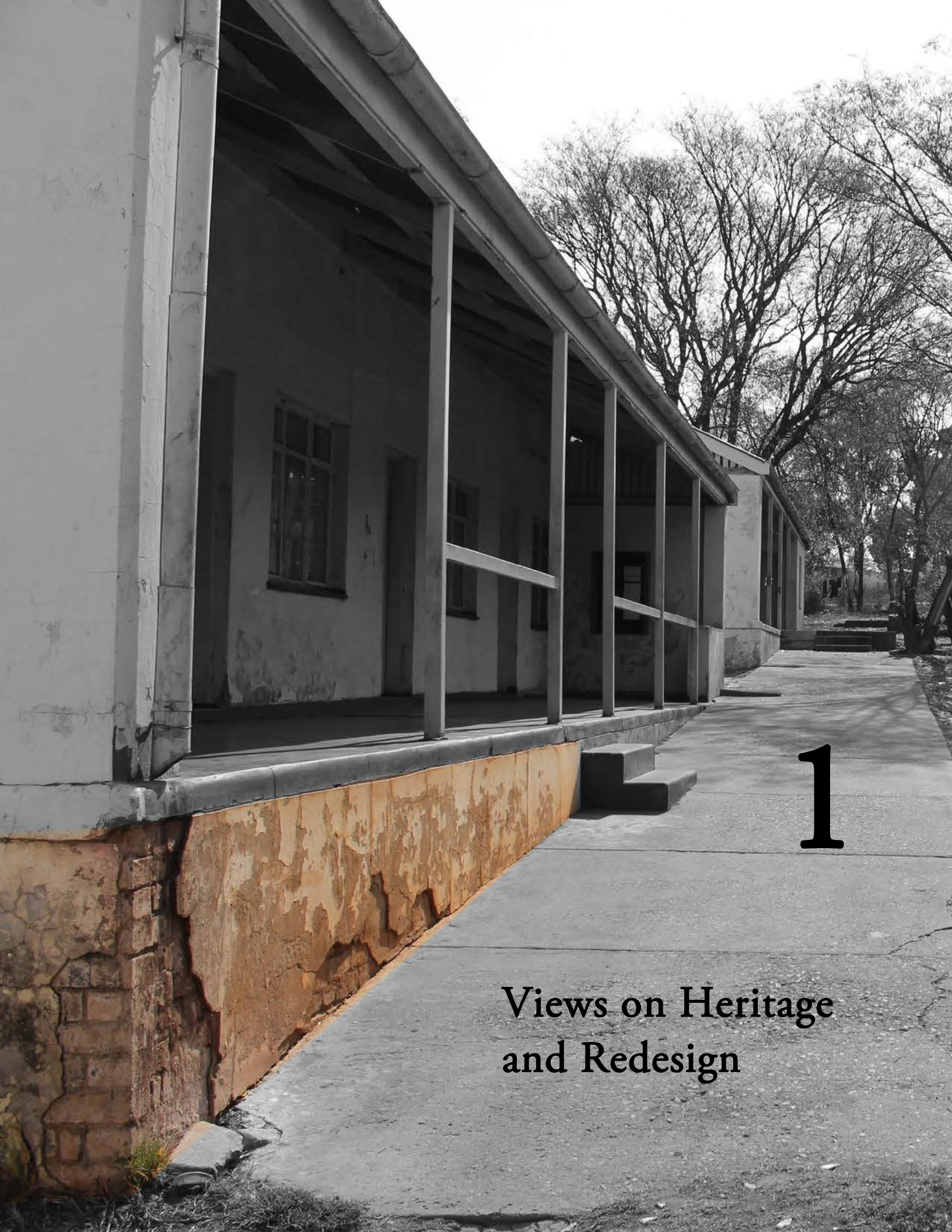
This research wants to contribute to the discussion on dealing with the existing environment, focused on 19<sup>th</sup> century heritage. It requires criteria to answer this question. These criteria are provided by different (societal) perspectives such as; economic perspective (costs and efficiency), political perspective (societal organization), sustainability (responsibility for the future), social perspective (community building) and cultural

perspective (traditions, demographic structure). In this research there is specifically chosen to investigate from a (cultural) historical architectural point of view. There's a strong relationship between societal conditions and the development of architecture, ultimately social and cultural perspectives will be an important contribution to the redesign, but they will not be extensively discussed in this investigation.

2. White female patient housing in Westfort, current situation with informal community







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Views on Heritage  
and Redesign



# Views on Heritage and Redesign

## Introduction

The nineteenth century and especially the last part, was characterized as a century of many public discussions concerning architecture and its appearance. This 'critical' view was present within different fields such as music, literature, archeology and (pictorial) art. That the perception of style, alternatively said the artistic value of architecture, could be an 'issue' became evident around 1800. All former securities like church, nation, family partly 'disappeared', or were at least questioned. The closed community became a diverse society. A strong desire for a new standard, a new style, a new art, a new expression of the renewed social harmony and community arose.<sup>2</sup>

The definition of 'style' in architecture sometimes causes confusion. Often a distinction is made between the 'surface'; the visible, the artistic, decorations and the way how the various elements and materials are used and placed in the façade or interior, subject to time and place, and the continuous part of architecture, presented in the 'form'. Architectural researcher Henk Engel states that architecture on the one hand consists of a more autonomous character, this includes the simple geometric shapes, regular bodies and their elementary distributions; striving for unity.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand it has a more subjective and dynamic character; a reflection of societal circumstances. The Dutch architect Jan Ernst van der Pek already described this distinction in 1908, he's questioning if architecture is an artistic expression at all;

*Art, in general, reflects more or less the ideas and ideals of a specific period of time. Architecture, compared to sculptures or paintings is the most bounded expression of art and often shows an amalgamation of different types of art. Architecture is always related to human needs, more than any other form of art. It stands at the border of artistic expression and shows a strong connection with family/home, society and nation.*<sup>4</sup>

Joseph Mordaunt Crook describes style as a way of designing within an established framework; "*the architectural style, described since the Renaissance as a conscious system of design, a visual code based on tectonic preference, a post-vernacular language of forms*".<sup>5</sup> "*Style in architecture is a way of building codified in imagistic form*".<sup>6</sup> "*It is the business of an architect to understand all styles and to be prejudiced in favor of none*".<sup>7</sup>

Style on the other hand can be interpreted as the art of organizing; the interaction amongst the different forms, the composition of a building or ensemble. Together with the more subjective interpretation, style can be defined as architecture. In this research the architectural style will mainly be interpreted as the more variable and subjective part of architecture; *the visible distinctive characteristics*. Within the next subchapters the three main architectural views will be explained, as distinguished by Hendrik Petrus Berlage, Henri Evers, Auke van der Woud, Wim Denslagen, Bernard Colenbrander, Job Roos and Joseph Mordaunt Crook. These visions are, to a greater or lesser extent, of all times, but since the societal changes in the 19th century the source for public debate.

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<sup>2</sup> (Colenbrander, 1993, pp. 19-21)

<sup>3</sup> (Engel, 2007, p. 48)

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<sup>4</sup> (Pek, 1908, pp. 16-22)

<sup>5</sup> (Crook, 1987, p. 13)

<sup>6</sup> (Crook, 1987, p. 11)

<sup>7</sup> (Crook, 1987, p. 13)

## Heritage and Tradition

*“Imagine if all neo-renaissance buildings in Amsterdam will be removed, the city would be, but a shadow of what it is today”* – Vincent van Rossem <sup>8</sup>

### Description

Tradition in architecture implies the idea that beauty can be achieved through a predefined framework. Architecture is in that sense introvert, immanent to itself. There is no discussion concerning what is 'good' and 'bad', this is a generally accepted fact. It's a tradition of previous generations, expressed in treatises such as; Alberti, Palladio and Scamozzi.<sup>9</sup> Traditions can be transmitted mouth-to-mouth in the form of habits, which are usually adapted to the characteristics of the environment and culture such as climate and geography.

### Historical development

Since the renaissance, architecture developed within a more or less homogeneous theoretical system. The classical tradition (Vitruvianisme) was leading the architectural theory and practice. Concerning to this doctrine, architecture must exist of *firmitas* (construction techniques), *utilitas* (functionality) and *venustas* (beauty). Beauty, explained by the classical tradition, was the ultimate pursuit of art; beauty elevates the society. How can beauty be achieved? What rules should be followed? The core term of beauty was 'character'; character should express the purpose of a building (function), interpreted by the spectator.<sup>10</sup> Changes in attitude of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are largely arrived from abroad, mainly from France and Germany. A new tendency started together with the French domination in the first

part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, inspired by the ideas of Durand. Durand reduced the aesthetic side of architecture to some eternal autonomous values; sobriety, harmony, irrespective of the function and the urban lay-out of the building. He introduces a more practical and technical approach. The aesthetic part of the architecture was reduced to the application of the five orders, to indicate the 'character' of the building.<sup>11</sup> The architectural theory developed from an artistic to a more scientific approach.<sup>12</sup> The classical architectural morphology was the inspiration for new architectural concepts in the Netherlands of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the Gothic Revival, the Neo-Renaissance and a more national variant; architecture for the community. Style was the leading term within these new concepts; a collective acceptance of objective rules and unity in action. Unity in diversity.<sup>13</sup> Architecture based on systems and traditions can be interpreted as repeating history. Nowadays the past still forms a source of inspiration. This is visible in greater or lesser extent in the form of imitation (restauration) or in a more free expression and a liberal application of historical forms; the past as inspiration, in some cases constructed with 'modern' materials. As regards to the classical meaning of 'character' (the purpose of a building should be evident) some recent buildings still reflect a certain building tradition, in which the function of the building is visible from the extern. This applies, for example, vernacular architecture or public buildings with a specific representative function. But these are exceptions as a function nowadays often exhibits infinite appearances. Still the most common treatment of the existing often shows a contrast with the tradition.

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<sup>8</sup> (Denslagen, 2004, p. 33)

<sup>9</sup> (Woud, 1997, p. 11)

<sup>10</sup> (Woud, 1997, pp. 11-13)

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<sup>11</sup> (Colenbrander, 1993, pp. 24-25)

<sup>12</sup> (Woud, 1997, p. 16)

<sup>13</sup> (Woud, 1997, p. 21)



3. Central station of Amsterdam completed in 1889, designed with a classical appearance by P.J.H. Cuypers /A.L. van Gendt
4. New housing at the Vijzelstraat Amsterdam (second to sixth building from left) 2007, Rappange & Partners architects





## Positioning Westfort village

The first layout of Westfort shows a clear relation with the architectural developments of that time in the Netherlands. The original designers of Westfort, Sytze Wierda and Klaas van Rijse, form an important link in the exchange of architectural ideas between the Netherlands and the ZAR. Neither has followed higher architectural education, but found a way to self-educate themselves in the field of architecture. In the first part of the 19th century the significance of the profession architect was more flexible than it is today, it was often a reference to a person with a particular craft, like carpenter, painter or sculptor.<sup>14</sup>

The emerging industry in the 19th century has formed a shift in the meaning of the profession architect; there is a dichotomy in the (structural) construction of a building and its design. The growing complexity of construction techniques and scaling of small projects to larger complex projects ensured that a manufacturer has a separate appeal. *The Royal Institute of Engineers*, of which Sytze Wierda was a member, was established in 1847. His first architectural project was the station building of Hengelo, shortly thereafter he was appointed as *Extraordinary supervisor at the State Railways*, due to its good knowledge of the constructional part of buildings. In 1870 he worked on the realization of the Amsterdam Zaandam railway and was appointed as *superintendent first class* and eventually in 1875 to *superintendent*. Wierda finally got the opportunity to work with van A.I. van Gendt and Pierre Cuypers on the design for the central station in Amsterdam. Wierda was next to his position as superintendent of the railway station, as well involved in the design of a number of Reformed

churches and designs for private clients. These clients often were members of the Reformed church community, where Wierda takes active part of. His early works are mainly built in Dutch Renaissance style, but his preference eventually went out to build in Neo-Renaissance style.<sup>15</sup>

It is of importance to realize that Wierda has experienced the developments in Amsterdam close by and have influenced him in his work in South Africa. It was a challenge for Wierda to meet the wishes of President Kruger, the Transvaal was a republic of farmers, and there were hardly industries to the manufacture of building materials: No iron foundries, brick factories, quarries, factories for building materials and so on. Almost all building materials had to be imported from Europe. The challenge for Wierda was to create an architectural style that was representative for the ZAR. The new republic had little historical foundations, besides the legacy of the original African tribes, which were not recognized by the Boers as a part of history. The beginning of a tradition had to be formed, the republic was a "free republic" and not a European colony. Wierda goal was to develop a style that was based on the current European tradition, without fully copying European examples.<sup>16</sup>

This architectural luggage and building traditions are reflected in both the urban layout as on the smaller scale in Westfort. On the larger scale the institutional character as secluded leprosy village was besides the environmental adaption (sloping landscape, soil types) based on organizational traditions of similar institutions such as the Dutch example at Veenhuizen, founded in 1822. This institution shows, in comparison to Westfort, the clear spatial planning of the patient quarters, the

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<sup>14</sup> (Bakker, 2014, pp. 7-9)

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<sup>15</sup> (Bakker, 2014, pp. 15-22)

<sup>16</sup> (Bakker, 2014, pp. 74-75)

staff area with a reformed church and administration building and squares as space structuring devices. The prominent position of the Reformed octagonal church in Westfort reflects the close association of church and state in the ZAR. On a smaller scale the influence of Veenhuizen and the architectural developments in the Netherlands can be noticed up to detail level. This can be seen by the monumental and symmetrical nature of the main institution buildings and the patient's barracks positioned in

rows.<sup>17</sup> The use of red bricks (mainly plastered) combined with stone details in the facades, strongly reflects the character of a Dutch Renaissance-style. Although the traditional (Dutch) features of Westfort, the transition towards a new architectural era and the adaption to the African environment can be clearly noticed for instance with the use of cast iron details, corrugated steel roofing, air vents, a drainage system adapted to the landscape and porches in front of most buildings as sun protection.



5. First layout of Westfort separated from the urban environment with in front the central staff buildings and patient quarters on the back

6. Detail of the administration building at Westfort



<sup>17</sup> (Bakker, 2014, pp. 166-168)

## Heritage and Dialogue

*“Redevelopment demands an attitude that is best suited to the assignment, not a design that is best suited to the architect” – Job Roos<sup>18</sup>*

### Description

Architecture, whether it concerns a building, ensemble or a city, always exists within a broader context. Architecture is always in a greater or lesser extent in dialogue with the surrounding landscape and responds to it. The subjective character of the environment and the personal view of an architect influence the design, proposed rules aren't the leading factor for the design. History forms a breeding ground for further developments. With redevelopment this dialogue becomes even more extensive. The design of the former architect (s) forms an interaction with the current architect. Heritage may be leading, submissive or in balance with a new design.

### Historical development

The fragmentation of the theoretical system and the search for a new identity in line with the new societal circumstances was the main challenge of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, started already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>19</sup>; *when, how and why is a building that is solid and functional, art?*<sup>20</sup> The dichotomy by the interpretation of style as orthodox, supernatural system versus a more heterodox, individual experience was leading the discussion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup> Different causes underlie this development; a process of individualization and specialization. The discussion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was, in contrast with the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not about the function of beauty, but how beauty could be

created.<sup>22</sup> The German architect Heinrich Hübsch introduced a new term to create beauty in architecture; 'truth'. This means that there should be coherence between construction and detailing, between exterior and interior. Character was a case of senses and feelings and truth of the (rational) mind.<sup>23</sup>

The establishment of the 'Association of the Promotion of Architecture' in 1842 created new insights towards architecture. According to director D.D. Büchler architecture must be seen as a social art. Art was not determined, but *'the product of a free operation'*. The beauty of it was not just formed by predefined rules, but was the result of circumstances, nation, climate, religion and local customs. Architecture changed together with the circumstances. In practice this was expressed in the intentional search for a new art, back to the source of classicism. The difference with the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was that they searched for a 'pure' historical order. They focused on the rational design and the true composition principles of the Greeks. The German classicists like Von Klenze and Schinkel supported this view and were of great influence.<sup>24</sup>

The situation changed in the 60s. The realization that social changes often cause change in architecture, led to questions concerning the classical approach. The 'indigenous' Gothic style was considered as a logical alternative especially for Catholic churches, together with a more national variant; the old Dutch tradition. The choice of style became a serious dilemma, together with a strong moral dimension. New questions arose concerning aesthetics, criticism, history, historical monuments and especially the national highlights

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<sup>18</sup> (Roos, 2007, p. 22)

<sup>19</sup> (Woud, 1997, pp. 11-16)

<sup>20</sup> (Woud, 1997, p. 21)

<sup>21</sup> (Woud, 1997, p. 56)

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<sup>22</sup> (Woud, 1997, p. 13)

<sup>23</sup> (Woud, 1997, pp. 18-19)

<sup>24</sup> (Colenbrander, 1993, pp. 26-30)



of Gothic and Renaissance, the development of contemporary architecture, the advent of new (industrial) building types and the meaning of recent technical developments such as cast iron and reinforced concrete.<sup>25</sup>

The re-appreciation of the traditional Dutch style and craftsmanship in the spirit of the 16<sup>th</sup> century architect Hendrick de Keyser (red bricks, white stone, traditional masonry, stained glass, sculptural ornaments) was largely due to the aversion of the exuberance character of the classicism, which did not fit with the Dutch national character because of its Italian origins. The increasing mechanization on the construction site and the serial application of building materials has also influenced the desire for the romantic past. A revaluation for national simplicity arose together with the growing interest for the urban (historical) context (cityscapes). The subjective visual qualities became more important, it became a matter of feeling together with the psychological side of architecture; to *see* instead of *understanding*, the accuracy of architecture was less important.<sup>26</sup> This romantic perception, described as 'picturesque' values architecture as scenery and architecture as embodied memory. This changed the position of the architect; the liberation of the creative ego.<sup>27</sup> This liberated perspective on architecture strongly influenced the final decades of the 19th century and this still is the case.

Architect Pierre Cuypers represented a progressive position within these developments. He states that

the composition of a structure had to comply with the program, the construction and location. This includes the ornament. The decorative elements were basically interchangeable. The ornament should emphasize the structure instead of enshroud the structure. He noticed that the abstract formalism of the Classicists and the archaeological (correct) reproduction of historical ideal models of the early Gothic Revival do not fit in the modern city. He shows the beginning of a more rational approach of architecture. This meant a radical shift towards the link between the architectural composition and the program: autonomous formal values as axuality, symmetry and regularity were exchanged for a logical composition of the plan. The personal genius of the artist had to be the answer to the dilemma of style.<sup>28</sup> The discussions continued; style, character and originality became subjective terms. Architect H.P. Berlage found that the architecture derives its meaning from the context of the city together with the society. Just like Cuypers he proposed that the shape of a building wasn't only the result of an analysis of the plan and a style doctrine, but as well forms the cityscape and vice-versa<sup>29</sup>:

*'The rational movement of the modern architecture is adapting as well to nature. The contemporary architect should not be a slave of the fixed patterns; he must have the ability to add value. This ability, together with a sensitive approach ensures the achievement to apply the 'rules' in the most advantageous way'.*<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> (Colenbrander, 1993, pp. 31-33)

<sup>26</sup> (Woud, 1997, pp. 114-118)

<sup>27</sup> (Crook, 1987, p. 13)

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<sup>28</sup> (Colenbrander, 1993, pp. 36-38)

<sup>29</sup> (Colenbrander, 1993, pp. 46-50)

<sup>30</sup> (Berlage, 1934, p. 203)



7. New use of the Westergasfabriek Amsterdam (1883), designed by Isaac Gosschalk

In contrast with Berlage, Cuypers mainly cared about the significance of the individual building within the city instead of the cityscape. Berlage argued that a building must reflect in all cases the economic situation. This was expressed in a more restrained use of ornaments. At the turn of the century the visions of Cuypers became more and more 'old fashioned'. With the gradually disappearance of ornament and history a new era had begun, with the leading terms: thrift, rationalism and society.<sup>31</sup> Redevelopment, nowadays and in the future, will cover a quantitative part of our built environment.

This is the result of our growing cities and landscapes. The dialogue amongst the existing and new structures gets more and more extensive. Economic necessities and changing requirements influence the interest for redevelopment. The scale of the assignments changes from single objects to the city scales. These large scale tasks require a different approach, responding to the growing complexity of our environment. The application of predetermined (historical) rules or the architect's intuition can't be the leading factors any more, the involvement of multiple parties and the growing consequences, asks for an integrated approach.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> (Colenbrander, 1993, p. 55)

<sup>32</sup> (Roos, 2007, pp. 14-15)



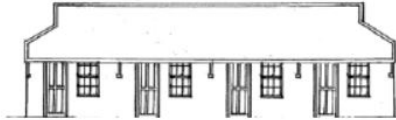
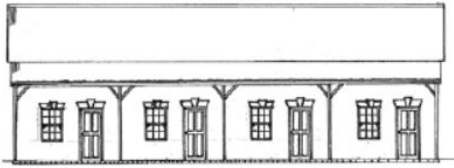
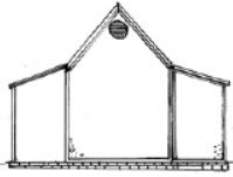
8. Redevelopment of the grain silo's Amsterdam by Andre van Stigt, original design by J. Klinkhamer and A.L. Van Gendt

### Positioning Westfort village

Since the first layout of the village several changes took place as result of an increased number of leprosy patients transported from different leprosaria to Westfort. After 1900, the British gain control of the Transvaal when they win the Second Boer War, they were responsible for a number of specific interventions in line with segregation and strict supervision of the area. This was expressed in the addition of separation fences to divide gender and race, watchtowers and an overall fence as demarcation of the institute. The addition of new patient barracks was done with a similar organization as the former Dutch design, with four concatenated patient units in one building block, placed in two rows facing each other, in order to create a semi-public zone for the patients. Distinctions can be noticed in the construction of the roofs and detailing; a difference in style. The increasing vegetation caused an ever clearer

interaction of the village with the landscape and created the identity of a green park-like oasis within the bald hill landscape. The addition of simple detailed patient buildings from the 30s can be seen as a consequence of rational modernist architectural ideas in the first part of the 20th century. A freer interpretation and reaction on the existing arose. Despite the continuous response on the urban and landscape tradition of the village, subtle differences in styles can be noticed. Since the 70s the function of Westfort changed from Leprosarium to a lunatic asylum, which fits well in terms of function to the identity of Westfort. Towards the 21st century the dialogue with the existing became more and more complex, especially when the asylum closed down in 1997 and an informal community occupied the village and this still is the case. Personal preferences form a new layer upon the existing structure. The different layers in time can be clearly noticed.





9. Development of the patient housing at Westfort
10. British patient barracks, with a similar organization as the original Dutch design



## Heritage and Repulsion

*"The Eclecticism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is characterized by unclear aesthetics, though the 'slavish' imitation of the classical art already has been replaced by the pursuit for proper expression according to purpose and destiny."* - Henri Evers<sup>33</sup>

### Description

Repulsion of heritage arises from the idea that architecture must be an expression of a specific period or of the ideas of an architect; history forms an obstacle within further developments, and can be neglected. Current views and needs do not fit in with existing structures and perceptions; new appearances must be discovered in line with the 'changeable constructible world'. The freedom of choice and the identity of the architect are considered more important than the identity of the place.

### Historical development

The contempt against the 19<sup>th</sup> century 'neo-styles' became strongly apparent around 1900, but existed already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the early decennia of the century complains, about the lack of a specific style compared to other centuries, already existed.<sup>34</sup> Repulsion against historical structures is of all times, this can be seen for instance in Paris with the construction of the boulevards of Haussman. These boulevards drastically changed the former medieval urban structure of the city. Today Paris derives her urban status from them and they can be seen as valuable history.<sup>35</sup> The question arises whether such interventions are successful in the longer term, it must obtain its value in time. Paris has been a successful example, although the original medieval

urban structure, with all certainty, had retained its value in the current time. On the other hand there was also a growing interest in the beauty of historic cities and landscapes. The rise of the protection of monuments was associated with a political desire which received around 1900 a national dimension. The preservation of monuments is a historically specific phenomenon, originated in a specific historical context. Therefore, they must be seen against the background of the people's fear of losing their historic environment.<sup>36</sup>

The changes in the perception of architecture in 60s' of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, influenced by the 'picturesque' together with the industrialization and the idea that an architect should operate freely, reinforced this liberated belief. This can be seen as the source of our modern way of thinking, with functionality as guiding theme; form follows function. The aversion against the neo-styles became stronger after the First World War. For the younger generation who had experienced the horror of the first world war, the old European civilization seemed to be history and everything that recalled that period, was ridiculed; a period of moral decay, of hypocrisy, dishonest appearances, and a suffocating atmosphere.<sup>37</sup>

A new kind of architecture must be created that would be pure functional and free from something like art and beauty; 'entirely free of professional preconceptions and prejudices that have encrusted architecture since it became art'. Art should trigger the mind and not necessarily the expression of beauty. The concept of beauty was associated with a wrong kind of civility.<sup>38</sup> The Swiss Historian Siegfried Giedion distinguishes three criteria for the Modern Movement; the rejection of historical

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<sup>33</sup> (Evers, 1911, p. 586)

<sup>34</sup> (Denslagen, 2004, p. 165)

<sup>35</sup> (Roos, 2007, p. 24)

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<sup>36</sup> (Denslagen, 2004, p. 11)

<sup>37</sup> (Denslagen, 2004, p. 61)

<sup>38</sup> (Denslagen, 2004, pp. 15-16)

styles, efficiency or functionality and honesty; the rejection of false architecture, false monumentality. Style conventions in this view are objectionable. Architecture is primarily solving technical problems serving humanity.<sup>39</sup> Supporters of traditionalist architecture were seen as enemies of progression, small bourgeois, conservative, law-abiding and impervious to the appeal of an open society in which everyone would get equal opportunities. The significance of architecture became more social.<sup>40</sup>

During the 20th century, the modern idea became reality, a huge amount of 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings were demolished, and not always because of poor irreparable conditions.<sup>41</sup> The 19th century was often amortized by the modern movement as "*the ugly century*" and functioned as a negative introduction of the modern movement. This view influenced the major part of the 20th century's architectural practice and theory, and this still can be seen today.

*"The architecture of the 19th century in the Netherlands in itself hardly matters. A tendency to enrich and overcome the classicism, to invent a new approach to the problems of that period, expressed in various movements and styles"*<sup>42</sup>

The Dutch urbanist Niek de Boer confirms this view: "*Protection that is simply aimed at maintaining forms denies the course of history.*" According to his opinion the core activity of monument care, which is trying to preserve historically valuable architecture and urban structures, is in conflict with the course of history, because time is continuous and will never end.<sup>43</sup>

Cities will become hollow, unreal places. This criticism was shared by many people, but not usually by the inhabitants of the restored houses, nor by tourists.<sup>44</sup>

Paul Meurs describes this consequence of the modern thinking in his book *Heritage-based design*:

*"Generations of architects learnt that it was taboo to build replicas, to reconstruct old building fragments or earlier building phases without scientific substantiation, or tear down monuments without having documented them properly. New additions had to remain recognizable, for example by designing them in a modern architectural style"*<sup>45</sup>

It is claimed that the revaluation of the past is growing, this is partly the case, as described earlier, on the other hand the modernist idea still lives on, this can be seen in architectural education. As well in the building sector, guided by regulations and economic interests, heritage, if protected, often plays a minor role.

## Positioning Westfort village

Lack of maintenance, since the closure of the institute in 1997, caused a quick deterioration of the village. The absence of a specific owner or organization who would take responsibility of this heritage and financial issues accelerated this process. Remarkably, the urban layout of the village barely changed, most architectural developments during the 20th century were characterized by (personal) additions or subtle changes in respect with the existing. Nowadays the drastic changing landscape adjacent to Westfort is causing a turning point in the terms of the future of the village. Urban plans to densify the

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<sup>39</sup> (Denslagen, 2004, p. 66)

<sup>40</sup> (Denslagen, 2004, p. 49)

<sup>41</sup> (Denslagen, 2004, pp. 165-166)

<sup>42</sup> (Fanelli, 1978, p. 50)

<sup>43</sup> (Denslagen, 2004, p. 36)

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<sup>44</sup> (Denslagen, 2004, p. 24)

<sup>45</sup> (Meurs, 2016, p. 31)





11. Delft central station with new addition designed by Mecanoo next to the 19<sup>th</sup> century station building of Posthumus Meyjes

area and demolish a large part of the existing heritage are already present. These changes are already expressed in the construction of a new pipe system in and around the village, sometimes across the (historic) structure of Westfort. The disappearance of the original green structures (tree-lined avenues, allotments, etc.) causes a dilution of the village's character. The current informal community of Westfort partly agrees with these developments because of the missing basic provisions in the area and they prefer the luxury of a new home above their current home. Another part however is committed to their current living situation and the life they have built there, and will be satisfied with small improvements such as more shade spots, running water and electricity. The new informal residents are an important factor of the current identity of Westfort. It's a paradoxical situation because the community can be seen as

the reason why the village still exists, the negative sub-colonial character of the original function as leprosy asylum that responds to the still ongoing division between black and white, could have been a reason for an earlier disappearance of parts of the village. On the other hand, the shortage of capital from within the community as already mentioned causes decline. Current riots between residents and careless treatment of the buildings worsen the situation with the result that remarkable buildings such as the octagonal Protestant church, the Catholic church and a hospital have been lost through vandalism and accidents. The current urban developments and frictions within the community seem to slowly repulse the structure and identity of the place, are these contrasting responses the only right solutions to deal with this legacy?





12. White male patient housing, current situation vs. original appearance due to deferred maintenance
13. The informal layer of the current community at Westfort shows personal adjustments of the existing





A black and white photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, a low brick wall runs diagonally from the bottom right towards the center. To the left of the wall is a large, leafless tree with a thick trunk. Further back, a dirt road leads into the distance, flanked by more trees and some small buildings. The sky is overcast.

# 2

## Interpretation and Reflection



## Interpretation and reflection

Reflecting on the changing situation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the development of architecture, the similarities are more prevalent than the differences; there's a clear link and continuity noticeable between the different views over time; different positions are present at the same moment. It's a continuous movement of nostalgia and progress, aversion and revaluation. The dilemma of the appearance of our environment isn't just determined since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however the fast growing process of individualization and specialization caused a drastic shift in architecture and the treatment of the existing, for instance the possibilities to demolish more rapidly became much easier since then. New building types and construction methods caused new possibilities, these new possibilities and insights on the other hand formed the start of the search for a fitting style in line with the identity of the nation; *the dilemma of style*. The 19<sup>th</sup> century idea to 'construct' the environment ultimately led to much more confusion instead of a clear direction in architecture. It was impossible to create a totally new style without referring to existing forms and styles, imitation is to a greater or lesser extent always present in architecture. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by in the continuous battle between the terms 'character' and 'truth', senses and feelings versus progress and ratio. Existing traditions were mixed with new techniques, an interplay between tradition/craftsmanship and modernity/mass production. The search for a specific style stopped more or less in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but strangely the idea that architecture must be an expression of a specific period didn't.

This search for a representative style in the Netherlands shows similarities with the situation

in South-Africa at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The beginning of a tradition had to be formed, based on European/Dutch examples without fully copying them. The first layout of Westfort designed by Sytze Wierda shows a strong connection with the Dutch building tradition, on the other hand the logical adjustments on the South-African landscape and climate shows a dialogue and the empathic and adaptive ability of the architect Sytze Wierda. This specific '*mixed*' style linked to a *certain period in history* can be interpreted as an 'uncommon' kind of architecture placed in an 'uncommon' setting; the barely untouched landscape of South-Africa stands in contrast with the more European regulated character of Westfort. Besides the rare architectural character of this style, forms this building tradition the basis for the development of architecture in South Africa and is in that sense *important as a reference* of the South-African architecture in the current time and future. The challenge of the ZAR to create a (more imposing) representative international style especially for the inner city of Pretoria, stands in contrast with the 'simple' appearance of Westfort which was much more adapted to the human scale, this quality, that fitted perfectly with the rural Boers identity and the function as Leprosarium remained fairly intact until today, it shows *the permanent nature of Westfort* and is in that sense also rare as an urban entity. This *townscape value* shows that Westfort can be valued on different scales, despite the value of the individual buildings and clusters at Westfort, the 'group' value is considered more important, in line with the original idea of Westfort as self-sufficient village and the rarity of this kind of institutions on global level.

These historically related values, tangible and intangible, are in some cases the reason for friction

when it comes to the current use of the area. The new use of the area shows the adaption of the existing structures towards current needs of the inhabitants. This is expressed in most cases in subtle additions and adjustments, but unfortunately sometimes in a more brutal treatment of the existing buildings and landscape. These 'time' layers and the unsuspecting additions from the community on the other hand add value to the area; it reflects the "current" identity of Westfort. *Westfort is more than the historical plan of Wierda*. Despite the growing diversity within the area Westfort still has a coherent character; unity in diversity. This is probably because of the unconsciously connections with the existing structures, as already mentioned the permanent nature of the original layout of Westfort. In order to ensure a future for Westfort the integral core value of the village should be put forward, where the historical values are integrated with the new developments of the area. This integral value is reflected in the previously mentioned values.

The original institutional character of Westfort as coherent entity, as village, has retained its strength over time despite the changing conditions of the area and is in that sense unique and worth to retain. This historical fundament, which is expressed in the built and the landscape, creates a link with the past in tangible and intangible sense. The original layout has created the basis for the later added layers including the newest layer of the community. It is important, therefore, to continue appreciating Westfort as urban entity, and not the various parts detached from each other, in order to avoid fragmentation of the villages (cultural) historical and current identity.



3

Recommendations and Discussion



## Recommendations and Discussion

*“The future of Westfort will be a constant search for a symbiosis between renewal and conservation. What is lost will slowly lose meaning, but to remain relevant, the gates will have to allow change in”.*

In order to avoid (further) fragmentation of the village the main challenge for a worthy and sustainable future of Westfort and its surroundings is to find an integrated approach, taking into account the needs and possibilities of the current situation (community, meaning of Westfort within the city and South-Africa), in co-operation with the existing including its (intangible) history. The solution is not searching for the best approach for conservation of the existing but rather ensuring that the use and function of the area has a sustained and lasting character, making the continued existence of Westfort evident, as explained by Paul Meurs:

*“Redevelopment encompasses much more than conservation alone. Attention must be paid to fire prevention, labor laws, users, car parks, necessary extensions, the environment, finance, technical possibilities and restrictions and numerous other boundary conditions and ambitions.” - Paul Meurs <sup>46</sup>*

This integrated approach has as main aim to achieve social cohesion by means of physical cohesion. The involvement of the current residents in the development of Westfort is essential because otherwise the problem of these ‘homeless’ people is causing trouble anywhere else. They have become part of the character of Westfort. This social cohesion is important so they can sense a

connection with the area and eventually will feel a certain degree of responsibility for their own environment; *formalizing the informal*. To retain the valuable institutional character of Westfort limits has to specify the area, in terms of use (an overarching use of the village) as literal limits to protect its identity. But in what way should new additions and adjustments relate to the existing structures? Is contrast the only right solutions to deal with this legacy? Returning to the research question:

*What historical and present day architectural views should act as informant in order to safeguard the cultural historical character of Westfort Village?*

As mentioned before, the development of Westfort in the recent decades show a significance of the newer added layers. In terms of style they may differ from the original design but structurally they do connect and are a continuous gesture to the original character of the village. There are so few ancient cities or city parts and landscapes in ‘reasonable’ integrity preserved, why should those few square kilometers of Westfort be an explore lab of new urban developments? The idea to densify in Westfort is possible; here the position *where* to add new structures is of great importance. Additions in the open fields between the clusters will ensure that the character of the village will be damaged. The simplicity and clarity of the original character should be continued in future developments, making a stronger dialogue of the existing with future new layers, with history as the main guideline. Space has to be created for (individual) interpretations, uses and growth from within the current and future users, not everything has to be planned. Social unity will be created by architectural unity and vice versa.

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<sup>46</sup> (Roos, 2007, p. 7)

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## Images

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