SCRIPT, CULTURE, ARCHITECTURE :

a dialogue

by SHELAGH HILL

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This thesis is a commentary on memory and cultural interpretation of architectural space, through language, narrative and representation. A dialogue is presented between two women, with culturally different backgrounds and experiences, who share memories of their past. This dialogue as an abstraction, prevents the work from forcing a set opinion or message, presenting facts that allow viewers/readers to come to their own conclusions – an introspective and personal searching in relation to the work.

“Creating a narrative of the past is not about fixing and preserving events through memory but about allowing memory to give personal interpretations of, and hence distort, the events of the past...this memory creates fictions and is unstable, allowing a plurality of possible existences.”¹

The same can be said of architectural experience whereby architecture may have a specific intent, though no one person may experience and interact with it in the exact same way, becoming a personal narrative for the visitor. The architectural experience is a process that allows for the exploration of the way we construct, receive and communicate ideas – ideas concerning space identity, representation and the relationship between words and images created through narratives.

¹ Dundjerovic, Aleksander Sasa. *The Theatricality of Robert Lepage*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2007. 11-12. Print.

education

- a. *the learning from experience – life, travel, doing.*

fragment

- a. *a remnant broken from its whole; a piece.*

Culture is defined as the behaviours and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group transmitted from one generation to another. It is also classified as the development or improvement of the mind by education.² Through the continual development of social, economic and physical environments, culture is bound to adapt and change.

Architecture is a place and process where culture, history and memory are embedded, providing a visitor the opportunity to experience the trials and successes of a community. In addition, architecture allows for an expansion of knowledge to occur, generating an understanding of the history, tradition, the environment and the people with whom the experience is shared. The experience should question the reality in which you have previously been exposed to, making the community question and be made aware of the conditions in which they live.

"History is harvested and collected, to be assembled, made to speak, remembered, re-read and rewritten, and language comes alive in transit, in interpretation."³ Through these interpretations, narratives and memories, cultures, traditions, and language adapt or change in time. Language and education evolve with one's continued everyday expansion of knowledge, questioning their purpose and limits within a place or culture or community.

² "Culture Definition | Definition of Culture at Dictionary.com." *Dictionary.com | Find the Meanings and Definitions of Words at Dictionary.com*. Web. 04 Dec. 2009. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/culture>

³ Chambers, Iain. *Migrancy, culture, identity*. London: Routledge, 1994.3. Print.

The effect of education thus causes a community to change, whether willingly or not, to its environment and the social economic conditions acting upon it. The experiences of this education will create imprints, within one's memory.

"These are fragments that remain as fragments: splinters of light that illuminate our journey while simultaneously casting questioning shadows along the path. The belief in the transparency of truth and the power of origins to define the finality of our passage is dispersed by this perpetual movement of transmutation and transformation."⁴

These fragments are details of said knowledge, specifics that one remembers, not necessarily pertaining to one's wants or needs. However, the assembly of these fragments is made possible by the personal narrative structure and the retelling of one's stories through text, representations, and architecture.

"I have only one means of emerging from myself: I must be able to live within another...This is the history of the philosopher who travels, as it were, from self to self... a work with multiple detours all heading toward self-clarification...where *communication* is a structure of true knowledge."⁵

⁴ Chambers, Iain. *Migrancy, culture, identity*. London: Routledge, 1994.3. Print.

⁵ Ricoeur, Paul. *History and Truth*. Trans. Charles A. Kelbley. Evanston: Northwestern Univ Pr, 1965. 51. Print.

This dialogue is inspired, adapted and cited from Janaczewska's play, *The history of water = Huyen thoai mot giong nuoc*⁶, and direct references are designated through a change of font. This play poetically investigates the similarities between the translation of language, the interpretation of meaning or experiences through photography and the process of image making as a vessel of memory. Additionally, with the help of personal experiences and travel journals, as well as Wiszowaty's, *My Massai Life*,⁷ and Gilbert's, *Broken Spears*,⁸ two characters are created; two women of different cultures and ethnic origins, a Westerner and a Maasai. We are taken on a journey through memory, where both women reflect on personal, and sometimes shared memories, and are able to find relationships between them in the details of fragmented thought.

⁶ Janaczewska, Noelle. *The history of water = Huyen thoai mot giong nuoc / Noelle Janaczewska* Currency Press, Paddington, NSW : 1995. Print.

⁷ Wiszowaty, Robin. *My Maasai Life: from Suburbia to Savannah*. Toronto: Me to We, 2009. Print.

⁸ Gilbert, Elizabeth L. *Broken Spears: a Maasai Journey*. New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2003. Print.

ACT 1 – Nkoyet-naiborr, Kenya, 2008 .Present.

Naserian
Liz!
Liz
Ao!
Naserian
Sopa!
Liz
Ipa!

Running toward one another, Liz drops her travel-pack and they embrace.

Naserian
Welcome home Liz!

On an early morning in July, Naserian guides Liz through the town and along a side path towards the school – Naserian lives in a small home just outside the compound of the school. Painted in white (a paste of ash and water) this dirt and dung structure is a small two room space. Lit by three openings the space is clean and organized. Lucky to have a wood frame structure and tin roof, Naserian shows her own home off proudly. Newspaper clippings cover the walls as art and colour. The dirt floor has been freshly swept and evened out. Three chairs encircle a fire pit with shelves and a short bench close by. The embers of a remaining fire give the room a golden glow.

The second room is Naserian's bedroom, where a stick frame bed and grass mattress stand covered by a few blankets.

Liz
Your home is wonderful Naserian. Thank you so much for letting me stay with you. As a gift, I have brought you some sugar and chai for the week.

SET 1.A

Figure 1

Figure 2

Naserian

Let's get you settled and then go get some water.

You do remember where to go don't you?

Liz

I think I can manage.

SET 2.A.

They weave through the sharp whistling-thorn acacia trees, water jugs in hand, careful not to snag their skirts or shins. The morning's clouds hangs low over the hills and a light mist clings to the ground.

Figure 3

At the water pipe this morning, Liz finds other mamas already hard at work. She follows close behind Naserian as she joins the line, greeting the other women. Everyone knows her, and the mamas greet one another as if they hadn't seen each other in years, even though they come here every day. Naserian is probably the loudest of them all; she calls each woman by name, asking about their families, their livestock and any news heard along the way.⁹

Figure 4

The *mitungi*¹⁰ must be carefully balanced on two rocks beneath the spout and then held in place while the trickling water slowly fills it all the way to the top...never to spill a drop.

SET 1.A

Back in Naserian's *manyatta*¹¹

Naserian is setting up the firewood to light a fire. Liz hovers close by and hands her items at request.

Figure 5

Naserian

Arrange the kindling in a small tripod, place larger branches on the outside and then take a can of paraffin wax from the shelf and coat the smallest kindling. I'll light the fire...now you have to give it some air.

⁹ Wiszowaty, Robin. *My Maasai Life: from Suburbia to Savannah*. Toronto: Me to We, 2009. 4,82. Print.

¹⁰ Mitungi – water jug

¹¹ Manyatta – home, house

Liz backs up to give Naserian some room to get the fire started. The smoke grows thick, filling the space. Liz turns around to cough and her eyes begin to squint and tear. They sit down as they wait for the fire to grow.

Naserian

I remember your first day here, and I was giving you advice on how to act back in mama's boma¹².

Liz

You told me I have to follow mama's and your example, to tone down my actions – not be submissive, necessarily, but always remain conscious of acting respectfully. Men are the centre of attention, while we are meant to keep the conversation going while sitting in very careful poses. We are to maintain a humble demeanour, always staying vigilant of the family's needs.¹³

Naserian

(smiles at the memory)

It seems like only yesterday you left us.

*

Sitting down across from one another Naserian and Liz begin down a lane of wandering thoughts and memories. The shadows are long as their thoughts wind deeper into their subconscious. Liz stares at the photos and clippings on the walls of the *manyatta*.

¹² Boma – house compound

¹³ Wiszowaty, Robin. *My Maasai Life: from Suburbia to Savannah*. Toronto: Me to We, 2009. 49. Print.

Liz

Every picture tells a story. That's what they say, isn't it? Every picture tells a story. But what if it doesn't? What I want to know is what happens if it doesn't tell a story? What happens then? I got tired of telling the same story; wrenching open my camera's eye when the entire world wanted to turn over and go back to sleep. I was sinking into the sludge of the story and I knew that if I didn't get out, I would drown in it. So I went elsewhere.

Naserian : *to the audience*

The Photographer photographs only landscapes. Nothing else. The gallery walls become huge walls of horizons and textures. Mere shadows of moments with a voice.

Liz

Now I photograph only landscapes. Nothing else. I go back to the city I grew up in. Bearing the imprint of all the other places I have lived in and visited since. The street where our house used to be has disappeared.

translation | photography | memory

a. capturing a negative/image

The process of photography and the development of an image embodies how the body and mind create a memory. The lens of a camera, similar to an eye in form and function, frames and focuses on the landscape to capture it through the burning of a negative with light. The negative framing the image is dated and stored within the camera until the film is completed – a strip of single-image memories recorded over a fragment of time and place. These memories must then go through a process of development through chemical or else they would erase instantaneously with a flash of light.

A process of three chemicals wash over the film making them clear and crisp – the first physical fragmentation of time and memory.

I spent a long, hot afternoon looking for it. When I finally found the place where it used to be, the houses were all gone and the street was re-built into another image.

But the shadows are still there; exactly as I remember them. There has been a lot of water under the bridge since then.

Naserian : *to the audience*

She is a photographer. There to capture the world in black and white...and occasionally in colour... on film. Taken in unguarded moments, for all to see.

Liz : *to the audience*

She is a translator, a teacher. There to interpret and transcribe the voice of another world. There to render comprehensible what would otherwise be incomprehensible.

b. evidence of elapsed time

Memories, over time, produce similar physical lines of abstraction upon the body. Upon one's face, wrinkles appear; lines of emotion and age, produced from moments, life, and repeated over time – each wrinkle holding a memory, a physical reminder of time and events passed. The rise and fall of the skin as the eyes brighten and smile, contracting together, showing a moment of pleasure. Released, the lines of the fall deepen slightly, recording another moment.

c. projecting a representation | evidence of a moment

To create a print of the image, the negative has to be projected onto photo paper. Again, through the use of light, the image in its raw form of monochromatic tones, acts as a filter against the light to create an image on the paper exposed at a distance. The paper is then washed over by three chemicals; the image magically appears, darkening in a pool of undulating liquid, exposing a captured moment in a pool of reflection.

The body, like a camera, is a time capsule of memory; a *translation* of a camera's function to the body. Some memories are encapsulated within the mind, others deeper, carrying physical demarcations through wrinkles, scars, deformations, all of which trigger recollections of specific moments in time of an event.

Liz crosses the room to the north wall where the water container is located and fills up the pot to boil water for tea.

Liz

It comes down to a question of cultural identity. We don't feel we really have one... or it's not solid enough...

Naserian

That doesn't make sense to me. How can you not have enough identity?

Liz

I don't know. But we worry about it obsessively. I think that's why going overseas is so important. Why I went to Kenya. I needed to find out where I was in the world...who I was in the world.

Naserian

Why Kenya?

Liz

I knew that Europe wasn't the right place; that it wouldn't tell me what I wanted to know...

Naserian

Couldn't you have found what you wanted to know in Canada?

Liz

Maybe...

I know this city I grew up in. Hot, dry summers where cars filled the driveways, bicycles scattered the lawns and children running in and around the cool, refreshing water raining from a sprinkler as a way to pass the time in play.

Naserian

The Maasai believe where the sky meets the grass that is the end. As pastoralists, we feed from the earth like all of its creatures and honour the god(s) for all that is given and what we take from them.

ACT 2

The sun hovers overhead, beaming its rays of heat onto the dry, dusty landscape. The shadows are at their shortest, almost nonexistent, disappearing within their subject of projection – a moment of submission into another reality.

Naserian

(sitting under tree)

I remember the day we first met, it was on that *matatu* from Nairobi heading to Nkoyet-naiborr. I was on my way home during a school break to visit my family and sitting next to me was a girl who seemed very nervous and unsure of her surroundings, yet very much in awe. I guessed she probably spoke English and despite my own inability to speak it, I asked her where she was headed. After a few minutes of conversation, we discovered that my family was hosting her for a few weeks for her school program. That girl was you.

Liz

(leaning against a tree next to Naserian)

I remember being very nervous that day, but after meeting you, I felt sure that things would

SET 2

Landscape projection

Lighting for afternoon

Figure 6

Figure 7

work out. It was very fateful we should be travelling home the same day.

Liz : *soliloquy*

Everyone was staring at me. A crowd of bodies surrounding me at all angles, a collision of voices whisper and laugh at what I assume must be me. I shove my hands deep into my pockets, feeling my face grow hot, wishing I knew how to sink into the crowd, be invisible.

I embark on a five hour journey to my new home. Joined by a crowd at a curb side, beneath a signboard advertising a cellular phone company, I tried to find some shade from the sun – already blinding despite the early hour. Hopping on a Nissan minibus – called a matatu—from the stop platform called a “stage”, I squeeze into the back row, squished among three adults and two children. A stranger hands me a bag to hold on my lap, though I can’t tell to whom it belongs.¹⁴

¹⁴ Wiszowaty, Robin. *My Maasai Life: from Suburbia to Savannah*. Toronto: Me to We, 2009. 31. Print.

Flashback to 2004

Liz and Naserian are sitting in mama's *boma*, just behind the *manyatta* and to the left of the bathing station, washing clothes in two small plastic wash tubs. The air is dry and the wind is picking up, blowing dust in every which way, creating small cyclones that skim across the surface and then vanish in an instant. Liz and Naserian while completing the wash begin to get to know each other, talking about their families and how they have grown up.

Liz

I grew up in a city called Waterloo. My mom came from a large family of nine, Irish through and through and dad grew up in Calgary, a wild country boy during his childhood, relocating to Toronto for his rebellious teen years.

(pause)

Buildings surround you; continuing to grow, blocking out the light and view of the lakeshore. Their favourite place was along the lake. Retreating there as much as possible, taking strolls, the sound of the creaking boards on the boardwalk, sand squishing between their toes and the sound of the waves rolling onto the shore.

Naserian

I came from the Nkoyet-naiborr. I grew up in a small community of a couple thousand spreading out into the rural areas.

Liz

My mother's family comes from Galway, along the west coast of Ireland. A medieval city along the river Corrib, it was originally the main port for trade with Spain and France in the middle ages.

SET 1.B

Landscape projection

Figure 8

Figure 9

Projection of city scape and water

Set dark with spot light

Figure 10

Switch back to landscape projection

Naserian

My mother's family was from here, Nkoyet-naiborr, a three hour walk from the water supply. She moved here when she married my father.

Liz

Mom was the eldest child – the youngest, Kevin was born when she was nearly nineteen.

Naserian

My father was also born in Nkoyet-naiborr. His family like many others here herd cattle mostly, but also sheep, donkeys and goats. Being semi-nomadic, the livestock is moved on a seasonal rotation, dependant on the rain cycle and the areas to graze.

If there was ever water, it was too precious to waste. The drought deprived all things of water. Withering away, we prayed for rain.

Liz

I've begun to learn Swahili. But I proceed slowly. I listen to the tones and rhythms of the language; trying to understand the strangely-shaped words.

Set goes dark.

*Spots on two women-
shone through tree/roof*

Naserian

*kwa muda gani walikuwa ninyi katika Kenya??
(How long are you in Kenya?)*

Liz

It's only from your expression I know you've asked a question and are waiting for me to answer.

Naserian

(slowly)

kwa muda gani walikuwa ninyi katika Kenya??

(How long are you in Kenya?)

Liz

(slowly, she finds the words and

attempts to arrange them in a sentence)

Mimi ni karibu mwezi, na kuwa hapa katika

Kenya kwa muda wa miezi minne

*(I am nearly new, and will be here in Kenya for
four months)*

Liz : *soliloquy*

*With these words comes the thrill of entering a whole
new world. And I collect up all the new sounds,
obsessively ordering and re-ordering them, writing and
re-writing them, speaking and repeating them. Willing
myself to remember them and my mouth to make the
correct sound. Trying hard to close that awful gap
between being able to hear and being able to
reproduce, a sound.*

words | image | translation

translation

- a. *the rendering of either word or text into another language, possibly one's own language.*
- b. *the change or conversion to another form and appearance.*

The interpretation of speech and language can be altered through the many filters of translation. These filters have the ability to abstract, dilute or enhance meaning or change one's interpretation of the given information. It is a complicated journey to find the right word or combination of words to express an initial thought, idea or emotion. Words, through the process of translation, can lose meaning as the translated language may not have an appropriate counterpart in its vocabulary; conversely it has the opportunity to find new meanings or possibilities in the interpretation or abstraction of the words.

The translation of text into representation creates a process of discovery and abstraction of space through cultural interpretations and personal reflections. Each one can be understood on its own or as a sequence of representations.

Liz

How do you even begin to remember words in different languages? There are so many with so many different meanings and arrangements.

Naserian

(stares at the bubbles on the water's surface, lightly running her hand across the surface)

To begin with, my new English words just float on the surface of my memory. And I have to keep saying them over and over. Again and again...

Liz/Naserian

Practicing foreign languages in empty rooms.

Naserian

Tell me about your hobbies now.

*

Liz : *to the audience*

The translator moves language. Changes sounds
and fashions reality into another image. Takes one
language and skims it across the surface of another.
Like a stone across a lake.

communication | culture | architecture

Architecture is an interdisciplinary art form; it shifts between various artistic languages. A hybrid that crosses diverse media, combining written text with mixed imagery- visual, auditory, technological and textual. Between cultures, architecture acts as a language, a way to communicate to an individual or group, an identity or lack thereof.

Communication between cultures relies on the translation of languages. For equitable communication to occur, the dissolving of identity and cultural differences must occur. Misunderstandings are realistic in design for communications however they are, "progressively and successfully replaced by other non-verbal languages: the language of the body and the language of art, which ultimately merge to allow not only communication but true communication between human beings in an altogether sensorial and spiritual process."¹⁵

These hybrid communications of body, image and word languages can be applied to architecture's communications with the world regardless of word language. The objective of the thesis is to tell a personal story in the visual and built language through the architecture.

"The collision of personal and collective identity supplies an important dynamic force that propels action in [the architecture]. An exploration of an inability to communicate or to be understood is part of [the] multilingual approach to performance "¹⁶ Theatrical performance, like that of individuals within an architectural space, adheres to the former, where each performer hopes to communicate the character to an audience through their interaction with the set and other characters. Those who inhabit an architectural space are like actors, performing as themselves within their own reality. The space is only able to have a dialogue if it is being observed or inhabited. Obstacles to communication through interdisciplinary artistic representation and the search for identity within one's own culture are the subjects of dramatic variance and interplay between characters or, in respect to architecture, the interaction of spaces and their human relationship.

¹⁵ Dundjerovic, Aleksander Sasa. *The Theatricality of Robert Lepage*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2007. 9. Print.

¹⁶ Dundjerovic, Aleksander Sasa. *The Theatricality of Robert Lepage*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2007. 9. Print.

Liz and Naserian pause and remember that it is becoming late to have a modest lunch. They decide to make another pot of tea and put a pot on the fire to make a small amount of *ugali*¹⁷, before they head out for another water run and to collect some firewood. As Liz makes the tea, her old habits becoming more familiar, Naserian crouches over a pot on the fire stirring the *ugali* continuously so it won't stick. Her rhythm quickens as the substance thickens; her arm tracing a broken figure eight movement.

Figure 11

Naserian

Are you well? You look well... I remember those days when we were all worried for you when you became ill that night we took you to the women's group meeting.

Liz

Being ill here was a far cry from how it would be at home. Watching ants parade along a gnarled tree root that winds its way through the house was different entertainment from watching movies while curled up in a blanket on the couch.¹⁸

*Projection of ants abstracted
layered with a second projection
of landscape*

Naserian

Across the world, people seem to have the same needs and desires: food, water, shelter, health, schooling, and social acceptance. Different generations will seek new priorities.

¹⁷ *Ugali* – an East African dish made of maize flour and water to form a porridge-like substance.

¹⁸ Wiszowaty, Robin. *My Maasai Life: from Suburbia to Savannah*. Toronto: Me to We, 2009. 134. Print.

Liz : soliloquy

As I walk around Nkoyet-naiborr, I become lost in the many intersecting footpaths stretching off into identical landscapes of rough brush and reddish dirt, well worn by many feet. I feel like I am floating in an ambiguous and uncertain space. No matter how hard I try, my newly-learned Swahili words just keep on sliding off the surface of my experiences, like rain down a window pane. I want them to stick and help me make sense of things, but they seem to cloud and blur things more. And I find it easier not to speak.

Naserian

In my muddy-water English thinking I couldn't translate words into images. I'd translate English words into Swahili words and then the Swahili words into images.

Liz

Is that still what you do?

Naserian

Hmm...sometimes. If the word is one I don't know. But most of the time I try to act without translation. I try to submerge the word in the pool of images which make up my English understanding...

Liz

But isn't that what we all do? I mean, what native English speakers do without actually realising they're doing it?

Set goes dark.

Landscape projection

(Film through a landscape, exhibiting horizon)

Set dark.

Spots on two women.

Structure/ fire lightly lit for spatial recognition

Naserian

I don't know. I'll never be a native English speaker, so I can't say. But I often feel that although I understand all the words, I don't really understand the meanings. When I read or speak Swahili, the meanings unfold like a blanket – but as soon as I translate, each word threatens to fall apart, and I have to struggle to hold together the sense of what I am translating.

Liz : *to the audience*

Like words in translation, the Translator drifts endlessly between meanings and possibilities.

shadow | architecture

- a. *threshold between being sheltered and exposed.*
- b. *the unknown.*

Shadow is a layer of the city's fabric that exists in relationship to the vertical and the sun projected onto the landscape. Shadows are not true to the object they are projected from. They are abstracted through time and the fabric they project on to. Similar to a memory they are altered through time and relate to the projector or trigger.

A translator is a shadow. Words are an in-between product of intent and reality. Abstracted through an external, the translator, words are filtered through language. Water washes over the words diluting them of meaning, pushing and pulling the fabric, distorting the shadow of language as words become a dialogue between two sources.

Liz

After moving to Waterloo, my parents lost their urban retreat. To regain a place of relaxation within their lives, urban or not, we began to vacation at a northern lake each summer for two weeks. The relaxing environment of warm days full of sun, sand between their toes and clear water for the daily plunge soon replaced their city retreat – still reminding them of their younger days and busy city living.

With most of my family in Toronto, I run down to the lakeshore whenever possible. The buildings have started to infiltrate the once untouched space. The boards creak as my feet gently touch them, as the rhythm of my breathing coincides with the rhythm of the sound of my feet and the water hitting the boardwalk's edge. Walls closing in, cold and barren, where the water had seemed to have abandoned me. My legs begin to tire, aching from repetitive impact. All that was clear begins to dissolve, a world I hardly knew...

Set goes dark.

City projection.

Film moving through the city

exhibiting horizon.

Water sound in background.

Figure 12

horizon | culture

The relationships between culture and landscape exist differently when challenged with cultural development and globalization. We exist within a particular relationship to the horizon, horizontal or vertical. A horizontal approach to the inhabitation of the landscape is one of a more traditional approach. To inhabit the ground plane with little to no modification, creating structures or inhabiting existing land structures that shelter oneself and little else. The horizontal approach creates a perspective of a land-dweller fixed from the ground, a 'natural' horizon. A vertical approach is a more 'modern' approach, inhabiting airspace as well as the ground plane and below grade. This approach creates multiple perspectives that are unfixed but parallel to the ground plane. This method is used in densification and helps to reduce ground cover through the extension of the ground plane creating new horizons to be explored.

It became a place of lifelessness, a nightmare at the edge of the city. A landscape without water, but where there used to be water. I'm alone on this vast, flat expanse of mud. Unable to run because I sink up to my knees in the slime. Unable to run because there is nowhere to run to. And in the distance I can hear the roar of approaching water, wild and angry, coming toward me across a sleepless night.

Western culture, adapted from Europe, is constantly in flux, trying to prove its power and worth to its citizens, as citizens, and as a country globally. This creates a mentality to rise above all, exhibited in the vertical structural rise of our architecture and evolution in material technology that continue to push the envelope. This vertical plane is an attempt to push past the horizon, to view life and city from the heavens, an escape from the reality of the ground plane. This need to live in an escape, a break from the reality of the grounding plane comments on our perception of the world from the ground as something that inhibits pleasure in life. A need to be on the vertical plane is a need for power and stature within society; the higher you get, the more power you have, the greater the escape from one's reality.

Power within cultures has historically been exhibited through the belief that systems ranging from religious, technological and economic bases have a direct correlation with the height of their structure. Within the realm of architecture, power has been exhibited through the breaking of the horizon. The church, at one time, was the only building to break the horizon of rooflines. Today, the financial and trading districts tower over their surroundings, demonstrating their importance within society and influencing our cultural identity.

A disregard of the natural plane has created an artificial horizon, a plane that has been pushed and pulled, through the extrusion and below-grade development of our cities. We not only have created above ground spaces that rise to unthinkable heights, but we have sculpted and moulded the earth below grade, creating a subterranean landscape. Despite complete submersion into the earth, we have developed a lack of understanding in our relationship to the landscape; not only is the relationship artificial, it is something we attempt to escape from.

Naserian

*(crosses room and picks out a postcard
from a tin off her bookshelf)*

When I was a child, my map of the world was a collection of postcards and newspaper clippings kept in a tin. Pictures of other places: The Eiffel Tower, motels and department stores in mid-west North American Towns, The Empire State Building, Roman Aqueducts. Most of the postcards were given to me by European or North American tourists and clippings I usually found on the ground. I began to see North America as the centre of the world and Kenya, a distant place; somewhere in the African safari of the world's imagination. And I began to feel detached from my world, as if I were in a small boat drifting out into the open sea; watching my life disappear over the horizon.

Liz

But you do have a space. Being a migrant is a sort of identity.

Naserian

Not if you're a migrant, it isn't. When I was first learning English and travelled to Nairobi, I was trying to communicate through gestures, expressions, moods and silences. But I soon realized that if I don't speak my own words, people will speak them for me.

Liz

From Nairobi, I travelled down a narrow dirt path called a highway to Soko – the last town before heading through the Great Rift Valley. And there it was, just past that last strip of buildings called a town, when Africa ceases to be a strange land. I'm just a stranger in it.

Spot on Naserian

Structure/Fire lightly lit.

Spot on both women.

Flashback to 2004, Nairobi

Naserian : *soliloquy*

One rainy afternoon, I finished work early and drove into the city. I parked my car near the park and went for a walk, enjoying the warm African rain on my face and bare arms. And by a tall acacia tree, I ran into Faith, a girl I used to know in Nkoyet-naiborr. We hadn't seen each other for ten years – not since we were children and used to walk along a dusty, red road to school together. I'm surprised that we still recognised each other, but we did immediately. After chatting briefly, we went back to her house that was close by, and she pulled out a photo of the two of us standing against the school wall in our uniforms, holding hands. When I looked at the photo, I remembered quite clearly the day it was taken. For a long time both of us stare at this tiny, creased picture from across the Rift Valley trying to connect that image there and this moment here.

Liz

I wanted to photograph my thoughts. Running all over the place, wild, like the rain creating a link, a blur of sky and landscape, not knowing where one starts and the other ends. But I couldn't find a way to photograph them, so I chose the closest thing I could find.

Liz : *soliloquy*

Breaking in Soko, a bustling market town to the southwest near the Great Rift Valley, I change transportation to go down the valley to Nkoyet-naiborr, the community I will soon call home. My feet feel clumsy on the unfamiliar terrain, the stares of local townspeople make me stumble even more as I make my way from the matatu

Set goes dark.

Spot on Naserian.

Photograph projection at cue.

Set goes dark.

Spot on Liz.

*stage to the main intersection. Heading west, I hop into the back of a Toyota pickup truck. A few passengers wait in the back with me until it is full and then we begin our journey into the Great Rift Valley. Like that of the Grand Canyon, either side ridges up to unimaginable heights, hugging the flat lands in between.*¹⁹

*

Naserian

Every year during the rainy season, from March until May and then again in November until December, the heavy downpour floods the land.

Spots on both women.

Set lit.

Liz

On the other side, having four seasons creates many beautiful as well as hard conditions some, difficult to endure. Rain may fall from April until November, and the transformation of rain into snow is surreal, blanketing the earth in a white frozen liquid.

Naserian

Flooding is just part of the ebb and flow of life – a matter of course, unlike in Waterloo where a flood is a national calamity?

Liz

I take photographs all along the landscapes. Recording change – changes in textures, terrains, horizons, inhabitants, though some may be similar, they are all unique in the details. I do this for me – snapping up evidence of where I've been.

¹⁹ Wiszowaty, Robin. *My Maasai Life: from Suburbia to Savannah*. Toronto: Me to We, 2009. 31. Print.

Liz

To see myself reflected. I point my lens at the landscape and hope that when the image is exposed, something about myself will come into focus.

Liz : *to the audience*

Using a Minolta analogue camera, I shoot with black and white film. The lack of colour, allows you to focus past colour association and its influence on memory. To focus on the bare essentials, the details – form, light, textures, rhythms, horizon and gravity.

Naserian

Landscape projection of Ellesmere

Beyond the shores of Ellesmere, where the hippos peer from the water's depths, lies the peaks of Mount Longonot, a dormant volcano where a thriving, untouched ecosystem defines its centre, ever changing at moment's end. The photographer connects moments and images into a story that will never be completed.

Liz

I remember the first morning I drove alone for the first time to the cottage to visit my parents, trying to recall the route after several years of sitting in the backseat daydreaming at the gently undulating landscape while we were driving through it. I knew I was on the right track when I reached a stretch of rolling hills where at every crest you could see the sunlight shimmer off the midnight blue water in the distance. Excited, despite being alone, an old memory arose from a new view of the same route that I have taken for years; a new perspective of the same landscape, noticing new details I could have only imagined.

Seeing is believing, or so the story goes. So the camera has to be everywhere. It has to travel to the limits of our material lives to snap up the evidence. Fix reality. Protect us from any sense that the world might be more than what we see.

Naserian

A landscape of peaks and valleys scatter the horizon. The sun casts shadows along the ridges of the dry sea, shimmering through the dust and mist that settles overnight. Hidden among the shadows married to the land are small dwellings encapsulating the lives of the old and young, protecting them from the elements and other land dwellers.

Figure 13

Why do you photograph only landscapes?

Rural African culture is one of the horizontal plane, a merging of landscape and architecture, reminiscent of our own tradition, pre-industrialization. Adapting some of the European construction techniques, rural African architecture has not strayed too far from its origins depending on the wealth of the individual. The ground plane is infinite and the architecture is temporal. Using only basic technology and materials, whatever can be gathered, structures of small proportions and scale blend into the ground plane, striving not to disrupt its line. Vegetation and the landscape are the natural structures that stray from the horizon reaching great heights. The man-made structures are made to a height of function and ease, for safety and shelter. The necessity for simplicity gives a formal understanding of multi-functional space. Although boundaries are formed, with walls delineating the function of a space, cultural activity and ritual allow for the melding of multiple functions in the more common areas.

Naserian

The first time I went up the steep incline of Longonot, I was just six. Thinking I could never reach the top, my brothers raced past me, their wake engulfing my eyes with dust. Through the dust, a hand reached out for mine. Firmly gripping my hand, my father guided me through the cloud and up the slope, encouraging me to keep going. Crowded by tourists and locals, we formed a procession to the top. In awe, no sounds escape our lips; we heard only the howling of the wind, whose force, so strong, could push us off the edge. Encircling the top lay a seven foot plateau following the rise and fall of the edge, allowing us to complete the loop around the volcano. Past the edge toward the centre, a new world emerged, lush and green, untouched, natural.

Liz

Driving around the bend just behind the beach-front cottages, a tight laneway crowded with trees opens up to our family retreat. Rented for two weeks every year, this lodging holds many memories within its four walls. The smells of sand and the lake fill my nostrils, the sun glimmers through the leaves of the trees. I climb the stone steps and enter the poorly lit cottage. The hardwood floor creaked, and I can hear my mom shuffling in the bedroom adjacent to the kitchen. The interior walls don't quite reach the roof framing, and although you may not see someone, you can always sense their activity within the small dwelling. The house that day smelt of bran-date muffins, wet sand and musty furniture... to me it was home.

Landscape projection of Longonot

Figure 14

SET 3.B

*Landscape projection
(Conversation occurring in
modern space)*

Figure 16

Figure 11

Figure 15

*(pause – a point of reflection and
change in memory location)*

SET 1.A

Set goes dark.

Fire lights the room.

The first river I saw in Kenya was the watering hole in Salabwek, a small rural town south-west of Norak. Cattle fenced in on one side and on the other a small stream coming from the hill side. And I thought: this is it, this is their water source? This rivulet was the largest source of water until my visit to Ellesmere where the water stretched into the horizon and one would need a boat to cross it. This place is very different from Canada, where creeks sprinkle the landscape, and rivers and lakes are wide bodies of water.....travelling around Kenya, I looked out of the lorry windows to see my new world. We crossed a handful of creeks and rivers and most were only about a meter wide. So the Swahili word river became very small. Now that I've been here for a greater period of time, the word has grown a bit wider. I have seen more rivers and lakes, but I still find them very small compared to rivers in Canada.

Figure 5

Naserian

But Kenya doesn't have much water, so it's very important.

*

Liz

I remember when you took me to your cousin Namasari's wedding. She looked beautiful, as her mother dressed her up in elaborate beaded collars, headgear, and beaded leather cape. Within the room where they dressed, gathered many women from the village. Crowded and dark, all the women placed a piece of jewellery on the bride. The weight she bears becomes heavy as the jewellery covers her arms, neck and ankles; like her future being thrust upon her. From one cage to another, she feels her freedom and childhood slowly fade into the shadows of her surroundings. Suddenly thirsty, she is given a bowl of water, and takes a sip. As she brings the bowl down from her lips, the surface reflects and glimmers light from the door; she is able to catch a glimpse of her reflection. 'Who am I?' she asks herself.

(pause)

This is a solemn occasion where friends and family gather in the morning to watch the bride depart her family's *boma*.

Naserian

Unlike western weddings, no vows are exchanged. The day grows long, the sun rises through the sky and the bride departs into the bush with a procession towards the groom, Patita's *boma*. Her path is marked with honey beer to ensure its safety.

Upon arrival at Patita's *boma*, Namasari ceremoniously steps over a cow dung trough filled with honey beer, urine and milk all the

Image projected

Figure 17

while being coaxed at the entrance by her new family with gifts of livestock.

Liz

The journey through the ceremony holds one of life's trials; the loss of childhood and being on one's own replaced with being welcomed into another's circle of protection.

theatre | architecture

In today's technology, knowledge has the ability to be 'everlasting'. Personal data such as our health, schooling, money, tastes, births, and deaths are recorded in binary digits, invisible and impossible to get rid of. No matter what we do, traces of information can still be found even if it was thought they were lost. We swim in oceans of information, languages and representations, surrounded by countless images and sounds – artefacts of what was and what will be. For the present is ever changing – with each second, a moment moves into the past, becoming a memory within our own body's ocean of information. 'We barely breathe above the ever-deepening incoming tide'²⁰.

In this context what we hold in our heads – our memory, our feelings, our sense of history – becomes more valued and understood as something unique to each individual. What is human cannot be digitized. Theatre, like architecture, "is an expression of that humanness: it is an art that can never dissolve its reliance on the scale of the human figure...it cannot be stored or recorded: it is live and it is unrepeatable, ephemeral even at its very greatest, melting away after the event like a snowman in the sun."²¹

²⁰ Eyre, Richard, and Nicholas Wright. "Introduction." Introduction. *Changing Stages: a View of British and American Theatre in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001. 10. Print.

²¹ Eyre, Richard, and Nicholas Wright. "Introduction." Introduction. *Changing Stages: a View of British and American Theatre in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001. 10. Print.

Naserian

It is not as romantic as you portray. The wedding ceremony is the final ceremony of passage into adulthood. There are no festive initiations to look forward to...a bride wears the weight of her sadness, her eyes always looking down, her head bowed in submission. ²²

*

Naserian

I have no childhood in English, so none of the instinctive, bodily memories of long, hot summers spent at the beach, of backyard sprinklers, of ice cream and photograph albums full of family snapshots. However much I get used to the geography and people, however much I like them, there's a level at which they'll always remain strange to me...

There is transience and immediacy to architecture and theatre. Everything that one may experience is in the present tense yet, following that moment, the experience becomes part of the past. One enters as an individual and exits as an audience. Theatre, similar to architecture uses the constants of space, time, light and imagination to create a world for transient inhabitation in human proportions.

Architecture, like theatre, relies on its context and surroundings, real time and real space. However one or many person(s) choose to inhabit the space, it always has the ability to be adapted.

²² Gilbert, Elizabeth L. *Broken Spears: a Maasai Journey*. New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2003. 143-45. Print.

Every 'summer' day as a child was spent doing chores and helping mama with my brothers and sister. On Sundays we would go to church, women on one side, men on the other. In a concrete block building, many would travel for miles for service. Rays of light penetrate the tall, airy structure through the small openings created in the staggering of the module. The light beams onto members of the congregation, beads of sweat begin to drip from their foreheads. We stand, I move to the rear of the church with all the other children to enter in procession with the priest. We begin to sing, sway and clap down the aisle followed by the priest and filter into the pews with our families. Service begins.

(pause)

I began to learn English when I was twelve, I was swamped by a fierce sense of loss. Language seems to have drained out of me, like water through sand, and I only have the memory of it left. I begin to panic, afraid I've lost my childhood world.

(pause)

Naserian

I live in two languages; like two negatives printed into one photograph. One image of the African landscape of my childhood and the other of the English translation of my adult world.

(Liz moves across the room and fingers through some photographs she brought back from home.)

I have grown up in English, it is the language in which I have become an adult, the language in which I have fallen in love and thought grown-up ideas. In Maasai

Figure 268

there are now whole areas of experience that are missing. Words I don't know.

Liz

What kind of words?

Naserian

Words to do with technology and that sort of thing...and in English I've also learned to be stressed and under pressure. Not just the words, but the feelings too.

Liz

How would you say you were stressed in Maasai?

Naserian

You couldn't. They are not referring to a feeling but action.

Liz

What would you say instead?

Naserian

I'm suffering busyness. You see they mean quite different things.

Now when I speak Swahili or Maasai, it's infiltrated by the English in me – just as Maasai is visible just below the surface of my English. The two seep into one another like a water colour painting left out in the rain, each language colouring the other. But now I can swim between them without drowning in the difference.

Liz

*(finding one image of her cottage and
the lake, she hands it over to Naserian)*

What I remember best is the language of the water. Crouched on the banks or wading in the shallow water, possibilities of that wide, blue and bronze bay emerge. As a child I spent hours in the water watching the sunlight dance along its surface. Watching and waiting until I could make sense of the sparkling shapes.

Figure 18

Naserian

For a place you visit for a couple days each year,
you sure talk about it a lot. Why is that?

Liz

*(not looking up from the photographs in
her hands...)*

I think it's because of my fear of losing that part
of me, that place that made me feel so at home.
To remember it as much as possible keeps it
present in my life, a constant reminder of who I
was and the people I shared those days with.

Naserian

Why are you here then and not there?

Liz

I wanted to see something else. For a long time,
from photographs I had seen, I thought of Africa
as a place of mystery and poverty. I wanted to
turn my viewfinder in a different direction; see
more than what met the eye.

You know, I used to believe in the camera. The camera
doesn't lie, and all that. To believe that through the
unflinching eye of the lens we could recapture the
sense of ourselves we seemed to have lost. But the

more photographs I took, the more I realised I was adding to the fiction of it all.

Naserian

Did you have to go to Kenya to discover that?

Liz

I don't know. I went to Kenya because I believed that there I would see myself reflected back in a way that wasn't possible back home – or in Europe.

(pause)

Liz : *soliloquy*

One early Sunday morning, I go into town for the market. A sea of people and colour greet me at the side of the main road. Entering the market is overwhelming. Lines of shanty structures create interior boundary lines layered with rows of street vendors that crowd the walkways with their products laid out on blankets and tarps. Walking through the market, men rush over to guide you to vendors selling products you might like. Children play in the walkways, chasing each other around vendors and marketers. Smells and colours of fabrics and fruits overwhelm the senses. This lively market hides an underlying poverty. Everyone there shows pride and hope in their faces and gestures, I stood there taking in my surroundings. I realise that this moment of looking at the masses is also looking at all the films, television documentaries and newspaper photographs I've ever seen of this small corner of the world where the landscape opens up so fluidly to greet a mass of people and their goods. And I know then that the camera has not helped to see ourselves as we really are, but has papered the surface of the world with images that allow us to separate what we see from

Set goes dark.

Market projection.

Spot on Liz.

Figure 19

Figure 20

what we feel. When we see photographs of rural communities in poverty, we don't see poverty, but the translated image of poverty. And we respond to the image, not the thing itself.

journey | temporality | memory

Narrative is used as a vehicle in this thesis to investigate journey, temporality and memory. A narrative and its content would give an understanding of the level of immersion into a culture, a journey of the recollection of memories of a specific duration of time. "Personal recollection of these stories, distorted through the lens of memory and transformed through time, and not their veracity"²³ creates illusions about the unknown, a world of multiple realities. Realities where signs and images form their own reality that can be accessed by anyone, regardless of language or culture.

Journey, dislocation or travel allow for this to exist. An education, an experience or an exposure to different realities helps define your place within your own reality. A chance to "rethink one's time and place within a culture, a language, an institution, a tradition, a set of histories, is to rethink the purpose, direction and limits of these very categories."²⁴

The level of transition into a new space or culture can be related to the length of a journey and the story one creates. A temporary transition is like a journey of short duration, where one is limited to the exposure of a culture and their social and economic conditions. It is a way to skim the surface, to become acquainted with these conditions, not confront them. A more permanent transition is like a journey of long duration, where one is forced to engage and immerse themselves within a culture or community on a day-to-day basis. The narrative one would create on a permanent journey becomes very personal and intimate as one becomes interactive with the community, learning about individuals as well as a community as a whole; the macro and micro.

²³ Dundjerovic, Aleksander Sasa. *The Theatricality of Robert Lepage*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2007. 10. Print.

²⁴ Chambers, Iain. *Migrancy, culture, identity*. London: Routledge, 1994.33. Print.

The boma held about fifteen *manyattas* while 200 people or so gathered across the compound. Fires lit outside were heating pots filled with cabbage and *ugali* in preparation for the celebration feast.

Liz

Landscape projection

I remember the sun was just peering above the hills in the distance when the celebration of initiation began. The twelve year old girl spent the entire day inside her manyatta with a group of family and friends, who were there to comfort her during this momentous occasion. Matrons offered advice for the initiation procedure; reminding her to hide her physical pain and only show a brave face. Her hair was shaved as a symbol of rebirth. This was all in preparation for the ceremony which took place the next day.

gathering space | landscape

space

a. the boundaries or limits of the function for a specific area

In many cultures, including the western culture, the identification of space and boundaries is necessary in the function of a space. This identification or definition of a space's function stems from a need to understand the function of said space and thus control the outcome of use. It is a 'natural' condition to want to associate a space with a function so one knows how to use it based on the understanding of the function in relationship to an experience or memory of said function. This topic poses the question of flexibility vs. fixed design; are spaces planned with adaptable function or pre-determined?

All spaces have the ability to be adapted for multiple functions. It is how one chooses to use them, based on human interaction with the space, or whether it is in their best interest to trust the 'architect' in the predetermined planning of function.

Naserian

Set goes dark.

The sky was dark when we woke the next morning. You brought me a cup of tea and we sat and looked at the stars, showing me which were the big dipper and Orion's belt. The compound began to stir, it was time. I pulled you up and pushed you into the manyatta.

*Collage projection-
Close up of supporters
moving down to ritual.*

Figure 19

Liz

I encountered a scene that I could never forget. The young girl was leaning back on the dirt floor facing me, her naked legs spread wide. Crouched before her was the circumciser, knife at the ready. Positioned directly behind the circumciser, I stood there motionless...

Spatial condition is defined as the setting of boundaries or limits and the definition of space is necessary to understand one's relationship to their surroundings. Therefore it is only human that upon seeing a new space, one tries to associate it with a function or program relating to a previous memory of a similar space.

The landscape in western culture has become built forms, fully manmade, excavated, twisted, manipulated and barren, all to conform to human wants and perception as to what it should be. Why is it that 'westerners' try to inhabit/manipulate/make use for every inch of land?

In rural African culture, the concept of multi-functional or multi-programmable spaces is taken to an extreme, where the landscape is open to all possibility of function. No single space has a definite program; all space is adaptable for necessity and practicality.

Fifty women were cramped into the small space, the heat was intense. The girl was supported from behind by two women's arms linked under her own. Another two women leaned on her thighs and still another mama lay sideways across her body, comforting her with a soothing hand on her forehead.

Naserian

Two minutes is all it takes, but from this moment on she is forever revered by her family and neighbours as a brave woman, someone to be counted on within the community. We exploded into high pitched cheers and we poured out of the manyatta arms raised in triumph. A great feast in the open sky began and lasted late into the night.

Liz

One has to wonder if this tradition would die out with the older generation or would it become an entirely different process of initiation?²⁵

(pause)

Liz

Do you believe there is something more to the circumcision? Do you know that there is a kind of pleasure you are taking away from yourselves? A pleasure that is natural, something that we were meant to experience.

The built form, however small, has a specific function but also has the ability to be used in any celebration or tradition. This adaptability is only possible through human interaction. A space can only be designed to a point and be staged for a possibility of function. An architect cannot predict how one will completely engage with what is designed.

SET 1.A

Lit by fire.

Figure 21A

Figure 21B

²⁵ Wiszowaty, Robin. *My Maasai Life: from Suburbia to Savannah*. Toronto: Me to We, 2009. 100-101, 103-104. Print.

Naserian

I am a forward thinker. Many elders and men believe that circumcision is still necessary, the only way a girl becomes a woman, a tradition that should still continue. Having been educated, the younger generation know the health risks involved and see things differently. We respect tradition and the way we were raised, however, I don't think this tradition will continue much longer.

I remember a story my grandfather once told me about how the women lost their power....'Long ago women used to rule this land and its men. They were harsh and men began to resent their hard hand. So when all the women were pregnant, the men came together and overthrew them. Before this women owned everything. The animal you saw – the antelope – was their goat. But because the women could not manage them, the goats ran away. They knew women to be weak.'

Men for as long as I can remember have always had a power over us, a dominance, despite the amount of work we do. So I suppose that being circumcised is a way to control us, to take away a source of intimate pleasure.

Liz

Back home, city girls use self-mutilation or sacrifice (piercings or tattoos) as a source of searching for one's self or as a method of remembering a significant moment in their life—defining one's own identity. Your culture exhibits

²⁶ Ngũgĩ, Wa Thiong'o. *The River Between*. London: Heinemann, 1965. 15. Print.

it as part of tradition, a way to show one's
accomplishments – bravery.

Naserian

Then why do you do it?

Liz

We do it for the same reasons, but also just to
feel...something.

*

Naserian and Liz get up and go out to collect more water for the
evening.

SET 2

Landscape projection

Mid-day lighting

Naserian

I remember when there was just the sound of
water, from the stream and then in an instant the
rain came after two months of drought, a
constant stream from the sky. I remember
walking home in it, carrying the *mitungi* on my
back and sinking into the mud. Faith had joined
me that day to fetch water for laundry, we had
tried to rush home to continue our work when
my foot just wouldn't come loose from the mud.
Laughing at this as such a strange sequence of
events, Faith helped me loosen my foot and with
a final tug, she fell backwards. Both of us now
laughing uncontrollably walked home wet and
covered in mud from head to toe. Where I lived
and played was my whole world.

Figure 20

Liz

For me the world was sun and sand and sea and
the smell of the beach and shad flies. I

remember digging and building sand castles in
the sand and having races up and down the
shoreline with my brother Patrick. And my
mother took photos. She never liked to be in the
photos so she would always be behind the
camera capturing life's moments on film.

Long after the moment has passed and been
forgotten, the photograph remains. And you
come across it suddenly. Unexpectedly, you pick
it up and hold it in your hand. Like a shell from a
beach you once visited or a ticket stub from a trip
you once went on. But the problem is the space
beyond the frame...what you don't see.

temporal | reality

Nothing exists in reality as fixed; nothing has the ability to remain exactly as one may initially have encountered it. There are too many external factors that have the power to change things. Even memories and dreams do not remain the same. Memories themselves are fragments, disjointed or abstracted from a past existence. They hold a certain overall memory but details become lost, blurred. Time is the constant, a factor that will always continue to change and allow for the possibility of change within reality. Therefore, if everything is in a constant state of change, memories we share with others have the opportunity to be of the same time, but given how the mind remembers, no one memory will be the same and hold the same meaning.

Photography and architecture are fragments reflecting a moment in "cultural" time; an expression of a culture at a particular moment of its "evolution" or state-of-being. The three phenomena that allow for space to exist dictate the temporal characteristics within a reality – gravity, time, light.

Naserian

When I translate, identities cease to be stable. So I try to think without translation. Sometimes I think in Maasai or Swahili, and sometimes in English. And when I am trying to work out some problem or other, I have to make up my mind before I consider the problem, which language I'm going to think in, because each language offers me different answers.

A few years ago, I was given this notebook for my birthday. It was the first time I'd ever thought about writing for just myself. But for ages it just sat in on my desk, unopened.

Liz

Why?

Naserian

I couldn't decide what language I should write in. Writing in Maasai would seem like being stuck in the past and writing in English would seem like floating in a very shallow present.

*(sitting down under an acacia tree after
filling up their water gourds)*

Liz

What did you decide?

Naserian

I've realised I don't have to decide at all, I can just write in whichever language comes first. Recently I'm writing in English more than Maasai, transforming my Maasai self into someone else.

Liz

*(sitting by the water's edge under an
acacia tree, partially in solitude)*

In Salabwek, I stayed in a camp across the road from the local school. We were rebuilding wood framed tent structures for the volunteers, with

Figure 21

makeshift bucket showers and stalls for washrooms lining the perimeter. Trapped for protection from animals we were caged-in nightly.

One early morning, I decided to go for a hike, along the dirt path, to make my way up into the hills. I pass a sea of corn gently swaying in a warm breeze as the sun began to beat down onto the back of my neck. I perched myself in a clearing at the top of the hill under an acacia tree. The shade brings a pleasant relief to my moment of solitude. I sat there staring off into the distance, mentally projecting myself into the distant and scattered community in the landscape. I saw a large mountain in the distance tucked in behind a series of hill, tracing the curves of the landscape into my sketchbook like that of the lines of the body. Fluidly, my pen moved across the page effortlessly, stopping occasionally to inscribe farms and houses along the earth's surface.

Naserian

In Maasai, we tell stories in different ways. We have no words for the ubiquitous English 'you' and no one word for 'I'. Instead you have to state your relationship to the people you talk to.

*

Gazing out the window, cacti fence-in the *boma*. Straight from the dry dust, lush green vertical lines offer protection from the harsh environment. Repetitious lines of cacti stripe the landscape, framing the earth-scape in the foreground and beyond.

Set goes dark.

SET 1.A

Figure 5

Liz

One of my last days here I spent sitting under an acacia tree, swatting at flies, my notes fanned around me. It was far from an ideal scenario for writing my thesis. I imagined the luxury of working in a quiet, air conditioned library at a comfortable desk, a world of research at my finger tips.²⁷

Naserian

I remember those libraries, being able to concentrate wholly on something without the constant need for completing chores just to get by. Spaces tall and open, housing books like a maze. One could get lost in all the words that have been written. Light pours in through walls of glass where the smell of books, the turning of pages and the clicking of keys from computers are all you could hear.

Figure 24

²⁷ Wiszowaty, Robin. *My Maasai Life: from Suburbia to Savannah*. Toronto: Me to We, 2009. 153. Print.

ACT 3

Naserian

(opens and reads from notebook)

Nkoyet-naiborr. It's dark outside, and I'm about eight. I go down to the river with mama for water for morning tea. It's the wet season and the river is full and flowing fast. High tide has raised the water level still further. Cloudy and dark. The only sound I can hear is the roar of that water rushing by. And I am afraid. The water is no longer a sunny place where we gather and chat with our neighbours, it has become a place where children are swept out and do not return and for that brief moment I am over whelmed.

(Naserian closes her notebook)

(pause and reflect)

I no longer know who I am.

I have lived in Nairobi for a little more than a year while completing my degree in teacher's education. The first time I went there I was overwhelmed by the noise, the skyscrapers, and the traffic jams. No one in my family and few of my neighbours had ever made the journey. I had only read about and seen pictures of these things; I was in a state of shock, turning around every ten steps to take in a slivered view of the city and its verticality. My neck hurt after having to extend it backwards in the hopes of looking at the details at the tops of the buildings. A relative was waiting for me at a *matatu* stage downtown. I thought perhaps I would see about four cars and buildings as tall as an acacia tree. My head was spinning with all the chaos and calamity of the city. We crossed the street and I saw water spouting from the earth, what I later learned was a fountain. I ran over to it not knowing why no

Figure 11

Set goes dark.

City Projection.

Figure 22

one else was drinking from it and was told it was only for decoration, the water wasn't clean. My aunt thought it best we go home, so I could slowly become aquatinted with the city. We hopped onto another *matatu* and arrived in a 'suburb' in the Westlands.²⁸

This new world was exciting but it left me anxious, not knowing where I really belonged. Like a fish out of water I felt like I was drowning in this bustling metropolis.

Liz

In photos of my mother and father when they were children, everyone dressed in their Sunday best; posing formally for the camera. Everyone had their place.

Naserian

Na kamera, na mpiga picha inatafsiri duniani.
With the camera, the photographer translates the world.

Liz

I stand in front of the camera clutching my favourite dress – a white linen dress with bright and pale pink flowers on it – and dad says: 'relax Liz. Act natural. Just be yourself.' And I panic. Who is myself? Suddenly, I don't know myself, I don't know who I am for the camera. And I am terrified that when the photo is printed I'll be exposed. That it will be clear to everyone that I am not Liz O'Reilly, twelve years old from Waterloo, but an imposter. Someone else slipped in between the click of the shutter and that moment.

²⁸ Wiszowaty, Robin. *My Maasai Life: from Suburbia to Savannah*. Toronto: Me to We, 2009. 75-79. Print.

Naserian

Inatafsiri ya kamera ya mpiga picha kwenye sanamu ya mwenyewe. Milele saba.

The camera translates the photographer into an image of herself. Forever twelve.

Liz

As a child I was always the one in the backyard pressed up against the window of the inside world. Breath misting the glass. Straining to see beyond the frame. I see the world in close up until photography teaches me to pursue the big picture. The one worth a thousand words, so I left behind my childhood and went to Europe and Africa in search of that big story, but I couldn't find it. I floundered around, sinking amongst preconceptions and over-exposed images...until I lost sight of myself altogether. Over the horizon. So I had no choice but to re-focus on what was around me.

We say a picture is worth a thousand words, but we never say one word is worth a thousand pictures do we?

The world grows dark inside and beyond the walls of our African dream. The fire seems to light the space just enough so we can see each other's faces. Her frame glows as she moves about the room to put on another pot of tea and make a little supper.

Set goes dark.

SET 1.A

*Evening lighting –
Landscape grows dark.*

Figure 26

Liz

Why did you choose to come back and teach in Nkoyet-naiborr, when you know what is out there in the world to explore?

Naserian

I wanted to share my knowledge with my community. They gave me so much; this was how I wanted to show my gratitude. I wanted to show them there is a world beyond the hills, to read about, to see, to explore. I have been fortunate enough to have seen some of it, now it is their time.

Figure 27

Liz

Don't you find it hard to come back to this more primitive way of living?

Naserian

(gazing into the fire)

Sometimes. I know what is out there and I can always go back to it, but there is something about being here, the land, the clear sky, my family. Here, it is not about you, it is about everyone else. Here you don't get caught up in all the material possessions.....

(pause and looks up to face Liz)

Do you?

Liz

There is something here that draws me in and can keep me. I think it is the simplicity of life here. Not that there are not challenges, and great ones at that. But like the landscape, life keeps flowing – some parts may be rocky and steep, where others are smooth and stretch beyond the sun. It is a life of acceptance and perseverance and hope.

*

Naserian

Language takes off like a herd of gazelle across the plains. Memories and conversations collide unexpectedly and words swarm like ... like flies. I realise that sometimes I dream in English. There are enough English words inside me to speak to me through sleep – through my body. And this is a real breakthrough; my most important translation yet.

I wanted to translate my thoughts, running all over the place, wild like rain. But I couldn't find a way to translate these thoughts, so I chose the nearest thing I could find...the earth.

I begin to sense shapes under the map. Another different pattern of borders and dreams.

Liz

As I stand and watch the lake...

Naserian

That last night as I look at the plains...

Liz

It seems to me that the history of the whole world is the history of the land under our feet.

Slowly, the lake begins to return to me the sense of
myself; whispering softly in a language only I can hear.

Naserian

Maybe when I was eight, I would go up into the
hills and just sit, and listen...listen to the wind. I
dreamt whole worlds on that hill.

Liz : *to the audience*

The translator improvises a bridge over unknowns, over
ambiguities and equivalences.

Liz

When I was seven, alone I would sit in the
shallows of the lake, the water as warm as a bath.
Becoming lost in the sun lit surface and
reflections of the sky; I would listen to the wind
as it coolly brushed my face. I dreamt whole
worlds within the lake that summer.

Naserian

No camera was there to record what happened.

Liz

And no translator was there to interpret the sequence of
events for us.

Naserian

If a camera had been there, do you think we'd know
what happened?

Liz

All the cameras in the world can't change the fact that
we stepped out of the frame and the picture changed.

Naserian

Maybe in looking for the story, we're looking in the
wrong place?

Set goes dark.

ACT 4

A new day. The sun rises. Liz and Naserian awake from a short sleep having talked late into the night. They complete the morning water run before taking the day to explore the hills...a place they share for their daydreaming. A mist hangs in the air, the grey sky threatens rain. Mirroring the landscape, the clouds of grey hover close to the horizon. Rays of light refract and break through the dense undulating blanket.

Landscape projection.

Liz/Naserian

We go to the hills...

Liz

Picking my way around pebbles and the
unfamiliar shapes.

Naserian

I look at the rolling hills, and think about what I'm seeing
in both languages. Words from one language washed
over by the other.

Liz

As we walk back along the path, I see the traces of our
footprints in the dirt washed almost smooth by the wind.
The ridges and troughs of our footprints fill with dust,
glinting in the sunlight like the shadow of a journey.

SET 3

Early morning lighting.

Figure 7

Naserian

And that day in the hills...

Liz

There's just me.

Naserian

And me...

Liz

And the infinite horizon.

Naserian

And endless possibility.

Set goes dark.

END.

| methodology |

collage

The collages created in conjunction with the dialogue are layered, fragmented images combined in a way that create a mysterious almost dream-like setting reminiscent of memories. These memory collages play with the viewer's perception and imagination, urging them to dwell within the multiple layers of images embedded within the shadows, and their exaggerated depths. Like one may dream only in grey, these memory collages appear de-saturated, allowing the viewer to focus on the story and the details rather than be distracted by the embellishment of colour.

Figure 17

photography

The use of photography in conjunction with the architecture was an investigation into the understanding and recording of spatial qualities and the architectural experience of existing spaces with similar programs, to create a narrative for this thesis' architecture. The Holga camera was the vehicle chosen in this process for its simplistic and manual nature. These characteristics were fundamental to create sequenced images that bleed into one another, abstracting the space into a dialogue between the exposures. Like a memory of a sequential architectural experience, one tends to remember fragments of the whole, thus abstracting one's reality. The Holga photography served as a method for capturing the spatial and temporal abstraction.

Figure 28

lighting and material

The use of natural materials with ephemeral qualities, (i.e. leaves, branches), were used to generate a material, lighting, and spatial exploration for the dialogue, and architecture. The natural phenomenon of light, time and gravity were emphasised while the analogous relationship between skin and structure were explored in the modelling of space, surface and structure.

Figure 29
From top left to bottom right:
texture and shadows of feathers 1, texture and shadows of feathers 2, leaf model 1, leaf model 2

| architecture |

The architecture investigates the manipulation of the horizon by combining the two realities or cultures through the methods of the plan and section.

Beyond the plan, a structure of a space has the ability to exist differently than it is originally perceived. The space below and above the 'cut' of a plan can be manipulated.

The architecture questions what would happen if there were an artificial landscape. For instance, is it a below grade dwelling or inhabitation? What would it be used for? Is it realistic? Does that matter?

Is it just to exhibit the idea that a plan can be manipulated or abstracted to exist in multiple locations or cultures?

The dialogue has played an important role in this exploration of cultures and the development of the architectural project. Through the direction of the dialogue a stage set was designed; a devise that allowed for the visualization of the text in a way that was brought down into its simplest visual form. The next stage was to create two spaces; both reflecting the other's culture – Naserian's African Home and a Laundromat | café | spa.

stage set design

Figure 2

Set designs not only are an extraction of the designer's imagination of texted space, they are the stage in which artists and actors can realize the imagination of space and inhabit it in character. The space is not only 'real' to the actors, it becomes 'real' to the audience, as the audience becomes inspired to use their imagination. Drawn from the dialogue, the set design is simple in form. This allows for it to be reassembled creating a multitude of different scenes and atmospheres for the characters to inhabit. Along with lighting and character placement, the sets can exhibit the change of day and how one might inhabit both the interior and exterior spaces.

The set has five different assemblages, seen in **Figure 30**, 'on the hill', 'gathering water', 'washing', 'home A' and 'home B'. With the use of projections, the location and horizon may change to help with the imagining of a different location of a similar space.

Figure 30
From top left to bottom right:
gathering water 1, gathering water 2, on the hill, washing, home A, home B

The basic frame of the interior structure, (i.e. walls), also functions as an exterior landscaping structure, (i.e. trees). The interior structure of 'home A' and 'home B' are similar but exhibit different uses of some of the furniture, for example, the fire pit becomes a stove with a countertop. This is an example of how similar spaces can be and that it is how one inhabits the space that differs.

The structure of the 'home' represents the two women, unique yet obviously similar. They are able to stand together or be separate, as well as transform into another strong structure, providing shelter and comfort. When separated, the wall structure transforms into trees and the interior furniture becomes a change in the landscape's topography. The trees can be rearranged on the stage to give a feeling of a different location or a changing topography.

Lighting is a critical part of stage design. It can create an atmosphere, change the time of day, highlight character placement, and create textures on surfaces for effects. Shadow in theatre is just as important as its counterpart; creating depth and mystery within the set helps to enhance the illusion of space and time in which the actors are able to interact and the audience to imagine.

Left: Figure 31
Right: Figure 11

african house

Figure 27B

Abstracted from the dialogue and the set design, the African house is modelled after the western home but with the functionality related to its inhabitant and its geographic location. The plan reflects a small and large open space where a multitude of activities can occur. The walls of tilt-in-place concrete are patterned with fabric to create a woven texture in the interior.

The openings in the walls allow for air flow giving relief to the day's dry heat, as well as a diffused light to enter the building throughout the day on the south and west sides. The openings in the exterior walls are worked with iron in a simple woven grid pattern and on the interior a tighter woven thatch creates an operable interior shutter. The light moving throughout the day, filters through the thatch of the window casting dancing speckles of light onto the trombe wall within.

The breeze lightly flows into the space through the open window, rustling the pages of Naserian's book that lies open on the fold-down table. The breeze fills the room where Naserian is hovering close to the fire, boiling water and cooling her brow. Folding a blanket, Naserian looks up at the ceiling and observes the similarities between the fabric and the roof structure.

Figure 32

Figure 33

The roof in an asymmetrical butterfly form is elevated to provide for upper level airflow and clad in corrugated steel. The angles of the roof allow for rain water collection into the central trombe wall where it drains into a water well located on the east wall.

The sound of the rain of an early morning shower clangs against the metal roof and flows down into the wall. Naserian wakes from the sound and the coolness against her skin; the sun has yet to rise. The fire had gone out while she was sleeping. Rising from her bed, she moves over to the fire place, assembling branches to start a new fire; it instantly begins to warm her. Pouring water into a pot, she begins to make some tea. Pulling a book off the shelf, she sits by the fire basking in its radiating heat, listening to the music of the rain, relaxing before she starts her day.

Figure 27A

Figure 34

The trombe wall acts as a heat distributor. It absorbs heat from the environment during the day and distributes it, through radiation, during the evening. This is also where the fireplace is located for cooking and heat production; a central location where the two elements interact.

The large space is Naserian's 'living' space; from cooking to entertaining, relaxing, and resting. It is a space that is adaptable and functional for all things. Though measuring only 2.5 square meters, this space is hers. Along the perimeter, shelving holds a place for her books, pictures, knickknacks, cookware, and food. The trombe wall next to the fireplace has a fold-down prep surface for cooking. Along the north wall, under the bookshelves, a bed folds down for Naserian to rest. When secured in an upright position, the removal of the bed allows for more movement in this humble abode, where three chairs and a small bench are assembled for afternoon tea.

Naserian begins to wash her clothing indoors in the small space off the entrance. She has opened the shutters for the breeze to cool her off as she completes this chore at mid-day when the sun is high. She takes the clothes outside to dry and lays them next to the small garden along the west wall on the cactai fence surrounding the property.

Figure 35

laundromat | café | spa

Figure 23

In the western counterpart, this thesis tries to bring a fresh look and compare daily rituals from both African and western societies. The chosen site is non-specific, in-flux, adhering only to the need of a corner lot and sharing of the southern wall. The programs chosen have become the western counterpart of daily rituals from Africa, i.e. tea | coffee, laundry, place of socializing | gathering, place of relaxation of mind and spirit—church | spa. These programs are combined to engage the ‘shadows’ of private and public spaces, the shift of the horizon, the relationship to water and the theatricality of the threshold(s).

Figure 24

The main floor or street level brings the washing of clothing into a more public space where a café is also integrated. This architecture, like theatre, relies on the users to give actions to the space. The water-wall represents the backdrop for the building and the stage sets contain the main program elements. The users of the spaces become the actors, using the sets and props (i.e. chairs, tables, laundry machines), creating a world of transient inhabitation – a dialogue with the body and the architecture reacting to the constants of space, time and light.

Figure 25

Each floor thus contains multiple dialogues within the whole of the building. One may focus on the individual or the whole. The dialogues of the individuals have the opportunity to cross or interact with one or multiple dialogues.

The space is organized but how one chooses to meander through the space, around tables and customers, creates distinctive narratives. The primary threshold between floors as well as their programs is a stairwell leading up to a spa or down to a library space and aquarium set below grade.

Particular attention was paid to the placement of openings meant to reveal where one's horizon may have been displaced as well as how to enhance the framing of water elements found throughout the building. The stair threshold also acts as a divider between the services and the café, where the water closets and storage facilities become a stackable entity within the building. The stairwell itself has a water/light wall that faces the cafe and extends vertically through the entire building section. The stairs are open - no risers, creating a light and breezy circulation space, while a skylight above it allows light to travel from the roof to the basement – a light that becomes fragmented through the stair, flickering as people walk above – as if one was under water, watching the light filter through from above.

Figure 26
From left to right
library|aquarium, laundromat|café, spa
plans 1:100

The basement is an extension of the café-laundromat, accessible from the back of the building by stairs that follow the water element into the depths of the building. Walking down with a coffee in hand and while waiting for laundry to be finished, one sees, through the water wall, a small fish stare at them as they descend. One soon finds the water is being filtered into a large tank where small aquatic specimens are free to leisurely move about. Lining the walls are book shelves, full of magazines and larger, more comfortable seating fills the open room. This space acts as a less intimidating social space where one can sit, read and have more intimate conversations or watch the performance within the aquarium.

Figure 40

Figure 27

The café-bar backs onto the stair/water wall, which serves as a backdrop for the space. The wall, like a screen, constantly changes – as water is pulled down into the building's depths and human movement is cast onto its surface – a continual play of form and shadow. The coffee tables and chairs are part of the stage, a prop that allows for patrons to sit, converse, read etc. It is also a place where those who are doing their laundry can relax and wait until their chore is complete. A wall of front loading washing machines and dryers runs opposite to the services-wall. A countertop above the washers/dryers offers a work space or folding table. One can be folding their delicates next to a woman drinking a coffee and reading the newspaper before heading to work, watching water stream down the window in front of them – wondering where it could be coming from.

Left: Figure 42
Middle: Figure 43
Right: Figure 44

The spa is located on the upper floor, an elevated place of relaxation for the mind and body and an escape from the busy action of the cafe|laundromat. As one reaches the top of the stair, a window exhibits the change of horizon. Waiting for a spa appointment, one may notice a water feature in the floor that runs from the water wall through the therapy rooms. The movement of water creates a therapeutic and relaxing ambiance. The fountain then flows out of the building down the windows behind the laundry machines. The therapy rooms are located directly above the laundry machines and across a garden terrace that looks out onto the hustle and bustle of the concrete streets below. Windows are strategically placed within the therapy rooms for the patients to look up to the sky or out onto the street while having their treatments.

Figure 45

Figure 45

Within the realm of memory, architecture, and this thesis, nothing is absolute. From text to image to three dimensional representation everything is in a constant state of change, allowing through the senses, for multiple perceptions/readings to exist. When combined, one has a homogenized understanding of space and its relationship to both the landscape and body and the architecture and body.

The relationships between architecture, theatre, narrative and representation are demonstrated through the architectural experience in this thesis. The dialogue between the two women provides a narrative and history and a means to research, observe, create and contrast their architectural experience. Through the personalization of the dialogue, a clearer understanding of space and a more direct relationship between the characters and their environments was achieved. The development of the dialogue, an adaptation and reconstruction, was a textual construction of architectural experience based from fragmented memory – a consistent limit to this thesis – yet it provided the most potential to the representation of architectural space due to its fragmentation and potential reconstruction.

The main limit presented in this thesis is that what is recorded is only the author's perception of an architectural experience fragmented through time and memory. Thus, this thesis is not an absolute understanding of an architectural experience, it is just a possible reconstitution of fragmented experiences. The methodology presented in this thesis has the potential to continue an investigation of natural versus constructed 'flux' within the architectural experience, while creating theatricality within the spatial sequence. The key to the sequence's structure is offered by the narrative, which sought to reveal the relationship between the body, the landscape and the architecture. In architecture as in theatre, the story begins with the actor in their setting the figure and their ground, before words are spoken.

appendix A

stage set design sketch

on the hill...

gathering
water...

washing...

home...

stage set

Figure 2

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 7

Figure 9

Figure 11

Figure 22

Figure 23

Figure 26

Figure 30

collages

Figure 10

Figure 12

Figure 25

Figure 27

Figure 13

Figure 17

Figure 20

Figure 21

photography

Figure 14

Figure 28

Figure 24

Figure 30

Figure 29

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