
Dissimulated landscapes: postcolonial method and the politics of space in southern Sri Lanka

Tariq Jazeel

Department of Geography, University of Sheffield, Winter Street, Sheffield S10 2TN, England; e-mail: t.jazeel@shef.ac.uk

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Abstract. This paper puts forward a broadly postcolonial method for engaging with landscapes in South Asia, in this case southern Sri Lanka. It argues that, as valuable as the familiar theoretical and conceptual languages of Euro-American landscape geography are, they also risk concealing a range of different aesthetics, social formations, and experiences that unfold in the non-Euro-American landscape. They risk dissimulating the politics of places as they are produced and lived contextually. In the paper I work this argument through a critical engagement of the landscape architecture of Sri Lanka's most famous tropical-modernist architect, Geoffrey Bawa; I specifically focus on his favorite, intensely choreographed, view at the estate *Lunuganga* on Sri Lanka's south coast. As I show, while tools from the new cultural geography and beyond can help us to read this view as a classically modernist and apolitical landscape, a work of 'art for art's sake', it is only a radically contextual familiarization with Sri Lankan society, politics, and history that can also reveal the landscape's more subtle instantiation of a spatializing Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony. Indeed, I show how some of the familiar (Eurocentric) concept-metaphors that we might intuitively bring to a reading of this landscape—namely 'nature', 'religion', and 'subjectivity'—hold at arm's length particular kinds of landscape politics that emerge from differently textualized human relationships with the environment. The paper charts a method responsive to *this particular* landscape, and by doing so insists on the difficult task of retaining the singularity of landscapes positioned beyond the Euro-American staging grounds of the conceptual debates current within contemporary cultural geography.

Keywords: landscape, architecture, Sri Lanka, Geoffrey Bawa, postcolonial, Buddhism

In a quiet spot on the banks of Lake Deduwa on Sri Lanka's southwest coast, lies the sprawling estate of *Lunuganga*, the home and garden of the late Geoffrey Bawa, Sri Lanka's most famous 'tropical-modern' architect. Of the landscapes, buildings, and pavilions that he built over his years there, one view from the main house south across Cinnamon Hill stood out as the architect's favourite. Standing at the house, looking across the thick lawn and up the gentle hill slope, one's view is framed by trees on either side and in the middle distance, on the crest of Cinnamon Hill, a lone moonamal tree looms over a large pot. The tree points to the gleaming white dome of the Katukuliya temple, a Buddhist dagoba nestled in the verdant vegetation of a hill separated from the estate by a thin sliver of lake. Each day, the temple is clearly visible with the naked eye from the estate (see figure 1). Of this landscaped vista, Bawa once remarked:

"Over the years moving through the garden as it grew, one saw the potential of various areas which had inherently different atmospheres. For instance, the long view to the south ended with the temple, but in the middle distance was a ridge with a splendid ancient moonamal tree and when I placed a large Chinese jar under it, the hand of man was established in this middle distance" (Bawa et al, 1990, page 13).



Figure 1. Photograph taken from the middle ground of Geoffrey Bawa’s favourite view over Cinnamon Hill, by the large Chinese jar under the moonamal tree; the white dome of the Katukuliya temple is visible on the horizon (source: author’s photograph).

This paper offers a reading of the politics of this kind of tropical–modern landscape design in southern Sri Lanka; a style made most famous by the work of architects like Geoffrey Bawa, Minette de Silva, and Ulrik Plesner through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Specifically though, this paper is an exploration of the ‘methodophilosophical’ challenge that an effective reading of the politics of this kind of landscape entails. Following Dipesh Chakrabarty’s (2002, page 69) reflections on modernity’s manifold *habitations*, the challenge designated here as ‘methodophilosophical’ works toward critical readings sensitized to the idiom of another—that is to say, a non-Euro-American—landscape context. Part of the challenge in this paper then is the translation of a landscape context that is very different from those through which cultural geography’s rich expertise has been developed.

Cultural geography has been a significant staging ground for conversations around the importance of landscape for excavating modes of power, presence, and the political. Recent decades have witnessed a retreat from purely materialist approaches conceiving landscape simply as ‘areal classification’ (after Carl Sauer), toward approaches more sensitized to landscape’s textual production. Borrowing from art history and literary theory in particular, early poststructural approaches to landscape geography (see Barnes and Duncan 1992; Cosgrove 1984; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Daniels 1994) productively regarded the meanings of any given landscape as structured discursively through dynamic representational processes. Landscapes thought this way, textually that is, are always becoming, and in turn are both products and signifiers of power relations and exclusions. The emphasis on landscape’s textuality also led to an introspection regarding the term itself, especially its cultural demarcation as a concept-metaphor tied to the visual. Landscape has thereby been reconceptualised as not simply area, but instead, as Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels famously put it, “a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings” (1988, page 1).

Landscape geography's representational turn, however, has since been critically engaged because of the distancing implied through such a pervasive focus on the visual (see Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000; Wylie 2007, chapter 5).⁽¹⁾ The troubling couplet sight/site captures well the concern that foregrounding the visibility of *landscape* masks more mundane human immersions in spaces that, instead of being conceived textually, are better understood through the affective dimensions of landscape experience. These interventions have asked why landscape has to circulate around the purely visual, and/or textual? Drawing upon a confluence of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology and Deleuzian rhizomatic thought, such landscape geography has turned to a postphenomenological approach where bodies and landscapes are thought to be coemergent (Wylie, 2005; Wylie and Rose, 2006). The primary concern has been to recuperate an embodied landscape experience, and landscape *as* embodied experience, in which a distinctly 'nonrepresentational' confluence of emergent subject and materiality is centrally, and conceptually, placed, though various interventions have also helpfully charted paths between the poles of representation and nonrepresentation (see Anderson, 2006; Lorimer, 2005; McCormack, 2003). One of the effects of this turn has been a useful return to landscape's undeniable materiality.

Readers of this journal will be well aware of these debates, and my aim is not to rehearse them. In setting them out, however, I want to suggest that the trajectory of landscape research within anglophone cultural geography has framed a tension for those interested in the confluences of landscapes and politics situated far from the Euro-American wellsprings of these conversations. My aim here is to not to jettison either the textuality of landscape or its affective capacities (see Tolia-Kelly, 2006). Indeed, my aim is to sidestep this kind of theoretical choice in the service of another aim, which is to respond to the contextuality of Lunuganga itself. To elaborate, my aim is to chart a cultural geography of landscape that is intellectually responsive to the politico-cultural context of this particular South Asian space which, I argue, is best understood on the terms through which it is lived. My contention is that to have to frame Lunuganga within the terms of the familiar debates sketched above—and, as I stress below, within three concepts taken for granted within the Euro-American academy that at first seem appropriate lenses of analysis: 'religion', 'nature', and 'subjectivity'—is to risk the landscape's dissimulation. That is to say, it is to conceal key parts of its actuality, and therefore to actively elide the politics of the place itself. The dissimulated landscapes of my title, therefore, are those whose contextual realities and spatial politics are held at arm's length precisely by the theoretical models and conceptual languages we use within the Euro-American academy.

Charting a method responsive to this particular landscape is a challenge that insists on the difficult task of retaining the singularity of landscapes positioned beyond the Euro-American staging grounds of the conceptual debates current within contemporary cultural geography. What follows then is broadly methodological and broadly postcolonial inasmuch I aim to think beyond the Eurocentrism of extant landscape parameters within contemporary cultural geography, and in doing so to make visible ontologically different bodies, landscapes, and political formations written in unfamiliar scripts and thereby infused from the outset with a singularity elusive for Euro-American landscape paradigms. In this sense, I engage a challenge that a raft of other critical spatial scholarship on South Asia has by necessity had to confront: that of using Euro-American theoretical tools through South Asian spatial contexts; see, for example, James Duncan's (1990) early poststructural landscape interpretation of Kandy in colonial Ceylon, Nihal Perera's (2009) use of Homi Bhabha's 'interstitiality' to evoke

⁽¹⁾ These interventions can also be seen in the context of a broader critique of what some have regarded as a dematerialization that followed in the wake of the new cultural geography's attempts to regard landscape, like culture, as a text or as representation. Such critiques emerged variously from Marxist, feminist, and materialist concerns about construing the fabric of space in artistic and textual hues.

northern Sri Lanka's recent spatial hybridities, Colin McFarlane's (2009) use of assemblage theory to understand the social movements of Mumbai slum dwellers, and Gyan Prakash's (2011) mobilization of 'cosmopolitanism' to evoke that same city's veritable polyphony. Common across this diverse work is the methodophilosophical challenge simply of working broadly Euro-American theoretical tools beyond their familiar staging grounds.

Though in this paper I aim to work beyond the Eurocentrism of debates within contemporary landscape geography, in doing so I neither propose any kind of anti-intellectual rejection of theory, nor its simple bifurcation into its Euro-American and "Southern" (Connell, 2007) variants. Instead, my argument is that if we are not attentive to the ways that theory must translate, mutate, and yield as it travels (Said, 1983), and if in the specific context of landscape geography we are to blithely hedge bets on *either* representational *or* nonrepresentational approaches for engaging Lunuganga, then we risk silencing the characteristics and politics of this particular South Asian landscape; we risk producing a dissimulated landscape through our Euro-American analytical gaze. To this extent, the paper aligns with recent attempts to engage field spaces in the Global South both responsibly and contextually (see Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010; Noxolo et al, 2012), by drawing attention to the effects of theory culture's structural Eurocentrisms (see Jazeel, 2009; Slater, 1992; Sparke, 2005). What I refer to as the "methodophilosophical" challenge (Chakrabarty 2002, page 69) means to assert the difficulty for the endemically Eurocentric social sciences of a slow, uncertain immersion into the very ordinary dimensions of landscapes like the one sketched above. An immersion that is nevertheless necessary to pose a critique of how the politics of identity works spatially in this context. To put this differently, the challenge this article confronts is that of teasing out the spatial politics of Sri Lanka's own landscapes on their own terms, in ways not beholden to the dissimulating Eurocentric theoretical normativities built into the late-modern critical landscape geographer's tool kit. In order to proceed, however, some contextualization is necessary.

Between 1983 and 2009 Sri Lanka played host to a bloody and divisive civil war fought between a Sinhala-Buddhist government and Tamil separatists, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The country's roughly twenty million inhabitants comprise three racialized groups. The Sinhalese constitute the vast majority, around 74%, most of whom are Buddhist. The largest minority population are Tamil, who are mostly Hindu and comprise around 15.4%, and around 7% of Sri Lanka's population are Muslims. Since the early 1950s Sri Lanka's politics has been characterized by Sinhalese majoritarian rule and the former colony's gradual conversion to a nonsecular Buddhist state, such that in 1972 Buddhism was written into the constitution.⁽²⁾ Various authors have shown how in southern and central Sri Lanka particularly, forms of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism have pervaded society, from education and national language policy in the 1950s, through postindependent emparkment and archaeological practice, to literary instantiations of the anticolonial Sinhala-Buddhist national (for examples, see Ismail 2005; Kemper 1991; Spencer 1990).

In response to the Sinhalization of everyday life, various Tamil nationalist groups have protested their marginalization, and from 1983 to 2009 the Sri Lankan government were engaged in a bitter war with the LTTE who demanded nothing less than a separate Tamil homeland, Eelam. In the wake of this polarized conflict, Muslim groups particularly on the east coast have been caught in a political crossfire of sorts that also galvanized Muslim communitarianism. Though the government's crushing military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009 signaled the end of the war, a state-endorsed Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony has continued to minoritize non-Sinhala and non-Buddhist otherness within the national polity (see Weiss, 2011). In fact, the triumphalist flag-waving that crept across central and southern Sri Lanka

⁽²⁾At which time Ceylon became 'Sri Lanka'.

in the war's aftermath was symptomatic of the continuing elisions between Sinhala–Buddhist nationalism and the Sri Lankan nation-state. In the context of this conflict, militarized manifestations of Sinhala–Buddhist and Tamil nationalism have been both common and easily identifiable (de Mel, 2007).

In contrast, the kind of ethnonationalism I evoke in this paper is that which does not announce itself so readily. Specifically, the paper makes visible a strain of Sinhala–Buddhist nationalism that passes for the ordinary and, as such, is rarely recognized *as* 'nationalism' per se. Geoffrey Bawa was neither ethnically Sinhala, nor religiously Buddhist. And as I stress below, Bawa's landscape architecture has always masqueraded as a distinctly apolitical form of cultural production, as 'art for art's sake'. Nevertheless, in the Sri Lankan context his work comprises a taken-for-granted modernism that, I argue, is politically powerful precisely because of its spatial instantiation of Sinhala–Buddhist hegemony. Whilst masquerading as 'art for art's sake', Lunuganga's landscape aesthetics instantiate a Sinhala–Buddhist sovereignty whose very hegemony resides in its liberal 'tolerance' of Tamil (Hindu or Christian) or Muslim otherness as it marks and territorializes its own ordinary and aesthetically sovereign geographies. It is central to my argument, however, that this particular 'ordinary' and its hegemonic politics are not easily accessible through familiar social science and humanities concept-metaphors that landscape geography might take unthinkingly to Lunuganga.

As such, besides working between the theoretical registers of text and affect, this paper also provincializes three concept-metaphors that intuitively seem to speak to the politics of identity formation in this spatial context: 'nature', 'religion', and 'subjectivity'. As I argue, projecting these onto Lunuganga as part of a taken-as-given theoretical vocabulary for understanding the landscape is to make implicit comparisons between Lunuganga and the Euro-American landscape. This is not to say that at Lunuganga there is no 'nature', that 'religion' is insignificant, or even that 'subjectivities' do not emerge with landscape experience. Rather, it is to suggest that these words also hold at arm's length particular kinds of landscape politics that emerge from *differently* textualized human relationships with the environment. Thinking through these concept-metaphors precludes an engagement with other worldings, other ontologies, and their politics. Evoking Lunuganga's politics effectively therefore requires hard work to develop literacies able to make Sri Lanka's spatial and political modernities visible on their own terms. In other words, reading the South Asian landscape through familiar concepts and landscape theory only is to engage in a form of "methodological projection", where "data from the periphery are framed by concepts, debates and research strategies from the metropole" (Connell 2007, page 64). The epistemological violence of this kind of methodological projection is that it ventriloquizes the South Asian landscape, enlivening it through particular Euro-American theoretical tongues, in the process occluding a range of other things at work in Lunuganga far more ordinary in the Sri Lankan context, and at the same time more troubling in terms of their spatial politics. Indeed, it is from these more ordinary and contextual landscape geographies positioned beyond the necessity to choose between text and affect, and beyond the conceptual register of the concepts 'nature', 'religion', and 'subjectivity', that a hegemonic ethnonational politics of sorts can be teased from Lunuganga.

Methodophilosophically, this paper departs from the conceptual roadmaps provided by subaltern studies, particularly the injunction to read differently, *in translation*, in order to bring into representation subaltern aesthetics that universalizing concept-metaphors are ill equipped to interrogate effectively. Indeed, translation is an apt metaphor for the work of reading Lunuganga effectively and therefore bringing its landscape politics into representation, for as Gayatri Spivak (1993; 1995) has argued, translation is the most intimate act of reading

wherein the reader must work hard to understand the idioms of a text (or a landscape) that are not available straightforwardly to the anglophone disciplinary social sciences or humanities.⁽³⁾

Reading and rereading Bawa and Lunuganga

I return then to Lunuganga. It is easy and no less productive to read the bourgeois and secular modern aesthetics and power relations that frame Bawa's view over his estate. The garden is a cultivated landscape, both a spectacle and a series of scenographic images. It was a retreat and private plaything for a wealthy colonialized gentleman.⁽⁴⁾ As one of Bawa's commentators notes, Lunuganga is pervaded by landscape qualities distinctly Palladian, as well as resolutely internationally modern architectural references (Robson 2002, pages 238–260). The *landscape* described bears all the hallmarks of the power relations of which the new cultural geography has made us well aware. The vista itself implies a classically modernist separation of active viewing subject from a passive field of objects, gazed upon, toiled over, and possessed, as Western gardens are through the logic of capital and proprietorship. The landscape's smoothness—its casual lines of sight—conceals the significant choreography that has gone into composing this work of art. For example, between the thick lawn in the foreground and the gentle slope up Cinnamon Hill, Bawa took great care to sink an access road leading through the estate so that it would be invisible to the subject taking in this sweep from the main house, just like an 18th-century ha-ha (see figure 2). With Bawa's own reference to "...the hand of man" (in Bawa et al, 1990, page 13), the landscape's gendered choreography is also evident. In short, this space and its enjoyment *as landscape* signals its inalienable connection with European and colonial modernism, as well as with familiar constellations of bourgeois privilege.

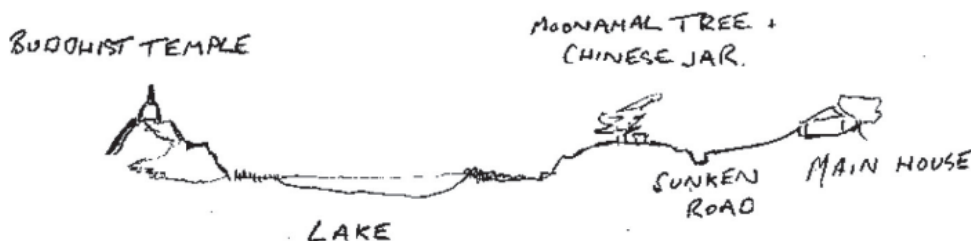


Figure 2. Author's sketch of transect (right to left) of view of over Cinnamon Hill, Lunuganga (adapted from Bawa et al, 1990, page 13).

Lunuganga's modernist landscape qualities are not surprising. Bawa's work and this tropical modern movement more generally must be situated within the global circuits of international modernism and landscape design, specifically their tropical variants (Robson 2002, page 238). Bawa qualified as an architect from London's Architectural Association (AA) in 1957, and only thereafter did he return to Sri Lanka to practice professionally. Architecturally, the clean lines and sharp edges of many of his early buildings (the Wijewardene house in Colombo, built between 1959 and 1964 and Bishop's College, Colombo, built between 1960 and 1963, for example), clearly betray his European training and a range of Western influences, including art nouveau, international modernism, and brutalism in particular. Over the years, his work's visible proximity to international modernism was gradually complemented by increasing references to the picturesque (Pieris 2011, pages 332–333). His immersion in such European architectural and landscape

⁽³⁾ 'Reading differently' as a postcolonial strategy can be traced through Ranajit Guha's seminal suggestions back in 1983 about how to read the colonial archives against the grain so as to tease out the power relations embedded in the archive's own textual properties (see Guha, 1999 [1983]).

⁽⁴⁾ Since Bawa's death in 2003, the estate was briefly turned into one of Sri Lanka's most expensive 'boutique' hotels. The term 'subalternity' clearly sits uncomfortably in this context.

conventions is all too evident in the fabrication of his prospects and pleasures at Lunuganga. If these modern landscape sensibilities were to remain integral to his work, Bawa's story—and the story of Sri Lankan tropical modernism more generally—can also be understood through his attempts to adapt to the tropical materialities and demands of a South Asian environmental context (see Jazeel, 2007). Bawa's training at the AA coincided with the establishment of Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew's newly conceived department of 'tropical architecture' in 1953 (Pieris, 2007a, page 64), where he learnt the latest European theories of how modernism practised in the tropics should express regional and national particularities, providing 'authentic' reactions to European and North American functionalism (Goad and Pieris, 2005; Pieris, 2007a; 2007b pages 1–16).⁽⁵⁾ So, through training and experience, Bawa's work, and that of his contemporaries, became more suited to the inevitabilities of decay, humidity, and superabundant growth. Increasingly their architectural articulations began to rely on the local palette of materials at their disposal. As a result, what has become known as Sri Lanka's own iteration of the regional modern was gradually consolidated (see Robson, 2007). None of this is remarkable. It speaks a familiar narrative of postcolonial architectural and artistic adaptation (see King, 2004; Leys Stepan, 2001). I stress this to reassert the European modernist aesthetics and power relations that we can tease from Bawa's view across Cinnamon Hill. This is, after all, a regional variant of modernism.

There is, however, much more to say about Bawa, and particularly his position as the doyen of architectural modernism in postindependent Sri Lanka. As I have already stressed, Bawa was neither religiously Buddhist, nor ethnically Sinhalese. Yet after his early proximity to international modernism, Bawa's own aesthetic recuperation of the picturesque from the 1970s drew more equivocally on notions of the Sri Lankan vernacular, the 'indigenous', that were well suited to discursive co-option by the anticolonial Sinhala–Buddhist nationalism of postindependent Sri Lanka (Pieris 2011). Bawa's own 'megaprojects' included not only his estate at Lunuganga. He was also commissioned by the state in 1978 to build Sri Lanka's brand new parliament building (see Goonewardena, 2002), thus he was quite literally asked to build space that would become both symbol and home of the new nonsecular Socialist Republic. In 1980 another prestigious state project came his way, Ruhuna University in Matara at a time when the state had chosen educational policy as another vehicle for nonsecular state building, and in the early 1990s he was commissioned by Aitken Spence (a hospitality corporation with close links to the Ceylon Tourist Board) to build the 150-room *Kandalama* hotel in the country's 'cultural triangle', a hotel that remains one of Sri Lanka's most bespoke and unusual eco-design statements to this day. Each of these projects has been closely aligned to the state, and thus hugely emblematic in the context of architectural articulations of the postcolonial Sri Lankan national. Indeed, it is precisely this tension between Bawa's commitment to secular architectural modernism on the one hand ('art for art's sake'), and on the other, his work's co-option by the nonsecular Sinhala–Buddhist nation, that necessitates a rereading of Lunuganga.

Dwelling a little longer in Bawa's view over Lunuganga then, rereading his words *in translation*, I want to suggest that another type of worlding emerges through the contours of his secular modernism—the trace of another kind of aesthetics. Crucially, Bawa uses this landscape vista as an example of an "atmosphere" (Bawa et al, 1990, page 1) inherent to the garden. This is far more than just a view, and the view itself signifies a more-than-visual aesthetic. This 'atmosphere', this more-than-visual aesthetic, is precisely what suggests a

⁽⁵⁾Tropicality, of course, has been shown to be a 'way of seeing' linked to colonial self-other formations (Driver and Martins, 2005; Leys Stepan, 2001). In this sense, Bawa's work, the tropical architectural movement that spanned South and Southeast Asia as well as parts of Latin America, and especially Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew's school of tropical architecture must be seen as tied to colonial and neocolonial power relations (see Chee et al, 2011).

certain “structure of feeling” (Williams, 1977) by no means incidental to this space. It is in fact inscribed by Bawa’s conscious architectural deployment of ‘vernacular’ Sri Lankan philosophy and his mobilization of ‘indigenous’ aesthetic and building resources. Bawa’s ‘atmosphere’ in fact is symptomatic of an aesthetic realm that was the product of a wider injunction during the 1980s for Sri Lankan tropical modern architecture to be, as Anoma Pieris has put it, “sustainable culturally, communally and technologically, and [for] local building practices ... to be taken into account” (2011, page 345). Though Bawa kept his national and political allegiances to himself, ‘vernacularism’, ‘cultural tradition’, and Sri Lankan ‘indigenism’ in 1980s Sri Lanka were key political resources for Sinhala–Buddhist nationalism. Lunuganga more generally therefore is strewn with references to the Sri Lankan vernacular, from the local materials and techniques used to build a bungalow concealed in the fold of Cinnamon Hill, to the incorporation of ornamental paddy fields and the lake (*wewa*), themselves idealised symbols of the rural Sinhala village.

A reappraisal of Lunuganga that is sensitive to such ethnically striated vernacularism necessitates a rereading of the (Buddhist) temple located beyond the estate as integral to Bawa’s landscape composition, such that in the cultural idiom I am evoking it becomes the key to the creation of the space’s special ‘atmosphere’. The temple on this reading signifies for the architect a naturalistic and harmonious reality in which the estate is set: the extension of garden into world, and importantly a particular kind of Buddhist and Sinhala—that is to say ‘Sri Lankan vernacular’—world. In fact, as Bawa himself wrote, “Lunuganga from the start was to be an extension of the surroundings—a *garden within a garden*” (in Bawa et al, 1990, page 11, my emphasis). So, if as Bawa suggests the “hand of man” is established in the middle distance where he “placed a large Chinese jar”, then the temple is in fact woven into the environment beyond—naturalized, or at least domesticated within the garden of the nation-state. In Bawa’s description of this landscape composition, there is more than a faint outline of an alternative habitation of modernity—a Buddhist aesthetics that another kind of landscape literacy attuned to this different spatial idiom is positioned to tease out.

Given that Bawa was neither Buddhist nor Sinhalese, Buddhism might seem merely ornamental in his composition at Lunuganga. And in some senses it is. But across southern and central Sri Lanka textual Buddhist traditions and philosophy are palpably omnipresent. As David Scott (1999, pages 53–69) has argued, thinking ‘religion’ through the Sri Lankan context necessitates the prior work of thinking through the connections between a history of concepts and imperialism, and specifically the role of world religion scholarship in the explicitly comparative emergence of Buddhism as a world ‘religion’ in 19th-century British South Asia. As Scott has shown, a range of intersecting colonial governmentalities, including the imperial science of comparative religion, produced and normalized the emergence of *Buddhism* as one of a series of major bounded ‘religions’ existent in the world. ‘Religions’ were thought identifiable, demarcatable, and comparable in as much as they each comprised a system of doctrines–scriptures–beliefs to which members of a religious community belonged. The resultant emergence of a politicized, majoritarian ‘religious’ community in early-20th-century Ceylon has been characterized as the rise of protestant Buddhism (Obeyesekere, 1970). And crucially, this protestant and majoritarian Buddhist community was racialized as Sinhala, to the exclusion of the colonial state’s Tamil, Muslim, and Burgher newly minoritized groups (Scott, 2000). When, in 1972, the protection of Buddhism as ‘religion’ was written into Sri Lanka’s constitution, ethnically and ‘religiously’ the notionally plural nation-state was geopolitically articulated as Sinhalese and Buddhist. Formally as well, religion and race were well and truly married.

Despite the existence of Buddhism as an ethnically marked ‘religion’ in contemporary Sri Lanka, it is the colonial history of ‘religion’s’ semantic consolidation *as* a concept and

category—an identifiable system of doctrines—scriptures—beliefs that is—that leads to the misconception that Buddhism must announce itself purely as formal, organized ‘religion’ on those terms. When writing of Tibetan Buddhism and the Western imagination, Peter Bishop (1993, page 17) rightly emphasizes that prior to the Orientalist obsession with the myth of the Shangri-La, it was difficult for Tibetans to think of themselves as ‘Buddhists’. Rather, they simply practiced the teachings of the Lord Buddha, pursuing beliefs and rituals that even today merge indefinably into local environments, folk customs, and everyday practices. In other words, the word ‘religion’ has little to do with any of the aesthetic specificities of the Tibetan present and its spiritualities.

Similarly, for many in southern Sri Lanka, in in-comparatively un-‘religious’ ways, Buddhist philosophy and aesthetics textualize society and space as much as Enlightenment and Cartesian rationality do. To paraphrase Williams (1977, chapters 8 and 9), at Lunuganga an aesthetically Buddhist structure of feeling is residual as an effective element of the environmental present. It haunts Bawa’s description of the view at Lunuganga. To formulate an environmental aesthetics in place this way is not only to maintain that Buddhist textualities remain here as a form of enchantment that Enlightenment rationality and architectural modernism could never banish. It is more. It is also to think Buddhism beyond the coordinates of the concept ‘religion’; as Gayatri Spivak has written, it is to “de-transcendentalize the sacred, to move it toward imagination” (2008, page 10). In the English language the word ‘religion’ continues to mark an Enlightenment teleology that separates the civility of the secular from the regressive mire of the sacred. It ceaselessly instantiates the sacred/secular binary. In such terms, we would have to describe Lunuganga as ‘secular’ space, which is to stress that when Bawa describes his favorite view over Cinnamon Hill he does not describe a ‘religious’ landscape. But—and this is the point—working against the kind of implicit comparativism stitched into the concept-metaphor ‘religion’, neither does Bawa describe an entirely ‘secular’ space. Instead, his ornamental and affective framing of the view within the garden of the nonsecular nation-state evokes a structure of feeling, a narrative conjunction, in which the sacred cannot easily be separated from the secular and modern.

Once we provincialize our understandings of Buddhism like this, it might seem logical to describe this different worlding, this landscape, as a ‘Buddhist nature’. But to do so is to rely upon the implicit comparativism of another of Enlightenment rationality’s founding binaries, that of nature/culture. More importantly, to call this aesthetics a ‘Buddhist nature’ is to fall some way short of responsibly engaging politics in this context. In other words, having provincialized understandings of ‘religion’ in the Sri Lankan context, referring to Lunuganga’s ‘Buddhist’ or ‘other’ ‘nature’ is to reify the Eurocentrism in the concept-metaphor ‘nature’ and project it onto this spatiality. The supplementation of the noun ‘nature’ with prefixes like ‘Buddhist’ or ‘other’ merely provides adjectival modification to the otherwise universal pretensions of ‘nature’ as explanatory concept. Thought this way, any ‘other’ ‘nature’ cannot be anything but another Enlightenment, Cartesian rendering of the rich fabric of a world that for many positioned outside the West refuses to coagulate into the dualistic abstractions of discrete natural and cultural spheres.

To speak Bawa’s view as ‘Buddhist nature’ then, is to conceive this landscape as a container *in* which there is a ‘religious’ ‘nature’ as object. It is to attempt to grasp an alternative habitation of modernity—a Buddhist aesthetics as residual structure of feeling—through a philosophical redux to Cartesian separations of mind and matter, the cleaving of the natural from the cultural and the abstraction of both from manifold worldings. As I show in the next section, Bawa’s ‘atmosphere’ hinges upon radically different spatial formations; specifically it hinges upon the presence and inscription of a Buddhist aesthetics

that ontologically is fundamentally nondualistic. His ‘atmosphere’ suggests an alterity that the very concept-metaphors ‘nature’ and, for that matter, ‘landscape’, actively dissimulate.

In fact, it is difficult to escape the legacies of a Cartesian dualism in much of the language we employ to bring ‘landscapes’, ‘natures’, and ‘environments’ into representation. An inescapable dualistic logic seems to pervade phrases as innocent as *the environment in which we live* (see Berleant, 1992). To be clear, I am not suggesting there is no dualistic logic in Bawa’s description of the view across Cinnamon Hill. That Bawa choreographed this space *as* landscape, and that he describes this *as* ‘view’, testify otherwise. Neither, however, should we simply assume that Lunuganga’s ‘atmosphere’ is any kind of nonrepresentational excess—that which cannot be accessed through recourse to the symbolic or the descriptive. Rather, I make these points to reassert that just as Bawa inscribes all those modern power relations and landscape conventions with which I began this section, he simultaneously ruptures them by instantiating an alternative, Sri Lankan ‘vernacular’ aesthetics. Lunuganga is woven from landscape geographies that refuse to reveal themselves either dualistically or nonrepresentationally. In terms of trying to tease out the politics of this landscape, this is absolutely the challenge of what, in a similar context, the Sri Lankan anthropologist Pradeep Jeganathan (2004, page 197) has referred to as the simple elaboration of an unravelling, and a slow, uncertain immersion into what has become the ordinary. Speaking Bawa’s view as ‘Buddhist nature’ fails to bring into representation the space’s ontological pluralism (Howitt and Suchet-Pearson, 2006), and its particular and contextual—and therefore political—Buddhist aesthetics.

Reading and rereading both Bawa and Lunuganga, I have addressed in this section the politically reductive implicit comparativisms into which the South Asianist is pulled by certain theoretical formulations and concept-metaphors. As Amir Mufti (2005) has written, all too frequently in the Euro-American academy we can be coerced into an unevenly globalizing knowledge economy that structures the habitus of a theory culture that remains deeply Eurocentric. This has politically disabling implications for those working beyond the West in as much as knowledge of the non-West becomes available, as Mufti writes, “*in translation*, assigned its place as Oriental text-object within the architecture of the Western library”. I have argued so far for work that makes such implicit comparisons explicit, bringing incommensurabilities into focus and embarking on the hard work required to begin to grasp radical modes of alterity situated beyond the gaze of Eurocentric landscape geography. So part of my argument here is for a greater degree of fidelity to field contexts in ways that force us into a slow, uncertain immersion into the landscape’s ordinary dimensions, wherein the political effects of the ordinary can be revealed.

The textuality of affect and the politics of experience

A few years ago I shadowed two architectural interns as they did renovations at Lunuganga. We stayed on the estate, in a bungalow built on Cinnamon Hill in 1992, the last of Bawa’s substantial additions to the estate. The Cinnamon Hill bungalow is situated right in the middle of the ‘atmosphere’ Bawa alludes to in his descriptions of the view over his estate. Somewhat characteristic of Sri Lankan tropical modernism, the bungalow opens out to the surrounding field and encroaching jungle such that it is very difficult to distinguish between inside and outside space. The bedrooms have high wooden shutters that when opened leave mostly insect wire between room and the environment beyond. Bath and shower rooms are exposed to the sky, and trees grow from inside the house through opened out walls. One evening we sat in the living area, itself a space open on two sides and covered by a tiled roof supported by pillars and a roughly rendered back-wall (see figure 3), and chatted about the estate.



Figure 3. [In colour online.] The living area in the Cinnamon Hill bungalow (source: author's own photograph).

Curious, I asked one of my companions—let me call him Romesh⁽⁶⁾—how he felt being in a place like this. He paused before asking his friend a question in Sinhala. “Infinity”, she replied. Romesh thought a little longer before saying, “I feel like my mind keeps making these connections, one after another, to infinity. It’s difficult to explain, words can’t really explain it. Actually in Buddhism there’s a good explanation for this.” He then told me a story about the Lord Buddha, his disciple and monk, Ananda, and their conversations about the search for the sphere of the infinity of consciousness. Again, he stressed, “I feel like my mind is growing and forging connections with something beyond myself.” Finally, that he thought only in this type of place could this happen.⁽⁷⁾

In the terms of landscape geography’s conceptual terrain, Romesh’s becoming infinite might well be read as proof of the nonrepresentational moment, where words fail to express his own affective becoming—a becoming that is conjunctural. Indeed, that very gap between Romesh’s experience and words to explain his experience seem to hint at the nonrepresentational. But to insist as such is to intellectually position oneself outside the time–space of Romesh’s emergence in and through this landscape. It is to fail to immerse oneself in the specificities of this field–space–time; to implicitly place oneself as the Euro-American analyst who diagnoses the episteme (Spivak, 1999, page 255). Because it is not that there are no words to explain Romesh’s experience. It is, moreover, that there are no words *in English* to describe his conjunctural becoming there and then. Romesh clearly tells us that a Buddhist textuality of sorts plays a central role in the way that he is constituted there and then. The challenge in this sense is to grasp and contextualize these Buddhist aesthetics from his testimony in order to fully grasp the effects of the altogether different worldings—that is to say the sensible manifestations—of Lunuganga’s ‘atmosphere’. It is to join the

⁽⁶⁾ Romesh was not his real name.

⁽⁷⁾ Notes made in my field diary, 26 February 2005.

dots between that space and his experience, to make that slow, uncertain immersion into this particular ordinary, thus revealing its spatial politics.

Romesh is both Sinhala and Buddhist, and furthermore both he and his companion worked for a well-known Colombo-based tropical modern architectural practice. He is therefore well versed in Lunuganga's textuality, which is to stress that his testimony was in some senses well scripted. Furthermore, there is little that is explicitly nationalistic in his sentiments. I draw attention to his experience, however, precisely *because* it indicates a proper—that is to say in this context 'ordinary'—orchestration of body, space, and world that hints precisely at that banal kind of nationalism that does not even refer to itself as nationalism. My point is that contextualizing Romesh's affect must be done with considerable geographical sensitivity which aims not just at provincializing one's familiar theoretical toolkit, but more fully at "suspending oneself into the text of the other" (Spivak, 2008, page 23). Romesh's becoming infinite bares some striking similarities to an altogether different figure and trope in William Wordsworth, who in *The Prelude* declares the scene before him as he stands at Mount Snowdon as the emblem of a mind that feeds upon infinity. Such a straightforward comparison, however, again cannot escape the shadow of Eurocentrism, because separated by a plentitude of miles, years, and difference, Romesh speaks his infinity *very* differently from European romanticism. His is an undoing, an exteriorization of subjectivity—not a romantic mind that devours an infinity-as-object in ways that keep the romantic *self* intact. Romesh's infinity is produced at that time, at that place, but definitely not by accident. He stresses that only in a place like Lunuganga can this happen, his intention being to mobilize the same 'atmosphere' written into the space by Bawa. And his difficulty to find the English words to explain his experience testifies to the alterity of that 'atmosphere'.

Romesh tells us that in Buddhism there is a good explanation for his experience, and being attentive to him (for it is absolutely my intention to listen to him) means thinking about the Buddhist biorhythms and environmental aesthetics that persistently deconstruct any logical opposition between the natural and the cultural. A Buddhist environmental literacy begins with a notion of the universe composed of dharmas, something like energy or forces. This is a premise that further conceives modernist knowledge of the nature-object, or any object for that matter, as but a projection (Epstein, 2007; Klostermaier, 1991), as Buddhist selves and biophysical worlds are better understood as the relational emergence into objective existence of these dharmas. Reading for a Buddhist reality then requires grasping that dharma is itself unknowable through subjective knowledge of object fields, and *naturalistic* reality is only graspable through a realist intuition, as the self unravels.

Linguistically Sinhala approximations of the word 'nature' speak to this nondualistic ontology. The word *swabhawadharmaya* is used to commonly refer to a biophysical—that is to say, 'natural'—world and its use conjoins two semantic prosodies within Sinhala. The noun *swabhawaya* refers to the nature of a thing (where *swa* denotes thing), but that nature is perhaps best understood as essential qualities, such as hardness, coldness, or smoothness. In this sense *swabhawaya* alone might represent the closest literal equivalent to the Latin *nāturā*, or English 'nature', which used in its earliest sense refers to the essential quality of some-thing and has since come to denote a distinctly nonhuman biophysical object world (Williams, 1983, pages 219–224). But in Sinhala *swabhawaya* is rarely used alone. It is used in conjunction with *dharmaya* which comes from dharma, and so connects the etymology back into a notion of Buddhist principles, specifically of a universe comprised of nondualistic dharma. *Swabhawadharmaya* then is by no means a simple equivalent to 'nature'. Idiomatically its literal use mobilizes an encompassment of metaphysical principles about the (Buddhist) world itself, principles that are irreducible to the duality of subject-object relations conceived as anything other than illusory projection. The point here is that the translation required

between ‘nature’ and ‘swabhawadharmaya’ involves an epistemic and metaphysical rupture of sorts, a transportation of the Eurocentric imagination. Understanding exactly *why* and *how* Buddhism provides a good explanation for Romesh’s own infinity therefore requires the translational work to learn the spatially contingent aesthetics that, in and through the bungalow at Lunuganga, persistently deconstruct any logical dualistic opposition between the human and the natural. To be clear, the understanding I seek to bring into representation here is that of Romesh’s own (non)self-fashioning, an understanding of the ways that he takes hold of his body’s energies to impose upon it regularities and legibilities that themselves are spatially contingent.

Focusing on one ethnically Sinhala tropical modern architectural student’s narrative here at Lunuganga inevitably raises questions about verifiability, partiality, and significance beyond the singular. There is no doubt that Romesh’s narrative was a performative reiteration of how this landscape *is meant to be* experienced. But this does not invalidate his narrative. On the contrary, it is precisely the authority behind Romesh’s poetic articulation of his engagement with Lunuganga’s ‘atmosphere’ that helps mark it as simultaneously nonsecular (that is to say Buddhist) and hegemonic. Though I do not have the space here, in the broader project from which this work is taken there are a raft of interviews that implicate similarly nonsecular experiential engagements of tropical modernism.

To go one step further in reading Romesh’s spatial formation at Lunuganga, it is apposite to ask whether the notion of ‘subjectivity’ itself is a robust enough concept-metaphor to bring his infinity into representation? In his work on colonial education, European knowledge and the question of difference in mid-19th-century British Bengal, Sanjay Seth (2007) usefully attends to the implicit comparativism and teleology in the very notion of ‘subjectivity’, stressing that all its forms ultimately culminate in modern forms of (often liberal) selfhood. Just as I have argued that the word ‘religious’ obscures the visibility of neither sacred nor secular structures of feeling, and just as I have suggested that the concept-metaphor ‘nature’ cannot help instantiate a dualistic understanding of relationships between humans and a biophysical object world, Seth writes “the ‘different’ in ‘different subjectivity’ is simultaneously enabled and obscured by the concept of ‘subjectivity’” (2007, page 686). The normativity and teleology built into the grammar of Eurocentric thought is difficult to shed when trying to grasp this kind of alterity. Taking Romesh’s experience on the terms through which it is written moves toward imagination the possibility of other kinds of sociospatial dialectics in the Sri Lankan context. In this case, selves that in and through moments like these live with the prospect of their own undoing through their own metaphysical principles, thereby selves placed within the midst of an imagined socius that is intuitively and textually Buddhist, thereby ethnically Sinhalese.

The interpretive difficulty of this kind of repositioned literacy beyond Eurocentrism should not be seen as a step toward political immobilization via cultural relativism—far from it. Instead, the effort to learn what Geoffrey Bawa referred to as Lunuganga’s ‘atmosphere’ attempts to get to grips with what Spivak, borrowing from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, has referred to as a “miraculating agency” of sorts, where “as if by a miracle one speaks as an agent of a culture or an agent of a sex or an agent of an ethnos et cetera” (1993, page 6). The deconstructive critique of those concept-metaphors I have grappled with here simply aims at making visible the spatial instantiation of the ‘miraculating’ agencies that produce Romesh in that place. They do so, however, by making visible the Eurocentrism that ‘miraculates’ the investigating subject, me.

An (in)hospitable landscape

Romesh's infinity is, of course, no miracle to him. Indeed, it is central to my argument that it is entirely ordinary and consistent with a pervasive Buddhist textuality written into this landscape not just by Bawa, but more widely by the ways that Sri Lankan society has subsumed the success story of this landscape architecture into what I refer to here as a form of 'cosmopolitan' Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism (see Jeganathan, 2004). To be clear, I do not mobilize the 'cosmopolitan' as any form of progressive political openness. Instead, I evoke an emergent seam of scholarship that critically points out how cosmopolitanism gives the lie to progressive forms of multiculturalism and conviviality while it reinstates political sovereignties, imperialisms, and closures (for examples, see Brennan, 1997; Jazeel, 2011; Mouffe, 2005, pages 90–118).

Following my stay at Lunuganga, I was taken to the architectural interns' Colombo office. It is a medium-sized, well-established architectural practice. Both senior partners collaborated with Geoffrey Bawa in the 1980s and 1990s; a history that to many cements the firm's position as heir apparent to Bawa's work. The practice's office building itself is a stylish, if minimal, tropical modern bungalow designed by one of the senior partners. Inside, the office is sparsely yet thoughtfully furnished adding to the space's uncluttered, organic minimalism. Among the office's very few ornaments is a large stone Buddha's head, perhaps two feet tall, which sits on a table in the CAD (computer-aided design) room gazing across computers and architects alike. As young architects come and go, electronically modelling, discussing and remodelling their designs, the statue is routinely ignored. It just sits there.

Like most tropical modern architectural practices, this practice is not a religiously aligned institution; in part this is a necessity of its very 'modernism'. However, conceiving of Buddhism beyond a Eurocentric understanding of 'religion' requires taking the statue's 'present absence' seriously to evoke the ways a neither sacred, nor secular aesthetics pervades both the practice and the genre of tropical modern architecture more generally. The statue speaks a pervasive Buddhist textuality in southern and central Sri Lanka symptomatic of the philosophy's symbolic, practical, and textual presence at every stage of modern life. Buddhism is no counterpoint to the modern (and hence Sri Lanka's modern architecture), but incontrovertibly part of Sri Lankan modernity. Iconographically in the Sri Lankan context it is true that the sculptural Buddha's head does not carry the same formally 'religious' symbolism as the three predominant forms of seated Buddha in narrative Buddhist sculpture.⁽⁸⁾ In fact, it is the more decorative connotations of the sculptural Buddha's head that enable it to be used by the practice as an ornament. Crucial here is the statue's unseen taken-for-grantedness—its routinized invisibility, yet simultaneous affective presence—which cements its place in the choreography of the ordinary. For the statue points to the particularity of a Buddhism that in the Sri Lankan context is irreducibly Sinhala, but simultaneously claims a universal place within modernity. This is its powerful choreography of the ordinary, its 'cosmopolitanism', actually. In itself, the statue makes no political claims, but it shapes the very parameters of modern life, marking the contours of the taken-as-given. That is its politics: to mark and naturalize the parameters of hegemony.

Returning to Geoffrey Bawa's view at Lunuganga, this is the same grammar of ordinary thought that Bawa articulates when he writes that "the long view to the south ended with the *temple*." Bawa does not need to specify that he refers to a Buddhist rather than Hindu temple, because in this Sinhala-Buddhist idiom, in his 'atmosphere', 'temple' cannot be anything other than Buddhist. The temple is woven into the fabric of this tropical modern

⁽⁸⁾ Those being (1) *dhyāna mudrā*, the highest station of ecstasy through meditation, in which the hands are crossed in the lap, (2) *bhumisparsa mudrā*, in which the right hand is moved forward across the right knee, and (3) *dharmacakra mudrā*, with hands raised before the chest (Coomaraswamy, 1964 [1916], pages 330–332).

space, metaphysically *naturalized*, whereas any non-Sinhala, non-Buddhist presence must be announced, a “*Chinese jar*” for instance. This is a space whose purview is hegemonically Buddhist and Sinhala; a space where Tamil, Muslim, or any other ‘other’ can only arrive as guest, marked as Tamil, as Muslim, named as ‘other’. If the space is plural, or ethnically hospitable, it is so in a conspicuously and power-laden ‘cosmopolitan’ tradition (see Derrida, 2001) wherein its structures of feeling accommodate, that is to say ‘tolerate’, non-Sinhala–Buddhist otherness, at the very same time reinscribing the signature of that Sinhala–Buddhist ethnos as host. For there is little doubt that Lunuganga’s ‘atmosphere’ is idiomatically and aesthetically both Buddhist and Sinhala. As Pieris (2011, page 346) has recently written, Bawa’s postindependent architecture was a key mode of cultural expression for liberal forms of “vernacular cosmopolitanism” amongst Sri Lanka’s national elites who sought a new utopian, Sinhala, and Buddhist national spirit by mobilizing “unbroken links with a precolonial past”. Mobilizing cosmopolitanism this way is to stress its benign forms of ethnic and political marginalization in the Sri Lankan landscape context.

Writing of this ‘cosmopolitan’ Sinhala–Buddhist nationalism, Pradeep Jeganathan rightly argues that it is unavailable straightforwardly to conventional anthropology (2004, page 195). Anthropology, like human geography, works through its own universals that can only describe Bawa’s space and Romesh’s infinity through concepts such as ‘Buddhist nature’, ‘religious experience’, or ‘different subjectivity’. What is much harder, and what I have posed as a methodophilosophical challenge postcolonial landscape geography, is the immersion into the ordinary dimensions of this space; dimensions that are occluded by those very same terms, as well as by theoretical coercions to regard this landscape as nonrepresentational merely because geography’s Euro-American disciplinary squint does not possess the representational tools to learn those nondualistic Buddhist ontologies inscribed here. At Lunuganga is an alternative ontology far more political, more hegemonic, more ostensibly Sinhala and Buddhist; one inscribed by Bawa and through the experiential mobilization of his ‘atmosphere’. Reading for these landscape aesthetics “is not simply a matter of imaginative geography but also of discontinuous epistemes” (Spivak 2008, page 8).

It is the connections between Buddhism and a majoritarian Sinhala ethnicity that make the political stakes of this kind of analysis great. The necessity of these kinds of critical readings of Sri Lankan tropical modern architecture is today enhanced given the position of this genre in a national, regional, and international context.⁽⁹⁾ As stressed above, Bawa’s work was heavily co-opted by an increasingly nonsecular Ceylonese/Sri Lankan state from around the 1970s. His own ‘art for art’s sake’ became a vehicle for the cultural expression of a new nationalism that saw in those notions of the Sri Lankan ‘vernacular’ an articulation of precolonial ethnicized purity that was Sinhala and Buddhist—not Tamil–Hindu, nor Muslim, nor Catholic—all the way back.

Bawa’s work has given rise to three glossy, expensively produced Thames and Hudson architecture/landscape books that celebrate his achievements in terms of the production and establishment of Sri Lanka’s own regional modernism (Robson 2002; 2007; 2008). The architecture has *come to be seen* as emblematic of Sri Lanka, and of Sri Lankan modernism. Indeed, this kind of architecture and landscape architecture is not just wrapped up with a suite of contemporary artistic production (including textile production, fine art, photography, interior design, and sculpture) dubbed ‘Sri Lankan style’ by some of its chief purveyors (Daswatte and Sansoni, 2006), it arguably and justifiably provides the leading innovative edge of contemporary modes of Sri Lankan modernism.⁽¹⁰⁾ The work has flourished not just

⁽⁹⁾ Critical engagements with Bawa and tropical modern architecture are limited, but see Pieris (2007a), and Goonewardena (2002).

⁽¹⁰⁾ A modernism that can be traced through Sri Lanka’s ‘1943 Group’ of artists that included George Keyt, Justin Daraniyagala, George Claessen, and Ivan Peries. For an outline see Dharmasiri (no date).

across Sri Lanka, but also and importantly across South and Southeast Asia. As one of Bawa's biographers puts it, "Geoffrey Bawa has come to be regarded as one of the most important Asian architects of the twentieth century" (Robson 2002, page 12). And the proliferation of rather brilliant work by Bawa's progeny of Sri Lankan tropical-modern architects has only enhanced the genre's repute.

The simple point of this in closing is that if the style has become emblematic of the Sri Lankan national, it is emblematic of a particular idiomatic articulation of Sri Lankan-ness. This is an aesthetics that this paper has worked through in detail, an aesthetics that instantiates a hegemonic 'cosmopolitan' Sinhala-Buddhist national in the most subtle, often occluded, of ways. If, as I have argued, a landscape geography working through the challenge posed by comparativism helps to make visible the faint trace of this nationalism in Lunuganga, then the connections to the ways that Romesh's body is fashioned as not just Buddhist, but by implication Sinhala also, are far more than merely coincident. The connections between landscape and ethnicized subjectivity are what this paper ultimately teases out. To develop the 'landscape geography beyond Eurocentrism' that I have worked through in this paper is to ask not only what kinds of reality haunt the estate, but what kinds of cultural and political norms are grounded in those realities, in those worldings. From Lunuganga's 'atmosphere', an atmosphere knowingly inscribed by its principal author Geoffrey Bawa, this paper has teased out the faint traces of a 'cosmopolitan' Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism whose politics reside in that very (in)hospitable 'tolerance' of Tamil-Hindu, Muslim, or Christian difference as it asserts its own claims to territorial and aesthetic sovereignty.

As I have stressed, Sri Lankan tropical-modern architecture rarely makes explicitly political or ethnicized claims, its authors preferring instead to regard the work as 'art for art's sake'. So, there are legitimate questions that can be asked about the value of ceding a figure like Bawa—and by extension the genre more generally—to Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. But the radically realigned comparativism that makes visible the ethnicizing politics of tropical-modern landscapes like Lunuganga is precisely what highlights the importance of asking such questions of figures like Bawa and his influence on Sri Lankan modernism. My approach asks what role such spaces play in 'miraculating', in fashioning, identity, and essence, and how they instantiate particular forms of ethnicized hegemony in the representational practices of everyday life. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper, I suggest the importance of raising more questions, not least around what kinds of connections, disconnections, or ambivalences Tamils, Muslims, and others experience in such ethnically hegemonic space. It has been my intention in this essay to move toward folding the critique of landscape geography's Eurocentrism into a conceptual labor that interrogates the spatial fixities of Sri Lanka's political present. The methodophilosophical work of reading Lunuganga beyond Eurocentrism has, firstly, urged that we cease to dissimulate the postcolonial landscape, and secondly, sketched the chalk outlines of new and urgent problem-spaces through which we might productively engage Sri Lanka's problematic political and spatial present.

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