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Co-Curating the Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage

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Abstract The Modern Heritage of Africa [MoHoA] programme was set up to support an equitable and sustainable heritage agenda in Africa and beyond through the research, protection, utilisation, reinterpretation and reconceptualisation of modern heritage and to contribute to improving the implementation of the World Heritage Convention across the African continent and in other areas of under-representation and historical marginalisation. It was conceptualised as a two phased process with first phase intended to interrogate the experiences of Africa and Africans to understand why the continent, its peoples and its cultures are under-represented on global, regional, and even local registers of modern heritage, and to assess the threats posed to this heritage by impending planetary crises. The authors present the four goals of the first phase, the process that led to development of The Cape Town Document, and the 2021 Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage.

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Edward DENISON is Professor of Architecture and Global Modernities at The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, and has twenty-years' experience as an independent consultant specialising in urban and cultural heritage. He is Director of the MA Architecture and Historic Urban Environments, Module Coordinator of 'Multiple Modernities Architecture' on the MA Architectural History, and a PhD Supervisor. Professor Denison's wideranging research is motivated by the notion of 'otherness', exploring the resistance to and the role, practice and imperative of non-canonical architectural histories, especially outside the west and in relation to modernity. Underlying all of his work is a deep concern for sustainability – ecologically, culturally and socially. Current research is focussed on other histories of architecture, the Anthropocene and the modern heritage of Africa. This has evolved partly from two-decades of work in Eritrea, culminating most recently in the inscription of Asmara, Eritrea's capital city, onto UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2017 - a first for Eritrea and a first for modernism in Africa.

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Convention across the African continent and in other areas of under-representation and historical marginalization. It was conceptualized initially as a two phased process. The first phase was intended to interrogate the experiences of Africa and Africans to understand why the continent, its peoples and its cultures are under-represented on global, regional, and even local registers of modern heritage, and to assess the threats posed to this heritage by impending planetary crises. Taking the lessons learned from Africa, the second phase aims to cast these issues onto a planetary scale through the lens of the Anthropocene, responding to the paradox of modern heritage, in all its forms, as being simultaneously *of* modernity and yet threatened by its consequences. The first phase therefore has the following goals:

- To examine the meanings of the Modern Heritage of Africa and to understand the role heritage can play in achieving equity and promoting sustainability.
- To develop skills among heritage practitioners and other public and private sector stakeholders in associated fields, including research, training, conservation, advocacy and management.
- To raise awareness about the significance of the Modern Heritage of Africa among all stakeholders, including academics, heritage practitioners, developers, policy makers and civil society, and especially among women and youth.
- To address the underrepresentation of the Modern Heritage of Africa in the World Heritage List by building capacity among heritage practitioners in the identification and presentation of properties to be inscribed on Tentative Lists and potential future World Heritage nominations.

Key to achieving these objectives were four workshops and the conference that led to the adoption of the first draft of the *Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage*. It is acknowledged here that four workshops and a conference within a year and the adoption of a draft *Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* is not of itself going to lead to a radical reinterpretation of the modern heritage of Africa. Neither will the sheer force of its intellectual depth and trajectory compel overnight change to prevailing World Heritage policies or lead to the immediate proliferation of modern African heritage on World Heritage listings in the short term. Nonetheless these intellectual endeavors are of critical importance as they raise many issues in relation to what constitutes the modern heritage of Africa, and encourage much-needed further research, particularly by young African scholars and activists, into this contested concept. This volume of *Curator* provides an insight into those intense debates, and their infusion into what is the *Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* (See also Appendices A and B for definitions and selected texts and bibliographic references).

While this brief introduction cannot possibly amplify every nuanced gesture that led to the adoption of the *Cape Town Document*, it does provide insight as to the successes heritage professionals, stakeholders and workers have achieved in terms of the goals outlined above, the knowledge and skills that have been acquired and are still required, all while offering a platform to share ideas. Above all, the workshops and conference presented a reflexive opportunity to confront key issues that need to be aired, magnified, and intensely researched, where shortcomings and deep historical prejudices were identified.

Most importantly the meetings gave participants an opportunity to begin rethinking the established understanding of modernity within the policies of the World Heritage Convention and its associated advisory and affiliated bodies, and to challenge these policies, guidelines and approaches. Above all, one of the primary aims of the conference was, as the *Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* indicates, to emphasize the necessity to rethink the past and the present, and to reflect on the multiple, often unequal, experiences of what modern means for African people in the context of heritage and their historical association with the rest of the world. There are valuable lessons to learn from this global, shared, albeit contested, heritage of Africa, and its entanglement and inequitable recognition within and throughout the rest of the world. It is this global context that the educator and anti-racist scholar Rosemary Campbell-Stephens refers to as the “global majority”. As a key component of the global majority, Africa’s role in the world is a constant reminder of a deeply and often brutally unequal and discriminatory past, and of the urgent need to realize a future in which structural inequalities and racism are consigned to the past, replaced by systems and practices that are equitable and sustainable. This must simultaneously and necessarily address the existential challenges precipitated by climate and environmental crises that have been at least 500 years in the making and are inherently entwined with the exploitation of African resources, including its people. Addressing human sustainability and justice in the future alongside acknowledging the value of Africa’s heritage and its contribution to humanity is an urgent modern agenda.

These are the issues that the *Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* seeks to address and can be encapsulated by one of the principal claims that modernity “represent[s] no single history and derive[s] from no single origin, culturally, geographically, or conceptually, but [is] part of a constellation of multiple historical experiences” (see section 2.1 below) in all its ruptures and continuities over long periods including the European colonial period.

The *Cape Town Document* represents the start of a process of change aimed at redressing the entrenched view that European civilisation represents the only solution to and framework for human progress. More fundamentally, the *Cape Town Document* reflects the content and debates that took place in the conference and its preceding workshops, and seeks to create the framework for a reconceptualisation of “the modern” that can be untethered from its Eurocentric, colonial or claims of universal origins, and help pave the way to an equitable and sustainable future. As a project designed to critically address historical inequities and iniquities dating back more than half a millennium, the authors and contributors are under no illusion as to the scale of the task and the time it will take, but is a start that must be taken with clarity of what is at stake.

THE CAPE TOWN DOCUMENT ON MODERN HERITAGE (2021) PREAMBLE

1. We, the participants from MoHoA at the Conference assembled in Cape Town (South Africa), wish to acknowledge the initiative of the University of Cape Town (UCT), the support of The Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment (University College London, UCL), in providing a

timely forum in which to address the challenges in defining the heritage of our time, and the knowledge that recognizes the vital role of Africa in contributing ways and means of broadening our horizons to bring greater respect for and understanding of contemporary heritage.

2. We also wish to acknowledge the value of the framework for discussion provided by the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Heritage Centre (WHC), and the Africa World Heritage Fund (AWHF), and the professional contributions of the Advisory Bodies, International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), and the International Committee for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings (DOCOMOMO) and their commitment to contemplate the broadening of understandings of modern heritage so that it equitably reflects the experiences of all societies and their encounters as exhibited by social and traditional practices, the creation of heritage through the interconnections between culture and nature, historic urban landscapes, and tangible and intangible cultural values.
3. In developing this document we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the UNESCO *Modern Heritage Programme* and build upon debates and definitions of Modern Heritage related to the implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, including, inter alia, the 2004 Regional Meeting on Modern Heritage for Sub-Saharan Africa,¹ World Heritage Centre (2015), African Modern Heritage, DOCOMOMO (2016), ICOMOS 20th Century Architecture (2017), Twentieth Century Thematic Framework, Getty (2021).
4. Achieving aspiration 5 of Agenda 2063 of the *Africa We Want*, which emphasizes strong cultural identity and common heritage values and ethics, will only be possible if communities, in particular youth, women and other marginalized voices, are included in the conservation and promotion of their heritage.
5. *The Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* is presented to align with and supplement existing conventions and recommendations, including the *UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape*, ICOMOS Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the UN *Sustainable Development Goals*, *The Ngorongoro Declaration* on sustainable development, the *Culture Urban Future* and the *New Urban Agenda*, and elaborate on how they may contribute to safeguarding heritage to make our environments and resources safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable.
6. *The Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* is conceived in the spirit of the *Nara Document on Authenticity* and the subsequent NARA +20 text and expands the understanding of what constitutes 'the modern' in response to the diverse nature of geo-cultural groupings and their regional cultural perceptions and practices within bio-geographic provinces.
7. It also acknowledges that climate change and biodiversity loss caused by anthropogenic activities that characterize *the modern* need to be urgently addressed to achieve sustainable planetary futures. In confronting these challenges, *The Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage* builds on existing interdisciplinary knowledge and advocates new creative approaches.
8. The historic urban landscape is the urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of "historic centre" or "ensemble" to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting.

9. This wider context includes notably the site's topography, geomorphology, hydrology and natural features, its built environment, both historic and contemporary, its infrastructures above and below ground, its open spaces and gardens, its land use patterns and spatial organization, perceptions and visual relationships, as well as all other elements of the urban structure. It also includes social and cultural practices and values, economic processes and the intangible dimensions of heritage as related to diversity and identity.
10. This definition provides the basis for a comprehensive and integrated approach for the identification, assessment, conservation and management of historic urban landscapes within an overall sustainable development framework.
11. The historic urban landscape approach is aimed at preserving the quality of the human environment, enhancing the productive and sustainable use of urban spaces, while recognizing their dynamic character, and promoting social and functional diversity. It integrates the goals of urban heritage conservation and those of social and economic development. It is rooted in a balanced and sustainable relationship between the urban and natural environment, between the needs of present and future generations and the legacy from the past.
12. The historic urban landscape approach considers cultural diversity and creativity as key assets for human, social and economic development, and provides tools to manage physical and social transformations and to ensure that contemporary interventions are harmoniously integrated with heritage in a historic setting and take into account regional contexts.
13. The historic urban landscape approach learns from the traditions and perceptions of local communities, while respecting the values of the national and international communities.

SECTION 2: COMPONENTS

1. Identity and Meaning

- The terms modern, modernity and modernism are complex and interrelated. They represent no single history and derive from no single origin, culturally, geographically, or conceptually, but are part of a constellation of multiple historical experiences born out of local, regional, and global networks that have grown to have a planetary impact.
- Modern heritage embodies the disruption and reconstitution of identity and sense of belonging as part of an open-ended, perpetually self-refashioning experience that has generated new identities born out of hybridity, globality, and transculturality.
- Modern heritage derives value not from the mutual exclusivity of dichotomies, oppositions and contradictions, as in tradition and modernity, urban and rural, and old and new, but from their mutual dependence.
- Modern heritage bears testimony to the historicity of its place, as well as to transformations that embody the connection between the local and the global providing for pride of place.

2. Ruptures and Continuities

- Ruptures and continuities are complementary attributes of modernity whose cultural expressions are embodied in modern heritage.
- Modern heritage embodies a disruption of temporal constructs and narratives, especially, but not exclusively, towards linear conceptualisations and chronologies.
- Modern heritage embodies the interaction of different linguistic systems, often bearing testimony to their ruptures caused by external factors and political forces. These ruptures have subsequently informed the definition and valorisation of this heritage.
- Modern heritage acknowledges its debt to regional Industrial Revolutions and the ruptures it brought, especially to cities, frequently possessing continuities that exist because of industrial absence

3. Expanding Definitions

- There is need for a transcultural understanding of modern heritage that goes beyond existing universal definitions and taxonomies to acknowledge the local traditions, practices, materials, and methodologies used to create modern heritage.
- The definition of modern heritage needs to expand beyond *modernism* by acknowledging and including geo-cultural practices that are ephemeral and intangible, including but not limited to oral testimonies, spoken word, texts, artworks, performative practices, and non-material or digital media.
- Modern heritage recognizes the interactions and interconnections between nature and culture and between tangible and intangible values in both contemporary built forms and landscapes, both urban and rural.
- Modern heritage embodies and promotes the intangible lived experiences of all those connected with this heritage, especially voices, stories and experiences of the marginalized that by definition have not been considered components of the modern narrative.

4. Diversity and Complexity

- Modern heritage is layered and is part of the cumulative and accelerated stratification of multiple memories and narratives, from the individual to the collective, and from the local to the global.
- Modern heritage recognizes the diversity of local and traditional knowledges and continuing practices that have engaged with modernity and contributed to the development of modern built forms, landscapes, and cultural practices.
- As a cultural manifestation of a planetary condition, modern heritage embodies and embraces complexity which should be reflected in its interpretations.

5. Sustainability and Equity

- Some components of modern heritage have origins in exploitative and inequitable practices, and there is a need for these to be recognized and redressed in the protection, restitution and valorisation of modern heritage assets.
- The application of innovation and equitable access to resources are a prerequisite for modern heritage practices globally ensuring its durability, resilience, and sustainability.
- Modern heritage practices recognize the intrinsic connection between environmental and cultural sustainability and human rights, and therefore align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, *The Ngorongoro Declaration* and UNESCO's *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape*.
- There is a need to respond to the priorities and processes of the World Heritage Convention including the Global Strategy, and the increasing pressures of urbanization and threats to rural landscapes to recognize the subsequent potential threats to modern heritage. These impacts may include limited capacity to react to disasters, both natural and man-made, socio-economic disparities, inequitable landownership and use, and ecological and environmental crises.

6. Cooperation, dissemination, and capacity building

- The recognition and protection of modern heritage depends on an inclusive and trans-disciplinary approach to develop academic, professional and managerial frameworks that can effectively define geo-cultural heritage typologies.
- Modern Heritage addresses communities including women and youth and its relevance should be part of local comprehensive awareness, education and interpretative activities especially in connecting the younger generations with initiatives that will make heritage a source of economic and social opportunity for their benefit.
- A full thematic study and gap analysis of modern heritage is necessary to harmonize and facilitate the process of identifying modern heritage and to revise the Tentative Lists of States Parties, especially those currently under-represented on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The Cape Town Document on Modern Heritage was drafted by the Modern Heritage of Africa initiative and approved at the Cape Town Conference on Heritage Day, 24 September 2021. **END**

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest with the production of this paper.

APPENDIX 1. DEFINITIONS

Modern Heritage: Inherited cultural and natural attributes of the modern era, the temporal extent of which is disciplinarily varied and ranges from the past two centuries to the past two millennia.

(Article 1 of the World Heritage Convention defines cultural heritage as monuments, groups of buildings and sites of cultural value).

Bio-geographic provinces: Biotic subdivisions of biogeographic realms subdivided into ecoregions, which are classified based on their biomes or habitat types and correspond to the floristic kingdoms of botany developed by Udvardy (1975) as in paragraph 71 of the Operational Guidelines.

Geo-cultural groupings: Groups of geographical locations each possessing their own distinct cultural characteristics as in paragraph 71 of the Operational Guidelines.

Temporalities: Subjective states existing within or having some relationship with time.

Sustainability: “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (UN Brundtland Commission, 1987).

Equity: The state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair.

Conservation: All efforts designed to understand cultural heritage, know its history and meaning, ensure its material safeguard and, as required, its presentation, restoration and enhancement.

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NOTES

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