



Political Animals

(an architectural design competition)

All this taking stock of the situation, this enlightening of consciousness, and this advance in the knowledge of the history of societies are only possible within the framework of an organization, and inside the structure of a people¹

- Frantz Fanon -

Preamble

Scattered over ten thousand square kilometres of grassland in Mpumalanga lay the ruins of a vast civilization known as the Bokoni. The architecture of the Bokoni consisted primarily of two materials; permanent, dry-stacked stone, and ephemeral, hand-woven grass. The social structures of the Bokoni are preserved in the visible plan forms of their homesteads, while the social structures represented by weaving practices can only be inferred from sub cultures still practising grass weaving today.

Of particular architectural interest at this site, is a large number of low-relief rock carvings. Perhaps surprisingly, the images captured on the stone surfaces are not figurative (animals, natural elements, religious figures) or symbolic, but are instead building plans. It is widely agreed that the plans were not intended for construction, but constitute a theoretical architectural representation. In other words, it seems that, when Bokoni herdsman doodled, they made drawings of the social structures within which they were embedded, as they are represented by architectural plans². It is with this tradition in mind that this competition is themed around *the architectural representation of social structures*.

The contemporary South African condition is marked by an imperative to transform our society from a racially segregated one to an inclusive, fair and equitable one. To do so, we are not only tasked with changing the distribution of resources, but also presented with the opportunity to radically rethink our collective values in terms of democracy. The inclusion of formerly-peripheral value systems relies heavily on the transformation of our institutions, within which our collective agency is concentrated and manifested.

¹ Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), p142.

² Delius, P. Maggs, T and Schoeman, A. *Forgotten World: The Stone-Walled Settlements of the Mpumalanga Escarpment* (2001), pp12-17.





SA PAVILION

The Structure of a People

After almost thirty years of formal, collective effort in this project (and contributions stretching back many generations before that) much has been learned about the specific trials and tribulations of transformation in a democratic setting. The basis for democratic processes is participation, and participation is mediated in complex ways.

Through representative politics (voting for government), substantial inroads have already been made into collectivizing our future and distributing the custodianship of the values which we will carry with us into the future as broadly as possible. But, politics at the national, regional and urban scales can be somewhat abstract and it is apparent that the world is also being made at smaller scales. Politics at the organizational and institutional scale tends to be visceral and affective. At the same time, organizations and corporate structures are highly effective at making the world. But they are practically never democratically managed.

For the purposes of this experiment, it is assumed that a large part of the reason for this absence of democratic participation at scales accessible to the intuition and to feeling, is counterintuitive. Though they are corporate (forming a body) and they are organized (made into organs), their material form does not resemble the organisms we can ordinarily perceive. They are highly distributed and multi-modal (telephones, contracts, policies, desks, individuals, plumbing, tacit agreements, carpet tiles, teams and projects — all may form part of the 'corpus' of an institution). This complexity makes them difficult to grasp, access, define, critique and form.

The architectural discipline may have a contribution to make here. Institutions place us together, and, as such, they are an architecture. Making complex material/immaterial artefacts accessible to the senses is at the foundation of architectural practice.

Make

Senior and postgraduate students as well as faculty from all South African Schools of Architecture are invited to submit proposals for crafted artefacts representing the structures of the institutions in which they are embedded. These artefacts are not models in the conventional sense, but rather miniature architectures in themselves.

These miniatures present us with hybrid-objects. Like buildings, they are physical manifestations of social relationships, but they also represent a fresh take on Aristotle's concept of the *Zoon Politikon*. Instead of positing human individuals as 'political animals' it is suggested that institutions and organizations bind us into larger formations, which could be conceived of as largely invisible, but very active, living architectural creatures.

Finalists will be invited to participate in online seminars with the curators of the South African Pavilion at the 18th Architecture Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia, and selected entries will be included in the exhibition which is scheduled for May - November 2023.





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The Structure of a People

Procedure

In teams of two-five persons (staff/students or a mix of participants), produce a crafted, physical artefact in the material(s) of your choice, representing the material and immaterial dimensions of your institution. The artefacts should be able to fit on a standard office desk (around 600mm maximum) and should be robust enough to be shipped internationally.

Individual teams/studios can spend as little or as much of the available time on the project and can choose to integrate it into a curriculum, or to keep the project extra-curricular.

Dates, Submissions and Contact

10 March 2023 - 1st pitch submission (Three A4 pages outlining concept, technical specifications, drawings, draft models and background). Teams progressing to the next round will be informed, and will meet in online seminars with the curators/creative directors to discuss development.

17 March 2023 - 1st Development Seminar [Online]

24 March 2023 - 2nd Development Seminar [Online]

5 April - Final Submission, Adjudication and Exhibition (Gauteng)

Please enter and submit 1st pitch documents online at: <https://iqoqo.org/venice-biennale/> before midnight on the 10th of March 2023.

Questions can be sent to: politicalanimals@iqoqo.org

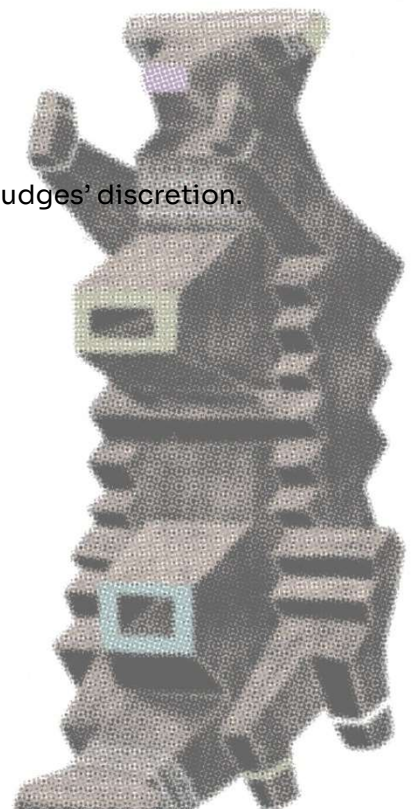
Prizes

Cash prizes will be awarded to the top three performing entries at the judges' discretion.

1st Prize: R20 000

2nd Prize: R12 000

3rd Prize: R6 000





Further reading

Christian Borch (2009) "Organizational Atmospheres: Foam, Affect and Architecture" in *Organization* (17: 2).

Edward Tufte (2001) *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Graphics Press.

Doreen Massey (1992) "Politics and Space/Time". *New Left Review*, 1(196), 65-84.

Kathryn Yusoff (2013) "Geologic Life: Prehistory, Climate, Futures in the Anthropocene" in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (31): 779-795.

Timothy Morton (2010) "Guest Column: Queer Ecology," in *PMLA* (152), 273-282.

Reference Images

(from top to bottom, page 1-3)

1. *Yoruba Epa Helmet Mask* by Bamgboye, Alaga of Odo Owa (mid-20th C)
2. *Organizational Structure, TUT ArchID* by Stephen Steyn (2021)
3. *Council of Beings I* by Sechaba Maape (2022)
4. *Social Structures* by Stephen Steyn (2020)
5. *Council of Beings II* by Sechaba Maape (2022)

