Full Length Article

Making sense of the state: Citizens and state buildings in South Africa☆

Julia Gallagher

Department of Politics and International Studies, SOAS, University of London, 10 Thornhaugh Street, London, WC1H 0XG, UK

ABSTRACT

Drawing on the example of South Africa, the article explores how the state, an incoherent and opaque set of ideas, discourses and relationships, is made into a 'thing' by its citizens. It describes how citizens encounter the state physically when they see, hear, touch and smell its buildings and how these different sensory engagements generate thoughts and impressions that help them make and unmake the state-thing. The argument is made first theoretically, drawing on work from architecture, cultural geography and urban studies on sensory engagements with buildings; and then empirically through an analysis of South African citizens' accounts of their engagements with state buildings, drawing on focus group discussions in urban centres and observations of state buildings in action. It finds that the state is reified through citizens' ability to think and feel their way from material form to idea, using sight to produce abstractions and metaphors, and the haptic senses to connect to personal memory and fantasy. This layered account of the state, described locally through the analogy of the face-brick, constitutes the making and unmaking of the state-thing that illustrates a deep but ambivalent involvement in it.

The puzzle driving this article is how citizens make sense of their state. It's a particular problem with such a nebulous, all-pervasive, complex and contradictory, important and 'big thing' as a state, supported by obscurity and criticism as much as by clarity and popular affirmation (Bartelson, 2001; Marston, 2004; Painter, 2006; Penrose, 2011). My approach is to take state buildings as material manifestations – the body – of the state. I apply Jacobs' (2006) description of buildings as 'big-things' constructed between an array of actors and materials, to work through how experiencing the state architecturally engages citizens in a process of making, remaking and unmaking it. In particular, I explore how citizens sense the state in its buildings, making metaphors from seeing it and linking to personal memories and fantasies through smelling, hearing and touching it. These experiences of the state help citizens constitute it as a thing and themselves in relationship with it. The argument is made in relation to the South African state, a powerful and historically contested example, which has undergone significant shifts in its scope and character since 1994. This contested process is often represented in a simplified way, its complexities and tensions reduced to a story about the triumph of democracy over apartheid. Using state architecture, as I show, uncovers the more complex and contradictory ways in which South African citizens make and unmake their state.

'Architecture' is a term often used to describe the state complex, with its array of institutions, processes, norms and relationships.[1] I am further concretizing this idea, suggesting that the buildings themselves, an eclectic mix of prestigious icons, mundane administrative hubs and community-level service centres, embody the complex state-project. In her work on skyscrapers, Jacobs (2006) points out that 'big-things' do not exist as independent objects. They are held together and pulled apart by a multitude of materials, ideas and actors. We could think of the state as an example of a *really* big thing created between ideas, actors and materials. Such an approach builds on the idea that the state is only brought into existence as a thing by the discourses that surround it (Mitchell, 1991; Abrams, 1988), relying on the complexity and obscurity of much of this discourse. As Bartelson (2001: 11) points out, 'ambiguity and centrality go hand in hand, and concepts which are both central and ambiguous tend to become constitutive and foundational'. One can understand why Daniel, in his study of Ethiopian state ideas, found it so difficult to pin down, and asked 'how is it that my informants talk so much about the "thing" they struggled to define?' (Daniel, 2020: 4). He

concluded that it was talk itself that created and held the 'thing'. For this article, the 'thing' is also created and held together by its buildings, and talk about them can help us understand how.

In research for the article I asked South African citizens to talk about their state buildings. Several used the face-brick as an architectural analogy to contrast the outsides and insides of their state. One woman from Johannesburg used the idea to explain how South Africa's court buildings could look wonderful from the outside while what went on inside them was 'complete and utter nonsense … [because] main buildings that are constructed by the government are all made with face-bricks. You know about those bricks? I think that's how we can actually understand these buildings'.[2] A man from Olievenhoutbosch near Pretoria said his grandmother used the term. 'She says, if you see a huge building, with face-brick, it looks good. But most buildings with face-brick, inside, it's not good … So most of the buildings we have: do they really do what they're supposed to do?'[3]

The face-brick analogy is an example of how people read the state through buildings. These two saw the building's face which 'looks good' but couldn't trust it because they know it's a veneer that covers 'complete and utter nonsense' inside. While the veneer of the state offers a visual description of beauty and order, the inside remains obscure and almost certainly problematic – nonsense, not good, probably not doing what it's supposed to.

South African state architecture, which includes buildings such as the parliament, ministry buildings and courts, police stations, schools and hospitals, has a history of troubling hidden parts covered by beautiful, orderly surfaces. The magnificent Union Buildings in Pretoria present a gracious and powerful veneer that for years of colonial and apartheid rule covered up bureaucratic corruption and weakness (Posel, 1998). The anodyne modernism of the John Vorster Square police station in Johannesburg tried to obscure systematic violence, powerfully described in van Wyk's poem, 'In Detention' (1979). Thus, the face-brick might suggest an apparently simple story of state-society relations as a standoff by those who parade 'tired debates about resistance to versus domination by' (Lees, 2001: 55). However, as I will show, the face-brick is a more complicated analogy than one might suppose.

The article speaks to several debates. It attempts to meet urban studies' call to contribute towards a 'fuller, richer and more textured account of ordinariness in African cities' by exploring the ways affect and imagination are stimulated through spatial engagement (Pieterse, 2011: 12). It also joins a body of work about affect as an object and a method of enquiry (Anderson, 2014; Antonsich et al., 2020; Sitas, 2020) and a desire in urban studies and anthropology to take sensory experience more seriously (Stoller, 1989; Classen, 1997, 1999; Edensor, 2007; Dundon & Hemer, 2016), to uncover the 'political life of the senses' (Jethro, 2020: 11). In particular, it draws on work from cultural geography that shows how users of buildings help hold them together and pull them apart (Jacobs, 2006; Jacobs et al., 2012; Jacobs & Merriman, 2011; Lees, 2001; Rose et al., 2010), in a bid to go beyond conventional accounts of architecture that focus on the original producers: the commissioners, funders, architects and builders (Jenkins, 2002; Llewellyn, 2003; Lees & Baxter, 2011). Importantly, it takes on a plea in some of the literature to take *users'* feelings into account when exploring the meanings of buildings (Rose et al., 2010; Lees & Baxter, 2011).

Much of the literature on architecture and politics focuses on elite perspectives, drawing (often implicitly) on assumptions about how architecture itself can shape individual and collective life through the power of design (Elleh, 2002; Till, 2013; Vale, 1992), using buildings to illustrate the broader nature of power (Leach, 1997). For example, Micieli-Voutsinas and Person discuss the ways in which monumental architecture creates 'authoritative narratives and official rhetoric to

shape and sustain meaning' (Micieli-Voutsinas and Person, 2021: 2). However, as Llewellyn (2003) points out, architecture is not simply produced by architects and consumed by users. Users construct architecture in their own ways (Lees, 2001), reading buildings by making metaphors and associations 'through personalization – through taking possession, completing it, chasing it' (Rapoport, 1982, p. 19: 21) activities that appropriate meaning-making no matter what the architect intended. This point is made clearer when we think about how buildings' aesthetic and cultural references change over time (Ballantyne, 2004; see also; Jenkins, 2002).

To get beyond the elite perspective, the article draws on a series of citizen-conversations which focused on direct experience, stories, myths and rumours about the buildings. These explore how citizens are co-producers – not consumers – of the state. From these conversations, it becomes clear that the insides and outsides of the state are experienced and imagined very differently; that citizens' experiences and imaginings are largely based on different sensory engagements – the outsides through sight and the insides through sound, touch and smell; and that these different types of sense produce different ways of constructing the state. By exploring how the state is constructed differently through the senses, the article tries to *make sense* of the state from citizens' perspectives.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section sets out conceptually how the state can be read sensorially through its buildings. Using examples from South Africa, it makes an argument about embodiments – of the state in its buildings and of people in the buildings – and how these provide a basis for state-making. The rest of the article expands this approach drawing on empirical work done in South Africa. It outlines a methodological approach to reading state-society relations through buildings, and then provides an analysis of citizen-FGDs about state architecture. It concludes with a discussion about how such an embodied approach to buildings helps us understand the South African state.

1. The state and the body

The state as a body – the body politic – has a well-established pedigree in political theory, famously in Thomas Hobbes' (2008) explicit use of human anatomy to describe the Leviathan in 1651. Ideas about the body-politic have also been applied explicitly in African contexts. Mudimbe (1991), for example, writes about the bodies of pre-colonial Bembe kings being used in ritual to convey the origin myths of the community. The king's body gave physical form to the history, norms and identity of the collective. Mbembe's (2001) description of the postcolony shows how the body of the president is used to project power, and also how popular accounts mock it through jokes and cartoons, focusing on human physical functions to subvert presidential pretensions. In both examples, the leader's body provides a thing upon which to describe, convey and read the workings and failings of political authority.

Describing the state as a body is compelling in several ways. As Hobbes (2008) suggests, it pulls a complicated set of limbs, senses and organs together into a rational whole. Mudimbe (1991), for example, describes how the king uses his body to build political authority by describing and then rationalising social ambiguity, a way of taking it apart and putting it back together again. Further, the body analogy anthropomorphises the state, eliciting human identification with it. Its biology implies power – it can grow and move and do; but also vulnerability – it can decay and die. Mbembe's (2001) presidential body represents physical appetite and power as well as the absurdities of lust, impotence, eating and defecating. Thus, the body metaphor creates coherence, social identification and reification out of a complex and vulnerable concept.

Mudimbe's and Mbembe's discussions address contexts where formal institutions are weak and power is largely concentrated within a single man: the king or president carries state-meaning in ways that are

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more difficult than in more institutionally complex modern states (Cheeseman, 2018; Mkandawire, 2015). For this reason, I suggest that buildings provide a more appropriate manifestation of the state-body in Africa's historically deep and institutionally variegated modern states. In particular, the collected buildings of the state highlight a crucial feature not just of 'big things', but of the state itself, that is, the ongoing struggle between coherence and incoherence. Buildings are 'always being "made" or "unmade", always doing the work of holding together and pulling apart' (Jacobs et al., 2012: 128), they are 'ongoing' but 'also always failing' (Rose et al., 2010: 347). In this they are ideal representatives of the state. As Gieryn points out, 'buildings stabilize social life [and at] the same time they are vulnerable to wrecking balls or discourse' (Gieryn, 2002: 35): their importance for stability is underlined by the vulnerability embedded in their potential destruction.

Public buildings embody and express political arrangements in many different ways (Elleh, 2002; Goodsell, 1988; Hoffman, 2017; Rapoport, 1982, p. 19; Batsani-Ncube, 2022; Vale, 1992). Historic buildings are markers of political events and controversies or changes of regime that took place inside them; they carry associations to particular political figures or popular demonstrations. They display decorations and scars, a physical record of the community's history and signifiers of its identity (Stater, 2014); their damage or destruction can generate collective grief (Bevan, 2007) or new possibilities (Buchli, 2014); their gradual decline and decay make space for reinterpretations of how society is ordered (DeSilvey, 2006; Edensor, 2005). You can describe such iconic buildings as the face of the state, used explicitly to represent and project the state's personality.

Historic buildings in South Africa include colonial- and apartheid-era structures including the Parliament and the President's Offices. Here, as in other parts of Africa, the colonial idea of a transcending European civilisation is expressed through monumental classicism, designed to tame both societies and landscapes (Amutabi, 2012). The preeminent example of this is the Union Buildings (see Fig. 1) in Pretoria, completed in 1913 to embody the union between Afrikaners and British in 1910,

and still used as the presidential office. This enormous honey-coloured building that looks like an Italian palazzo, sits on a kopje (hill) overlooking Pretoria, kept apart from its noise and mess by carefully cultivated gardens, which emphasize the 'intangible qualities with which all great architecture is associated' (Greig, 1971) and guarantee its 'classical monumentality' (Joubert, 2009).

Other colonial examples include the white-pillared Parliament in Cape Town (1884) (see Fig. 2), and the domed Ou Raadsaal (1892, originally the Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) headquarters and now offices for the local Tshwane authority) in Pretoria (see Fig. 3). These buildings sit more firmly within their respective cities but provide a sense of respite from them. The Parliament is surrounded by the original Company's Gardens, museums and a library (expressing cultivation of nature and intellect together), fountains and a large white statue of Queen Victoria hiding in shrubbery at its entrance. The Ou Raadsaal faces the Palace of Justice over Church Square, home to an impressive and now-fenced-off statue of ZAR leader Paul Kruger (which was splashed with paint in 2016).

The challenge since 1994 has been to reinterpret these buildings, particularly the Parliament and the Union Buildings which remain central to the national story as scenery for political ritual and the state idea. An enormous statue of Nelson Mandela stands in front of the Union Buildings facing Pretoria with open arms, suggesting an embracing, encompassing state. The Parliament is open for public tours, and its insides are familiar to most South Africans through TV coverage. The gardens around all three buildings are open and popular with locals and tourists.

Newer iconic buildings speak to identity by representing dramatic political rupture, by describing ideas of newness or modernity (Hess, 2006; Kusno, 2010) or by exploring forms and aesthetics from the past in ways that reject intervening forms and ideologies (Hughes, 1997; Murray, 2007). Many of South Africa's post-1994 buildings are designed to do this, expressing democratic ideals or pre-colonial philosophies (see Fig. 4). The Constitutional Court in Johannesburg, for example,

Fig. 1. Union Buildings, Pretoria - photograph by the author.

Fig. 2. South African Parliament Building, Cape Town - photograph by the author.

represents apartheid's overthrow by occupying space once home to a prison when it was viewed as 'a gash in the landscape' (Gevisser, 2008: 318), but now a shrine to human rights, a 'sacred' heart for the new state (Ibid: 327). Materials from the prison have been incorporated into the building creating an example of 'South Africa's aesthetic symbiosis of the contradictory' (Raman, 2009: 14). The building's exterior maintains the austerity and to an extent the concrete-brick-and-iron simplicity of the original, but entering it feels like bursting into a chamber of gem-like colour, curving, generous shapes and rich textures, 'symbolic forms that reinforce many foundation myths of the postcolonial state: rebuilding, reconciliation, and unity in diversity' (Freschi, 2007: 34). The building's openness – anyone can come in if they are prepared to put their bag through a scanner – is another expression of a break with the past, although its position on a hill above and away from the main city acts as a barrier to many people.

Another example is the Northern Cape Legislature (see Fig. 5) in Galeshewe outside Kimberley, positioned close to the township to signal a shift in the locus of power (Malan & McInerney, 2003). From the road it looks like a collection of toy bricks in bold shapes and colours. The dominant building is a conical tower in rich orange-brown, decorated with mosaics and carvings of South Africa's post 1994 presidents. It is shaped to represent a bullhorn, a traditional way to summon people for public announcements. Noble argues that it deliberately eschews the 'transcendental ideal' of colonial-era buildings and offers instead a 'cosmopolitan representation': '[n]arrative remains open, totality unresolved' (Noble, 2011: 105). Freschi (2006) is less complimentary,

describing the complex as a post-modern mess. However, the complex is best understood as an example of an African modernism that both celebrates and critiques the state (Manful et al., 2022).

Other state buildings, such as government departments or military facilities, usually closed to the public, are more anonymous and secretive. Their importance, coupled with uncertainty about what they do, can make them objects of anxiety and their opacity gives rise to rumours and fantasies. These might be thought of as representing the mysterious and potentially ominous organs that make the state work.

The South African government has built several impressive new ministry buildings since 1994, physical examples of the new government's desire to shape the state around African rather than European ideas (Sihlongonyane, 2015). However, ideas about improving accessibility and cultural resonance often appear to get lost during construction and use (see Fig. 6). For example, the O. R. Tambo building, home to the Department for International Relations and Cooperation was originally planned to represent African values of Ubuntu and batho pele (people first), and the architect designed a skeleton-like external structure that was meant to convey the idea of a gift wrapped, African-style, in a blanket (Christie, 2011). The boney protrusions were attached to the northern side (originally intended to be the entrance) but were deemed too abrasive, and so the building was flipped and the southern side, now the entrance, was given a more conventional modern-classical design – all glass and metal modernism. The building, already at some distance from the centre of the city, now faces away from it altogether, and although it can be looked at from the hill above, it is heavily secured and intimidating up-close.

Finally, more mundane buildings like schools, hospitals and police stations signal the state's willingness and capacity to nurture, protect and control: their physical condition, the ways in which they inhibit or encourage people to come inside, and the stories and experiences people have of using them, all speak to the quality of welfare and the degree of security they provide (Kraftl & Adey, 2008). Continuing with our body analogy, such buildings might be described as the limbs of the state, the bits meant to reach out to provide, nurture, or discipline.

A well-known South African example of a more mundane state building is the Johannesburg Central Police Station (1968) (see Fig. 7), originally called John Vorster Square after a particularly brutal minister of justice (and later prime minister). During the apartheid era it was famous as a place where political prisoners were detained and tortured (Patel, 2022). The building occupies a space between what used to be racially segregated areas, serving as a 'spatial barrier that made the segregated city tangible' (Fisher & Clarke, 2014: 139). Built in the 'International Style', this building's power is underwritten by its references to the wider world through notions of rootless universalism that were the bedrock of mid-20th century modernism, denying the idea of apartheid as an exceptional (and increasingly isolated) regime (Murray, 2007). This building seems unafraid to get stuck into messy life, embedded in the city, surrounded by traffic, pedestrians and shops, a good example of what Manning (2007: 529) describes as architecture that 'played a role both in giving definition to the ideology of white superiority and in manifesting it': a bulky expression of separation by brute force. The building has undergone a makeover since 1994, in line with the wider move to democratize and detoxify the police force (now the police service [Rauch, 2000]). People working and walking near the building told me they felt comfortable going in.[4] Although its association with the worst aspects of police brutality were often invoked (and most people called it John Vorster rather than Johannesburg Central Police Station), many also expressed concern that it was less powerful than it used to be – a reflection of anxiety about high crime rates in Johannesburg that lends a more complex tinge to the building's violent legacy.

These buildings embody an array of historical scars, functions, ideas

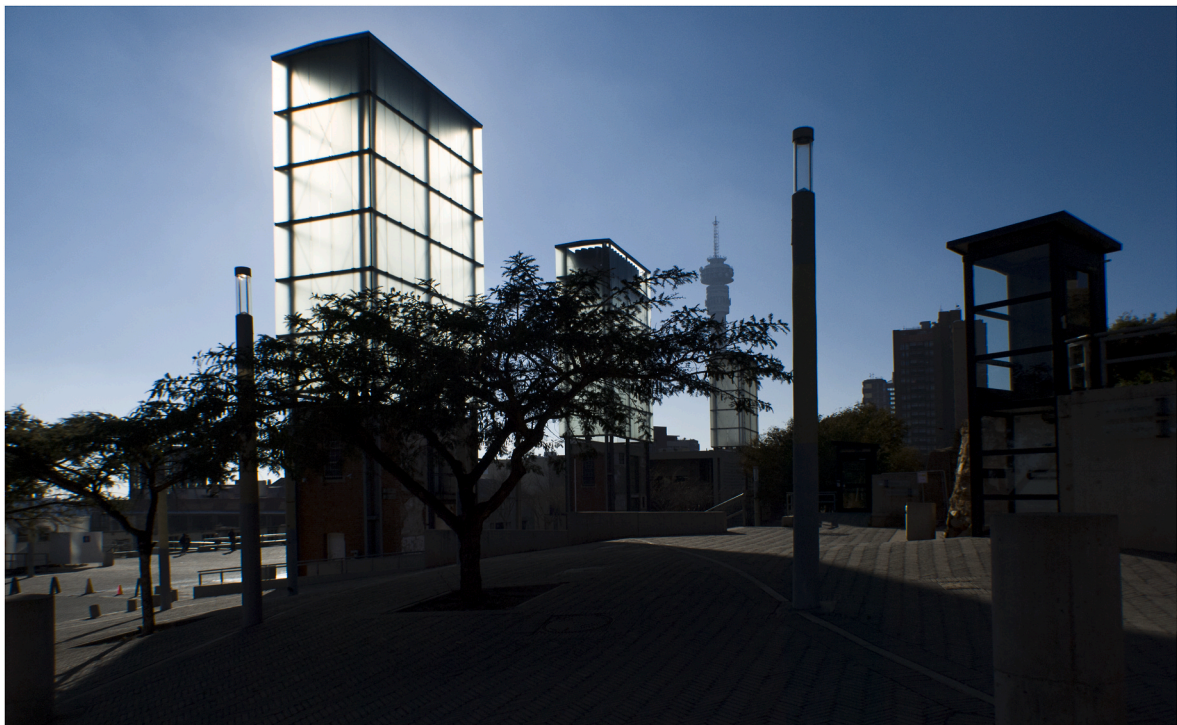**Fig. 3.** Ou Raadsaal, Pretoria - photograph by the author.

Fig. 4. Constitutional Court, Johannesburg – photograph by the author.

and compromises, charting the state's role in representing and enabling collective life. Their materiality describes the struggles of making and unmaking, coherence and collapse, that mirror the fortunes of the state itself. Their longevity too is part of what enables them to express statehood: buildings reflect the idea of institutions that outlive

particular presidents or regimes, offering a way to separate out, at least to some extent, the meanings people attach to a currently ruling regime and the underlying, ongoing state itself.

If we accept the state as physically embodied in its buildings, we can begin to explore how it is experienced and understood through bodily

Fig. 5. Northern Cape Legislature, Galeshewe – photograph by the author.

Fig. 6. Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Pretoria – photograph by the author.

encounters. This is to take up Lakoff and Johnson's argument for a 'philosophy of the flesh' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1990), a 'way of inhabiting and being at home in one's world' (Johnson, 2017: 47) in which

sensory engagements are thought to make meaning. Perhaps one of the greatest values of associating senses with making meaning is the way the approach respects both subjectivity and relationships rather than the

Fig. 7. Johannesburg Central Police Station – photograph by the author.

valorisation of the individual intellect found in European Enlightenment approaches. It puts people into the environment rather than imagining them as detached from it, and focuses on affect which, in the first place 'holds the key to deciphering deeply embedded dispositions, desires and concerns' (Pieterse, 2011: 16); and in the second 'can be understood as the property of relations, of interactions, of events: It is not purely the property of a single (human) being' (Kraftl & Adey, 2008: 215). In effect, making sense of our environment is not just a cognitive activity, but about the way we fit our sensory perceptions into broader experiences – memories, beliefs and relationships within a broader culture (Boswell, 2008; Chidester, 2015; Rose et al., 2010; Paterson, 2011; Johnson, 2017; Jethro, 2020; Daniel, 2021).

There are different ways of making sense of the state through its buildings. Many of the largest and most imposing parts of its body sit in cities where urban residents come across them every day, seeing one part perched on a hill; walking past another during the commute to work; or encountering others at more of a remove on TV, on posters at airports, stamps, bank notes and in history books. More mundane buildings involve direct engagement through visits for services like healthcare or education, engagement with law and its enforcement in police stations and courts, or in banal processes of providing and collecting state-required documentation. These various engagements call on different senses – we use our eyes to see a building from afar or on TV, but other senses come into play as we get closer – the smell of urine in an alley running alongside a building, or newly-watered soil in its surrounding gardens. Getting closer still, as we enter the building, we might feel a blast of air conditioning and touch the textures of a smooth banister, a rough wall, a sticky plastic chair. We hear the building through echoes on large hard-surfaced spaces, or pick up sounds of people chatting, phones, clacking feet, a creaking staircase or a banging door. And we can smell odours from dusty carpets or polished floors, the whiff of drains or that day's lunches from a distant canteen. Because these non-seeing senses are rooted in closeness and implication, it is useful to label them collectively as 'haptic senses' as a way to emphasize the physical engagement they bring, that seeing does not.

There is a rich and fascinating discussion amongst architectural

theorists about the ways in which buildings are read through all the senses, which can be used to counter what Paterson has called a visual bias in Geography's relationship with architecture (Paterson, 2011).[5] Many are made in support of embodied interactions that demand much more than visual engagement. Pallasmaa has been a key contributor to this discussion, asserting that, '[a]rchitecture is born of the body, and when we experience profound architecture we return to the body' (Pallasmaa, 2017: 70). Similarly, Erwine argues that we need to immerse ourselves in a building to develop a 'sense of place' (Erwine, 2017: 4). Different senses provide different ways of experiencing. Seeing, which establishes distance from external objects, is connected to 'clear thinking, the sense of the mind' (Erwine, 2017: 10) and thus to rationality. It has been privileged in Enlightenment aesthetics as the 'highest' of the senses because of its objectivity (Korsmeyer, 2002).[6] However, Pallasmaa (2012: 25) provides a harsh critique of the capacities of the eye, arguing that architecture experienced exclusively through sight produces 'sensory and mental detachment and alienation'. In contrast, as Erwine (2017: 10) writes: '[t]he other senses provide interactive, immersive experiences. You have to be close to something to smell or touch it'. Closeness and implication carry a clear reminder of our participation in an 'interactive, two-way relationship with the world' (Erwine, 2017: 24), and our dependence on it. While seeing is associated with detached reasoning, the other senses tend to be associated with more subjective qualities such as empathy, memory and imagination (Robinson, 2017; Waskul et al., 2009), and bring individual and cultural experience to the engagement (Howes, 2018), situating our understandings within specific contexts.

In European philosophy there is a tradition of tension between bodily

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[5] Although the importance of human experiences of their environment has been a preoccupation of the discipline since the 1970s – see Buttimer and Seamon (2015).

[6] It also framed European ideas about racial and class hierarchies (Howes & Classen, 2014), creating a racist legacy that, according to Classen (1997), deterred anthropologists from exploring sensory factors, impoverishing the discipline in the process.

senses and rationality (Dixon et al., 2012), carrying a suspicion that higher forms of understanding and aesthetic appreciation are undermined by subjectivity. However, such a tension is viewed as potentially creative in other traditions, where aesthetic appreciation is heightened by taking in rationality and order alongside more troubling, destructive aspects. I have discussed this approach in the context of West African architecture (Gallagher et al., 2021) in work that explores how aesthetic power needs to be fed by appreciation of both a rational beauty that is visible and an irrational sublime which is hidden. Put together, the rational things that can be seen and the chaotic things that can't, powerfully describe the making and unmaking of things through an endless ordering and disordering.

For our purposes here, I am particularly interested in the idea that different types of sensory engagement are linked to different ways of understanding, specifically, the eye to objective rationality and the haptic senses to imagination and memory and how they work together to produce understanding. A variety of sensory stimuli give us a more complete idea of a place than one on its own. As Johnson (2017) puts it, we use our experiences to build 'qualitative unity' by which we understand through a variety of bodily experiences. Being in a building is 'a great interplay of sensory stimuli, an immersed sensing body, a remembering/naming mind and a cultural overlay of meaning' (Erwine, 2017: 36). It is the juxtaposition of these two types of experience that give the richest ways to make meaning (McGilcrist, 2017).

2. A method for researching statehood through buildings

The empirical part of the article is based on three periods of fieldwork conducted in South Africa in July–August 2016, January and November 2019. The research employed a bricolage approach, building understanding from a collection of different sources in an attempt to mirror the complexity of socio-political arrangements (Kincheloe, 2005).

In the first period I explored three national capitals Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town and one regional capital, Kimberley in a bid to understand how they are shaped by and around their buildings (Adjaye, 2012). The three capital cities are home to the country's main political and administrative buildings including the Presidential Offices and government departments (Pretoria), the Constitutional Court (Johannesburg) and the Parliament (Cape Town). Kimberley is home to one of South Africa's nine regional parliaments, an institution established after 1994 in an attempt to devolve democratic decision-making. I visited their state buildings, photographed them and talked to people passing by and working near them. I also built a sense of where more mundane buildings such as police stations, court houses, hospitals and schools were situated and what they looked like. Where possible I visited the insides (participating in public tours and through invitations of people who work there).[7] I documented findings in fieldnotes and a collection of photographs.

In the second period, I worked with local research assistants Selemo Nkwe and Anastasia Slamat who helped me organise and run 24 focus group discussions (FGDs) with citizens drawn from community groups in and around the four cities: ten from Pretoria, Johannesburg and surrounding townships; nine from Cape Town and surrounding townships; and five from Kimberley and surrounding townships. We engaged with men and women from different ethnic, socio-economic, religious and age groups to gather stories and views on state buildings. We approached people through local organisations, including churches, community centres, libraries, education institutions, youth clubs and

care homes. Involving gate-keepers in this way creates complex relationships around research (Campbell et al., 2006), bringing the advantage of establishing trust through local leaders who then help the researcher to meet and engage with members of their group, but also the potential drawback of local power dynamics influencing who is included, what kinds of consent are gained and so on. To foster voluntary participation we produced information sheets in relevant languages and talked through the aims and scope of the research with participants before discussions started; but the nature of research like this is that the researcher is only one actor in the process and must adapt to some circumstances, balancing between disciplinary and institutional research requirements and local norms. Indeed, this is part of the reason to use the approach, allowing power to shift towards participants who outnumber the researcher in a bid to undermine to some extent the idea of the researcher being in charge (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2014), and to view the encounter itself as an example of relationships and power-dynamics within groups (Bryman, 2012; Duchesne, 2015). Our groups had an average of eight participants, usually a reasonably internally homogenous group of people who either already knew each other or who were able to identify each other as members of the same organisation. We found this a good way to establish a relaxed, safe atmosphere (Duchesne, 2017).

Discussions were guided by two questions: the first asked participants to suggest nominations for 'South Africa's most important public building'. Once a list was established, we encouraged the group to describe each of the buildings on it. Discussion was thus led by the group's priorities as to which buildings 'counted' as important, and how they should be described – whether from direct experience or rumour, from the outside or inside, through things seen or otherwise sensed regularly, remembered from a particular experience, or imagined.

Language presented an important constraint: our groups included people whose first language was Sotho, Zulu, Tswana, Xhosa and Afrikaans. Having intended to conduct discussions in people's first languages, in order to allow them more scope to translate idiom and thought into words (Masolo, 1991), with my role being reduced to initiating discussion and the research assistants guiding it where necessary, we found ourselves in a position where nearly all participants opted to speak in English because they wanted me to understand (with occasional recourses to first languages when people got excited or struggled to find the words to describe what they meant). The result was almost certainly a loss of nuance, an illustration of the restricted access to meaning-making for a foreign researcher whose understanding will be shaped by translation of explanation rather than the deeper knowledge (linguistic and cultural) accessible to a local researcher. My research assistants and I mitigated as much as we could for this shortcoming by discussing what had happened in the groups afterwards. In the end though, this account of state buildings operated within the constraints of colonial legacies that have left an official language that is only a minority's first language, replicated by the presence of a British researcher. Speaking about the state in first languages might well have yielded different types of thinking; as it is, the reflections considered here emerge from a framework originally conditioned by colonial values and ideas – as is the state itself.

However, this approach – where participants describe and explain their state architecture and politics to an interested outsider – carries virtues of its own. The assumption that research is purely extractive should be challenged for overlooking the advantages of creating relationships between people who do research and people who participate in it (sometimes causing discomfort or disappointment on both sides [Gallagher, 2017]). For example, many groups were clear that they did not want to expose 'ignorance' about the buildings (some assuming the exercise was a test of knowledge) and FGDs nearly always included discussion about how best to represent people's views fairly. As a result, not only the format and shape of discussion, but the treatment of its outcomes, were determined in collaboration.

Many also expressed a desire to find out what happened to their

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[7] I joined public tours of the Parliament in Cape Town, the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg and the Northern Cape Legislature in Kimberley; I visited and met staff in the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Pretoria City Hall, the Department of Environment (all in Pretoria) and the Johannesburg Central Police Station.

contributions and to read the research outcomes. The third part of the research attempted to meet this desire, and to collect further thoughts building on our early work. We ran a series of pop-up exhibitions in Pretoria, Soweto and Johannesburg, some at or near buildings that had been discussed and others in sites where FGDs had taken place. The exhibition was designed by the South African architectural design team Counterspace, and comprised mobile boards carrying cut-out shapes of the five most-discussed buildings overlaid with written quotes from FGD participants and a recording of students reading from them.[8] People passing by were able to stop to read the comments and to add their own. Some chose to engage in discussing the exhibition and its subject with the team.

Across the three activities we spoke with more than 300 people, aged between 18 and 85, from a variety of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, roughly half men and half women. These urban ('citizens' in Mamdani's [1996] formulation) accounts of statehood articulated from experiences and readings of state buildings were frequently explicit. Most discussions moved quickly and without prompting to meanings of statehood.

3. Sensing the state

The empirical material returns us to the face-brick analogy. The surface of the face-brick can only be experienced by sight, from the outside of the building as it provides a covering, facing the world. But it was a particular kind of building that people described from this position: the prestigious, iconic, impressive buildings, largely those I have described as making up the 'face' of the state. All groups mentioned the nationally significant Union Buildings and Parliament in their descriptions of outsides. Others were more parochial – Johannesburg residents referred to the Constitutional Court and Albert Luthuli House (headquarters of the ANC), some Pretorians mentioned the City Hall, people living in Kimberley/Galeshewe discussed the Northern Cape Legislature, and some Cape Townians mentioned Cape Town Castle. The underneath of the face-bricks came most immediately into discussions of mundane buildings – like hospitals, schools and police stations. Unlike the more iconic state buildings that are reserved for elites, people are used to being inside such buildings and confident in describing direct experiences, which they did largely through haptic sensory impressions. These buildings were of interest in all groups, but in particular to some of the most marginalised groups.

Jenkins argues against reductive approaches to architecture which uncritically buy into 'a material state that is easily accepted and understandable – the plan, the facade, or the photograph' (Jenkins, 2002: 225) – stressing the need to get inside the 'black box' of buildings to properly understand them. Yet the face-brick analogy suggests the importance of doing both, and perhaps even of understanding the relationship between an attractive, 'understandable' facade and a more ambiguous interior. As I will show, South African citizens tended to experience the outsides and insides of state buildings very differently, the outside embodying order, and the inside chaos. As I will argue, this juxtaposition produces different ways of understanding the state body, *making* it on one hand and *unmaking* it on the other.

3.1. Looking at the state

Perhaps it is not surprising that the iconic faces of buildings should be described exclusively through what people saw. Many of these buildings were designed to impress people from a distance and although it is possible to look through perimeter fences and over walls, barriers make it impossible for most people to get close enough to touch. The two most 'important buildings' (judging by the frequency that they were mentioned) were the Union Buildings and Parliament. People began with impressions of 'neatness', 'whiteness', 'pillars', 'gardens'; 'uniqueness' and 'hugeness', the quality of 'a building apart'. As discussion warmed up, people began to intellectualise their descriptions using historical narrative, metaphor and abstraction. For example, in one group of young people from Olievenhoutbosch, the Union Buildings were variously described as 'the first passport of a black man'; 'where our history was found'; 'what we are'.[9] Community workers from the same township said that the Union Buildings were 'everyone'; 'the skeleton of this country'; 'where you get your answer'.[10] Others dwelt on their association with apartheid, one man for example describing them as 'the devil's headquarters'.[11] The Parliament was described by one woman from Cape Town as a 'the dark side of what used to be'[12]; and by community activists in Galeshewe as 'like an umbrella' or 'crutches' for the country.[13] The Northern Cape Legislature was described by a woman from Galeshewe as 'a giant lipstick'.[14] A man from Galeshewe called it a 'ship', and explained that the Galeshewe 'ship' was much better than the Cape Town parliament because it realised Jan van Riebeeck's original state-vision better than the colonial one had.[15]

Analogies and historical associations showed how seeing the state from a distance enabled people to encapsulate and express what it meant – with some objectivity – by putting its institutions within broader historical or political contexts. There was something helpful in *seeing* these buildings for people to rationalise their meaning: they were legible embodiments of the state.

People's feelings about this seen state varied. A group of Johannesburg church-goers in their 20s found a very positive version embodied in the Union Buildings:

It's beautiful.

It's too much.

It's stunning, it is absolutely stunning.

It's just, oh my God, it's absolutely, I actually love this building so much.[16]

They 'saw' in it stories about the 1956 Women's March (against the pass-laws), Nelson Mandela's inauguration in 1994 and lying in state in 2013. They took the building's claim to symbolise 'union' and turned it into the union between all South Africans that Mandela had inaugurated in 1994.[17] After some discussion, one woman was able to sum up how the building has engendered such strong emotional engagement: 'I can see myself in that building … Nelson Mandela's inauguration gives us a collective narrative that we can all relate to because that was the beginning of democracy.'[18]

[8] There is a short film about the exhibition, State-ments: https://www.africanstatearchitecture.co.uk/post/asa-exhibition-on-state-architecture-in-south-africa-1.

[9] FGD with youths, Olievenhoutbosch, 18 January 2019 (Pretoria_FG3).
[10] Pretoria_FG4.
[11] FGD with library users, 16 January 2019, Pretoria_FG1.
[12] FGD with civil society group, Cape Town, 31 January 2019 (CT_FG7).
[13] FGD with community activists, Galeshewe, Kimberley, 21 January 2019 (Kimberley_FG1).
[14] FGD with youths, Galeshewe, Kimberley, 23 January 2019 (Kimberley_FG5).
[15] Kimberley_FG1. Van Riebeeck, leader of some of the first European settlers, was appointed as Commander of the Dutch settlement in the Cape, 1652–1662.
[16] Pretoria_FG1.
[17] This appropriation of the term is an example of 'misprision' or 'theft' of a building's original purpose, which Ballantyne explains as happening when buildings 'have been made to mean things that their designers did not have in mind' (Ballantyne, 2004: 11). Such re-readings have been discussed in other contexts. Coombes (2003), for example, describes how contentious structures such as the Voortrekker Monument that celebrates the Great Trek and military victories over the Zulus and Ndebele can be retained and re-read by new generations of South Africans.
[18] Pretoria_FG1.

In contrast many older people talked about their detachment from the buildings, 'backing off' or dismissing them as 'important for tourists',[19] and 'not really our things'.[20] Some went further, describing alienation. For example, a group of elders I met in Soweto refused to talk about the Union Buildings at all. As one man said:

When you discuss buildings like the Union Buildings, all the politics were for the oppression of black people. So, I'm very sorry – in fact, I'm not sorry – I'm not interested in that building, in the Union Buildings.[21]

Another older man in Roodepan near Kimberley, said:

I had the privilege of being at the Union Buildings for one of Madiba's celebrations on the grass there. And I hated every minute of it … The very location that you're in, made you hate every brick that you're looking at … As we left I saw in the wing mirror the Union Buildings: it was like a sigh of relief.[22]

These older men refused to buy into the beautiful face-brick veneer. Overwhelmingly conscious of the building's underlying structure, they wouldn't even look at its beautiful exterior.

Further descriptions conveyed ambivalence. A group of politically active students described the Union Buildings as made in a European style that was 'comfortable and homelike' for white South Africans, but created a tendency for black South Africans to 'back off'.[23] Another suggested that all such buildings should be pulled down. Others disagreed, and the discussion ended on more ambivalent reflection on the 'home' provided by South African state-buildings:

[A building from the colonial era] can't be your home because it doesn't resemble what you understand or what you know. But it's home in a sense that it's in your land, and it carries a history about your people, even if it might be a violent history … Therefore, it *is* your space. So it's complex.[24]

Other groups of young people described their fuller attachment to the building, but were aware of its repellent characteristics. The building gave them positive impressions of Mandela,[25] the idea that 'that's where our history was found', that this was the building that 'destroyed apartheid and built freedom', and that it provides 'a home for every individual in South Africa' and 'encourages different cultures to unite there'.[26] At the same time they knew that their parents associated it with another history. One woman said: 'Honestly speaking, my mother doesn't like the Union Building. Even when we went there, she was never part of it. And I can't say I blame her.'[27]

All these accounts – positive, negative and ambivalent – make the state by mapping out its story. Histories, personal and collective identities and the connections between them, were summoned up when people talked about how they saw its buildings. Metaphor-making and story-telling, as Arendt (1981) suggests, are part of the sorting out and making connections between here and there that constitute thinking. This 'carrying over' or 'transition' (Bernstein, 2000) is an active, creative process of making. Seeing, with its detachment, and creation of an apparently rational facade, gives scope to this kind of meaning-making in which people appeared to bounce light off the surface of the state in order to arrange it into patterns, to sort and organise. Even the most

negative perceptions of the state – those based on a refusal to look at the buildings – were active acts of state-making that describe a broken relationship with an othered state, albeit a thing apart.

3.2. Touching the state

The face-brick analogy is not only concerned with the rational exterior, but carries suggestions of a much more problematic and ambiguous inside. In our FGDs, we found that these insides were rarely described through the sense of sight, but focused on smell, sound and touch. This was true explicitly of mundane state buildings (hospitals, schools, police stations and council offices where people go to pay rent and bills) whose interiors everyone had direct experience of but, as we shall see, it was similarly imagined of the interiors of iconic buildings where most people had not been. I am not suggesting that the insides of buildings cannot be seen; rather that in FGDs it was the haptic senses that were used in remembering and describing them.

One example, discussed by a church group in Soweto, very clearly illustrated the differences between the inside and outside.[28] This was Chris Hani Baragwanath, 'the biggest hospital in Africa, in Soweto,' and a source of local pride, which members of the group said had 'two parts to it', one designed to be seen (on VIP visits, on TV) and the other for users. These two parts of the hospital were completely different, one beautiful and shiny to look at, the other full of tangible horror. One woman described it:

There is the part that they usually show on TV, the most beautiful part where it's clean-clean. I think that's where they usually take the president and the ministers for the cameras to see how beautiful it is. But there is this other part where it is so disgusting, where you can come across blood, and where it's not clean. I found myself [there] the other day, when my dad passed away, when I had to go and do the body ID. The smell in that place … I could not eat for days. It's horrible. People are thrown down on the floor by the cops, you'll find them lying on the floor. As much as it's a very big hospital, I don't know whether it's not well taken care of, but something is not right.[29]

Equivalent buildings were similarly described. Hospitals were 'dirty',[30] where you 'meet dead people in the lift'.[31] Schools were 'overcrowded and draining',[32] cold and uncomfortable because 'the windows are broken, the desks, you can't sit there anymore',[33] unsafe and full of crime.[34] Police stations were smelly and undignified,[35] 'horrible because you can't see; it is dark, no lights on, nothing', a place where 'the prisoners are sicker than each other',[36] and whose internal state of decay and confusion was a direct cause of corruption.[37] Although most descriptions of mundane buildings detailed unpleasant characteristics, some people mentioned more positive feelings. One man from Galeshewe said his local hospital 'smelled of medicine'.[38] But, positive or negative, descriptions of interiors focused on smells, sounds and touch. Impressions were visceral, possessing none of the abstraction

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[19] FGD with church goers, Jabulani, Soweto, 13 January 2019 (Soweto_FG2).

[20] FGD with students, Johannesburg, 11 January 2019, (Joburg_FG3).

[21] FGD with elders, Soweto, 8 January 2019 (Soweto_FG1).

[22] FGD with elders, Kimberley, 21 January 2019 (Kimberley_FG3). Madiba is the respectful title many South Africans use to refer to Nelson Mandela.

[23] Joburg_FG3.

[24] Joburg_FG3.

[25] FGD with youths, Mamelodi, Pretoria, 17 January 2019 (Pretoria_FG2).

[26] Pretoria_FG3.

[27] Pretoria_FG3.

[28] Soweto_FG2. The hospital was built in 1942 and was celebrated during the apartheid period too.

[29] Soweto_FG2.

[30] Pretoria_FG1.

[31] FGD with workers, Galeshewe, 21 January 2019 (Kimberley_FG2).

[32] FGD with artists, Galeshewe, 22 January 2019 (Kimberley_FG4).

[33] FGD with adults working in education, Cape Town, 30 January 2019 (CT_FG6).

[34] FGD with civil society group, Manenberg, Cape Town 29 January 2019 (CT_FG5).

[35] FGD with youth group, Cape Town, 24 January, (CT_FG1).

[36] FGD with community activists, Lavender Hill, Cape Town, 1 February 2019, (CT_FG8).

[37] Joburg_FG2.

[38] Kimberley_FG2.

or objectivity of the outsides of iconic buildings. Haptic impressions were connected with vulnerability and entanglement: people were disgusted, frightened or reassured. The story was much messier.

The sensory impressions gathered from inside buildings described an ambiguous state, one in which citizens were implicated, and from which a problematic state-citizen relationship emerged. Mundane state buildings, often full of stink and corruption, were at once penetrated by society's crime and disorder and author of further chaos. Commenting on a police station in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, one man said: 'That building was one of the beautiful ones. Who makes the place dirty? It's the people who are staying there. Who destroys the lifts? … The first corruption is with us.'[39] This idea of the dangers to the state from citizens was powerfully conveyed in several discussions about the problem of empty, neglected buildings. A Cape Town group discussed the way these leave space for criminals to move in; they are 'where all the dodginess happens'.[40] The state was often a threatening thing. As a student explained, people were reluctant to enter state buildings because 'if you meet a police officer or a security guard or whatever, by virtue of the fact that you know that these people use force, even though you know about your rights, you shrink'.[41] But the state was also potentially vulnerable. Many people expressed concern about opening buildings that were usually off-limits. I found this amongst traders working at the foot of the Union Buildings who talked about the dangers to the building represented by the increased openness of the park beneath it. They felt that the building's integrity, formerly protected by a wide, strictly enforced barrier, was jeopardised by the people who now slept at its foot, representatives of a dirty and violent city.[42] A Cape Town man was concerned about the idea of opening up the Parliament: 'It's too dangerous. It's dangerous yes, it's allowing enemies in.' A colleague tried to reassure him by detailing the complicated security measures that would keep 'enemies' out.[43]

As discussions progressed, ideas of ambiguity increasingly attached to the insides of all parts of the state. Rumour and imagination came to the fore. Even though people might see the inside of the parliament on TV, for example, their descriptions came to focus on more haptic impressions, as though linked to direct experiences of hospitals, schools and police stations. During the apartheid era the Parliament 'kept its secrets',[44] but now televized proceedings reveal some of them. A group of community volunteers in Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town described the outsides of the Parliament building as imposing, impressive, exclusive, protective, big, awe-inspiring … until one woman reflecting on the contrast with what goes on inside added, 'and then they go chaos'.[45] Chaos is a description that comes up everywhere, along with descriptions of MPs as 'not educated … not professional',[46] 'corrupt',[47] 'always fighting',[48] 'setting a bad example'.[49] Time after time people pointed to the disjuncture between a building 'where everything comes from … where everything is planned, and where people are told what is going on'[50] and the 'messed up'[51] innards, the loud 'fighting place'[52]

exposed by the media. In similar vein, young people from Johannesburg, after telling me how much they adored the Union Buildings, referred to news stories of 'shady business' and 'the Guptas' in relation to what goes on inside it.[53] Such glimpses of the insides of the state were sometimes supplemented by troubling rumours. People made oblique references to frightening things happening in the cellars of state buildings.[54] One Tshwane local authority employee who worked in the Ou Raadsaal talked about haunting sounds heard by colleagues working after dark in the building.[55] There was a discussion in Mitchell's Plain about an underground chamber in the Parliament said to contain burning crosses, ceremonies involving chicken blood and torture.[56] Some linked them to the apartheid era, and others to the ritual practices of the Khoi-San people, thought to be South Africa's oldest ethnic group.

Personal memories of revulsion, fears about a mutually violent state-society relationship, and fantasies of chilling terror all speak to the haptic senses' ability to remind people of vulnerability and dependence. The confusion engendered by impressions drawn from the haptic senses offered little scope for putting things together, for making. Instead, the person can feel overwhelmed with impressions that are felt but difficult to explain within a bigger narrative. Descriptions of bad smells, discordant sounds and coldness, described physical vulnerability; their associations with corruption, violence and death, spoke to state decay . Discussions of the insides of the state dealt with a mutual vulnerability between the state and society, found in fears of what each might do to the other. Being inside was being implicated, affecting and being affected by the state. The state emerged as partial, unfinished and jumbled; narratives that might tidy and settle were elusive and it was unclear that anyone was in control. It was as if entering the state through its buildings was to begin to find and create an unravelling, an exercise in unmaking of its thingness.

4. Conclusion: making sense of the state

In his book about the ways in which South Africans' senses have been deployed in memorialisation and nation-building since 1994, Jethro discusses 'seeing' in relation to Freedom Park, a memorial to the anti-apartheid struggle. The memorial is positioned on a kopje overlooking Pretoria, visible from the city and in line of sight of the Union Buildings and the Voortrekker Memorial. Here, he argues, the government has tried to promote 'vision as the primary sensibility for the nation to access knowledge about the past' (Jethro, 2020: 21). For Jethro, Freedom Park represents the 'seeing state', knowing, ordering and in control, produced by state elites for citizens' consumption. On a different register, he describes how personal memories are represented through smell and sound in Cape Town's District Six Museum. In particular, 'odours and aromas have symbolic properties that transcend not only material space but also time' (Jethro, 2020: 80) building powerful individual meanings. Jethro's senses present two levels of the political – a high politics projected from the top-down in things seen from a distance, and a personal politics of life in an urban community.

Jethro's insights are helpful for working through how our citizen discussions illustrate acts of making and unmaking the state through sensory impressions. On one side is an exercise of making the state as citadel – seen and overseeing. Its capacity can be linked to violence and control, and to the creation of collective meaning. Most crucially though, the state emerges as a thing with capacity. On the other side,

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[39] Joburg_FG2.
[40] CT_FG1.
[41] Johannesburg_FG3.
[42] Fieldnotes, 26 June 2016.
[43] FGD with elders, Woodstock, Cape Town, 25 January 2019.
[44] CT_FG5.
[45] FGD with civil society group, Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town, 26 January 2019 (CT_FG3).
[46] FGD with community members from Joe Slovo and Dunoon townships, Du Noon, Cape Town, 28 January 2019 (CT_FG4).
[47] FGD with church goers, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, 6 January 2019 (Joburg_FG1).
[48] Kimberley_FG1.
[49] CT_FG8.
[50] Soweto_FG1.
[51] Kimberley_FG5.
[52] CT_FG1.

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[53] Joburg_FG1. Atul, Ajay and Rajesh Gupta are businessmen associated with former President Jacob Zuma, widely believed to have been involved in a number of corrupt deals during his tenure. The relationship between business and political elites is referred to as 'state capture' – see Martin and Solomon (2016) and Shai (2017).
[54] Kimberley_FG3.
[55] Fieldnotes, 7 September 2016.
[56] CT_FG3.

unmaking comes through individualized engagements that centre on touching and feeling a state that is found and made to be unravelling in the process. However, it is not simply that such personal engagements disrupt official narratives, as Jethro suggests, but that these are found in ambiguous circumstances, and are impossible to resolve. Unmaking is more than providing separate alternatives; it constitutes an unpicking of the state-thing.

In this article I have described a contradictory project of seeing and feeling the state in a project of making and unmaking. Jacobs (2006) points out that 'making' happens when narratives, discourses and materials operate together to make a big thing cohere. This is similar to ideas about reifying the state, creating a coherent and rational account of it. In the FGDs' rendering, this account of the state was created from a distance, reinforcing the idea of the state as separate from society. Such an approach has many implications for theoretical ideas of how the state is created as a separate and coherent entity (Bartelson, 2001; Mitchell, 1991). However, I suggest that citizens are not receivers of this version of the state thing, as Jethro implies, but, as Jacobs argues of the 'big-thing', they are active coproducers. Seeing is conducive to thinking. It enabled our South African informants to create metaphors to represent state meaning as a grand project that explained and enabled collective life. In other words, citizens were active agents in the act of state-making.

At the same time, other senses pursued a very different kind of engagement with the state, one closer to state-unmaking. This goes beyond a remaking, a providing of alternatives to the official narrative. Unmaking comes from the ways in which the haptic senses involve people in a state that is vulnerable and incoherent. Once past the veneer of the face-brick they experience a chaotic jumble of sensory impressions that are difficult to weave into a coherent narrative. This state comes apart, breaks apart, potentially vulnerable and decayed.

It would be misleading to suggest that this layered state-thing is necessarily the story of unfinished business or an entity teetering between viability and collapse. Rather, following Bartelson (2001), we might understand how critique, constituted here in impressions of unmaking, is simply another side to the making of the state; for South Africans, a living body, effectively described as a 'face-brick', an unsightly interior with a beautiful but thin veneer.

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