

1 Green Scenery

THE VERTICAL AND THE HORIZONTAL

The power of a country road when one is walking along it is different from the power it has when one is flying over it by airplane.

—Walter Benjamin

I arrived in Bahrain for my fieldwork on the eve of Eid al-Fitr, the festival of breaking the fast that marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. I had intended to be in Bahrain before then, in order to visit estate agents to find housing, but the taxi driver who drove me from the airport to the Oriental Hotel in the Manama suq announced gleefully that “Eid has just been declared!” The king, he told me, had declared Eid a day earlier than expected, following the first spotting of the moon marking the end of the Ramadan fast—Islam follows the lunar calendar. This meant five days of public holiday would follow, and significantly for me, real estate accommodation offices would be closed. I had decided early on not to live with expatriates or in an area that Western expatriates might normally choose, such as Juffair, Exhibition Road, or Budaiya. But it was impossible for me to find a place to live with a Bahraini family and to achieve the intimacy of living conditions that the ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski would advocate.¹ After much searching through the *Gulf Daily News* and in the Internet cafés of Manama during Eid, I gave up on the idea and sublet a modest one-bedroom apartment from a French hairdresser, Philippe, who in turn rented the villa from a pilot in the king’s fleet. I found the apartment through an advertisement on Expatriates.com:

1 b/room Flat attached to a private house for rent n nice area Manama. Description: Little sweet-home Flat with character in Manama (15 mns walking to souk) **nice green area** for 1 person, attached to a private villa, with it's private door. 1 b.room + separ.private shower & toilet & separate mini-kitchen with fridge/micro-wave/kettle/elec ring stove/crokery/cuttlery/new bed(130 cm)/T.V/internet(with an extra 20 bd/months on share)/little cute garden with pond. 200 bds/months (400 bhd every 2 months) all tax included (water and electricity and the 10 % municipality residential tax and the maintenance). [All sic; emphasis mine.]

I was intrigued and went to see it. The “nice green area” was the district of Gufool, just outside Manama and beside the Water Gardens, which had been “beautified” by Charles Belgrave some fifty years before. Belgrave was the British-born adviser to the ruler of Bahrain, and effectively prime minister, from 1926 to 1957. The location of the apartment allowed easy access by foot to Manama on one side and the greenbelt on the other; this centrality was important for my desire to walk everywhere I needed to go. Gufool itself is full of mid-twentieth-century villas and is laid out in a grid system. One can easily imagine the date palms that used to inhabit the site; clearly from its context, surrounded by date palm groves and former date palm groves, it was formerly a date palm plantation too, a *bustān*.

The apartment itself was directly above the hair salon serving female expatriates and *sheikhāt*, female members of the ruling family. “You look youngerrrrr!” became my morning wake-up call, as Philippe complimented his clients. After I moved in in early October, it became a priority for me to paint the yellow walls of the apartment white. Steven Caton did this during his fieldwork, as he reports in *Yemen Chronicle*, as a way of establishing his ownership over his place of abode.² It took some time for the landlord to agree, but once the walls were white I realized the power of color to transform perception of space. The color had energized me for the task I had set myself.

THE MINISTRY

When I entered Rashid's office on my first day calling on the Ministry of Municipalities in Manama, on the desk on top of a pile of papers was a

full-color printed version of a report widely available on the Internet. This report, made soon after Google Earth became available in Bahrain, compared areas of Bahrain with Bahraini royal properties and did not mince words. Comparing the densely populated capital city of Manama with the king's private island—of exactly the same size as the capital—the anonymous author asked: “How many people live in Manama? And how many property owners are there? Who is allowed to enter the city? And what's the density of its population?” It goes on to say, “Ask the same questions for this ‘Bahrain’ island over here!”³ The document, which was widely circulated by e-mail around the Gulf, contained screenshots made before Google Earth was banned in Bahrain (for a brief period, as it turned out). As one blogger put it, “Pamphleteering doesn't get much more visceral than this (even if I have no easy way of verifying if it is true). If Bahrain's government wants to prevent the spread of this kind of information, it will have to ban e-mail.”⁴ This report's presence on a ministry desk indicated the seriousness with which online informal communication is taken.

I had planned on working with the Ministry of Municipalities and Agriculture Affairs. To access the archives of the ministry—or so I was told—I needed a formal job. My appointment to the Physical Planning Directorate was approved at the lower levels of the bureaucracy, went through the hierarchy, and I was told, sat in the minister's inbox for most of a year. I had actually left Bahrain when I received a message that the ministry was looking for me to start work in its offices in an office building in the center of Manama called “Gold City.” The message was in the form of a voicemail inquiring as to my whereabouts as I had not shown up for work. By then I had met the then minister, who was Shi'i, one evening at the Ma'tam Bin Rajab, his family *ma'tam*, at a celebration he had organized. Cattle and sheep were slaughtered on the street outside as offerings for the poor. This follows one of the foundational practices of Islam, *zakat*, or alms-giving and distribution of one's wealth among the community. It was that evening, a couple of weeks before I finished my fieldwork, that I first met the minister in person and told him what I was doing. He told me to let him know if there was anything I ever needed or wanted. Soon after that, my appointment to the ministry was approved—through his generosity or merely slow coincidence I cannot say. I heard critique from several

Sunnis in the ministry that the minister was only interested in helping the Baharna, an ethnic group I obviously am not a member of. During my year in Bahrain, officials at the ministry were most gracious and gave me desk space in the office, although without that formal job I could not have access to the official database. My time at the ministry allowed me to closely observe their ways of working and cultivate many conversations and indeed friendships. At first I would bring my notebooks so I could work at my desk and write up my fieldnotes but quickly found that I could not work when I went to the ministry; the days were taken up with people stopping by to chat and drink tea. Usually we would have lemon tea, made of black dried lemon and hot water with some honey.

I had expected that the affiliation with the ministry would allow me greater access to information and people. In general, this was not the case. While I made many good friends through the ministry, it took a few weeks for me to realize that being attached to the ministry included both obligation toward the ministry and a bias, perceived or actual. And then there was the issue that the ministry was not really that powerful.⁵

In general I found that those in authority, while sympathetic to my presence—and this includes a friend from the royal family—did not seem used to being questioned about government policies. They either didn't know the answers to my questions or did not want to tell me the answers, although no one ever actually said no. A couple of people who were especially sympathetic to my work explained that their willingness to open up to me was hampered by the fact that they feared giving out too much information might jeopardize their positions.

“Do you want the official figure or the real figure?” was a regular question asked in the various ministries in response to my queries, and hardly anyone batted an eyelash at the irony of such a question being posed. Obtaining any sort of quantitative information could be taxing and frustrating. In one instance, at an unnamed institution, a senior figure explained to me that a huge discrepancy between the published figures and the reality originated from a desire to please the rulers. Once the rulers became aware of a figure, exaggerated by a civil servant to make himself and his team look better in the eyes of the authorities, the organization became trapped in a set of double figures. There were those figures

that were presented to the rulers and those that were used within the organization to try to catch up with what they were declaring. Other sets of double figures persist more pervasively.

When I inquired at a ministry in Manama about the square meters of green space in Bahrain, I was told that the official figure was both freely available and unreliable; meanwhile the real figure could only be obtained on my behalf through the written request of the president of my university to the minister. Furthermore, I was told that even if the president of Harvard wrote to the minister, she would probably not receive an answer. The complexities of the cultural conditions in Bahrain add to the complexities of gathering information. In general, I found that the majority Shi'i population was receptive to my presence and much more open with me than were the Sunni-controlled ministries. As the literature on the urbanism of landscape was so thin for Bahrain, it became clear that the broad range of data I needed for this research project could be obtained only from a long-term period of ethnographic fieldwork. I would need extended engagement with the location and its people to gather the data, qualitative and quantitative, that I needed.

METHODS

Having secured funding for a year of fieldwork in Bahrain and the Gulf, I developed a schedule for the first few months. I wanted to confirm my plan's usefulness and asked some eminent professors for guidance on my methodology. The professors told me, "Just do what you need to do." In other words, don't think too hard. It took me some time to realize and appreciate that this was not an evasion of the question but actually really good advice. I went to Bahrain and started doing. It was only when I was in the field, for instance, that I realized how important walking would be, as it increased the possibilities of serendipity that most anthropologists depend on and brought me into contact with many Bahrainis outside of my regular social orbit with whom I could engage.

Once in the field, I found that even the best-laid plans did not always work out as hoped. I constantly had to improvise, to abandon work I had been doing, to keep multiple lines of inquiry open, and hardest of all, to be

patient. One of the biggest challenges I faced was that things took time, although being Irish I was already used to “creative” schedules for things such as buses. When I asked an Irish bus driver once why the bus was always late, he quipped, “If we left on time, everyone would miss it.” The expression *inshāllah* (a colloquial form of *in shā’ Allāh*, meaning “God willing”) has many tonalities, each of which implies a different degree of commitment. Until I learned to appreciate and interpret the significance of these nuances, I found that the driver did not show up or promised meetings did not happen. The standard explanation for something not happening in the way that it was supposed to was that it couldn’t have been God’s will. God’s intentions, it turned out, can be somewhat anticipated by noticing the different emphases between *inshāllah*, *inshāāllah*, and *inshāāāllah*. The longer the *ā*, the more likely something is to happen.

My expectations for my time in Bahrain were to live among Bahrainis, to meet locals as much as possible, and to speak Arabic on a daily basis—a plan that turned out to be incredibly difficult for many reasons, never mind the fact that there are so many local social groups and voices to be heard. Bahrain’s polyvocality is evidenced by the plethora of accents in Bahrain; often they differ markedly even within families if children go to different schools or socialize with different social groups.⁶ I had a romantic notion similar to that of Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the founders of ethnographic fieldwork, who advocates for an immersive experience but describes an easy division of observer from observed, which is not always so easy in the field. Malinowski writes that the proper conditions for ethnographic fieldwork “consist mainly in cutting oneself off from the company of other white men, and remaining in as close contact with the natives as possible, which can only be achieved by camping right in their villages.”⁷

Camping in Bahrain’s villages would be useful only if the villagers camped too. Most Bahrainis live behind high walls, and it is unusual for expatriates such as myself to be invited inside. The lack of interaction between Bahrainis and expatriates is often attributed to issues surrounding women and modesty, but clearly there is more to it than that. In any case, I was surprised at how isolated my life was from what I expected local life to be. It was not at all the experience I was expecting; indeed my day-to-day life was in general not that different from my existence in the United States. This was due both to the impenetrability of Bahraini

society to expatriates and to the fact that the Bahraini lifestyle is in many respects quite westernized. So when I did get invited behind the high walls, I was sometimes surprised at how life within was not that different.

When I met my Bahraini friends for lunch or dinner, I usually wanted to eat traditional Bahraini street food such as the most delicious local *tikka*—finely chopped cubes of lamb marinated overnight in dried lemon, which gives them a black color, and grilled on a skewer. It is eaten with fresh *khubz* (bread) and raw green onion leaves. My friend Isa, the U.S.-educated civil servant with a deep love for Bahrain and Bahraini traditions, introduced me to “*wāḥid dīnār tikka*” (*wāḥid* means “one”; one dinar is about US\$2.65). Except for Isa, my Bahraini friends and informants steered me toward fancy restaurants such as Monsoon, which they would describe as “the best Thai restaurant in Bahrain.” Indeed, on one occasion when I returned to Bahrain for a short trip, all I wanted was to go find *tikka*, whereas my friends wanted to go to a posh restaurant with “international cuisine,” which also included pork and alcohol. They probably thought I would enjoy that. They preferred to showcase their cosmopolitan bona fides, but all I wanted was Bahraini food. One of the few restaurants near my home was Dairy Queen, the U.S. fast-food restaurant, and although I initially tried to avoid eating there, I wound up being a regular customer known to the mostly Filipino staff. It had a largely student clientele, due to the proximity of the campus of AMA International University. Ali, a younger brother of my friend Isa, said he often went to Dairy Queen in the early hours of the morning with his friends.

I did get invited into a few Bahraini homes during the course of the year, sometimes to a *majlis* and sometimes to the living area, depending on how traditional the family was. I was very fortunate in that Isa’s family regularly had me over for meals, including Friday lunch. Following Friday prayers, this was the main family meal of the week. Soon after I arrived in Bahrain, Umm Isa invited me over for Friday lunch. Umm means “mother of.” She told me to treat their home like my own. “This is your house,” she told me. “Come over whenever you feel like it. It is your home.” Umm Isa’s hospitality, I later learned, was not the norm, and it provided me with a welcome degree of security and stability in a sometimes harsh environment. Perhaps because they were of Persian descent, Friday lunch almost

always included rice, yellow from saffron, mixed with pomegranates and crusted from oil on the bottom of the pan, as well as local fish such as *hāmūr* (grouper), *chan‘ad* (mackerel), or *ṣāfy* (rabbitfish). Isa’s family home became a second home for me, and I spent many hours there, although the distance—on the other side of the island out of walking range from my lodgings—always made it a little bit hard to get to.

My work became a multilayered ethnography, an ethnography based on seemingly disparate interviews and casual encounters, walking, photography, formal analysis of built projects, and some archival research. I studied green on a daily basis in public spaces, gardens, observing religious practices, government ministries, politics, and so forth. I would meet my core group of friends and informants on a regular basis, but they lacked social engagement with one another, and this led to a narrow, affiliation-based contact with the people I intended to study. In other words, I did not have access to any one preestablished community or wider extended family or group of friends in Bahrain; instead, I constructed my own. I interacted with a diversity of people and sites dispersed across the city, connected by green as discussed and practiced on a daily basis. I came to call this interaction multilayered ethnography.⁸

In due course, I decided to accept the unpredictability of life and to treat it as a positive thing rather than an inconvenience. It reminds me of one relative who says she makes no plans because when she does, they never turn out as planned, so she has learned not to make any plans. I learned not just to deal with chance and serendipity as they arose, responding passively to whatever was thrown at me, but to actively engineer the likelihood of chance occurrences. Here, walking became critically important. My whole year was informed by walking and by the routes I took. Walking for long distances, I should add, is not always easy in Bahrain during the daytime, due to the hot sun and a lack of pathways. I became a familiar sight to some interlocutors, who often told me that I was the only foreigner they saw walking around the island. I do not want to overly romanticize the power of walking, although it became an essential part of my method, since I do not drive and public transport can be confusing in Bahrain. Daytime walking in Bahrain is delightful for more than six months of the year, from October to March or April; the

oppressive summer heat can make it very difficult, though. That's why I did many of my walks after dark.

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My fieldwork carried with it several methodological points relating to the gathering of data, interviews, and my own access and sense of belonging. For example, I was not expecting to have much interaction with expatriates, but they were an important constituency for engagement.

Alfie was a destitute British-born expatriate who somehow fell through a gap in the system that encourages expatriates to leave Bahrain once they reach the age of retirement. Alfie found himself in his eighties, out of work and not wanting to die in Bahrain. I met him at Nirvana, an Indian restaurant in the suq where I liked to eat my lunch, usually green pea masala, extra spicy. The clientele included mostly Indian expatriate businessmen. The price of about 900 *fil*s (US\$2.50) for a lunch was high, but it seemed clean. That is why I chose to eat there the first time, and I returned often. Alfie was the only other white person I met in Nirvana. Seated at an adjacent table, he joined me and talked at length. Alfie had one son in Berlin and another in Bangkok, and was trying to decide where to spend his final years. He had previously worked in the film industry, including one stint in Hong Kong working with Sean Connery. We talked about language and accents. Alfie told me that the worst English accent he ever heard was among housewives in coffee shops in Saar: what he described as a mix of a bland expatriate twang and a frontal Essex accent from outside London. Saar is an area to the west of Bahrain where expatriates live in villas on land that was, until recently, desert or date palm groves. A couple of weeks later, I told Isa, who lived in Saar, about my conversation with Alfie. While Isa agreed about the accents, he casually asked if I had written about this encounter in my fieldnotes. I was surprised to realize that I had not. "Why?" asked my friend. "Is it because he is English?" I had to agree. Alfie did not matter to me because he was English. After my meeting with Alfie, I listened much more closely to what non-Bahrainis told me. Bahrain's polyvocality was not something I was prepared for.

Language also presented a problem. The Arabic classes I had taken equipped me with skills in written and spoken Modern Standard Arabic,

useful for eyeing documents at the ministries or skimming the newspapers. Arabic helped me among the Baharna, a social group that I really only started meeting later on, during the ‘Ashura’ religious festival. The governing classes were my primary interlocutors at first. Bahrain’s business language is English, most people speak English, and the people I encountered in my everyday life—such as the laundryman, the tailor, and Mr. Kareem from the corner store (called *barrāda*, “cold store” in Bahrain), who hailed from Kerala, which he said was very green—usually spoke English to me, their native language being Urdu, Hindi, Malayalam, or Tagalog. So, Arabic was in fact of limited use, and those who spoke Arabic would find my Arabic “charming” and insist on speaking English to me for anything meaningful.

I lived and conducted fieldwork in Bahrain primarily during 2007 and 2008 and made several field visits before and after this time.⁹ A few books I was reading at the time were especially influential in my thinking. First, I incorporated methods such as those found in Farha Ghannam’s *Remaking the Modern: Space, Relocation, and the Politics of Identity in a Global Cairo*, an ethnography about a new housing development constructed on the edge of Cairo.¹⁰ Like Ghannam, I had the luxury of a year of fieldwork in one place. I also embraced the multilayered strategy of Diane Singerman and Paul Amar’s *Cairo Cosmopolitan*, a collection of essays that I came to regard as almost a “multiauthored” ethnography of Cairo.¹¹ I was also inspired by the combination of written and visual narrative in Orhan Pamuk’s *Istanbul*, in that Pamuk’s text is punctuated with melancholy historic photographs that, rather than illustrating facts, add to the mood and atmosphere of the book. I also closely consulted Steven Caton’s *Yemen Chronicle*, an “ethnomemoir” of his fieldwork in Yemen.¹² Caton’s book, written twenty years after his original fieldwork, prepared me for some of the challenges of the field and what some might call the fieldwork blues.¹³ It was comforting to know of someone else’s struggles, emotional and practical, with being in the field. I tried, for instance, to emulate Caton and maintain both analytic fieldnotes and a personal journal but was unable to maintain this duality, focusing instead on fieldnotes. Caton finds his journal a useful comparative tool to read in conjunction with his notes. I have found this more personal aspect represented in e-mails I sent to friends from the field, which became an important source for me as I analyzed my time in Bahrain.

Predominantly, I follow the more traditional fieldwork of ethnographers like Ghannam, inasmuch as I was based in one site, and my notes are informed not just by what people said to me but also by the place as well as my personal bias.¹⁴ Yet my research differs from Ghannam significantly in two ways. The scale of the location is bigger: Bahrain is a nation-state of some seven-hundred-plus square kilometers, much larger than a single housing development on the fringes of Cairo.¹⁵ But of more significance is that Ghannam had intimate contact with a family and social group with whom she spent most of her time and interacted with almost daily on a deep personal level. Ghannam spent her time embedded within a preexisting community that intimately informed her ethnography. If I had done this, my study would have been very different, perhaps an ethnography of green among one social group—say, the Baharna, or among the ‘Ajam, or Keralites, or Western expatriates—rather than an ethnography based on a color across the whole city-state of Bahrain.

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The anthropologist Clifford Geertz, in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, suggests that loci cannot be taken as objects of ethnographic research, stating that “anthropologists don’t study villages (tribes, towns, neighborhoods); they study *in* villages.”¹⁶ This line of argument ignores the fact that objects and things may have a “social life” too, and as anthropologists move beyond the study of people to the study of the relationality of things, an extensive body of literature emerges on the social life of nonhumans such as trees, movies, and everyday objects.¹⁷ Geertz tells us elsewhere: “Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.”¹⁸ In a similar vein, this book began as a study of green in Bahrain, where the color is an object, and evolved into an ethnographic study of landscape in Bahrain through the lens of color. Critically speaking, landscape comprises land and the people who inhabit the land, as well as the relationships between them.¹⁹ While it might seem strange that an assemblage of relationships could be considered an interlocutor, others might agree that the landscape has the loudest voice of all. One of the ways that landscape speaks to us is through color. For example, a brown, dried-out lawn could

be saying it is thirsty, a gray-green, thriving date palm grove that it is content, and an evening red sky that a good day will follow.²⁰

WALKING

In the year of my fieldwork in Bahrain, my goal was to walk everywhere I needed to go. If landscape is the object, it is obvious that one needs to be *in* it. When one is inside or in a car, one is removed from the tactility of the landscape. In addition, when one walks, one has chance encounters in a way that does not happen in a car. Walking increases the opportunities for meeting people, and also for finding the unexpected and the strange. Ultimately, my goal was to make the strange familiar, to borrow from the oft-quoted phrase.²¹ It is a phrase often used to explain anthropology: in making the strange familiar, and the familiar strange, we come to new knowledge regarding social patterns and relationships.

Having decided on the necessity of walking, my next and more difficult question was where to walk. I struggled with the routes for my walks. Does one just take the lines as drawn on the map? Does one use the seemingly arbitrary lines reflecting roads, laneways, and property boundaries? Or does one draw one's own line and follow that? Either way, I was thinking in lines. I was looking for patterns of green and landscape, and I thought the line would help to give structure to my walks. Inspired by the land artist Richard Long, I first drew ten straight lines running from the east to the west of Bahrain and determined that I would walk these straight lines, one per week.²² The lines would cross various types of properties: public, private, wasteland, agricultural land, private housing, schools, and cemeteries, many of which are crisscrossed by walls, roads, and paths.

Walking these lines would not be intuitive or even necessarily legal; the aim was to enter diverse places that I might not normally encounter or might avoid. I expected to be introduced to people, landscapes, and green that I would not otherwise have access to. I would create something new in the process, connecting disparate parts via the lines I would draw on the map and walk by foot. While walking, I would record visually and with

fieldnotes my interactions with green along the way. Another schema for conducting my fieldwork could have been to throw beans on a map and to go to the points on which the beans fell. A method inspired by Raoul Bunschoten and CHORA, the London-based design practice, this would at least in theory introduce a random sampling into the equation, also bringing me to places I might not normally visit. I did not follow either of these plans, not just for reasons of practicality and to avoid drawing too much attention to myself; my focus on green rendered these map-based schemata superfluous. The line was a distraction from the green.

Instead, I followed green. I had a number of methods for choosing the routes I would walk, and the aerial image coupled with intuition played the biggest part in selecting my routes. Basically, I walked wherever I needed to go. If I was going to a ministry in Manama to discuss green, I would walk for thirty minutes through the suq to get there. I recorded my interactions with green along the way, taking photographs and writing scratch notes in my pocket-size notebook and methodically noting details not just of the green but people's reactions to it as well. This meant starting conversations with strangers and being receptive to strangers starting conversations with me. The suq is not the greenest location, but still I would note the green vegetables being sold, the green winter *thiyāb* for sale in the tailor's, the green hubs on the car parked along the sidewalk, the green weeds poking through the pavement, the *mashmūm* (sweet basil) for sale at the cemetery on a Thursday evening. If I had to go to the ministry the following day, I would take a slightly different route.

Other times, I had to go farther than I could walk. On these occasions I would take a public bus, or Illias, my landlord's driver, would drive me. I followed the patches of green and the corridors I used to get there. I used the aerial image to help myself find the green areas, and I would set off to see those areas. In many ways my routes became a complex interplay between Google Earth, which guided me, and the beholding of green scenery as seen from eye level. Rarely did my walks turn out as expected.

This book is based on a year of living and *walking* in Bahrain. The method of walking is fundamental to my understanding of Bahrain and intended to supplement rather than replace aerial reconnaissance, which was also an important tool in the research.²³ Peripatetics such as Francesco Careri, founder of the Italian Stalker/*Osservatorio Nomade* urban art

workshop, describe walking “as a primary act in the symbolic transformation of the territory.”²⁴ For me, the approach was much more pragmatic and designed to gather ethnographic data through the encounters I had with people, land, and color. I met many of my friends and interlocutors through walking, Latif being the most notable.

ABSTRACTION AND AERIAL

In their epic *The Landscape of Man: Shaping the Environment from Prehistory to the Present Day*, Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe position together one of Ian McHarg’s maps of Philadelphia with a Jackson Pollock painting.²⁵ McHarg, a professor of landscape architecture and regional planning at the University of Pennsylvania, was known for his large-scale layered maps, which identified and separated various aspects of landscape such as soils, hydrology, and so forth. Although the Jellicoes do not directly explain the relationship between the two images, the juxtaposition implies that spatial designers should take inspiration from the abstract arts (and vice versa), although the Jellicoes are careful to acknowledge that such interpretation is personal to every author. Concerned that humankind is moving into a phase where traditional understandings of space and time are no longer valid or in fact relevant, the Jellicoes advise their readers to look to the arts for a vision of the future, “gaining confidence in the knowledge that the abstract art that lies beyond all art lives a life of its own independent of time and space.”²⁶

This particular juxtaposition of McHarg and Pollock, the colors and application of the paint on the canvas informing how we read and live in the contemporary city, was the underlying inspiration for this book. Reading the aerial image of Bahrain as a painting, I was able to abstract the land use from the particular geography, infrastructure, or element of landscape. Then, in addressing the color, I got a different view of the city than had I focused on the land use itself. The aerial view shows landscape in a certain nakedness.

Stretching back to Le Corbusier’s fascination with the aerial image, since the rise of mass availability of aerial photography and indeed more recently Google Maps, Google Earth, and NASA images, designers have

become used to reading the city as a collection of physical artifacts. There are many attempts at classification of the components of the city, such as Kevin Lynch's "paths, nodes, districts, points and landmarks" and Stan Allen's "points and lines."²⁷ Richard T. T. Forman has a particular classification of landscape from the point of view of landscape ecology. For Forman, if people drop from a helicopter onto a city (again the aerial image is invoked), they will land on one of three components: a patch, a corridor, or the matrix. The matrix is the space that holds the patches and corridors together.²⁸ Thus, a city might be read as a collection of recognizable patches like houses, parks, and gardens; connected by corridors of infrastructures of roads, streets, and sidewalks; and all organized in a matrix, which are the leftover spaces that hold everything together in one (arguably) larger ecological system.²⁹

The fascination with aerial photography has rightly permeated the design and ecological disciplines and offers an incredible tool to attempt to understand escalating urbanization and emergent urban, suburban, and exurban forms. Ian McHarg was of course an early pioneer, in *Design with Nature*. McHarg's layered maps were a radical departure in their day and were primarily rational and scientific in their evaluations.³⁰ More recently, Charles Waldheim has been a vocal advocate of the importance of the aerial image. For Waldheim, aerial images make possible a new understanding of urbanism as a "flatbed terrain" and "horizontal surface." Waldheim writes: "New audiences and sites for work also offer the possibility of new formulations of landscape, recasting its image from green scenery beheld vertically to a flatbed infrastructure that includes both natural and urban environments."³¹ Waldheim challenges us to change our perspective on landscape from the traditional notion of green scenery seen at eye level toward one of landscape as a horizontal surface that makes no distinction between urban and rural, landscape and urbanism. This book began as an attempt to describe the urbanism of landscape—as green scenery beheld vertically—in large part in response to the above quotation. In demonstrating the urban qualities of landscape, the aim is to take a slightly different approach to landscape urbanism, a disciplinary realignment including an influential body of literature and professional projects that have originated since the late 1990s. A basic tenet of landscape urbanism, again to quote Waldheim, is that "landscape replaces

architecture as the basic building block of contemporary urbanism.”³² Combining fieldwork—the vertical—with the aerial image (the horizontal) allows the opportunity for a “thicker” reading of a landscape, and therefore is positioned to propose “thicker” solutions that might ultimately be more successful.³³ (I should stress, however, that there is no linear relationship between fieldwork and proposition, as ethnography and design have very different epistemologies.) As the landscape ecologist Richard T.T. Forman affirms, “Of course, dropping from the sky to examine the land closely is also essential.”³⁴

For Forman, landscapes as read from an airplane are almost always a mosaic, and mosaics, as he points out, are colored.³⁵ Yet as Walter Benjamin reminds us, the power of a country road—and presumably a city one too—is greater when walking through it than when looking at it from above. Benjamin offers more detailed advice, which Hugh Raffles quotes in his book *In Amazonia: A Natural History*, which he claims is “less a history of nature than a way of writing the present as a condensation of multiple natures and their differences.”³⁶ Benjamin’s quote is as follows:

The power of a country road when one is walking along it is different from the power it has when one is flying over it by airplane. In the same way, the power of a text when it is read is different from the power it has when it is copied out. The airplane passenger sees only how the road pushed through the landscape, how it unfolds according to the same laws as the terrain surrounding it. Only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power it commands, and of how, from the very scenery that for the flier is only the unfurled plain, it calls forth distances, belvederes, clearings, prospects at each of its turns like a commander deploying soldiers at a front.³⁷

The vertical transect allows for a more intimate and nuanced reading of landscape than we can get from aerial images alone. “Get out now. Not just outside, but beyond the trap of the programmed electronic age,” urges John R. Stilgoe in *Outside Lies Magic*, a wonderful reading of the American landscape. Stilgoe urges the reader to “Walk. Stroll. Saunter. Ride a bike, and coast along a lot. Explore.”³⁸ A city from above may look gray; from inside it can be dazzling in its colors: think of Times Square or Shinjuku. Indeed, when walking through the city, as the Urban Earth, a UK-based geography collaborative, do, it can be surprising how much

green there is in the city outside the official category of green space. Why not behold landscape from both perspectives, from above and from eye level too? Large-scale geographies need to be understood ethnographically if we are not to lose touch with the people in those geographies.

Although the word *geography*, like *landscape*, is concerned with space and territory, geography differs from landscape in three significant ways. The first is inherent in the etymology of the word: *geo-graphy* means writing about the land as it is, recording its features and uses, whereas landscape overtly indicates a visual component. A second significant difference is the issue of scale: geography is not really tied to any one scale in the way a landscape is, or in the spatially hierarchical way the design disciplines are structured, from the broadest regional planning, to urban design, to landscape architecture, to architecture, to garden design, to interior design, and finally product design, all having a particular scalar focus.³⁹ We live in a multiscale world—where the earth is not necessarily getting smaller, or bigger, just both—and geography liberates us from scale in a way that promises fresh insights into the study of that land. Aerial photography is a means to understanding that multiscale end. Lastly, and significantly, geography inherently implies a social component. I suggest that designers need to rediscover people, and that ethnography offers a set of skills to engage with people.

DESIGN ANTHROPOLOGY

This multi-disciplinary book sits within the emerging field of design anthropology. More than the study of design process, it is an attempt to shift the focus from anthropological description toward *action*.⁴⁰ In this sense, design anthropology responds to a critique of contemporary anthropology that, Borneman and Hammoudi assert, identifies three denials in the field. This critique maintains “that ethnography is a literary genre which denies itself as such; that reliance on observation leads to a denial of the role of the ethnographer in shaping the object/subject studied; and that ethnographers tend to deny the constructed character of their objects and of the knowledge they produce from the initial period of fieldwork, through to the writing of their essays and books.”⁴¹ I am par-

ticularly interested in the idea that the agency of ethnography be used in the design process itself, rather than as a retrospective tool. The emerging literature on the field includes the impressive ethnography of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), *Made by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture: An Ethnography of Design* by Albena Yaneva, published in 2009 (and dedicated to Bruno Latour). Yaneva, in a subsection headed “Why stories?”—presumably preempting the question “Why ethnography?”—says: “This writing strategy aims at creating a reflexive text by trying to direct attention to the reader himself, to his own life and experience as a designer.”⁴²

Dori Tunstall writes on what design anthropology can add to a design practice: “Design anthropology is an interdisciplinary field that seeks to understand the role of design artifacts and processes in defining what it means to be human (e.g., human nature). It is more than lists of user requirements in a design brief, which makes it different from contextual inquiry, some forms of design research, and qualitative focus groups. Design anthropology offers challenges to existing ideas about human experiences and values.”⁴³ In the concluding chapter to her ethnography of design at OMA, Albena Yaneva suggests that the product of design has become disconnected from the conditions of its making and the design experiences of its makers. Thus, we can appreciate a building without knowing anything about its design process, but you cannot *understand* that building without considering design experiences.⁴⁴ Yaneva’s ethnography opens up a provocative critique of the architectural design process. The challenge and potential lie in consciously using ethnography as part of a design process—in the actual shaping of space—rather than using it to only interpret or critique design. And doing so necessitates the beholding of green scenery vertically as well as horizontally.