Vryheidspark and other governmonumentalities – walking and working through Pretoria, government capital

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Approaching the city of Pretoria/Tshwane from the south, one is greeted by three monumental structures perched atop three hills surrounding Pretoria, from west to east: the Voortrekker Monument, Freedom Park, and the University of South Africa (UNISA), each one of them a dense conglomeration of symbols, emblems, and iconsforged out of concrete, rock, earth and stone. Not far behind this formidable threesome follows another massive fortress marking the entrance to the city – Pretoria Central Prison.

How does one inhabit this weight of overdetermined meaning? How to penetrate the perpetuity, to contest what has been incontestably solidified, fortified against 'outsiders' of various categorisations, as against change? How to blow open what remains cast in stone – closed, mute, and immobile?

Let me start with a few observations on the structure providing a meeting point for the Walkshop 'Vryheidspark and other governmonumentalities' in September 2011, from which the articles in this Special Edition emerged. Incongruous with the currently advertised and advertorialised 'virtual' online distance learning mission with a planetary reach – from 'proudly South African' appointments through an 'African university' to 'humanity' as a whole – UNISA stands as a grandiloquent monument to the mute immutability of a previous political regime similarly seeking to eternalise itself. Thus does the present mission shake hands with the past vision.

Designed by architect Brian Sandrock in brutalist style,[1] fortress UNISA is nearly the size of the Pentagon. Stretching across a length of nearly a kilometre, it leaves nothing to any stretch of the imagination. In the words of Daniel Herwitz (2003:148), its 'endlessly interconnected corridors dwarf the human, the faculties lining the corridors appear like so many cells. It assertively imposes itself horizontally over the freeway as you drive toward it and under it, as if to say, "space is mine, you pass if you obey."' It gestures towards remaking the world, for all time to come – between the time of the completion of the first building in 1973 and that of the end of the last in the series in 1988,[2] the time of apartheid under siege. But beyond that, it made sure to leave a legacy: '... the first building became the exemplar for the continual addition of new ones. The strict uniformity of the first and the last belies [any notion of transformation]' (Mare 1996:272).[3] It

seamlessly assimilates the monumentalism of the previous regime to the new traditions dreamt up by the adepts of the African Renaissance seated here.[4]

While falling short of 'transformation', we do yet notice certain appearances and noiseless disappearances: the removal of the busts of the stone-sculpted likenesses of the elders from their bases, to quieter, darker abodes behind staircases and dimly lit corners, and their replacement with emblems infused with the inspiration of self-styled prophet Credo Mutwa in a style dubbed 'authentic fake' (calabash, cows' horns, the rays of sunrise); the happy coexistence of buildings named after *Ossewa Brandwag* notables and *broeders* (AJH van der Walt) and those named after heroes of a liberation movement (OR Tambo). The Theo van Wijk Building envelops the Miriam Makeba Auditorium and ZK Matthews Hall.

The latest element in the series of buildings still bearing the imprint of Sandrock's design, emulates in architectural style and interior decor the ethnic souvenir art and inscriptions of former Bantustan puppet government architecture.[5] The pride of the new *Kgorong* building, inaugurated at the end of 2010, is a venue called 'The Cattle Bar', aptly combining the literal and the figural of the present in the intersection between watering hole and feeding trough, while retaining a reference to the *osse-span* of a bygone age.

It speaks to the newly invented traditions which still bear the hallmarks of those now discredited, against which the new proudly asserts itself, evoking, as did its predecessors, 'vertical authority and autochthonous origins, ... [in] connections [drawn] between the spirit of the nation and natural processes such as the movement of light and water' (Bunn 1989:109).
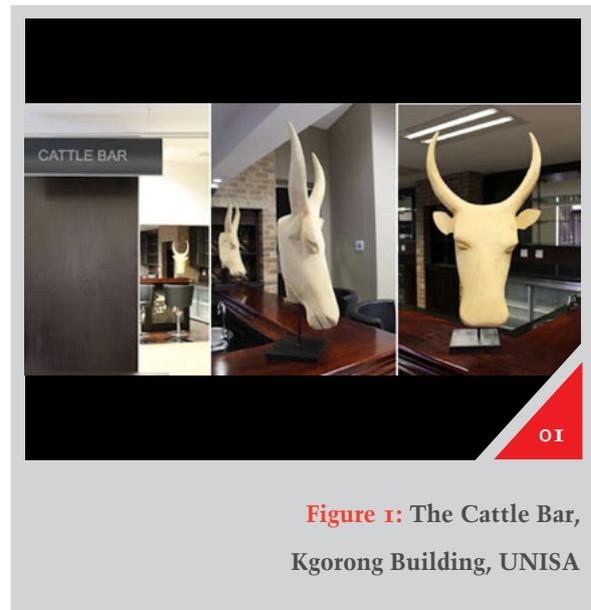

Figure 1: The Cattle Bar, Kgorong Building, UNISA

Previous South African monumental designs had 'come to be haunted by what was repressed to achieve their exclusiveness' (Bunn 1989:109), failing in their efforts to evoke collective meanings, and therefore compulsively marshalling the African soil itself as warrant for their claims. The new recasting of Freedom as a themepark likewise poses as originary inscription on the Earth, as Annett Schulze demonstrates and Johan Strijdom critiques, as indigenism fostering new ethnic hierarchies and exclusions. Like its predecessors, the landscaping of Freedom Park harnesses rock, stone, earth, water, and flora, culminating in fortification-like structures resembling underground caverns, shyly protruding watchtowers, and bold signal posts transmitting secret codes from the top of Salvokop, to protect a newly found 'memory' now enshrined as the spirit of the Nation. At its base it enacts its claim to modernisation, featuring the national flagship project of the Gautrain moving at high speed through the newly created arcane landscape, accentuated at its terminus with the fragmented creations of fractious urban renewal documented by Cynthia Kros.

Unlike many of its predecessors, though, it gestures toward greater inclusiveness forged according to a script

which would itself bear deciphering. Not entirely unlike its Voortrekker-monumental predecessor, Vryheidspark is explicitly designed (see Annett Schulze's interview with Ramzie Abrahams) as a *place of memory* without a clearly defined historical national referent. It inscribes a metamorphosis of commemoration – a 'passage from the historical to the remembered and the remembered to the commemorative', opening a gap between national history and national memory (Nora [1992] 1998:626, 632), between history and heritage. Thus, at the same time as imaginary commemoration assumes cultural form in newly instituted *lieux de mémoire*, the previous institutions of national pedagogy – the traditional monuments, the museums (in Pretoria, the Natural History Museum and the Cultural History Museum) and the curricula of the academic study of history – are disintegrating, becoming defunct, falling into disrepair.'... the rise of the memorial [nation] has paralleled the acceleration of the transition from a form of historical consciousness to a form of social consciousness ...' (Nora [1992] 1998:634-635), embedding the idea of the nation in a performativity of memorialisation.

In the process, the idea of the nation undergoes a transformation in two directions. Firstly, we are now seeing 'resurgent popular nationalisms, both African and Afrikaner, in which historical geographies of colonialism and imperialism are insistently being inserted into the present through struggles over the meaning of the nation and liberation' (Hart 2008:693). The stagings and mutual up-stagings of these popular nationalisms are being brought to the fore in the articles on 'running on the outskirts' and 'rugbymentality' by Sope Maithufi and Charles Villet, respectively.

Secondly, and in tandem with popular nationalism, we are seeing a transformation of the idea of the nation comparable to that described by Michel Foucault as 'the governmentalisation of the state'.[6] The notion of 'governmentality' captures the displacement of formal/juridical power to informal techniques of government (see Lemke 2000:11). On the one hand, this displacement involves a delegation of tasks of governance from nation-state to supranational levels; on the other hand, it gives way to sub-political forms of agency (see Lemke 2000:11). While the staunchly nationalist monuments and monumental architecture of the past proclaim their inspiration drawn from models elsewhere, as illustrated in the article of Rolf Annas,[7] some of them showcasing the so-called International Style, this was still pegged to the local geniuses of the Pretoria School, and held together by the frame of nationalist-ideological precepts. The **new** nation, by contrast, seems eclectically dispersed in Freedom Park, as Annett Schulze shows. Aspects of the design, building and landscaping of the latest monumental addition have been parcelled out to numerous heritage consultants, cultural entrepreneurs, Council officials, architectural firms, policy advisers, and construction companies (from which conglomeration academic historians were the first to take flight).

Transnational monumentality does not seem far off, where nationalist visions could be handed over wholesale, on a commission basis, to agencies tendering to monumentalise such intuitions, in an entirely different nexus – that of an evacuated Comintern imagiNation trained on precepts of socialism in one country, and culturalist-spatial answers to 'the national question' (as demonstrated by Angie Baecker in her Walkshop presentation – see Baecker 2010; also Vladislavić 1996: 13-38), now in search of new embodiments.

While several hills overlooking central Pretoria boast forts, memorials, and monuments of different eras dedicated to different causes, some of them now approaching oblivion; while, in the city centre, monumental

Figure 2: Site of demolished structures in Marabastad, Pretoria

This, then, is the way in which I would propose undertaking this task: working through the dense over-determined meanings, moving through the mute immutabilities, contesting what is cast in concrete, rock, and stone through what its cracks and clearings attest to. In other words, I would propose, with Michel de Certeau (1984:93), becoming practitioners of the city 'below the threshold at which their [monumental] visibility begins', and thus 'escaping the imaginary totalisations produced by the eye'. Such a practice of the city and its surrounds emerges from Sope Maithufi's tracking of road-running around the city along tracks stencilled out by entrepreneurs seeking to perpetuate a militaristic social imaginary underscoring a previous political dispensation. A similarly antagonistic dynamic is registered in Charles Villet's account of not-quite carnivalesque rugbymentality playing itself out at Loftus Versfeld Stadium, where erstwhile identifications are agonistically staged, and up-staged by a new commerce of images, and by a 'nation' jostling for its balls.

edifices now alienated from their initially envisaged purpose are vying for the attention of a public that has eluded them; and while vast expanses towards the east have been cleared for sprawling consumer palaces – gaping empty spaces in the city centre bear testimony to the disjunction between memorialisation and the experience of civic exclusion and social dislocation that has foiled the emergence of a public sphere. Latter-day places and practices of memorialisation have no way to relate to this absence.

Rendering this absence palpable involves a counter-memory – a task to which only few writers, artists, and non-historicist historians have responded, along paths and detours without predetermined destinations, without prescribed commemorative gestures (as indicated in Ivan Vladislavić's reflections inspired by Micha Ullman's memorial *Bibliothek*, in 'The Cold Storage Club').

Walking the city, transposing places into spaces,[8] as de Certeau suggests, opens the view on 'a migrational city' slipping into and out of the grids of the planned cityscapecaptured in the purportedly stable signifiers of the grid of the street plan, that local authority (see de Certeau 1984:99, 106). In Pretoria/Tshwane, such fixity has become unstable with the re-inscription of the changed street names of Natalie Swanepoel's description.

In a way that the pages of this journal can reflect only in a reduced dimension, walking the city of Pretoria/Tshwane wary of repeating, could open a path of remembering and working-through.

Notes

1   The corporatist nature of UNISA's governing structure is suggested for its architectural incarnations in the 1970s and early 1980s: '[Sandrock] inspired confidence in his clients, especially those relatively anonymous corporate bodies of universities and boards, with ... efficient management of projects and boards' (Fisher 1998:234).

2   '[Sandrock] believed in controlled expansion which must carefully follow a master plan.Long before the first building saw the light of day he had already prepared a master-site development programme for a systematic progression of buildings to be constructed from west to east on the campus. All the buildings had to blend in with the landscape.

The firm Brian Sandrock was responsible for the design of the following buildings on the Unisa Muckleneuk Campus:

Theo van Wijk Building (official opening 1973).

The Administration Building (Oliver Tambo Building) (official opening 1980). His design of the Administration Building was to break away forever from the conventional cell offices concept and was to introduce to Unisa the advantages of open-landscaped offices. Brian Sandrock always considered the Administration Building to be the focal point of the campus. Therefore it is fitting that his bronze bust was placed on the second floor of this building.

Technical Building (RR Maluleke Building) (official opening 1983).

AJH van der Walt Building (official opening 1983).

Samuel Pauw Library (official opening 1988), (Brian Sandrock – Master Planner for the Unisa Campus, 8 July 2011). http://unisalibrary research.blogspot.com/2011/07/brian-sandrock-master-planner-for-unisa.html.

3   Indeed, its claim to perpetuity seems vindicated in the words of its latest acolytes. 'Welcoming guests to the event [opening the Kgorong Building as 'the crowning glory'], Professor Mandla Makhanya, … [at the time, November 2010] Vice Chancellor designate, said that the university formed part of a triangle formed by Freedom Park, the Union Buildings, and Unisa. "Where other landmarks may have engendered fear, or alienation, Unisa … has always engendered and symbolised hope." He termed this trio a triangle of vision, a vision that spoke to the future. The Kgorong Building features as "the centre, the heart, a point of convergence, and the social core"' (*Focus. Staff Newsletter*, Nov/Dec 2010:1).

4   As the UNISA staff newsletter *Focus* (Nov/Dec 2010:2) enlightens its readers,

In a traditional African setting, *kgorong* has two meanings:

It is an entrance to a property. In a traditional setting, a compound is fenced off by means of logs of wood, shrubs and thorns. To enter the property, one needs to use the designated entrance called a *kgoro*.

It is a meeting place for the community where members of the community are called together to discuss matters that affect the entire community. This meeting place is generally situated close to the king or induna's compound. The concept of *lekgotla* or *imbizo*, often used today for meetings, is linked to the concept of *kgorong*, as it is there that the *lekgotla* or *imbizo* meet.

Architect Marco Zietsman translates this African-ising vision into the slightly more sanguine, slightly more universal ideals of 'knowledge flows' – of

> the creation of a dynamic centre core in the building from which all knowledge will flow, while the horizontal and vertical open spaces capitalise on expressing circulation and movement to facilitate visual connections and communication between the occupants, thus interlinking inside and outside. (*Focus*. Staff Newsletter, Nov/Dec 2010:2)

5   ... [E]thnic references were deployed in the design of apartheid buildings in the 1970s – in the homeland capital of Mmabatho, for instance. ... the homeland dictator, Lucas Mangope, ... 'issued a directive indicating that the plan of the capital should reflect local Tswana architectural forms', said the architects, 'a modern government centre is being developed that will reflect the strength, tradition and essential humanism of the Bophuthatswana nation.' What was offered, in the end, was a *mise en scène* of democracy: the Mangope dictatorship was able to stage its operations in buildings around Government Square, a circular space 'reminiscent of a Kgotla, the central meeting space of the traditional Tswana village' (Bunn 1998:117).

However, this 'is not to say that there was a one-way traffic of ideas or that architects simply imposed a language of tribal difference on reluctant participants'.(Bunn 1998:116). Indeed, as David Bunn (1998:116) elaborates, some aspects of apartheid ethnicisation have become elements of self-attribution of groups making claims on resources in the name of 'origin', 'indigeneity', and 'tradition':

> one of the most powerful influences on architecture and development planning

today is the alliance between certain forms of archaeology and ethnography in the service of African communities who see the need to define themselves – or advertise themselves – as distinct 'tribes' with fixed boundaries, traditions, and ancient ruins. ... The global tourist economy has massively accelerated the rate at which marketable indigenous cultures are transformed into Hollywood versions of themselves. Under these conditions, it is hardly surprising that it is now not always easy to distinguish between monument and tourist destination.

6   Foucault developed the notion of governmentality within the context of a genealogy of the modern state (Lecture 5 April 1978) in two lecture series at the Collège de France – one in 1978 entitled '*Sécurité, territoire et population*', and one in 1979, entitled '*La naissance de la biopolitique*'.

7   The most palpable model being that of the *Völkerschlachtsdenkmal* in Leipzig, inaugurated on the centenary of the defeat of Napoleon at Leipzig in 1813.

8   See de Certeau's (1984:117) distinction between space (*espace*) and place (*lieu*):

> A place (*lieu*) is the order ... in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (place). The law of the "proper" rules in the place the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability.

> A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of

intersections of mobile elements. It is ... actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalise it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. ... In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a "proper".

In short, space is a practiced place. Thus, the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers.

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