

In Their Names

Memorialization in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Danny Herwitz

Introduction

In Volume 5 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, published on October 29, 1998, there appears a list of all the victims of gross human rights violations whose names appeared in the Commission's database (as of 30 August 1998).¹ The list is arranged in three columns and is nearly 100 pages long. It is a factual compendium, for the archive, in keeping with a crucial intention of the TRC: to gather evidence of atrocity in the name of the nation.² It is also a memorial, not unlike the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. of 1982 by Maya Lin, whose stark litany of the dead is a chronology of loss reduced to names and years. The list of the victims in the TRC report is not cast in the hard currency of cut masonry like Lin's memorial, but appears in the abstraction of the printed page. Nevertheless, when read as a memorial rather than a mere compellation of facts, and when read as a distillation of the powerful events of the Commission, the report takes on an aura akin to that of Lin's memorial. This is in accord with the religious/biblical character of the TRC, a work of nation-building guided by three men of the cloth--most famously by Bishop Tutu dressed in his flaming crimson robes and speaking the homilies of divinity before the victims, while sternly urging perpetrators to full disclosure and even confession. For a report of five volumes whose utopian gesture is to distill truth into reconciliation, suffering into forgiveness, historical strife into national

identity and word into divinity must lend that book the aura of a thing of grace to be reverentially held in one's hands: a bible of contemporary times.

The aura of the Report. When Walter Benjamin in his celebrated essay on mechanical reproducibility chose to resurrect the notion of an aura, he knew that its sources were in religion—Christian, Jewish, Hindu—and in the aesthetics of the nineteenth century. For the nineteenth century's aesthetics, the grand tour was an act of pilgrimage. The nineteenth century pilgrim, a person out of a Henry James novel, stood in the presence, reverentially, of the sites of Europe. From experience of place issued music: Franz Liszt's *Annees des Pelerinages* from the falling of September leaves in the gardens of the Villa D'Este. From place came painting: Claude Monet's impressionist series of the façade of the Cathedral at Rouen with its constantly varying patina of light. The façade itself is in many ways repeatable: one could largely duplicate it in Belgium or even Long Beach, California. But, the idea goes, it is the microscopic details of its construction and place which truly matter for the aesthetic eye, and the likelihood of finding these systemically duplicated elsewhere is close to unimaginable. A Façade in Belgium would have its own aura. The moment of post-apartheid nation building, a moment of almost religious ecstasy symbolized by the TRC, is equally irreplaceable. By extension, the Report, when read in a certain mood, is the same.

Benjamin argued that the mechanisms of reproducibility were destroying the aesthetics of the aura--of that idiomatic inflection occasioned in the senses and mind of the viewer, which renders place unique and rewarding, and which is by nature irreplaceable, meaning you must be present to *it*, like to the burning bush. But note: the Report, unlike the event of the proceedings, is a mass producible object—a book or even web file. This does not, I

think, attenuate its aura. Time has shown that Benjamin is not correct about the loss of the aesthetics of the aura in an age of mass reproducibility. He is more correct about the loss of the centrality of individual *place* (the world tour) in contemporary aesthetics—especially regarding new technologies. Benjamin is incorrect about the loss of the aura in an age of mass reproducibility because what media like film have in fact done is reconstitute the aura in a way that allows it to become mass producible, which is to say capable of mass dissemination. Benjamin argued that mass-reproducible phenomena like film cannot retain the aesthetics of the aura because characters in film are not present to the audience. Such media lose, he argued, the crucial ingredient of presence. Instead characters, scenes, actions exist in the netherworld of the screen. However, what these media have done is remake the conditions of presence such that it is not we who are present to the things and people in photos or on screen, but nevertheless we experience these things and people as present to us. I am adopting an idea of Stanley Cavell's.³ We cannot speak to or touch Cary Grant when we watch him in *His Girl Friday*. We have no presence to *him*: he is not there and does not notice us. He *was* there when the film was shot. But Grant's screen presence is overwhelming and this sense of his screen presence is fundamental to everything film and photography are about. "That is Uncle Harry in the picture, look, there he is in Boston, see how young he is, he has that glow in his eyes, God how I miss the man." Harry in the photograph is in a peculiar way *present* to us, *presented* to us, in a way that he would not be in a drawing or watercolor. Not that he is present in time; what we are looking at is always an image taken in the past and Harry is long deceased, like Cary Grant. This recurrence of absent people and absent places is what lends photography and film their auratic characters. This and their related

unrepeatability. Bogart rushes angrily to the piano in *Casablanca* and says to Sam, “I thought I told you never to play...”, at which point his gaze meets Bergman’s, both freeze, and the camera frames each in close up—her eyes languid pools of emotion, his jaw clotted in bitterness. One could no more repeat the effect in another film than one could duplicate the exact play of light on the façade of the Cathedral of Rouen.

This is a crucial point for theories of the visual: that reproducible media *reconstitute* rather than destroy the aura. Mere mass reproducibility does not attenuate the aura, it can re-enliven it. However, the related process of commodification *does* have the tendency to reduce the aura to a product value. Without this pair of facts one will never understand postmodernism. I speak of the aura of the supermodel, which is a largely repeatable, fetishized commodity form. Her vague and vapid visage is part of an ever expanding department store of cultural products--along with the use of the Villa D’Este and the Cathedral at Rouen in MTV rock videos and Honda automobile commercials. Her aura is a saleable item, largely reduced in idiom to product value. The films of the 1980s with their endless remakes did the same, until even the stars got sick of their emaciated roles (after they had made their millions of course). A central domain of postmodern painting, music and architecture has similarly reduced form, sign and allusion into transposable product values, which Adorno had long ago called “the culture industry”. Even the avant-gardes have not been free of this process of commodification, as certain exhibitions at the Whitney Museum demonstrate (to my eye anyway).

I shall conclude this presentation by returning to the commodification of the aura, suggesting that even the momentous events of the South African transition and its acts of memorialization are not free of such commodification. But before ending with that point,

I wish to explore the language of memorialization, and the presence of memorial monuments, in post-apartheid South Africa. A defining characteristic of the post-apartheid South African moment has been its turn away from the construction of memorial monuments, towards gestures of memorialization in *language* and in silent actions. I want to suggest why this has happened. But before I do, I want to explore the language of memorialization. Note immediately that the turn away from monument construction to memorialization in language is not a turn away from visuality. When a report or a list of names is taken to be auratic, that implies that it is sensualized: made present in the manner of a burning bush or mysterious cloud of sound. It is an insufficiently explored point of theory to consider how word and sensuous image merge when reports, books, names, sentences, texts are rendered auratic. Twentieth century philosophy has given *presence* a bad name by rightly exposing hidden metaphysical ideologies in the concept. But the other side is that theory is now free to explore the many ways in which things are “made present” by operations of mind, imagination and social practice.

The aura of a word need not be literally visual. However, there is an overwhelming tendency for the complex sensual correspondences comprising auratic experience to have visual components. Even the image of a “cloud of sound” associated with a word is visual. I would like to hazard the generalization that when words or texts take on auras the complex sensualities associated with the words typically have powerful visual components—even if only in “the mind’s eye”. There are a number of ways that word and image merge when word or text become auratic.⁴ The “word of God” may be literally paraded up and down the aisles of the Jewish temple, an object of reverence to be

touched by the (usually male) congregant's Tallit or prayer book, which is then kissed. Visualization may occur through a ritual of remembrance in which the names of the departed are "called up" (the metaphor of "calling up" or *re-calling* is halfway between sound and image). It may happen through the mind's referral of a text to the larger events of which it is part--as many in South Africa instinctively refer the report to their images of Desmond Tutu in his robes, shepherding the commission through its traumatic proceedings. For language to become auratic there must always be some operation of sensualization, and this ordinarily makes word present in patterns of imagery suspended between vision, sound, emotion and kinesthesia. The limits of the auratic are the limits—in individuals, societies, places and times—of these operations of sensualization or *schematisms*.⁵

Film shares with memorialization a way of making present things that are otherwise absent, while also keeping them absent and elusive. The entire system of concepts associated with memorialization is about the metaphors of *place or dwelling*. (Whatever else it is about.) The dead are called forth, brought to attention, placed before us, *remembered*. This *re-membling* often makes use of plaques on buildings, signs in parks, the apertures of public space. But it need not. Whether public space is made use of or not, memorialization is spatialization.

Transitional Justice

Now the wider range of my concern is with transitional justice. Transitional justice is the kind of justice distinctive to nations on the rocky road from authoritarian regimes

characterized by gross violations of human rights, to liberal democracies. The concept of transitional justice was introduced to capture specific characteristics pertinent to such nations, for example their turn towards truth commissions and their relations to law and constitutionality. However I believe memorialization, a crucial ingredient in the justice of transitions, also falls under the broader scope of the justice pertinent to transitions.

What is the idea behind transitional justice? A nation in transition from authoritarianism to liberal democracy has a unique set of needs: 1) the need to punish perpetrators from the past regime and related, to thereby strengthen the rule of law against forces of terror remaining in the society, 2) the need for the kind of social healing that comes not from punishment but instead from public exercises in reconciliation, 3) the need for specific spectacles of transition, often in an international forum or over the media, which will build the moral capital of the new regime and garner support, and 4) the need to delicately appease those from the old regime, so that transition will not be derailed by a coup or other regressive means. These needs are not exactly consistent, hence the *dilemma* of transition.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a negotiation that resulted from all of these needs. By 1989 it was clear that neither the African National Congress nor the National Party and the South African Defense Forces could win an outright civil war. This, along with the collapse of communism world-wide, brought both sides to the negotiating table. The CODESA TALKS of 1991-2, (“Coalition for a Democratic South Africa”) carried initial negotiations forward in a formal way and resulted in the Interim government of Mandela and De Klerk, the timetable for elections (1994) and the Interim Constitution, also of 1994. The Interim Constitution in turn mandated the Truth and

Reconciliation Committees, including the Committee on Amnesty--which was so controversial that its mandate appeared only as a postscript to the Constitution.

The kind of Amnesty offered, as most of you probably know, was qualified. Amnesty would be granted in exchange for: 1) full disclosure of the truth and, 2) demonstration that the crimes committed were, I quote, “in proportion” to the hypothetical goals which motivated the larger scheme of action of which the crime was a part. Full disclosure would be measured by the Amnesty Committee on the basis of the proceedings of the Committee on Truth and Reconciliation hearings. Proportionality would be decided on the basis of whether a gross violation of human rights could be explained in terms of the larger political motive which compelled the perpetrator to act: a motive such as keeping the state intact or “winning the war against the communists”. While the concept of proportionality is in one respect absurd--given that what are being investigated are gross violations of human rights which are of their very nature *out of proportion* from human decency--the idea is to distinguish between acts directed at “the enemy” and random killings of children, rape of women bystanders, torture of old people, etc., which cannot be defended as actions performed “for the cause” in the way the assassination of presumed “political targets” can be. Qualified amnesty brought with it conceptual as well as moral problems; what is right in the theory of transitional justice is that qualified amnesty cannot be measured against a timeless, universal and unyielding concept of justice, against which it would fail. Rather, the concept of justice itself has to be understood in a more contextual way, with inconsistent demands (at least sometimes) relevant to specific historical moments. Qualified Amnesty emerged from the CODESA talks as a compromise formation: The African National Congress wanted outright

punishment for crimes, the National Party wanted blanket amnesty. The alternative to qualified Amnesty might well have produced a stalemate to the transitional process, even civil war. Qualified amnesty allowed, moreover, the TRC to formulate itself as a proceeding motivated by forgiveness, reconciliation, and nation building, rather than the sterner stuff of retribution. There could have been no Desmond Tutu, Alec Borrairie or Bongani Finca in a truth commission of the Nurenberg type, no assimilation of the TRC to the New Testament. In short, and this is my point, the *aura* generated by the players in the TRC and occasioned for so many readers in the Report, depended on qualified Amnesty. This aura of the biblical: of forgiveness, reparation and moral nation building, is central to Report's language of memorialization. The forms of memorialization appropriate to the TRC has a clear political formation in the South African transitional moment.

The Language of Memorialization

Consider the name of one person on the TRC's list of victims: Mr. Ahmed Timol. According to Volume 3 of the Report:

“Mr. Ahmed Timol...died in police custody on 27 October 1971 after allegedly committing suicide by jumping from the tenth floor of security police headquarters at John Vorster Square in Johannesburg. Timol had been in detention for five days. He was the twenty-second person to die in police custody since the introduction of detention without trial.

Ahmed Timol's mother, Ms. Hawa Timol, described to the Commission how she heard about her son's death:

'On Wednesday 27th [in the] evening my husband and son had gone to the mosque for evening prayers. During this time three policemen who identified them as SB [Security Branch] came and entered our house. One of them pushed me into a seat and then proceeded to tell me that my son Ahmed had tried to escape by jumping out of the tenth floor of John Vorster Square and that I as to tell my husband that his body was lying in the Hillbrow government mortuary. I could not believe what was being said and in my confusion, I tried to argue that this was not true...I even remember taking them to the flat windows and saying look how could my son have jumped out of the difficult windows at John Vorster Square.'" (Volume 3: p. 542)

In fact Mr. Timol had been pushed out of an upper window of the detention centre at John Vorster Square in Johannesburg, a not unusual practice of the time. It is with the memorialization of Mr. Timol that I am concerned.

To the TRC, the father of Ahmed Timol requested that his son be remembered in these terms:

"As a family what we would like to have, and I am sure many...South Africans would like to have, is that their loved ones should never, ever be forgotten...in Ahmed's case a school in his name would be appropriate. But at the end of the

day I believe that South Africans in future generations should never, ever forget those that were killed in the name of apartheid.” (Volume 1: P. 116)

Haroon Timol is calling for a memorialization of his son as one of a *type*: a political activist who was killed in the struggle against apartheid. Haroon is asking for what many a wealthy captain of industry has done in establishing buildings, sports palaces, foundations, collections, schools in the name of sons lost during the wars and the terror which have rocked modernity to its foundations and continue to do so now: now in America and the Middle East. Such memorializations have been personal, but also public recognitions of “those who lost their lives in the Great War”. Through public eternalization, through the *publicity* of a son or daughter’s life, the pain of the father or mother may be relieved of at least the burden of privacy. The dead child may live through their memorial, and be given their due by history.

Recognition of the dead. We know how to do it; we do it. Perhaps we cannot live without it. But what is it that we are doing when we do it? What is the *meaning* of the act, if that is even an appropriate turn of phrase?

Consider the language used:

In his memory. So that he shall never be forgotten. So that what he did shall always be treasured. Collective memory is a strange thing, because while friends and family remember the dead, the collective performs an act of remembrance without actually remembering the object of memory! Most of those who enter the portals of what will be the Timol school will not have known Ahmed Timol and cannot strictly speaking be said to *remember* him. Public memory is the creation of remembrance largely without actual

memory, of remembrance with a different kind and quality of memory. This creation of memory is closely connected to monumentality, since it is also the function of monuments to publicize an event, place it before the public eye, keep the past in consciousness so that it might live a life in the future. Monuments create public memory: of dead martyrs, glorious events, moments of national formation or group origin in the name of the future through the names and events of the past. In the terms of Maurice Halbwachs, they create collective memory which rewrites the past and articulates group identity around the inscription.⁶

Haroon Timol wants a school “in his son’s name”, and in one sense this language is very simple to understand. The school should be named after him, carry his name, in the manner of the high schools dedicated to Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King and George Washington in the United States. The school should be named after him as opposed to given a place name (“Beverly Hills High School”) or a descriptive title (“High School of Music and Art”, “Technisches Hochschule”). The wish is that, in carrying the name, the school shall stand as a memorialization of his son. It shall be a way of inculcating remembrance of his activism, of what he did.

In their names is akin to: *to their memories* or *in their memories*. But strictly speaking the dead no longer *have* memories. To honour them is in one sense, equally impossible. The dead can no more remember than they can be the recipients of honours or receive payment for a moral or political debt which society has incurred in the violence committed against them, as in “we must give the dead their due”. We honour the dead but do not actually pay them reparations nor elect them to public offices in the new government. We have rock concerts in New York with Billy Crystal to help their

families. We pay tribute to the dead, to their bringing down a plane outside of Pittsburgh which was presumed to have been headed for Washington. But the dead do not receive this tribute. Who receives it, if anyone? It would appear that doing something “in memory of her” is entirely doing something for the living who remember her, or who engage in acts of remembrance even if they did not know her. “In her memory” would therefore translate into “In memory of her”. So that nothing is actually *predicated* of the dead person, like memory capacity, or the ability to receive tribute.

This formulation does not sit right in the mind: One insists on the thought that one is doing something *for* the dead, *not* for the living, even if it is not literally so.

Haroon Timol, speaking of dedicating a school, uses the phrase “in his name”. Partly, he wants a school named *in memory of* his dearly departed son, in public recognition of what Ahmed Timol did when he was alive. He wants to pay tribute to his son, while knowing that his son cannot receive this tribute. This is not the same as his wanting to pay tribute to himself, or to the living. That is emphatically *not* what he wants. There is little way around the paradox: he wants to pay a tribute to his son he knows he cannot pay. This paradox seems to me the core of memorialization. I shall explore it in everything that follows, noting, but not pursuing, the broad importance of Derrida’s work on the gift and on giving for what I am doing.⁷

Now Haroon Timol may also think--his words suggest this--that to dedicate a school “in his son’s name” is to do “what his son would have wanted”. Or perhaps even “what he said he wanted”--although probably not “what he *said* he wanted”, probably they never discussed the matter of how the young son might be memorialized were he thrown from the tenth story of John Vorster Square, or letter bombed or shot. Such discussions

usually do not take place between father and son. Let us take the phrase “in his son’s name” to mean the former: “what the son *would* have wanted”. What he would have wanted were he asked *then*. Or at least, what he would have *valued* then—values being more general than actual wants. Of course then is then and now is now, and what he might have wanted or valued *then* might be inappropriate for the post-apartheid moment of the South African transition. For example he might have wanted, were he asked then, to have his name on a school also named for V.I. Lenin. We do not know. Any political moment structures and constrains the possibilities and the forms of appropriateness which memorialization may take, and then is then, now is now. Ahmed might even have said back then that he wanted a bomb placed in the High Court of Pretoria so that “the struggle would continue and succeed in his name” (here I am improvising, I do not know his details). It would not have been possible for his father to have issued that as a request, in 1997, before the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, when they asked him if there was anything they might be able to do for him. It would not have been possible because the politics of the TRC eschewed violence and urged reconciliation, and a bomb is not an element in post-apartheid reconciliation.

Values, formulated at a general enough level, endure over time. Ahmed wanted justice, equality, education, freedom. These are the things he fought for and for which he died. Alive today, he would still value these things. But not necessarily in the same way. Even values, while general constraints on what it would be appropriate to do “in his name”, are not decisive.⁸

It is crucial to what that father is doing that he is not just inventing a memorial on the basis of the fit between Ahmed’s values (then) and the new dispensation now. He is

trying to do something that he believes would please his son, would *recognize* him, and this means not simply that the gaze of the new South Africa should be upon him, but that Ahmed himself would (were he alive today) feel recognized by the gesture, rather than repelled by it. Were the father to believe he is doing something that probably would repel his son (were his son alive today), he would not be doing it. He has to believe in his heart that this is right for Ahmed, that Ahmed “would have wanted it”.

A school in his name is perhaps as good a choice as any, since it is politically neutral (education is important to all free societies), and so education has to resonate with the general values Ahmed must have held dear. It is appropriate. Moreover, it is a visual form of remembrance in two senses: the name will be there on the school for the generations to see, and it will carry an internal aura of remembrance that will change over time.

So the act would be appropriate because 1) it is what the family wants and 2) it is what the father *imagines*, deep in his heart, Ahmed would himself have wanted, given who he was then and given what the times are *now*”. What the son would have wanted, or at minimum, would have found a worthy gesture of recognition to which he could reconcile himself. Based on knowledge of his son from the past—of his values and wants--*and* based in knowledge of present times, the father projects the son’s voice into the present. Here the living presume to speak for the dead by imagining a possible world in which the dead are still alive—still have values, wants and voices; and then by designating themselves their representatives.⁹ After imagining the possible world in which Ahmed is alive and speaks, his father then serves as his mouthpiece--the way a proxy might be self nominated to speak in my name at a political convention if I could not be found.

Now there is an astonishing twist to this analysis. The father is imagining a possible world in which Ahmed is alive to get the answer to what should happen in Ahmed's name, given that he is dead. This is the stuff of Hollywood comedy (Billy Crystal is dropped back in the middle of Los Angeles from the dead to find that they have erected a building in his honour which he detests. Acting in the guise of his idiot twin brother who is a personal trainer, he tries to get the building leveled, only to be found out by his ex-wife who he then falls in love with all over again and who falls in love with him since he is nicer as a dead person. She, meanwhile, is now married to his ex-analyst, etc. etc...). The comedy takes off from the paradox that doing something for the dead is anthropomorphizing them, bringing them back to life through the imagination of a possible world, while also, most pointedly, acknowledging them to be dead, that is, unrecoverable. Such memorializing language satisfies the fantasy that the dead never go away, that they are still among us. It is a fantasy at the basis of memorialization and monuments. And so language takes on the aura of remembrance. At the same time it acknowledges that the dead are dead, and allows us to get past them, to place them in the past.

Freud famously stated in *Mourning and Melancholia*, that the mourning process is defined by a movement towards, and then away from the dead. Through the *dasein* of making the dead present, through identification with the dead, the living gain the energy to release themselves from the burden of grieving. And so the living free themselves from the dead *fortzuehen*: to move on, to go on living without them. Memorialization makes the dead present through its irreducibly anthropomorphic language or granite, while also

acknowledging that they are dead. It satisfies both sides of the mourning process: the fort and the da.

This is not all it does. There is an important respect in which “in his name” is about the *name* and not the bearer of the name. A name designates a bearer, as Kripke points out, rigidly: in all possible worlds (“Haroon Timol” designates that person, whether he is alive or dead today). But a name is also comprised of a set of descriptions, images, phrases, beliefs, through which the person is known over time in this changing world. When a building is dedicated in a dead person’s name, gradually, over time, the person designated by the name becomes less and less significant (since nobody any more knows *him*), and his name begins to live a second life in which it is part of the school, like its venerable lintel and neo-classical columns. As this happens, the images and descriptions associated with the name become more venerable, more mythological. “Ahmed Timol” gradually becomes remembered as “one of those struggle heroes from the past”, a progenitor of the new South Africa, a founding hero . His father had asked that he be remembered as one of a type and this is what happens: the individual drops out, the type becomes magnified. His name merges with a number of others, all under the auspices of moral and political justice. The name becomes a link between the *then* and the *now*, between the past and the new generation of school children. Through this subtle, creative rewriting of the past that comes with remembrance over time, Ahmed the person is gradually identified with the new meanings his *name* takes on: the new descriptions and images associated with it. This linguistic change is, in the father’s mind, a way of insuring Ahmed’s futurity, his immortality. Ascribing to the *name* such futurity is a way of repairing the brutality of Ahmed’s shortened life: a compensation for the truncated

past by reference to the long future. The aura of the name will live its own life through future generations.

Reparation is that form of justice which is the paying back of an unpayable debt. You can never bring back a dead man and put him again on the hundred and fifth floor of the World Trade Towers, nor retrieve your grandparents from the camps. You can never erase slavery from the past. What you can do is provide recognition and compensation (and in some cases, punishment through the rule of law) which will help the process of overcoming. Crucial to the memorialization of Ahmed Timol is an attempt to repair the past by deference to the future: by giving his *name* a life in the future.

It is essential to transitional justice that on the one hand memorialization is a giving of the past its due, while on the other it is a way of envisioning a second life for the past in the *future*. The moment of transition is one of a potentially chaotic break with the past, and the setting of a new agenda for the future nation is crucial to the success of the moment. The setting of that agenda is a constitutional matter, a civic matter, but also a matter for cultural symbolizations. Always remember your roots; always live through your descendents. Through acts of reparation the moral duty of the future to live by honoring the past is instituted. A vision of moral continuity into the future is set forth, and that vision is part of what institutes continuity at a moment of tumultuous social change. This is a crucial reason for the turn to Truth Commissions at moments of transition. They provide living symbols for the moral future by working through the violent past. In doing so, they institute a regime of remembrance for the future, about the past. Reparation happens in the form of nation-building.

The Politics of Monuments in the New South Africa

The post-apartheid moment was, until around the year 2000, a moment in which memorialization tended to occur through speech acts associated with naming, remembering, dedicating, describing, archiving, stating. Robbin Island Museum was developed, which is an historical site crucial to the transitional process. As were a small number of spaces such as the District Six Museum, an intimate memorialization of a community bulldozed into oblivion in the 1960s in the form of an interactive space filled with photographs, and a large map on the floor, upon which members of the former community could mark where they used to live with their names (could mark it “in their names”). The period, one highlighting the Truth Commission and the making of the Constitution, was one foregrounding language. There was a virtual blackout on the construction of monuments—either in stone, granite, bronze or travertine.

What lay behind the turn towards language (even if on the portals of stone doors), and the eschewing of actual monuments to remembrance?

The anthropologist David Bunn described it as a moment of “reluctance” regarding monuments:

“We [in South Africa] have arrived at a transitional moment in the language of monuments. There are few grand plans for memorial buildings in post-Apartheid South Africa, and the dust of absurdity has begun to settle over some of the more venerable historical edifices. But for many, including the millions displaced from their homes under apartheid, and the relatives who died at the hands of the security police, there is a complete disjunction between personal suffering and public memory. Apartheid’s worst torturers relied absolutely on the fact that it

was possible to kill, maim and massacre without any record of their actions passing into the public domain...When policemen like Gideon Niewoudt burnt the bodies of Siphwe Mtimkulu and Topsy Madaka, wrapped the ash and bone fragments in rubbish bags and dumped them into the Fish River, they expected the waters to obliterate all traces of their victims....Some months ago, the widows and children of the men murdered by Gideon Niewoudt finally learned, in confessions before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, what became of those who were thought erased from the historical record. Some time after the hearing, a simple ceremony was held at the approximate site where the bone ash was thrown into the river. Those who had gathered to remember, tossed wreaths into the water and watched them carried away towards the sea.”¹⁰

To appreciate this story of the widows of Mtimkulu and Madaka, one must understand that in many Southern African religions, there is the belief that the souls of the dead live in or near the bodies of the dead for a time, after which, gradually, these souls disperse. Many Africans expressed a desire simply to find the bodies of their loved ones when they gave testimony before the TRC. What they wanted was to be present to the souls of their dead loved ones, which they believed lingered around their bodies. The ritual of casting wreaths into the river is that of making contact with the souls of the dead, which hover there, but also of cleansing sorrow by enacting the gesture of relinquishment, which is, taken literally, exactly what will happen to those souls when they float away towards oblivion. Monuments in stone are utterly foreign to such gestures.

There remains, however, the question of the more general reluctance of post-apartheid South Africa to monumentalize in stone, granite, steel or bronze, and this goes beyond the question of distinctively Southern African styles of memorializing. Its answer is this: the new dispensation has wished to free itself from the landscape of monuments--colonial and apartheid--because it was a landscape of colonial and apartheid power. Social transition required a symbolic break from the monuments of the past.

I refer to colonial instantiations of power as these:

Rhodes Memorial, Herbert Baker

This monument is sited directly above Rhodes' estate at the foot of Table Mountain, at the northwest edge of Cape Town. There it reigns over the surrounding landscape from the highest point up this steep and imposing mountain where it is possible to build. The monument features Rhodes in a Greek temple, surveying his own property below, but more than that, the entire landscape of the Cape stretching north to the mountains in the far distance. In this sweeping vista encompassed by Rhode's gaze is retained his vision of an England stretching "from Cape to Cairo", as if he can see all the way to the Mediterranean sea. Rhode's is a monument of energy, industry, spirit, action, Anglophilia. One imagines Isadora Duncan dancing at its columns, in praise of this benighted Greco-Mediterranean landscape perched at the toe of Africa and the utopia vision set forth from its temple mount.

King George V, 1865-1936, Monument by F. Doyle Jones, cast 1938

Standing at the top of the topmost hill in Durban, framed by the entrance to Howard College of the University of Natal, the monument celebrates Eurocentric command over city and sea. Here the King reigns on in spirit, two years after his death (the monument was created in 1938). Under the good King's shadow the university may bring education, welfare, order, control to Natal, the most "English" of all the South African provinces.

I refer to such Apartheid monuments as this pair of Voortrekker Monuments:

The Voortrekker Monument, Moerdyk, 1949

The Voortrekker Monument near Pretoria was built at the inception of the apartheid state (1948). The monument is *the* major commemoration of the "Great Trek" in South Africa, that event of the nineteenth century when a band of Afrikaners drove their ox wagons into the interior of the country, established themselves in the Transvaal, and fought off the "Zulu hordes" by forming their Ox Carts into a "Laager", a circle of security through which the Zulu enemy could not penetrate and from which the Trekkers could fire their rifles from positions of relative safety. In the symbolizations of the apartheid state, the laager comes to denote state power (against all aliens) radiating from the power of an Afrikaner communalist identity formation originating in what was done in the past. It is because of the great Trek, the mythology goes, that this great nation of South Africa was founded. Its destiny derives from the Great Trek as originating moment. Claiming control over the origin of the nation, the National Party thus banishes

indigenous and English populations from any real stake in the history of the nation, and by extension, in its destiny.

The monument was designed by Gerard Moerdyk, one year after the formation of the apartheid state, as if to bring mythology into stone as fast as possible. Moerdyk drew his inspiration from Bruno Schmitz's Völkerschlacht Memorial in Leipzig.¹¹ Both the enclosing wall with its ox-wagon reliefs and the circular interior echo the form of the laager. From the upper floor, with its 'history paintings', the visitor looks down upon the cenotaph where an eternal flame is burning (for the time being at least). This flame is the living incarnation of spirit, anthropomorphized as Wagnerian fire and hence, given the immortality of a people. The inscription below it reads: in translation from Afrikaans, We are all for you, South Africa.

The monument takes art deco forms and renders them as ornament, hardening their fluid lines, imposing a religious severity and overstated indomitability. Moreover it takes the multiple gothic, orientaling references of its German prototype and reduces them to a spare, religious front (the architect of the had designed a number of Dutch Reformed churches which similarly arched, brick portals). The kitsch resides in the tension between the deco elements and the memorializing purpose: the building looks like a deco radio tower made to do duty as brick church and war bunker.

Now it is significant that the monument upon which Moerdyk draws is the Völkerschlacht Memorial in Leipzig. "Völkerschlacht" means "carnage of the people", or better: "carnage of the *volk*", and there is a special work of signification that arises from the "dialogue" between these two monuments. The Leipzig monument was built at the beginning of the twentieth century, just at the time when the Boer War was lost, the

Afrikaner people were decimated, their power wrested by the English, they themselves were placed in concentration camps by Lord Kitchener's "scorched earth policy", and they were reduced to penury as a people. And so the German memorial becomes in Moerdyk's mind an archetype of Afrikaner suffering, the architectural unconscious of the Voortrekker Monument. The Voortrekker monument therefore both remembers defeat and suffering (through its relationship to its German prototype) and converts that experience of defeat into the victorious force of a state power capable of rewriting the past in its own name. *In its own name*: that is the point of this memorialization. It is therefore natural that this monument is built at the very moment that the National Party wins the elections and the apartheid state comes into being, as a sign of immediate symbolization and victory.

The Voortrekker Monument is probably also a way of voicing the pro-Nazi sympathies of many who founded the apartheid state, for it identifies Afrikaner suffering with the symbols of German nationalism.

The Voortrekker Monument, Winburg, Free State 1968

This modernist monument was constructed in the Free State during the heyday of apartheid. It exudes the hollowed and exuberant confidence of the 1960s, when resistance was subdued, the leaders of the resistance movement (Mandela, Mkebi, Sissulu, etc...) were all under arrest at Robbin Island, and South Africa was relatively "quiet". The monument could not have been made ten years later, when confidence in the apartheid state was no longer publicly assertable in the form of absolute homage in the light of the Soweto riots and the ensuing spiral of violence and struggle. Because thi monument is

modernist, cast in the abstractions of modernist architecture and sculpture, a text is required for its public deciphering. And so, engraved upon it, is a plaque, which states the following:

“This monument has been erected in the commemoration of the Voortrekker

The symbolism is complex

The five columns symbolize the Treks of Louis Trichardt,
Hendrik Potgieter, Gert Maritz, Piet Retief, and Pieter Uys.

The lines extending skywards suggest Drive, Struggle,

The Restlessness of the Trek. The Grouping Symbolizes

The Law-Abiding Community as well as the Wagon

Lager and the Concave Slope of the Wagon. The Upward

Sweeping Horns suggest not only the Ox but also surge

Forward and upwards towards the higher Ideals of

Independence and Freedom.

The Water Bowl Linking the Columns with Five Chutes,

Symbolizes the faith of the Trekkers and the Outward

Flow of the Water the spreading of the Christian Religion and Civilization,

Through the opening in the Water Bowl light from above

Falls on to the Bronze Plaque in the Courtyard, Symbol of

Divine Light.”

These instructions may remind one of Wagner’s command, which he wrote directly into the score of *Parsifal*, that the audience sit in rapt awe and silence after the first act.

By 1976 and the Soweto riots it was no longer possible to expect such religious fervour emoted over the mythic Afrikaner-nationalist past. Fortunately.

Now each of these styles of monument is frankly imitative of European models. Such imitation is a kind of eurocentrism, for it relies on cultural dependency to confirm the European Status of the symbol. The European symbol, transposed to the colony and made “more European than European”, articulates apartness from--and power over--native populations. Each monument seeks domination over the landscape around it, way of forcing the landscape to yield to what is an explicitly alien visual presence. It need hardly be added that the presence is patriarchal.

Hence the importance of refusing monuments and all they stand for at the moment of transition.

However, there is more, and that has to do with keeping silent about matters of such searing, traumatic intensity that they seem to burst the bounds of representation. The nation seems to have decided in its early days—without saying so—that the events of the TRC command the dignity of silence and the speech acts of remembrance, not the monumental currency of stone. The desire has been to allow the momentous events of the TRC to remain objects of awe and sublimity. As in: there can be no poetry after Auschwitz. At least, not *immediately* after. And in some mood essential to the encounter with Auschwitz, never. This mood is crucial to the way in which the biblical character of the TRC became a driving symbolization of the nation during the late 1990s. For its language is precisely that of religious deference to a higher power of truth and

reconciliation that refuses monumentalization except in the spoken and written word: in the aura of the Report.

The Postmodern Memorial

That museums honouring the struggle are now being designed and built is a sign that the new dispensation, the ANC, is sedimented as the state, and wishes to confirm its state power by monumentalizing its own struggle past.¹² Moreover, the state is weak vis a vis the economic sector, lacking in internal legitimacy because of its problems in social delivery and especially because of its frankly bizarre views about HIV/Aids in a country where fully 25% of the population is HIV positive, including members of Parliament. The state is ready to monumentalize itself, but it also *needs* to monumentalize itself.

It is also ready to commodify the past. This began as early as 1996-7 with a television commercial widely broadcast over the airwaves during South Africa's bid to host the Olympics in 2004. The commercial featured an ex-political prisoner from Robbin island recalling the importance of intramural games for prisoner morale during those terrible days of his imprisonment while a loving camera lingers on the now empty prison-site--the point of this piece of national nostalgia being to sell the idea of an Olympics in Cape Town under the banner of South African liberation. Certain well known ex-prisoners now use their Robbin Island stories to sell automobiles.

A newly instituted, bizarre law requires every corporate agent who builds a new casino to also build a museum honoring the struggle, or a new monument. One wonders if the monument will be situated in between the crap tables.

There is now a burgeoning tourist industry at Robbin Island, which includes a tour of the cells of the great—Nelson Mandela, Walter Sissulu, Robert Seybukwe, Govan

Mbeki--complete with politically correct sound bites that evacuate, as perhaps must be the case, a great deal of nuance and complexity. In many ways these tours are a good thing. They bring in money, contribute to moral eco-tourism, and spread the message of what the island was to South African school children. However, the “Robbin Island Museum” is not free of a certain commodification. During the CNN millennium celebrations, Mandela returned to his cell, along with a host of CNN set designers and an African chorus, where he passed a torch to Thabo Mbeki while the cameras took it all in. The Island is gradually turning into a theme park where nostalgia overwhelms past reality and the past appears as a joyful simulacrum. This demonstrates that South Africa exists in the global postmodern encomium, and that memorialization is increasingly guided by the forces of mass commodification. One awaits with trepidation the day when Robbin Island begins to replicate its new aura by opening a second branch down the street from Euro-Disney.

¹ I wish to thank Andre DuToit and Deepak Mistrey for helpful comments on this paper.

² In the new version of the Report, the list will contain short paragraphs about each victim. Still, the question is, why have this list at all, given that victims could be cross-referenced by an index at the back? The answer surely has to do with the desire to highlight the victims in a certain format, and I think of this as, in part, as memorializing format.

³ Cavell, Stanley; The World Viewed (Harvard: Cambridge and London, 1971).

⁴ Significant work on word and image includes: Mitchell, Tom; *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: Chicago and London, 1986), and Wollheim, Richard; *Painting as an Art* (Princeton: Princeton, 1987). I have learned from both authors.

⁵ A dialogue with Kant is in order here.

⁶ Halbwachs, Maurice; *On Collective Memory*, edited, translated, and introduced by L. A. Coser (University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1992).

⁷ Derrida, Jacques; *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: Chicago and London, 1995).

I have also been influenced by earlier work of Ted Cohen on “figurative acts”. Cohen argues that certain speech acts take on peculiar power from the way their terms of execution are flouted. His example is promising to live forever, something one cannot, strictly speaking, do (since a promise requires that at minimum one believes one can complete the act promised). Whatever is special about this speech act derives from the paradox (let me say) of promising the ‘unpromisable’. See Cohen, Ted, “Figurative Speech and Figurative Acts”, *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 72, No. 19, 1975, pp. 669-684.

⁸ I am helped here by remarks of Peter Railton in private conversation.

⁹ There is no implied belief in the ontological “reality” of possible worlds here, merely the claim that possible worlds exist as figments of Haroon Timol’s imagination.

¹⁰ Bunn, David; “Whited Sepulchres: On the Reluctance of Monuments”, in *blank—Architecture, apartheid and after*, ed. Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavic (Netherlands Architectural Institute: Rotterdam, 1998).

¹¹ For a good discussion, see also Chipkin, Clive; *Johannesburg Style: Architecture and Society 1880s-1960s* (David Philip: Cape Town, 1993), pp. 280-1. See also Herwitz, Daniel; *Race, Reconciliation, Renaissance* (Minnesota: Minnesota and London: forthcoming 2003), Chapter 6.

¹² Physical monuments tend to be created either by fiercely independent, and often aggrieved groups, or by the state at a moment when its power is meant to be asserted. The moment of the TRC was a moment before the concentration of state power (which has only taken place during the Mbeki regime), indeed a moment when vital to the transitional process were attitudes of *healing*—transmuting the deep strife between social agents and groups into what Tutu called “restorative truth” or reconciliation focused on victim acknowledgment. The victims were not stridently trying to assert their group identity in autonomy from the larger nation. Those who took part in the TRC had signed on to a game of national unity eschewing such assertions of separate identity as captured in monuments. And remember, the TRC took place during a state of on-again off-again political violence (between Inkatha and the ANC, and between other groups), and it was the work of the Truth Commission to salve these eruptions of malcontent through ideals and images of unity and harmony rather than through assertion of monumental power.