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A critique of monuments

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This article deals with the purpose of monuments, both sculptural and architectural. At issue is the assessment of the congruence between the aesthetic design and material expression, and the ethical or ideological meaning of monuments. Historical examples have been selected from the category of architectural structures and statues representing defunct ideologies. Such structures are often neglected, vandalised, destroyed, toppled, appropriated or recycled by rival groups. The discussion also focuses on two proposed monuments, both of which are intended to honour the victims of past events inspired by ideological bias. An attempt is made to solve the problem of remembering the past in ways other than the erection of monumental constructions intended to celebrate past or present political ideologies or heroes.

'n Kritiek van monumente

Hierdie artikel handel oor die doel van monumente, sowel beeldhoukunstig as argitektonies. Die bepaling van die kongruensie tussen die estetiese ontwerp of materiële uitdrukking en die etiese of ideologiese betekenis van monumente is hier ter sprake. Historiese voorbeelde is geselekteer uit die kategorie van argitektoniese strukture en standbeelde wat uitgediende ideologieë verteenwoordig. Sodanige strukture word dikwels verwaarloos en deur oproergroepe gevandaleer, vernietig, omgegooi, toegeëien of hergebruik. Vervolgens word gefokus op twee voorgestelde monumente waarmee in beide gevalle beoog word om die slagoffers van gebeure uit die verlede wat deur 'n ideologiese vooroordeel geïnspireer is, te huldig. Ten slotte word gepoog om die probleem op te los om die verlede op die wyse te gedenk. Alternatiewe word voorgestel vir die oprigting van monumentale strukture wat bedoel is om vorige of huidige politieke ideologieë of helde te vereer.

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Monuments are defined mainly in terms of their purpose: “to remind viewers of specific individuals or events” (Stocker 1996: 41).¹ A monument is a physical object, such as an architectural structure or statue,² displayed in public and intended to be “regarded as representing a past civilization, even if its original purpose was different” (Stocker 1996: 41). Defining a monument in terms of function and iconography is relatively easy. Primarily, monuments are erected to celebrate military victories. Indeed, James Tatum’s (2003) thesis is that, no matter when or where they are fought, all wars have one thing in common: a relentless progression of monuments and memorials for the dead.³ Monuments are also erected to celebrate the prominent stature and prestige of a living or deceased political leader, or to serve as political statements rooted in current ideology. Less frequently, statues of artists celebrate the more worthy cause of human genius, albeit to enhance chauvinistic pride. As objects, monuments and memorials are presumed to be functional in the sense that they serve as *aides-mémoires* to a specific community or group. In fact, most memorials are designed for the indoctrination of those for whose viewing they are intended, and may thus be aptly defined as “politics on pedestals”.⁴ Thus, to enhance their ideological and social role, monuments have a clear relationship to ritual, as has been pointed out by Cara Armstrong & Karen Nelson (1993):

- 1 I wish to thank Arthur Rapanos for the illustrations, which were done from the sources indicated.
- 2 According to Pliny (1968: 14-15), “The Athenians were [...] introducing a new custom when they set up statues at the public expense in honour of Harmodios and Aristogeiton, who killed the tyrant. This occurred in the very year in which the kings were expelled from Rome. A refined ambition led to the universal adoption of the custom, and statues began to adorn the public places of every town; the memories of men were immortalized, and their honours were no longer merely graven on their tombstones, but handed down for posterity to read on the pedestals of statues.” In hindsight, the irony is evident because thereafter tyrants, rather than the slayers of tyrants, were honoured with statues.
- 3 See also Borg (1991), who gives an overview of types of war memorials.
- 4 The quotation is a reference to the title of an article by Merrick (1991) which deals with the evolution of royal imagery and symbolism in monumental sculpture.

The ritual and the monument can embody the essence of events. Monuments can provide a site for a form of permanence in a landscape and imprint events in collective memory. [...] Monuments remind, warn, and suture; they provide public space for recognition, reunion, and mourning (Ioan 2002: 29).

In his turn, Arthur C Danto (1987: 112) defines as memorials those structures which serve only to remind viewers of past events. He draws a distinction between “monuments” and “memorials”:

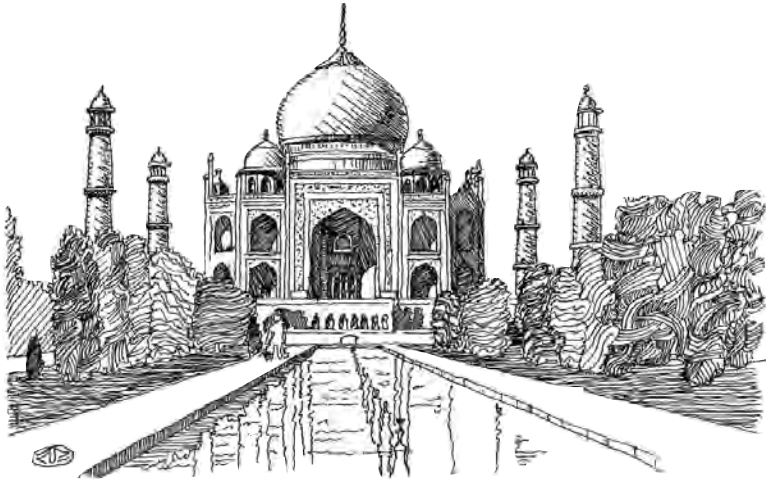
Monuments make heroes and triumphs, victories and conquests, perpetually present and part of life. The memorial is a special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honour the dead. With monuments we honour ourselves.

While Danto’s distinction between monuments and memorials is clear and concise, it raises several questions. Is the memorial essentially a sacred place with limited access, or is it a tomb in the sense of consigning things to oblivion, thus having a function that denotes the opposite of the apparent intention signified by the appellation “memorial”? The latter is what Danto’s distinction seems to indicate; it seems too narrowly defined without recognising the potentially overlapping functions of monuments and memorials. And, as Augustin Ioan (2002: 29) points out, “At the extreme, public monuments as sites of memory can be (and have been, over the centuries) also identified as sacred spaces”.

An example of overlapping functions is the Taj Mahal (1632-54) at Agra, the most famous of all Islamic mausoleums, which was built by a Moghul ruler of India, Shah Jahan, as a memorial to one of his wives, Mumtaz Mahal (Figure 1). While functioning as a mausoleum to the memory of a woman, the Taj Mahal, as one of the great architectural wonders of the world, is first and foremost a monument to Shah Jahan’s own grandeur and power as a ruler who had command of state resources. However, no lover of beauty would wish it away for that reason.

To evaluate existing or proposed monuments as meaningful works of art or architecture in terms of aesthetic criteria is more difficult. Even a cursory survey of the art-historical literature on monuments reveals that, as artefacts, they have not yet been included in mainstream art history. Even though recent articles have appeared in in-

Figure 1: A view of the Taj Mahal, Agra, India



Source: De la Croix & Tansey 1980: 262

ternational art history journals,⁵ there does not appear to be any movement to develop a theoretical basis upon which to evaluate monuments according to their contexts and art-historical value, probably because the intrinsic artistic value of most monuments is negligible and because some ideological issues may still be politically sensitive. It

- 5 Several of the articles in recent editions of leading art-historical journals deal with French monuments. In the *Gazette des beaux-arts* 6(132), 1998, Norma M Heiman discusses “The art of politics in early nineteenth century France” and deals with the historic reception of E-É-F Gois’s statue of Jeanne d’Arc. The *Oxford Art Journal* 23(2), 2000, contains three research articles on monuments, by Andrew McClellan, Brian Grosskurth and Etienne Jollet. The abstract of McClellan’s article states: “Focussing on Edme Bouchardson’s Louis XV (1748-1763), this essay explores the power vested in these monuments owing to their dual role as portraits of a living but absent king and the symbolic embodiments of the timeless qualities of monarchy. This double function of representation motivated their destruction during the French Revolution and their subsequent decline in critical fortunes.” This description confirms the main thesis explored in the present article: the vulnerability of monuments as symbolic embodiments of ideologies.

should be asked whether the custom of building monuments should be banned because almost all of these structures are badly done or done for the wrong reasons. However, banning anything would have ideological implications.

The most notable contribution to the evaluation of monuments is that of the art historian Serguisz Michalski who teaches at the University of Braunschweig, Germany. His main thesis is this:

Despite what might be seen as their numerous artistic failings, public monuments continue to serve as admirable visual condensations of power and of societies' attitudes to their pasts (Michalski 1998: front page).

A brief survey of the mixed fortunes that have befallen historical monuments over time reveals that they often continue in existence physically, but lose their meaning. A notable example is Trajan's Column in that emperor's Roman Forum, which fits the model of imperial propaganda (Figure 2). This monument is 30 metres high and decorated by a continuous narrative relief that completes 23 spiral turns. Paul Veyne (1988: 3) comments on the illegibility of the sculptural

Figure 2: Trajan's Column, Trajan's Forum, Rome



Source: Photograph by author

representation: “The Column does not inform people [about the emperor’s exploits]; it simply lets them see the evidence of the greatness of Trajan”. At best, the column, with the original human-scale figure of the emperor on top replaced in the seventeenth century by a figure of St Peter, is still an imposing landmark among the ruins of Trajan’s Forum. The artistic merit of the continuous frieze is not disputed, even if art historians and other viewers can never study it *in situ*, but only by means of reproductions of the narrative flattened out horizontally on a page.

Veyne (1988: 3) also refers to the inscription celebrating Darius the Great, which is another surviving statement about the greatness of a ruler:

[A]t the summit of the Bisitun Rock, Iran, Darius the Great had a monumental inscription engraved in three languages to the glory of his reign. This inscription was not meant to be read: it is located at the top of a peak, and only sages or mountain climbers suspended on their ropes could read it.

The inscription is accompanied by a vivid scene carved in relief, depicting Darius standing with his foot upon the squirming figure of one of the rival claimants to the throne, while the bound figures of other rebels are lined up before him. The invincible figure of Darius towers above his followers and victims alike (Figure 3).⁶

When it comes to megalomania, few rulers can rival Nero, who fully realised that visibility was important. He had a statue erected to himself which represented him surrounded by the rays of the sun and ordered his subjects to worship him in this form as a sun-god. Rising to a height of 35 metres, this colossal statue dominated the *domus aurea* in Rome and was clearly visible to people outside. It was the first statue of a human being which had the dimensions reserved for images of gods. Fortunately, this monstrosity was destroyed.

Certainly, the wish for immortality which inspired rulers of previous millennia and ages to commission their builders and sculptors resulted in the erection of enduring structures that were as awe-inspiring to both original and subsequent viewers as they were costly to the state coffers. Some are still with us, as awe-inspiring as ever.

6 For an art-historical analysis of the frieze, cf Margaret Cool Root (1996: 116).

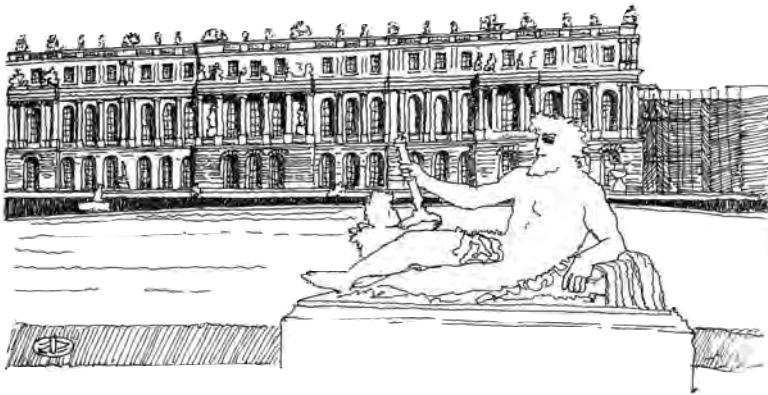
Figure 3: Rock relief and inscription of Darius the Great, Bisitun Rock, Persia



Source: Cool Root 1996: 116

In this regard, the Egyptian pyramids spring to mind, whose economic impact on the ancient population at large is unknown and irrelevant at this remove. In early modern times the palace of Versailles (1667-70), a 2000-metre-long edifice built by Charles le Brun and Louis le Vau for Louis XIV of France as his residence and seat of government, became the greatest architectural project of the age and probably the leading symbolic cause of the French Revolution (Figure 4). At present the palace of Versailles, like the pyramids and the Taj Mahal, is a great tourist attraction. Presumably they at least earn their keep as well as leaving an indelible impression of what their ages could conceive and accomplish.

Figure 4: Garden view of the Palace of Versailles, France



Source: Photograph by author

Although many structures honour powerful rulers and their regimes, it is also true that the destruction and replacement of monuments is common in world history. A reason for this phenomenon is given by Mark Stocker (1996: 42), who refers to the powerful effect of the symbolism of monuments that “are sometimes interpreted as instruments of oppression as well as salvation”. This statement resonates with serpent mythology in which serpents can be both good or bad.⁷ Most often, rulers emulate or endeavour to surpass the glories of the predecessors whose yoke they tossed off, and thus, ironically, emulate the ideals of the oppressors, so that victims of abuse become abusers because they have no other role model.

Public monuments are subject and particularly vulnerable to counter-propaganda, vandalism or total destruction. An iconoclastic process is especially evident during the late twentieth century in liberalised Eastern European states, where many statues of Lenin and Stalin were toppled from their pedestals (Figure 5). In Communist Russia,

... the twin phenomena of stylization and gigantism set in, giving Communist statues their grim, depressing quality. The fall of Soviet

7 For example the serpent persuaded Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, while Moses erected a bronze serpent to heal the Israelites when they were stung by vipers in the desert.

statues in 1998 provides us with a unique example of the removal of a whole universe of compromised public monuments (Michalski 1998: 9).

The communist monumental statues to specific people and the social ideals they propagated were so “realistic” that they effectively became cartoon characters and caricatures, essentially kitsch, signalling the bully on the pedestal’s pathological self-assertion (Figures 6 and 7). These statues, designed to last for centuries, carry the seeds of their own destruction in their caricature-like quality and the indiscriminate threat of violent aggression which they signal to the viewer, which may explain Michalski’s (1998: 152) speculative remark: “Only in Russia have discarded figures been left on the ground; the demarcation between neglect and conscious denigration is often hazy”. The Moscow statue park, known as the Temporary Museum of Totalitarian Art, adopted such a principle, exhibiting standing as well as overturned or defaced figures. This is a kind of *Depot de mémoire et oubli*.⁸

Figure 5: A bust of Stalin toppled in Budapest, Hungary



Source: Michalski 1998: 143

8 Since 1994 only one public monument of a former South African politician has been consigned to oblivion, namely the statue of J F Verwoerd, which was situated in the centre of Bloemfontein (Van den Berg 1996).

Figure 6: A statue of Lenin at the Finland Station, Moscow



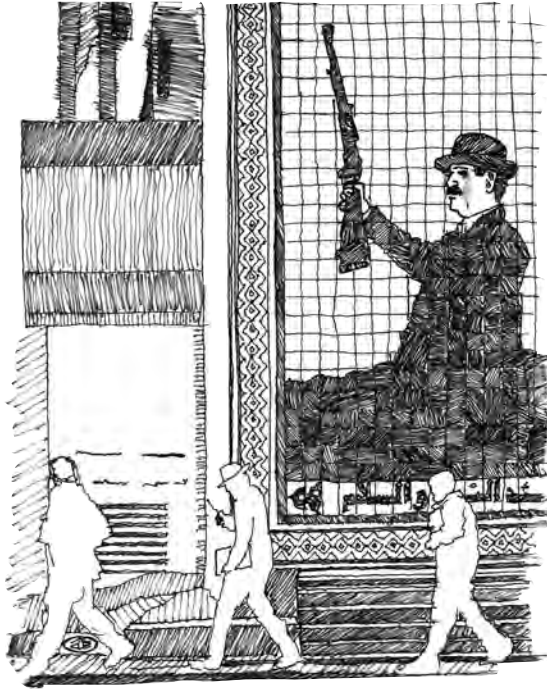
Source: Michalski 1998: 114

Figure 7: The motherland memorial, Mamayer Hill, former Stalingrad



Source: *Newsweek* 20 January 2002

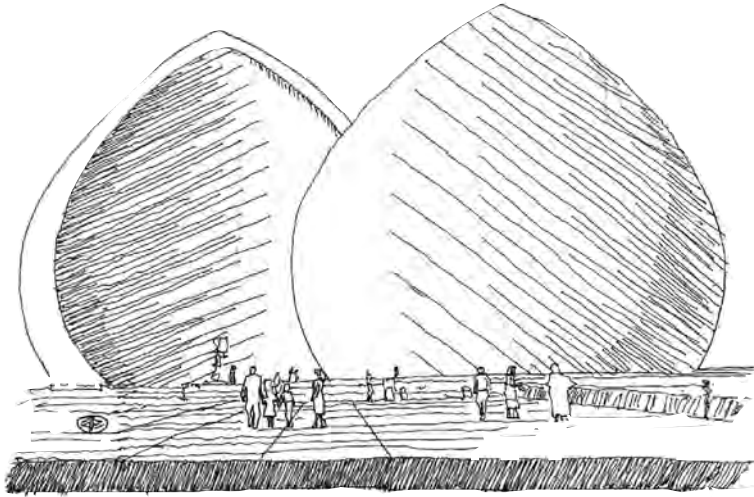
Figure 8: A monumental poster of Saddam Hussein, Baghdad, Iraq



Source: *Time Magazine* 16 December 2002

In a chapter on “Public monuments in the Third World”, Michalski (1998: 195-200) deals with the interesting case of Saddam Hussein’s mania for icons of himself and monuments to his regime (Figure 8). By differentiating between ephemeral cult forms and structures designed to survive for centuries, the Iraqi dictator was a more calculating propagandist than the communist rulers. The more durable political monuments which Saddam had erected in Baghdad bow in the direction of the Islamic artistic tradition. The imposing Martyr’s Monument (1982) by Ismael Fattah shows two onion-profile half-domes opposite each other, aligned slightly off-centre (Figure 9). Most remarkable is the pop-style metal Iraqi flag placed in the middle, on a translucent base constituting the roof of an underground mu-

Figure 9: Martyr's Monument, Baghdad, Iraq



Source: Michalski 1998: 197

seum. Saddam's popular figural likenesses, made from non-durable materials, are rooted in a traditional Arab illustrative style, combined with American billboard aesthetics. These icons of himself are lavishly distributed in Baghdad, on a scale similar to Nero's monument to himself. However, it came as no surprise that immediately after the end of the US-Iraqi War in April 2003 the citizens of Iraq toppled Saddam's effigies (Figure 10).

The removal or replacement of monuments can be explained in terms of René Girard's (1987) concept of "mimetic desire". This phenomenon refers to violence caused by an opposing group which is psychologically motivated to attain a prestige that rivals and, if possible, exceeds that of the dominant group whose monuments they envy. Therefore, a clash of cultures may lead to violence and the destruction or vandalising of the monuments of defeated regimes. The underlying cause of such behaviour implies a reactive opposition to the physical symbols of dominance. According to Wink (1986: 15), resisting reactive opposition is one of the most profound and difficult truths in Scripture (and, one may add, of the spiritual teachings of

Figure 10: A Saddam Hussein statue is toppled, Baghdad, Iraq



Source: *Newsweek* 14 April 2003

many religions). He notes that once people succumb, individually or as a group, to the urge to reactive opposition “we become what we hate”. Thus role models tend to determine behaviour, as Wink correctly observes:

The very act of hating something draws it to us. Since our hate is a direct response to the evil done, [it] almost invariably causes us to respond in the same terms already laid down by the enemy. Unaware of what is happening, we turn into the very thing we oppose. [Thus:] It would make a fascinating story to write a history of the world from the perspective of the principle of forcible resistance transforming into its opposite. One can find instances from virtually every period.

The lesson remains that the abused become the abusers, for lack of a different role model.

In a similar vein René Girard (1977) formulated a theory of violence based on “mimetic desire”, which is basically an attempt on the part of the conqueror to possess for himself the values or excellence of a “guilty victim”. The imitator becomes increasingly malicious towards his model, causing a “double bind” through which the model becomes the subject’s “monstrous double”. If one group envies an

object because it is an object of desire or emulation produced by the model group, the envy may increase in intensity to become a mimetic envy, causing admiration to be transformed into conflict. In the end, the model is eliminated because of the desire to appropriate its identity. In the process of obliterating what belongs to the victim, violence is done to history, tradition, texts, and reputations (and, one may add, to monuments). This violence leads to future reprisals and, ultimately, to cycles of retaliation.

It comes as no surprise that, in the process of laying claim to the victim's best possessions, sacred places are desecrated or appropriated in the same way as ideologically inspired monuments. According to Heather L Ecker (1997: 190),

... [t]here has been a good deal of interest recently in the medieval history of the conversion of sacred buildings from the religion of the conquered people to that of its conqueror, or to other purposes.

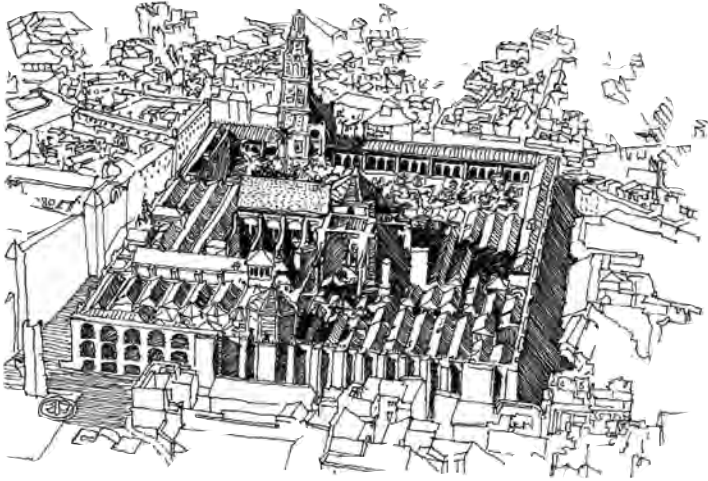
A notable example of such a conversion which was motivated by “mimetic desire” occurred at Córdoba, where the Christians turned part of a tenth-century mosque into a sixteenth-century, late Gothic cathedral (Figure 11). The co-existence of these edifices, for as long as they remain standing, will evoke the reactive opposition of Spanish Christians to Islam. These edifices can never be separate entities, but will remain conflicting embodiments of rival modalities.⁹ The same is true of the Hagia Sophia,¹⁰ “one of the most superb examples of Christian architecture that have come down to us” (Talbot Rice 1962: 56). However, it was converted into a mosque in 1453, after the Turkish conquest of Constantinople (Figure 12), and during the past century it became a museum.

A South African case in point is the Machel Monument in Mbuluzini, situated in the RSA-Mozambique-Swaziland corner, where an impoverished community lives (Figure 13). On the night of 19 October 1986 a Russian plane transporting President Samora Machel of

9 See Maré (1998) for a full description of the mosque of Córdoba which was turned into a cathedral.

10 The Hagia Sophia was Emperor Justinian's (527-565) greatest edifice, erected between 534 and 539 under the direction of the architect Anthemius of Tralles, assisted by Isidore of Miletus.

Figure 11 A view of the mosque and cathedral, Córdoba, Spain



Source: Photograph by author

Figure 12: Hagia Sophia as a mosque, Istanbul, Turkey



Source: Talbot Rice 1963: 46

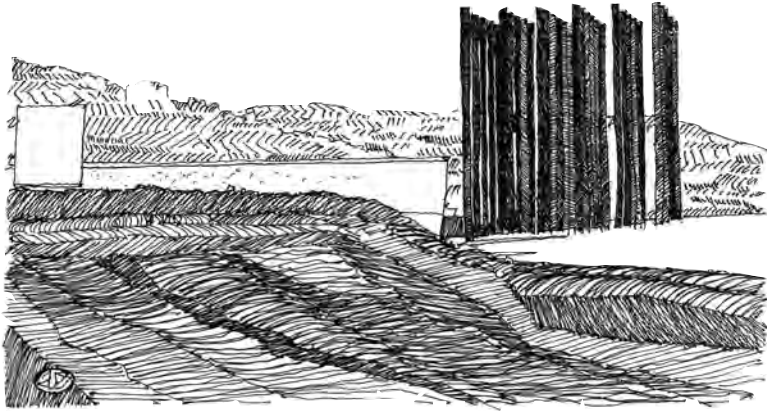
Mozambique crashed in this remote Lomombo mountain area. While some pro-RSA government media speculated about the possibility of pilot error, most anti-government voices joined in the chorus claiming South African sabotage. However, the Margo Commission which was appointed to investigate the accident found no evidence to lend substance to the allegations that the apartheid regime had been guilty of wrongdoing.¹¹ Nevertheless, a monument to Machel was erected in Mbuzini, serving as one of the examples of the new history-making process in South Africa, since the inscription in three languages on the monument blames the apartheid regime for the catastrophe. In this regard Chris van Vuuren (2003) stated in a paper read at the Association for Anthropology in Southern Africa (AASA) conference in May 2000:

The debate on the need to evaluate and redress imbalances on monuments and museums [in SA] has been continuing for some time. An example was the Wits History Workshop, entitled 'Myths, Monuments and Museums', held in July 1991. The Southern African Museums Association has also debated the issue of colonialist paradigms in museum exhibits and policy. The issue involves art history, anthropology, archaeology and history in particular. The table is set for new representations and ideologies.

From the African National Congress (ANC)'s accession to power in South Africa there was talk of appropriating the lower level of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, built by the Afrikaners to commemorate their ancestors' trek from the Cape to escape British rule (Figure 14), for a permanent exhibition to commemorate the ANC's struggle against white minority rule. This would have meant the ANC's appropriating for themselves the very thing they oppose — Afrikaner domination — as denoted by a monumental fortress which still draws more visitors than any other monument or museum in South Africa. Indeed, if that had happened, the spaces of the Afrikaner and the ANC struggles would have co-existed in one monumental structure, the hegemony of each remaining unresolved. In this context, what happened at Córdoba could be an object lesson to all multicultural societies in which the dominant group exacts vengeance upon the cultural artifacts of a subjected group (Maré 1998: 25). In

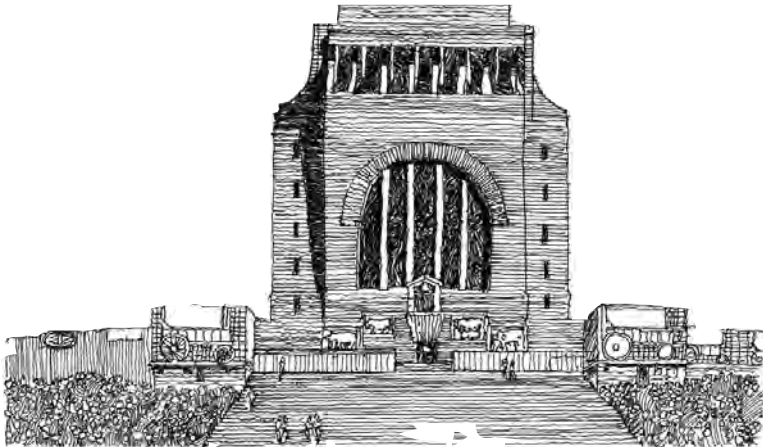
11 Cf <<http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/commissions/1998/trc/2chap6a.htm>>.

Figure 13: The Samora Machel Monument, Mbuluzini, South Africa



Source: Photograph by C van Vuuren

Figure 14: Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria



Source: Photograph by author

the event, the ANC ultimately decided to plan a new monument to the struggle, called Freedom Park.

It seems that most proposed twentieth-century monuments have been contentious, for example the Holocaust Monument which is at present planned for Berlin, as well as Freedom Park, to be constructed on a hilltop in Pretoria. The architect Peter Eisenman presented a model of the Holocaust Monument in August 1998, since when the project has provoked much debate in Germany. Alberto Manguel's (2000: 255) comment is apt:

The objections are multiple and valid: a memorial would provide an excuse not to remember; a memorial would suggest boundaries for both guilt and remembrance; no monument can represent the unrepresentable; any construction must imply an aesthetic and how can there be an aesthetic of evil?

Manguel (2000: 259) believes that Eisenman's private Derridean vocabulary (he is the co-author of a book with the French philosopher Jacques Derrida):

... will remain for the most part silent to the common visitor, inscrutable, a bulky memorial that requires, like so much conceptual art, 'large signs in German and English [...] showing what the memorial will be and explaining its significance' [*International Herald Tribune* (Zürich), 18 January 2000]. At most, what will confront the viewer in the two hectares of prime Berlin property is the *impossibility* of representation.

Clearly, the Holocaust cannot be represented and its contemplation elevates it to the level of the sublime. Therefore, "The aesthetic of [...] a [Holocaust] monument would [...] not be made of [...] dead stone but of living memory. Such a monument would simply be a library" (Manguel 2000: 259). This implies that in literate societies monuments of stone should be replaced by narratives contained in books.

Since 1994 new monuments have been erected in the New South Africa and more are planned. As is the case with monuments all over the world, all existing South African monuments have been criticised in one way or another. A notable example is the Women's Memorial in Bloemfontein, which was erected after the Anglo-Boer War (Figure 15). This monument is representative of only a part of the suffering caused by the war, as Johan Snyman (1996) explained in a well-argued article. In this case the problem is not aesthetic, but ethical.

With reference to existing, envisaged or planned monuments in South Africa it is hoped that the present government will not perpetuate the tradition of erecting ideological landmarks which in time become offensive when power changes hands. The main current example is the ambitious Freedom Park project, which will incorporate a monument to the armed struggle against the previous minority government. The first design, widely publicised some years back, incorporated a monumental raised arm with the hand forming a fist, in fascist fashion. Needless to say, criticism was voiced and the project was scrapped.

Figure 15: Detail of Women's Memorial, Bloemfontein



Source: Photograph by author

The Department of Arts, Culture and Technology is responsible for the planning of Freedom Park. The purpose of whatever precinct and structures are envisaged is to celebrate South Africa's unique history, from the precolonial period to the present. Its three underlying themes are struggle, democracy and nation-building. This park, its

buildings and statues will be established on Salvokop, which is in full view of the hill on which the Voortrekker Monument stands. How the hillside setting will be turned into a "Freedom Park" is not yet clear. Neither is it sure when construction will start or even what the design will look like. An architectural competition has been launched, and in the preface to the competition "Brief and Conditions", the State President wrote: "The Freedom Park project is the most ambitious heritage project to be undertaken by the new democratic government". The cost is estimated at US \$940 000.¹²

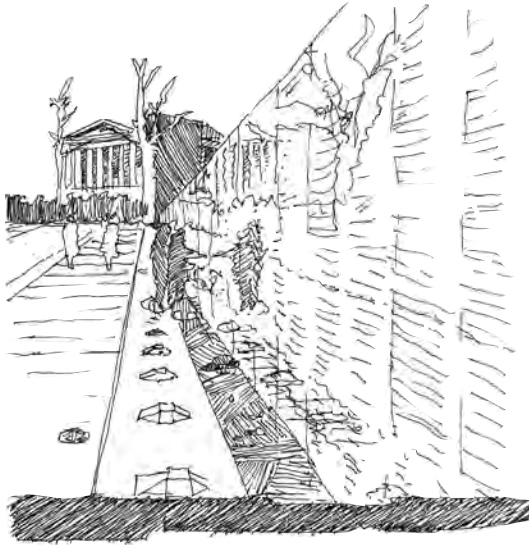
It is clear that the envisaged purpose of Freedom Park is ambitious in the extreme. One may therefore safely echo Manguel's (2000: 259) comment on the Holocaust Museum in Berlin: "At most, what will confront the viewer in the two hectares of prime Berlin property [read: Pretoria hilltop] is the *impossibility* of representation".

Since Freedom Park will not be a memorial only to the deceased, like the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC (Figure 16), Danto's (1987: 112) definition springs to mind again: "With monuments we honour ourselves." The ANC struggle was politically inspired and heavily laden with ideology. So are the concepts of colonialism and nation-building. In South Africa's present circumstances this would imply that the celebration of a monument to the struggle would efface those against whom the struggle was waged. There is no exact parallel to the present South African context, but after some revolutionary changes of power in the past, for example the French Revolution, attempts were made by the new rulers to eradicate the past by

12 At the date of submission of this article three overseas designers had been named as the finalists in the competition for the project. However, no winner was announced and the initial scheme was scrapped, apparently because the designers did not respect the integrity of Salvokop. Instead, the government commissioned a team of landscape architects, architects, town planners and traditional healers to redesign Freedom Park in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act. The first phase, the Garden of Remembrance (where the spirits of those deceased in the struggle will come to rest) is nearing completion on the eastern slope of Salvokop, at an estimated cost of R60 000 000. A monument and a Pool of Creation will also be erected on top of the hill. On the western slope there will be an administrative building and a museum, about which no further details are available.

means of the transforming power of a new ideology. In this regard a document published in 1683 by the authors “B and Y” in London refers to the purpose of a proposed monument as follows: “The present political power being what it is, the stupidity is ludicrous of those who believe that the memory of the succeeding generation can be extinguished” (Moore 1998: 498, note 2).

Figure 16: Vietnam Memorial, Washington, DC



Source: Photograph by author

Remembering the past without celebrating an ideology or a person seems to be a constructive ideal for the future, since most public monuments are not on a par with public sculptures created by independent artists making a gift of their talents to the general public. Works in this latter category are usually commissioned from artists who are not ideologically compromised, and erected mainly to adorn affluent cities. Moreover, their merit can be assessed according to aesthetic criteria. On the other hand, because of their predominantly ideological importance, figural sculptures of heroes or statesmen usually fail the

test of aesthetics, that is of being objects pleasing in themselves and of lasting aesthetic value. The whole genre of twenty-first century monuments should therefore be reconsidered. Surely, the various ideologies to which the planners of monuments adhere must influence their aesthetic perceptions, which are executed by the commissioned architects and sculptors according to a preconceived programme. In the case of architectural structures or buildings I can do no better than to quote the opinion of the British architect Colin St John Wilson (1953: 104): “The sense in which I think that architecture is being prostituted beyond bearing is if it is made to submit to a political ideology”. This statement clearly indicates the incompatibility of ethics and the ideal of architecture as a social art. In this regard Wolfgang Iser (1997: 74) points out the “modern analogy between art and living conditions”. He refers to the complexities of the life-world which are relatively opaque, whereas “those in the aesthetic sphere are more transparent”. He advocates a new approach which he designates “aesthetics”. Derived from Theodor Adorno, this approach “does not draw the line at the borders of art, but [...] is capable of radiating out to contexts of the life world”. Therefore, aesthetics should acquire bearing in the life-world, not just as a means of embellishment, but as an authority of “aesthetics”. If what we design to remember the past can be integrated into the life-world, then no monument need be set apart as a “special precinct” — to echo Danto’s terminology. In any case, our history is chronicled by the world which was and still is created by human endeavour. In this text there are large headings, sub-headings, and so on. What writers say and emphasise most is a matter of who wields the power and authority to assume authorship.

Considering the environmental impact and cost of monuments, the conclusion may be drawn that, all over the world, their design should be deleted from the list of government priorities. As the proposed monument to the Holocaust and Freedom Park prove, they are post-event events. Since monuments can never arise directly out of a context which merits remembrance, they are planned in retrospect according to ideas that hindsight makes meaningful.

Michalski (1998: 210) is right in pointing out the changed message of the public monument in the West:

This message, however, no longer attempts to praise traditional political or cultural achievements. Conveying the impact of catastrophes like the Holocaust or mounting environmental dangers and of alienation and cultural disjunction, it is a truthful expression of the demise of universally accepted figurative imagery and our disturbed state of mind on the threshold of the third millennium.

The examples discussed in this study were chosen because their individual designs could indicate whether their planners had learnt the lesson of the past — that the ideologies which inspire them at the present time will inevitably become defunct, and that the physical presence of symbolic structures will become offensive to future rulers. In terms of both formal qualities and content or meaning in the context of the dominant political ideology of a society, there is generally a mismatch between aesthetic expression and ethical intent in the design of political or national monuments. In view of the debate concerning the destruction or neglect of ideologically defunct individual works of monumental sculpture or architecture, the problem that concerns art historians is how to reconcile explanations of individual works in the category of monumental sculpture and architecture, erected according to principles wholly internal to them, but with external sociological and cultural frames of reference that elude definitive interpretation.

In view of the problematic status of monuments I argue that all existing monuments should be left to represent an extinct species. If we need to commemorate a non-ideological event, a modest memorial could be erected. However, the question arises as to who will define “non-ideological” and “modest”. Preferably, money should not be wasted on monuments and memorials but donated to libraries. Manguel is right in denying that the living memory of the Holocaust can be made of dead stones; “such a monument [should] simply be a library”. The history contained in books could be the most lasting memorial to events which defy representation, and the library building could be both a functional and an aesthetic asset in the life-world in which the events to be celebrated or remembered took place.

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