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1 Statue of Jan Smuts. Cape Town. Mitford Barberton, 1974.

2 Paul Kruger monument. Pretoria. Church Square. Anton van Wouw, 1895-1899.

THE SIGNIFYING POWER OF THE MONUMENTAL IMAGE

SABINE MARSCHALL

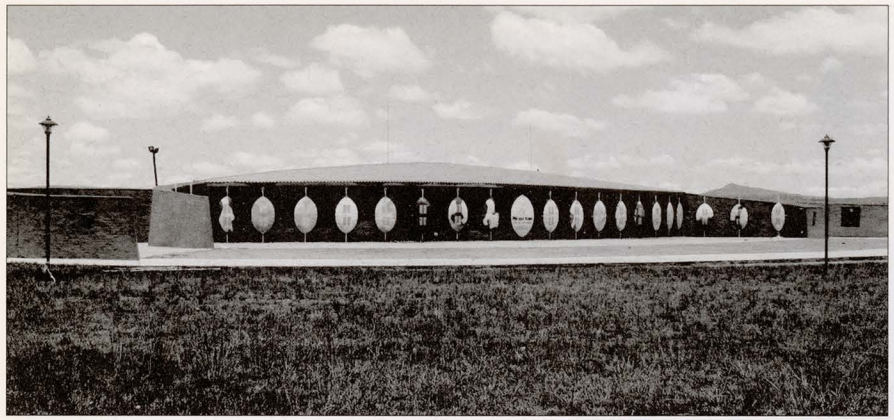
The post-apartheid era in South Africa has seen much debate about the issue of commemorative monuments.[1] Discussions still flare up on occasion as to whether or not a particular monument or memorial erected during the colonial or apartheid era should be removed, relocated or modified. Calls for new monuments that reflect the heritage of those currently in power are a constant item on the latter's politico-cultural agenda and an increasing number of such monuments have, in fact, been completed or are currently under way.[2] The debate around monuments often prompts emotionally charged responses. Monuments are signifiers imbued with symbolic meaning by means of both image and text. But what exactly does any specific monument actually symbolise and who determines that? On average, people seem to be quite certain what exactly a particular monument stands for, which suggests that meaning is assumed to be fixed. Yet, most people will also agree that one and the same monument can mean different things to different people. Indeed, there are many examples of monuments that have been reinterpreted.

Drawing mostly on semiotics, post-structuralist discourses and theoretical analyses of memory, a closer look will be taken at how monuments acquire their meaning; under what circumstances the meaning can change and to what extent a monument can be re-interpreted to suit the needs of the present.

AMBIGUITY OF SYMBOLISM

'Some people might not like what Field Marshal Smuts stood for, but he did draft the preamble to the United Nations Charter and we still are members,' Linscott (2001) reminds us (figure 1). General Louis Botha, too, represents an ambivalent figure in South Africa's history: He was a distinguished Afrikaner military leader on the one hand, but on the other hand, Botha also freed King Dinizulu and assisted the Zulus in their negotiations over claims for land rights (Taylor 2001; Linscott 2001). We may in fact find that almost every historical personality has an ambiguous, or at least, multifaceted, character. What applies to the heroes of the past, equally holds for those of the present. For instance, anecdotal evidence suggests that Winnie Mandela will always remain a hero for some people, while for others she has fallen from grace owing to the revelations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and other factors that have 'tainted' her image in recent years.

Individuals have complex identities and varied life experiences, but our natural inclination is to classify people in simple binary oppositions, especially good and evil.[3] From a psychoanalytical perspective, Lambek and Antze (1996:xxviii) explain that ambivalence is hard to tolerate, even though ambivalence is, in fact, characteristic of each of us. We all secretly identify with portions of the villain's supposed be-



3 Ncome Monument and Museum. Opposite Blood River Monument outside Dundee, 1998/99

haviour, but we attach great importance to the labelling and persecution of the villain, perhaps unconsciously projecting our own aggression and desire.

That the classification of the 'other' is indeed crucial to the definition of self, is the basic premise of colonial discourse theory as espoused in Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (first published in 1978). Clearly, defining the identity of another person helps us define our own identity – in contrast or in relation to the 'other'. Thus, how we define the identity of leading figures in our history reflects how we want to construct our own identity as individuals, groups or nations.

The ambiguity regarding what exactly a person symbolised inevitably manifests itself in attitudes towards the monument that embodies the memory of that person. At a raucous incident in Cape Town, two completely opposing groups (left and right wingers) attempted to 'claim' the monument of Jan Smuts (McGibbon 1990) (figure 1).[4] In Pretoria, the monument to Paul Kruger – commonly associated by non-white communities with colonialism and Afrikaner nationalist values – was unexpectedly defended by a 'coloured' woman, Luella Chequenton, from Eldorado Park (Johannesburg) in 1996 (figure 2). Claiming Kruger as part of her heritage, she proudly announced herself to be one of 'Oom Paul's' many mixed race descendents and expressed outrage at the Government's habit of mentioning Kruger's name in the same breath as apartheid (Kelly 1996).

The same potential lack of consensus regarding what a particular person stood for can be found in the symbolic meaning of events and places. 'Africans, like their Afrikaner counterparts, have never held a common view of what the battle of Ncome has meant to them as people,' observed historian, Jabulani Sithole (in Coan 1998) (figure 3).[5] Ultimately, the reason for such lack of consensus is that 'Africans', like 'Afrikaners', or 'Indians', are not homogenous groups with mutual values, interests and perspectives on the past and the present. The Indian community, for instance, is fragmented along language, religious, class and gender lines, with vastly different pasts and different perspectives on the present. When a monument to *the Indian* community was proposed, Naidu (2000, 2000a) controversially argued that this is indeed a highly problematic proposal.

Given that different people may hold vastly different views regarding what a person, a historical site or event symbolises, it is not surprising that the respective monument could hypothetically be interpreted in vastly different ways. This holds especially true when large cultural gaps exist within the audience, as between members of different class or racial groups, between local residents and foreign tourists or between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' of an event. According to Connerton (1989:28), cognitive psychologists have established that

> the memories of people in different cultures will vary because their mental maps are different ... [W]itnesses from sharply differing cultures will inevitably differ in their recollections of the same event, particularly if that is a complex event like most of those to which oral traditions allude.

Pierre Nora, one of the most influential theorists on the issue of memory, has argued that the memory site or *lieu de mémoire* (*i.e.* the museum, archive, monument) does not refer to anything outside of itself (*i.e.* the *lieu de mémoire* is its own referent). He states: 'In this sense, the *lieu de mémoire* is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations'[6] (Nora 1989:24). Even fairly homogenous audiences can interpret visual signifiers differently as Urry (1990:111) states: 'There is no sense of the complexity by which different visitors can gaze upon the same set of objects and read them in a quite different way.' Oha (2000:34), in his analysis of road monuments in Nigeria, concurs: 'The road monument is an open text that everybody reads, although everybody may read it differently.'

THE MONUMENT AS SIGNIFIER

Ambiguity and controversies regarding meaning (of persons and events as well as monuments representing them) suggests the instability of the meaning of these icons. How do signifiers – such as monuments – acquire and convey their meaning? Theoretical explorations in semiotics, structuralism, post-structuralism and psychoanalysis have contributed much to our understanding of the sign (visual and verbal) and allied processes of communication and meaning-production.

In the semiotic approach, monuments function as signifiers in the production of meaning. Like signs, texts, gestures, music or clothes, monuments construct meaning and carry a message (Hall 1997:37). 'Like languages, monuments cannot be inherently racist for they possess no inherent repressive character,' reminds Mngomezulu (2000). In fact, monuments possess no inherent meaning at all; their meaning is acquired through consensus, it must be learned by the community – and it can change.

Monuments are structures intended to encode memory

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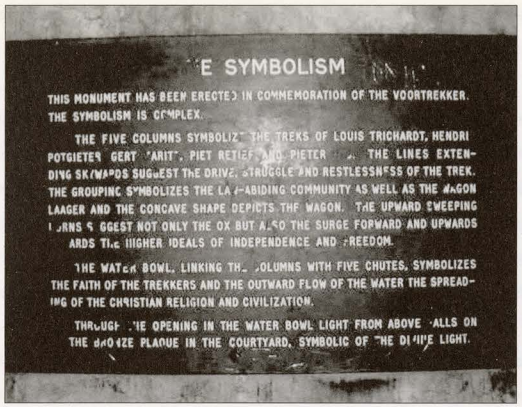

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4 Voortrekker Monument. Winburg (Free State). Hans Hallen and Maurice Dibb, 1968.

5 Voortrekker Monument. Winburg (Free State), detail.

6 Hector Pieterson Memorial. Soweto. Mashabane Rose Architects, 2002.

7 Resistance Park. Durban. Ravi Jhupsee (architecture), 2002.

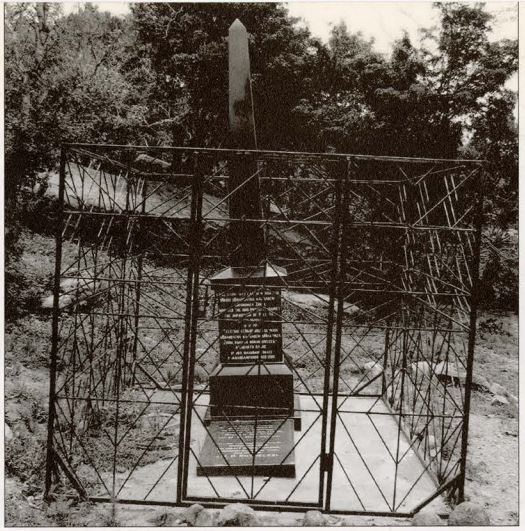
through text and image. The notion of encoding is also central to the study of cognitive memory, as Connerton (1989) explains. Memory is not simply recalled but always actively constructed. The process of remembering always involves the construction of a 'schema', or mnemonic coding, which can take a semantic, verbal, or visual dimension. Cognitive psychologists have established that concrete items translated into images (*i.e.* using the visual code) are retained more effectively than abstract items. Most monuments are visual or iconic signifiers.

Post-structuralists hold that every signifier is polysemous, that is it carries multiple meanings, of which some tend to be privileged over others, depending on context. The reader/viewer actively produces or constructs meaning by choosing some and ignoring other signifieds. At the same time, different people remember a person or an event of the past differently. Some monuments, especially those that could be called works of commemorative public art, adopt a deliberately ambiguous visual language that encourages different readings or a multi-layered process of meaning production, thus accommodating precisely those differences in memory.

However, the idea that different visitors may give a new monument different, possibly contradictory meanings, may pose unease for some in a context where the objective or intended message of the monument is frequently meant to be unmistakable and determined by the desire to counter the (biased) historical account of the previous era. Thus it appears that some monuments attempt to 'fix' meaning or limit the range of possible readings to a greater degree than others. This happens primarily through linguistic messages, that is by text inscribed into or attached to the monument.

Examples include both post-apartheid and older monuments. Among the Afrikaner nationalist monuments the strategy is particularly prevalent in those structures (erected mostly during the 1960s and 1970s) that use an abstract formal language, notably the Voortrekker Monument at Winburg (1968) (figures 4, 5) and the *Taal* (Language) Monument in Paarl (1975). While the abstract style combined with the modern building material of re-enforced concrete were meant to signal the progressiveness and dynamic character of the Afrikaner nation (Bunn s.a.), the absence of clearly recognisable images and the potential openness of the abstract forms for a range of different interpretative readings seems to have worried Afrikaner monument designers. As a result, the monument is complemented (or completed) with an 'explanation' about the specific symbolic meaning of every single form and shape. At Paarl, this explanatory panel is set up prominently at the beginning of the path towards the monument, which clearly spells out in drawings and text (for those who do not buy the guide book), what the various curves, columns and hemispheres stand for.[7] At Winburg, the intended interpretation is stated in a plaque mounted in the centre of the monument.

Among the post-apartheid monuments, the desire to 'fix' meaning is evident, for instance, in the tendency to complement the monument with a museum (*e.g.* at the Hector Pieterson Memorial; Sharpeville Memorial; Ncome Monument; proposed Freedom Park), which serves to place the monument into a particular context, thereby suggesting a preferred reading (figure 6). Some monuments, notably Resistance Park in Durban (figure 7), may not have a museum attached, but contain in their structure a museum-like didactic display, using text panels and images, which similarly contextualise the event to be commemorated. Many post-apartheid monuments – even simple steel-type memorials such as the one at Ambush Rock near Greytown, commemorating the victims of the Bambhatha Rebellion (figure 8) – are also distinguished by the use of a great amount of text, providing ample information to remove any doubts about the structure's meaning.



8 Bhambatha Memorial. Ambush Rock (between Greytown and Keate's Drift, KwaZulu Natal). Amafa Akwazulu-Natal, 2000.

Roland Barthes (1964:33), in his analysis of the process of signification – the question of how the image acquires meaning – distinguishes between linguistic (text) and iconic (image) levels of meaning. The latter is either symbolic (*i.e.* coded, culturally specific; requiring a certain 'knowledge') or literal (*i.e.* uncoded; requiring only knowledge bound up with our perception). Messages are thus either linguistic, coded iconic (*i.e.* symbolic) or non-coded iconic (*i.e.* literal). Monuments tend to operate on all these levels. Because images are always polysemous, iconic signifiers are often backed up by textual messages in an attempt to 'fix' the 'floating chain of signifieds' (Barthes 1964:37). Like the caption below an image, the words inscribed on a monument elucidate the visual perception and permit an understanding of the sign.

The textual message is meant to decode the image, but in fact simultaneously encodes it by attempting to 'fix' its meaning (Barthes 1964; Hall 1997). In his analysis of advertisement, Barthes (1964:37/8) explains how

> the text *directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle *dispatching*, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance. In all these cases of anchorage, language clearly has a function of elucidation, but this elucidation is selective, a metalanguage applied not to the totality of the iconic message but only to certain of its signs.

Barthes focuses on the advertising image, because 'in advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional' (Barthes 1964:33). Many monuments, as highly public signifiers intended to communicate a 'message' to large anonymous audiences, can, in a sense, be compared with mass media such as advertisement, where complex processes of 'encoding' and 'decoding' constitute meaning and myth plays an important role.[8] The significance of myth lies in naturalising, and thereby disguising, historical intention.[9] With respect to monuments, myth, more specifically the nation's 'foundation myth,'[10] plays an important role in the attempt to 'fix' meaning by providing the context into which the monument is embedded or the meta-language through which meaning is articulated.

Silverstone (1989:139) also makes a case for 'treating museums and heritage displays as mass media', and advocates exploring 'the usefulness of some of the more recent research efforts in media and cultural studies for research in this new field'. Monuments differ in some (important) respects from museums and heritage displays, but also share similarities, especially with respect to their function as signifiers intended to represent the past to potentially large, anonymous audiences. Heritage displays are 'exercises in mass communication' (Silverstone 1989:139) and as such, Silverstone recommends, the procedures and theories developed for the study of mass communication and contemporary culture can elucidate the understanding of their effects and effectiveness.

Re-contextualisation

Following on from his argument about the character of *lieux de mémoire*, Nora (1989:22) claims that '[s]tatues or monuments to the dead … owe their meaning to their intrinsic existence … [and] one could justify relocating them without altering their meaning'. I strongly agree with Johnson (1995:55) who has pointed out that this contention warrants some revision. As a geographer, Johnson (1995:51) has alerted us to the importance of territory, or the space that the monument occupies, which should never be regarded as an incidental backdrop. The specifics of the urban or environmental context of a monument impact on determining its meaning. As meaning always depends on context, any change in a monument's context – for instance its relocation to a different place – will invariably impact on its meaning to a certain degree. Johnson (1995) cites the example of the Soviet era monuments in Budapest. Once moved from their public spaces into a 'heritage space', the specially designed statue park, they become subject to the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1990) and they will be viewed differently.

There has been much talk about the need for 're-contextualising' existing monuments in South Africa.[11] This can involve the physical relocation of statues and movable structures to other suitable places. Kearney (2000), for instance, has outlined this as one of the options for colonial and apartheid era monuments in Durban.[12] The recent winning design for a Heroes Monument in Durban envisages the implementation (at least in part) of Kearney's recommendation, in that various statues representing the 'old guard' are meant to be moved to the proposed new monument site at Botha's Park, a proposal that has met with fierce opposition (Marschall 2003).

But, as the case of the Heroes Monument shows, the issue of physically relocating statues often causes concern or outright resistance, testifying once more to the significance of the spatial context for the monument's meaning. In many other cases, relocation is not an option, because the structure is too large or otherwise unsuitable for a physical move. In such cases, re-contextualisation can mean renaming and re-interpretation. It is also important to understand 'context' in a much broader sense other than referring only to

the physical environs. As Webb (1997:7) states:

> The principle reason for re-interpreting history is the fact that each age provides a new context and asks new questions of the historical evidence. There are others as well: to correct factual inaccuracies where new evidence is discovered and to revise obvious distortions.

Re-interpretation

Webb (1997) suggests some monuments and historical sites in the Eastern Cape that need re-interpretation.[13] There is no doubt that monuments can be re-interpreted to suit current needs for a newly defined group identity and allied ideological agenda. This is theoretically grounded in post-structuralist discourses of identity construction and postmodern notions of polyvalence and the instability of meaning, as well as a shift from the work and its 'author' to the viewer or 'reader' and his/her perception of the work:

> Before the postmodern revolt, before the 1960s, historians assumed that monuments, like memories, were representations of the past inscribed in the past. ... All visitors would 'read' or appreciate the same text in the same way. ... memorials and memories were timeless truths for those who followed to memorize and perhaps feel inspired by. We could ignore or fail to memorize them accurately but we could not actively reinterpret them (Thelen 1993:127).

This has drastically changed in the wake of postmodernism, states Thelen (1993:128), and monuments have become 'not markers with single meanings from and about the past but objects for "dialogue" or "negotiation"'. It is paradoxical to observe that many South Africans appear to associate particular monuments with a very specific symbolic meaning, yet, at the same time, the notion that one can, in fact, re-interpret monuments or re-negotiate what they represent, is commonly accepted by others. Luella Chequenton, who claims Paul Kruger for her heritage, for instance, attempts to negotiate the symbolic meaning of Paul Kruger, thereby negotiating her own identity. While she sympathises with the Government's drive to remove monuments to Verwoerd and other controversial personalities, she advocates that the statue of Paul Kruger should be re-dedicated: 'Not as a symbol of Afrikanerdom as was originally intended, but rather to a quite amazing figure in our history' (Kelly 1996).

Graham et al (2000:93) have claimed that all heritage is someone's heritage and inevitably not someone else's; one group's heritage therefore always involves the disinheritance of another. This may be true in one sense, but the process of re-interpretation intends to address exactly this dilemma. The Afrikaans Language or *Taal* Monument at Paarl, for instance, once a highly politicised icon of Afrikaner identity, excluding the population majority, can now be interpreted in an inclusive manner, as a symbol of the celebration of diverse cultures in a 'rainbow nation' South Africa. With the former stigma removed, the monument has even become a popular tourist destination (A monumental debate 1999).[14] The Rand Regiment's Memorial in Saxonwold, Johannesburg, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, which previously honoured the British victims of the Anglo-Boer War, has now been re-dedicated to the victims of all races.[15]

Most re-interpretations of South African monuments tend to follow an inclusive agenda in line with the 'Rainbow Nation' ideology; others simply aim at depoliticising or ideologically neutralising the symbolically charged structure of the past. In the city centre of Johannesburg, two existing public sculptures in front of the Public Library have been re-dedicated in the context of the renaming of the square to Dr Beyers Naude Square. In some cases the renaming or re-interpretation can involve some physical changes or additions to the existing monument as in a proposal for the Monument in Strijdom Square in Pretoria.[16] This proposal soon became obsolete, when the elaborate monumental structure suddenly collapsed.[17]

The case of the Voortrekker Monument

The process of re-interpreting monuments and historical sites is, of course, common practice in many other countries, as Fox (1994) illustrates.[18] In South Africa, the single most significant example of re-inscribing meaning onto an existing monument is probably Tokyo Sexwale's (then Premier of Gauteng Province) clever re-interpretation of the Voortrekker Monument (Unsworth 1996; Coombes 2000). Sexwale had himself photographed in front of and inside this icon of Afrikaner nationalism for a double spread in the City Metro edition of the *Sunday Times* in December 1996. Examining, one by one, various elements of the monument's design, he inscribes many of them with new meaning, often inverting the originally intended one. This ostentatious demonstration (or 'performance') was intended to remove the structure's stigma for the population majority, to illustrate its potential for multiple meanings, and to appropriate the formerly exclusive monument for a new inclusive national agenda. Andrew Unsworth (1996) reports about the unusual visit:

> When told that the iron assegais on the gates actually symbolise the power of Dingane who sought to block the path of civilisation, he [Sexwale] stops. 'No, it was not to be,' he muses. 'It was precisely the assegai at its height that turned the tide. That's why our army was called Umkhonto weSizwe, the spear of the nation. The path of civilisation was not blocked by the spear; in the end it was the spear that opened it up'.

Annie Coombes (2000:175), who has conducted a detailed critical analysis of the changing meanings of the Voortrekker Monument in the new South Africa, suggests that the monument has effectively been transformed by various constituencies. It has accrued additional meanings that in some cases are directly at odds with the originally intended symbolism.

Coombes draws on the concept of translation as espoused by Walter Benjamin (1969), who argues that the act of translating transforms the 'original' text by revealing supplemental meanings. More recently, Gayatri Spivak (1993) developed the notion of the 'reader as translator'. This reader does not passively consume intended messages, but actively engages in reading the text, including between the lines and 'against the grain'. Considering Sexwale's re-interpretation, Coombes (2000:186) concludes that '[i]n a sense then, the Monument becomes the focus for an active process of "translation" in terms of Gayatri Spivak's proposition of the "reader as translator" – reading against the grain.'

But contrary to Sexwale's inversion or Africanisation of the Monument's meaning,[19] Coombes (2000) considers another case of re-inscribing meaning – not from an African, but from an Afrikaner perspective. In June 1995 a new Afrikaans-language porn magazine entitled *Loslyf* was launched with a cover image of 'Dina at the Monument'. The magazine included a photo-shoot of porn model Dina posing in the grassy environs around the Voortrekker Monument. Coombes (2000:189) argues that this feature represents not simply the usual disrespect for the boundaries between the sacred and the profane common in pornographic literature, but 'a more serious critique of the most oppressive version of Afrikaner ethnic absolutism'. What is interesting here is that Dina is apparently related to General Andries Hendrik Potgieter, one of the leading figures of the Great Trek. She proudly proclaims her Boer heritage and admiration for her great-great grandfather Potgieter,[20] just as Luella Chequenton identified herself with Paul Kruger's heritage. But neither Dina's nor Luella's identity fit the profile of the 'Afrikaner' as Kruger and Potgieter might have represented it.

Attempts at Africanising the meaning of monuments – such as Sexwale's re-interpretation of the Voortrekker Monument – tend to be based on simplistic, stereotypical notions of 'the Boers' as a homogeneous group with a clearly circumscribed set of values. But the reality is much more complex, especially in the context of the effective restaging of Afrikaner identity after 1994. While we can still encounter some ultra-conservative Afrikaners of the kind that proclaim 'Apartheid is Heiligheid' at the Blood River Monument,[21] many Afrikaners subscribe to liberal values. In the case of 'Dina at the Monument', Coombes (2000:191) concludes that Dina represents a deliberately ambiguous figure, both in terms of gender and ethnic identifications, which disrupts the versions of Afrikaner identity (both male and female) as they are played out in the interior marble frieze and other aspects of the Voortrekker Monument. Despite representing a considerably altered Afrikaner identity, Dina strongly identifies herself with the Monument. This suggests that the monument carries multiple meanings even within the Afrikaner community. In a sense this 'claiming' of the monument for a much re-defined Afrikaner community, is as effective as Sexwale's attempt at appropriating it for other population groups.

If even the Voortrekker Monument, heavily laden with explicit symbolic references and a near universally understood epitome of Afrikaner Nationalism, can be invested with different, even opposing, meanings, then all monuments can probably be re-interpreted. As Oha (2000:41) put it, 'The authorities necessarily impose "texts" of monuments on the city, indeed acting the roles of gatekeepers and (re)producers of ideology.' But the meaning of each text is forever unstable and each text '... already contains elements that undermine meaning / messages that are authorized' (Oha 2000:42). In other words, as much as monuments are gestures of power, representing hegemonic interpretations from privileged viewpoints, each such monumental signifier already contains an inherent subversive quality, which facilitates its re-interpretation and inversion of meaning from a marginalised or counter-hegemonic viewpoint.

SOME CRITICAL THOUGHTS ABOUT RE-INTERPRETATION

A cursory glance at the monumental landscape in South Africa today shows that the re-naming, re-dedication, re-contextualisation, or re-interpretation of monuments is common practice. But how effective is this strategy really in disinvesting monuments from a previous era of their ideological power and in neutralising the politicised symbolic values that they have always represented, which are considered so offensive for so many people? Informal discussions suggest that a mere verbal re-interpretation (as Sexwale attempts), without physical alterations that visually support the new verbal account, is not enough to make a previously highly exclusive and offensive monument inclusive and acceptable to the majority of the population.[22]

But the issue of re-interpreting monuments also poses questions of a more philosophical kind. At the beginning of Neil McCarthy's play *The great outdoors* (2002), one of the main characters, a police investigator called Neville, contemplates the nature of 'truth' in South Africa. He considers the 'truth' or the 'fact' that someone has committed a crime. What happens if this crime is later re-defined as an act of liberation? Does it mean that what was previously 'true' is now 'untrue'? If the truth of the past has been turned into the lie of the present, does that mean that he, the police investigator who helped establish the truth, is now a liar?

What happens to those artists, architects, designers, sponsors and other stakeholders who, in the past, have contributed to the erection of monuments dedicated to what was at that time considered to be the 'truth'? The recent, highly controversial discussion around the proposal for a Freedom Monument in the shape of former President Mandela's hand has raised exactly this point. While the monument was disapproved for several reasons (including its cost and aesthetic), it was primarily the perceived 'mismatch' be-

tween the person to be commemorated and the persons in charge of making and sponsoring the monument, that drew the fiercest criticism. The artist, Danie de Jager, was seen as completely inappropriate to be entrusted with the design of such a monument on account of his previous association with commissions for monuments that represent apartheid leaders. He had, for instance, made a bust of Verwoerd and a sculpture for the Strijdom Monument in Pretoria (Vanderhaeghen 1996; Coombes 2000). The same applies to the sponsors, businessmen Abe and Solly Krok, whose varied business interests included the marketing of skin-lightening creams – a lucrative business in a black African dominated market, but easily perceived as unethical and exploitative.

Conclusion

Monuments can go largely unnoticed for decades, but as soon as they are threatened by removal or alteration, they can become rallying points for a defensive community, who appear to associate very specific values with them. In conflict situations, too, monuments are often perceived to be symbolic of particular sets of values, fostering clear-cut divisions into 'our' and 'their' monuments. Throughout the world, examples abound of the revengeful or triumphant destruction of 'enemy' monuments. Yet, as this article has attempted to show, the meaning of monuments and other cultural icons symbolising key persons and events of our history and our present experience is much less clear and less fixed than generally assumed. In fact, the meaning of monuments is essentially fluid and largely dependent on context.

With the advent of the post-apartheid period in South Africa, a somewhat paradoxical situation has arisen. On the one hand, this fluidity of meaning is readily accepted with respect to some of the older monuments, which are now subjected to an active and rapid process of re-contextualisation or re-interpretation. On the other hand, however, it appears that the initiators and designers of new monuments frequently strive to 'fix' meaning (mostly through textual signifiers), presumably in an attempt to avoid the possibility of a similarly drastic reinterpretation of 'their' monuments by future generations.

Many people question the necessity for monuments *per se*. It could be suggested that there are alternative – perhaps better – ways of commemorating or representing the values of those previously marginalised. This applies in particular in the current South African context, marked by a desire to implement the 'African Renaissance'. Perhaps someone will display the creativity and have the courage to take up the challenge of finding such alternatives.

Notes

1 This material is based on work supported by the National Research Foundation.

2 Examples include Freedom Park outside Pretoria; Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication and Hector Pieterson Memorial in Soweto; Sharpeville Memorial; Ncome Monument near Dundee; Resistance Park in Durban; the Bulhoek Massacre Memorial outside Queenstown; Cradock Four Memorial at Cradock; or the Emlotheni Monument at New Brighton (Port Elizabeth). A number of statues have been erected, dedicated, for instance, to Nelson Mandela (*e.g.* Hammanskraal and Sandton Square), Steve Biko (*e.g.* East London) and Mahatma Gandhi (*e.g.* Ladysmith, Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Johannesburg).

3 Simplistic black-and-white-thinking meant to shore up publicity was revealed in a controversial incident in 1997. *Tribute* magazine, a publication largely aimed at the black African market, took a public stance against 'meaningless' old monuments in Pretoria and Johannesburg (including the statue of the miner outside Eastgate and the Scottish War Memorial in Parktown) by covering them up with black cloth. A statement issued on behalf of the magazine said the message was simple: 'we are black and proud' ('Meaningless' statues from the old SA swathed in black 1997). The same concept was applied the following year – equally controversially – at the inauguration ceremony of Thabo Mbeki as president, when statues of colonial and apartheid leaders at the Union Buildings were covered up (Jayiya 1998).

4 The incident happened in February 1990, when a young comrade climbed up the Jan Smuts statue in Adderley Street (next to Parliament), draped the ANC flag over the statue's head and then, 'in true guerrilla theatre, he swung a mock AK-47 at hip level in an arc of convulsive fire' (McGibbon 1990). The following week, the right wing reacted by 'reconsecrating' the statue. A young Afrikaner perched atop the statue's head, shouting 'White Power' and holding a poster with the slogan 'De Klerk is a political traitor' (McGibbon 1990).

5 Coan (1998) quotes Sithole and explains: 'From an African perspective views of the King and the battle can be divided broadly into two camps. The first view, promulgated mainly by activists and intellectuals associated with the African National Congress and the then Communist Party of South Africa, holds Dingane in the highest esteem ... and regards him as the foremost freedom fighter who defended his people, the land and the sovereignity of the Zulu state in the face of colonial invasion.' According to the second view, fostered by more conservative intellectuals associated with the ANC, Dingane was to be blamed for sowing the seeds of racial conflict in South Africa. Another set of contesting views came into play during the 1970s and 1980s along party lines (Cosatu and Inkatha), whereby Dingane was variously seen as traitor or hero (Coan 1998).

6 'One simple but decisive trait of *lieux de mémoire* sets them apart from every type of history to which we have become accustomed, ancient or modern. Every previous historical or scientific approach to memory, whether national or social, has concerned itself with *realia*, with things in themselves and in their immediate reality. Contrary to historical objects, however, *lieux de mémoire* have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs. This is not to say that they are without content, physical presence, or history; it is to suggest that what makes them *lieux de mémoire* is precisely that by which they escape from history. In this sense, the *lieu de mémoire* is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations' (Nora 1989:24).

7 According to this chart, the colonnade at the entrance to the left (or west), for instance, represents the 'Clear West', whereas the podium with three hemispheres to the right represents 'magical Africa'. A bridging element leads to the steeply rising column, which symbolises the Afrikaans language, accompanied by a similar, lower column, representing the Republic. The low wall in front represents the Malay language. The guide book further elaborates on the symbolism by summing up: 'Together with the main column, placed in the same life-giving pool

with bubbling fountain, rises a structure symbolizing our Republic: free, yet encompassed by and open to Africa; free in form and reminiscent of the west, whose cultures helped to establish it. It symbolizes two languages and two mutual enriching cultures, yet one nation, facing the future with courage and resolution' (*Die Afrikaanse Taalmonument* s.a.:7).

8 Stuart Hall has suggests that 'we must recognize that the symbolic form of the message has a privileged position in the communication exchange: and that moments of "encoding" and "decoding", though only "relatively autonomous" in relation to the communication process as a whole, are determinate moments' (quoted in Woollacott 1982:92).

9 According to Barthes (1973:57): 'Semiology has taught us that myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal. Now this process is exactly that of bourgeois ideology'. 'The denoted image naturalizes the symbolic message, it innocents the semantic artifice of connotation, which is extremely dense, especially in advertising. ...This is without doubt an important historical paradox: the more technology develops the diffusion of information (and notably of images), the more it provides the means of masking the constructed meaning under the appearance of the given meaning' (Barthes 1964:40).

10 Various writers (e.g. Bunn s.a., Graham *et al* 2000; Coombes 2000) have shown how the Afrikaners mythologised the Great Trek and how the celebration of this shared heritage, through monuments and rituals, functioned as a powerful unifier, which assisted in forging a coherent group identity amongst people with diverse origins. In post-apartheid South Africa, the dominance of the old meta-narrative of the Voortrekkers has now been replaced with the 'Struggle' as a new foundation myth intended to similarly forge people of diverse origins into one nation (cf. Marschall 2005).

11 For instance, the 1995 National Monuments Council's report on future heritage conservation in South Africa, recommends that in the case of controversial existing monuments 'efforts be made to stress an inclusive historial (sic) interpretation of the facts and to strive though (sic) the educational process to change people's interpretations.' (Leave our cultural landscape alone plea 1995). Hynes (1999) presents a number of examples of venues in Cape Town that have been re-interpreted, often in conjunction with an art exhibition.

12 'Examine each monument, memorial or object in relation to its origin, meaning and context. Find new homes and situations for them. Shift their spatial dominance from the city centre. But find new locations for them in meaningful spaces and places.'(Kearney 2000:9).

13 Fort Armstrong (remains of fortification with bronze plaque explaining significance), on the Kat River near Balfour, 1835; Bulhoek: graves of victims that have been neglected as historical sites; Ngqika's Grave; Fort Fordyce; Battle of Burnshill; Jabavu's House; Tyhume Valley Villages; Eardley-Wilmot Gun; Healdtown; Lovedale; Fort Willshire and other sites in the Great Fish River Game Reserve Complex (Webb 1997).

14 As Graham *et al* (2000:118) observe, 'white heritage' can be re-interpreted to reflect more inclusive values, but the previously excluded may also in some cases value the heritage site precisely for its 'oppressive associations.'

15 But even prior to this recent re-dedication, there appears to have been confusion about the meaning of the Rand Regiment's Memorial. As Brink and Krige (1999) point out, it is frequently being referred to as the 'War Memorial', reflecting the common notion that this memorial is dedicated to the victims of World War I and II.

16 Some discussion about the renaming of Strijdom Square to Freedom Square took place in 1994. One proposal suggested that the square could be renamed 'to honour all freedom fighters including Boer soldiers from South Africa's past.' (Pretoria plans Freedom Square 1994). A number of busts depicting freedom fighters were to be erected. However, deference to the old was shown by explicitly specifying that the new busts should be smaller than that of Strijdom for aesthetic reasons.

17 It is interesting to note the great enthusiasm about making changes to the symbols of the old South Africa (names, national symbols and monuments) that characterised the immediate post-apartheid period. However, the implementation of the many proposals that emerged around the time proceeded much more slowly and cautiously. The Strijdom monument is a case in point: it was neither removed, nor was the plan to re-dedicate it to all freedom fighters ever implemented. What is more, even after the structural collapse of the monument, the site was closed off for security reasons with the unsightly ruins remaining untouched, while debates about the future of this monument or the site appear to continue.

18 Fox (1994) cites the example of the Emperor's palace in Beijing, which has in modern times been re-dedicated as a monument to the workers who laboured on its construction.

19 'More than this, however, Sexwale's inversion or "Africanisation" recalls a much earlier moment in the Monument's history and reclaims for African consumption what was identified at its founding as the hybrid nature of the iconographic schema. By so doing, I want to argue, he attempts to render the structure "safe" and to disinvest the Monument of the power of its oppressive legacy as a hingepin in the armoury of apartheid' (Coombes 2000:186).

20 'My great great grandfather, Hendrik Potgieter, has been my hero since my childhood. He was the sort of man who inspired people to trek barefoot over the Drakensberg mountains so that us Boere could be free and at peace living here in the Transvaal. If only we could have a leader of his calibre today' (*Loslyf* 1995 quoted in Coombes 2000:189-190).

21 At the official opening of the Ncome monument, doubts were cast on the structure's objective of reconciliation when a group of Afrikaner right wingers gathered inside the bronze oxwagon laager, flying a banner with the words 'Apartheid is Heiligheid' (apartheid is holy) and praising God for giving them victory over the Zulus (Milazi 1998, Pienaar 1998).

22 This observation is based on informal talks about monuments with various people, but most specifically on a class discussion (in May 2002) among third year students enrolled in the Cultural and Heritage Tourism programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

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