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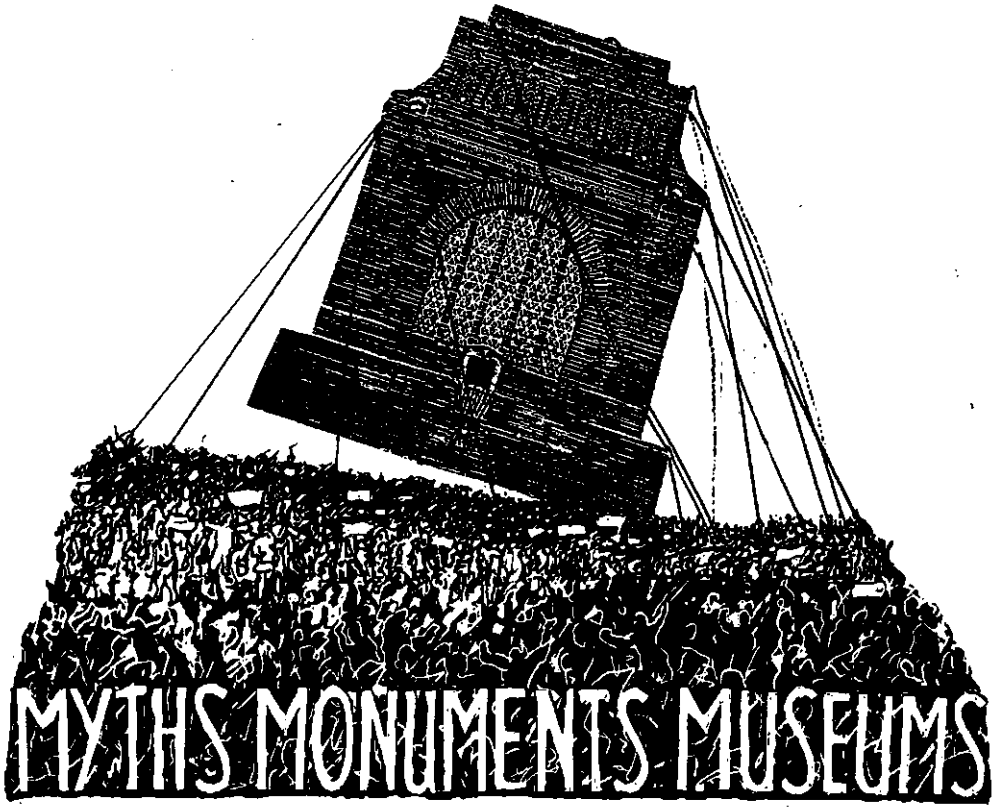

NEW PREMISES?

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
HISTORY WORKSHOP

UNWRAPPING HISTORY AT THE CAPE TOWN WATERFRONT

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UNWRAPPING HISTORY AT THE CAPE TOWN WATERFRONT

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> 'Here, at the tip of Africa, lost in legend, wrapped in history, absorbed in harbour activity, teeming with life and energy, is Cape Town's own Waterfront'[2].

The Victoria and Alfred Basin area of Table Bay harbour has recently been dramatically 'revived'. Created by the establishment of the first breakwater in 1860, extended in 1905, the centre of Cape Town's shipping trade from the late nineteenth century through to the building of the Duncan Dock in 1945, it then faded into relative obscurity. New container vessels altered the nature of shipping activities in Cape Town harbour, with a notable decline in the wake of the re-opening of the Suez Canal and the impact of international sanctions. Moreover the draining of land on the Cape Town foreshore in the early 1940s and the erection

[1] This paper is based on my observations and conversations with visitors made at the Waterfront between February and May 1992. Comments of the anonymous visitors are indicated in footnotes by gender, approximate age, place of origin and month of visit. In June 1992 over a hundred history students at the University of Cape Town also made a study of the Waterfront as part of their final year examinations. Some of their comments are referred to in this paper, and acknowledged in footnotes by student name and date (June 1992). My thanks to all of these informants, and to Cheryl Ozinsky of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront Company who greatly assisted in the project. I am also grateful to the staff of the African Studies Library, UCT, where the cited municipal records, press releases, and press cuttings (MacMillan collection) are located.

[2] Victoria and Alfred Waterfront publicity brochure, Summer 1991/2.

of faceless (largely state owned) buildings had cut the centre of Cape Town off from its harbour. The Victoria and Alfred Basins then sunk out of public sight, and were used primarily as a dry dock and fishing harbour. By the mid-1980s Capetonians only knew the area for its rather dilapidated Harbour Cafe, accessible through a barrage of security controls and set in the midst of unprepossessing and rundown yards.

Since then the emergence of the bright new commercial triumph of the 'Victoria and Alfred Waterfront' has been one of the most publicized developments in Cape Town. The Harbour, we are told, has 'come back to life', and between 1990 and 1992 an estimated six million people have visited the scheme making it Cape Town's prime tourist venue[3].

The idea of developing Cape Town's waterfront as a public venue was as early as 1971. However plans for the development of the Granger Bay area were turned down by the City Council partly because 'commercial exploitation' was considered undesirable, but also because the working areas of the dock, particularly shunting trains, made it unsuitable for public access[4]. By the mid-1980s this had changed. Commercial development and privatization was now seen as a desirable way of developing state and municipal land, and the working areas of the Victoria and Alfred Basins were in a greater state of decline. Tourism was a

[3] 'Million in four months' Argus 14 May 1991

[4] Argus 6 September 1984; Press Release, Minister of Transport Affairs, 5 May 1988.

more desirable option. Award-winning plans were made by two UCT architecture students in 1984 to reflood parts of the Foreshore and reconnect the harbour with the city centre. The head of the School of Architecture declared to the press that

> we would like to see the original shoreline of 1652 recreated and the Castle walls lapped by the sea. The foreshore has been a disastrous example of reclamation and is now only 15 percent developed. Our plan, which is a fresh look at the problem, will be a boom to tourism and create a link with the sea, something which is sadly lacking now.[5]

Some of these ideas attracted municipal interest. While the aim of reversing the foreshore reclamation of the 1940s was considered over-ambitious, that of creating a waterfront tourist facility which would draw on the 'heritage' of the Capetonian past was desirable. Sol Kreiner, the Mayor, formed a steering committee to consider a waterfront scheme stating that,

> As Johannesburg has gold we have a beautiful city as a tourist attraction and we must all work together for a better Cape Town. We have a large cross-section of people who are prepared to sit down and discuss a scheme which will bring back the old city where one can freely walk around, visit the harbour, go for tug rides and learn more about our heritage.[6]

Municipal initiatives were forestalled by the Burggraaf Committee established by the government to make recommendations on the development of harbour areas for tourism and commercial enterprise throughout the country. Municipal plans for Waterfront development were submitted to the committee but the initiative thus passed from municipal

[5] 'Bringing the waterfront back to the city', Argus 13 October 1984.

[6] ibid

to central state authority, since the harbour land was controlled by the South African Transport Services. The Burggraaf report was only finally approved by the Minister of Transport Affairs in May 1988. It backed the municipal proposals for a staged process of redevelopment, to include the restoration of historic harbour buildings, the creation of restaurants, a fish market, exhibition centre, souvenir shops, office accommodation and berths for harbour tours, plus a leisure boat marina, parking lots and hotel accommodation[7]. In all of this the private sector was to take the lead since no state or municipal funding would be available. Transnet (as the Transport Services was renamed) would provide backing by long-term lease of the government owned harbour land[8].

The granting of state approval opened the way for private tenders for development. Amidst accusations of Council favouritism towards certain architects and developers, private capital moved in.[9] The Victoria and Alfred Waterfront (Pty) Ltd company was formed in September 1988 stating its 'philosophy...to "let the project evolve over time in response to market forces"', with the Chairman,

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[7] Moontlike aanwending van dele van handelshawens vir toerisme en ontspannigdoeleindes: Deel I - Tafelbaaihawe. Verslag .H44/5/4 Suid-Afrikaanse Vervoerdienste [Burggraaf Kommittee]. June 1987.

[8] Although Transnet has provided some backing for the ost recent development of the Victoria Wharf, Victoria and Alfred Waterfront Company, Annual Review 1991, p.10

[9] Response of Cape Town City Planning Officer to Councillor Sam Grose' questions, Council Agenda, 25 February 1988; Press statement by Chairman of Exco regarding recent media publicity, undated.

Brian Kantor appointed by the South African Transport Services as 'an authority on and enthusiast for privatization'[10]. Under the supervision of the V & A Company, development at the Waterfront has proceeded apace, with the restoration of the 'historic harbour area', and current plans for the flooding of adjacent land, commercial and residential property construction and canal links with the foreshore and lower city. Capital expenditure by 1992 reached R 191.81 million, and is estimated to exceed R 2055 million by the end of the century[11]. In a comment which revealed much about a Capetonian vision of success, the director of the J H Isaacs Property Group, which has developed much of the Waterfront, declared that

> The Victoria and Alfred Company can give Cape Town the equivalent of three or four gold mines, handled on strictly business lines, using the Disneyland syndrome of thinking and acting big.[12]

Waterfront development is thus a product of a combination of municipal desire for increased tourism and profit to the city, government anxiety to reap income from under-utilised harbour land, and an avaricious investment of private capital at a time of heightened property speculation.

But not everyone has gained from the Waterfront. Restauranteurs and small scale tourist enterprises in other parts of the city have felt the bite of Waterfront competition: 'Duck the Fox' slogans on T-shirts appeared

10 News release, Ministry of Transport Affairs, 27 September 1988.

11 V & A Company, Annual review 1991, p.31.

12 Errol Friedman, cited in 'Dock land: Foreign interest growing' Cape Times 11 February 1989.

first in neighbouring Three Anchor Bay and Sea Point[13]. Public attention was drawn to the disadvantages of living close to the Waterfront by Green Point residents who objected to the construction of a cableway between the harbour and Signal Hill. Press reports raised the spectre of lowering property values together with the salacious prospect of "Peeping Tom" tourists flying overhead[14]. Less publicized were the complaints of fishing companies that the Victoria and Alfred Company was forcing them out of the Waterfront by development plans to relocate the Royal Cape Yacht Club, contrary to the principle of the Burggraaf Report that the fishing industry would be protected[15]

Wider issues had been raised by members of the public when the Waterfront development plans were revealed in 1989. Fears that residential would be segregated under the Group Areas Act were dispelled by the repeal of the Act in the following year. However there was a broader concern that 'because developers are running the project it will merely benefit the Company and not the people of Cape Town as well'[16]. The Company responded that

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[13] 'Trade wars: city takes on Waterfront' Argus 12 October 1991.

[14] For instance, Cape Times 'Residents vow to fight cableway' 30 November 1991.

[15] 'Fishermen, yachtsmen square up on Waterfront' Argus 10 November 1990.

[16] Concerns raised by general public comments on Waterfront plans, in Final Comments of City Council Planning Committee on Draft Report: Victoria and Alfred Waterfront Development Framework, November 1989, adopted by Council 14 December 1989.

> International precedent has shown that a profit exclusive approach to Waterfront development has not yet met with success. Preconditions for success include a wide range of activity and above all access and participation from as broad a spectrum of the community as possible[17].

However the issue of community access to the Waterfront has not been resolved. At a recent meeting between the management of the Company and the regional executive of the ANC, concern was expressed that 'the development has an all-white image and "excludes the broader community at all levels." The privatization of public property without consultation with 'the broader community', the composition of the Company board and the absence of employment policies which require affirmative action to 'give establishments there more of a Cape Town face' have all been criticised by the ANC[18]. Initial reported responses by the Company have been unsympathetic. The managing director, David Jack, dismissed allegations of racial exclusivity by citing the example of a Halaal take away as a 'great success story' while chairman Brian Kantor commented that there had been initial scepticism about the project but that

> now it was successful, people who had not been involved earlier would "use almost any tactic" to gain a footing...the idea that this project is keeping out people of any persuasion is a calumny. We want to provide opportunity for everybody based on merit, This development is open to all and its opportunities are being used by everybody. But this is not a charity. What some people want is affirmative action of some kind[19].

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[17] ibid.

[18] 'Race row tarnishes jewel of harbour' Sunday Times Cape Metro 7 June 1992; 'ANC wants say in Waterfront project' Cape Times 8 June 1992; 'Waterfront: yuppie themepark - or a plek for all the people?' South 20 - 24 June 1992.

[19] Sunday Times 7 June 1992.

Over the same weekend the Waterfront came in for scathing comment from Pearlie Joubert of the Vrye Weekblad for its sanitised middle class character in which the true Cape Town was absent:

> ...enige plek in Kaapstad wat voorgee om eg Kaap te wees, sonder dat die swartmense van Kaapstad tuis genoeg voel om daar te kuier én wat 'n winkelsentrum bou wat Sandton City 'n go kan gee, hoort nie op dié stuk waterkantgrond nie[20].

The Waterfront has thus emerged as a commercial success story but one which arouses feelings of personal exclusion and remoteness from the reality of the city in which it is based. And these features are equally apparent in the way in which history is publicly presented at Cape Town's harbour.

The Waterfront is not a historical theme park along the lines of Gold Reef City or the Kimberley Mine Museum. Yet both in its conception and its current stage of development it uses historical images as an important part of its self-presentation. V & A Company and press reports and publicity material, invariably prefix the term Waterfront by the adjective 'historic'. The original UCT Architecture School project, the municipal plans and the Burggraaf Report all stressed the historical heritage of the harbour area. In arguing for its tourist potential, the municipal Town Planning report of 1985 stressed that South African visitors would be offered 'a special historical ambience' although it pointed out that historically related attractions ranked low

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20 'Maar waar's die bokkoms?' Vrye Weekblad, 5-11 Junie 1992.

for foreign visitors[21]. The Burggraaf Committee report was more overt:

> The historical and distinctive architecture of the older parts of the harbour has, through the years, been a special tourist attraction, which the Capetonians have always regarded as part of their heritage[22]

And in the development framework report of the V & A Company urban conservation areas of the 'historical environment' were identified. Some of the stated objectives, together with the promotion of tourism, residential and business and harbour activities, included 'restoring the historic links to the city', 'ensuring the urban fabric has an image in keeping with the historic and cultural context of the waterfront' and 'conserving and enhancing those elements with cultural significance'[23].

But what heritage is being presented at the Waterfront? And whose? And in what ways? What has cultural significance? Strong images of a Cape Town past are certainly present, even if many visitors are seemingly unaware of the fact[24]. The restoration of a number of buildings, four of which are

[21] 'The development potential of Cape Town's historic Waterfront' Report of the City Engineer's Department, City of Cape Town, Town Planning Branch, November 1985, p. 18.

[22] Burggraaf Committee report summary, Press release, Minister of Transport Affairs, 5 May 1988.

[23] Victoria and Alfred Waterfront Company Development Framework Report III, September 1989, p.10 and 15.

[24] For instance, 'There isn't much history here - it's all too new for that' (Capetonian visitor, February 1992); 'this place is too new to remind me of anything old' (waiter working at Waterfront, cited in E.Jacobs June 1992). Staff at the visitors' information centre commented that the UCT student project had caused more requests about the history of the Waterfront than at any time since it was opened (P.Pregnalato, June 1992).

classified National Monuments, two maritime museums (one private, the other a branch of the South African Cultural History Museum), a historical walk brochure, several plaques and displays and an award-winning audio-visual presentation in the visitor information centre all convey an overt sense of a Capetonian past. Less tangible, but none the less apparent, is the ethos of an imagined past that pervades the Waterfront atmosphere. To some this represents a past with which they can identify. To others it is alienating and disturbing. Examination of the historical images of the Cape Town Waterfront thus highlights important features of public history in South Africa. I shall focus on three of them: public history and the construction of identity, the role of nostalgia, and heritage and private enterprise.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CAPETONIAN IDENTITY

A constant theme in the Waterfront plans and proposals is the uniqueness of Cape Town's cultural heritage. The image presented of the past is thus one which reflects a Capetonian identity. Yet, as in all public representations of the past, such an identity is carefully constructed. As Robert Lumley has observed in the context of museums, 'history is made and re-made...[it] is used as a political resource whereby national identities are constructed and forms of power and privilege justified and celebrated'[25]. At the Waterfront the identity is not national but local. Yet the Capetonian past it presents certainly celebrates a particular form of power and privilege.

[25] R.Lumley (ed) The museum time machine (London and New York 1988), p.2.

The strongest element in the Waterfront's presentation of Cape Town's history is the significance of the sea. This of course is the distinctive element of the harbour area, the meeting of sea, port and land. The audio-visual display tells us that in the past, 'The city was the sea - the sea was the city'. But then

> the city left the sea - it crept inland, it left the harbour to itself..it left behind some of the most beautiful buildings, romantic places...left behind the slap of water, the creak of rope, the groan of wood... Yet today a clock is being carefully turned back.

The process by which the harbour fell into decline and was physically isolated from Cape Town by the Foreshore reclamation is not explained. The point is rather the quintessential unity of Capetonians with their harbour, a severed unity which the Waterfront development is busily restoring, 'breathing life and soul back into history'. And to emphasise this history the audio-visual portrays a past 'teeming with atmosphere and vibrancy', shown by the replacement of sail by steam ships, the mail boats, passengers waved off at the quay sides (some apparently Haj pilgrims), the pier and its orchestra, rowing boats, children swimming and fishing.

The role of the sea is paramount elsewhere at the Waterfront. The Maritime Museum, (as yet only temporarily arranged) offers a rather bizarre and dull collection of

items, many of them unconnected with the Cape[26]. However a display section on Cape Town harbour does make more explicit links: 'Table Bay - home to indigenous San and Khoikhoi for almost 2 000 years; stopover for European seafarers for nearly 500 years; Gateway to Africa; the Mother City; Tavern of the Seas' the notices proclaim. Pictures of dock construction, the pier and whaling boats, and models of ocean cruise liners arriving in Table Bay give an image of the Capetonian past which is both British and male in focus[27]. More appealing to the visitors I saw was the map showing sites of shipwrecks off the South African coast with advice on 'what to do if you wish to salvage a wreck'. Actual wreck salvage is displayed in the separate privately run floating ship moored in the Albert Basin.

Inevitably the buildings preserved at the Waterfront all stress the maritime theme: the Port Captain's Office (now the headquarters of the Victoria and Alfred Company), the

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[26] Despite the injunctions of the teacher to a party of schoolchildren I followed that each showcase must be carefully examined since 'elke skip het 'n stukkie van ons geskiedenis', the most popular display was that of a coracle, proclaimed by the label as 'used in Scotland and Ireland' but actually found in the South China Sea with a weakened fisherman inside it. The Maritime Museum falls under the aegis of the Cultural History Museum, and in the tricameral dispensation on museums was a 'white affairs' concern. This may explain something of its highly conservative and selective approach to the history of Table Bay.

[27] As one female student commented, 'My brother might enjoy this, but it is of little interest to me' (K.Ribbans, June 1992). The gender exclusivity of maritime museums is not confined to the Waterfront; Margaret Anderson comments on Australian feminist critique of maritime museums as another example of 'big toys for big boys', 'History in museums in the 1990s', Packaging the past? Public histories (Australian Historical Studies, Melbourne 1991), p.134.

Harbour Master's residence, the Union Castle dock offices, and the harbour stores reconstructed as the Ferryman's Tavern.

It is of course not surprising that a waterfront development stresses a maritime tradition. This distinguishes Cape Town's past from the symbols of rural Dutch settlement often associated with the western Cape. It is not the past of Cape Dutch gables and wine farms. But it is a highly selective maritime history. The past of the Waterfront is an intensely British colonial one. The Waterfront interprets its role in the history of the harbour rather literally: since the Alfred Basin was inaugurated by the British and developed in the heyday of late nineteenth century imperialism, this is the history of the Cape Town docks that is presented. No wider interpretation of the history of the city which was linked to the sea is permitted. Little is said about the town or its harbour before 1860. Van Riebeeck receives an obligatory but passing mention in the audio-visual show as the builder of a jetty but it is, as one student observed, 'as if Van Riebeeck arrived, then slept and waited for the British to come and do the rest of the work'[28] The sailors, soldiers, slaves, Khoi, political exiles and fishermen who crowded the harbour before then are conspicuous by their absence. British enterprise and industry is presented as a more fitting element of the Capetonian past, a model for the

[28] M.Ngwenya, June 1992. On the omnipresence of Van Riebeeck in contemporary South African public history, C.Rassool and L.Witz, 'The 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival: constructing and contesting public national history', History Workshop Conference, Myths, monuments and museums, July 1992.

initiatives displayed by private developers of the modern Waterfront[29]. And no mention is made of the parsimony of the British colonial government in the 1850s which nearly aborted attempts to build the breakwater[30].

But of course it was not only the British who built the Waterfront. More strikingly absent than the pre-British past are the workers who constructed the harbour and the working class Capetonians who made a living at it. While Prince Alfred's role in tipping the first load of rubble into the bay is commemorated by a plaque and highlighted in the audiovisual and historical brochures, nothing is said of the convict labourers used to carry out the work of breakwater construction. Convicts were employed in preference to free workers whose employment according to the Resident Engineer in 1860,

> would upset all the arrangements of trade. We should have men asking for higher wages, strikes taking place from the knowledge that the works must be executed rapidly and we are entirely dependent upon them[31].

And it was the Alfred and Victoria basins which employed the first African migrants in Cape Town, recruited from the Transkei and Eastern Cape from the 1870s onwards and by the end of the nineteenth century housed in a location on site under the aegis of the Harbour Board. It was these workers

[29] Even the notices are in English. Not only is Xhosa absent (except for the single word for 'information' at the visitors' centre), but Afrikaans is also little used. The audio-visual show is in English only.

[30] S.Petersen, 'The development of the Table Bay harbour, 1860-1870' Studies in the History of Cape Town, 3, 1984, p.35.

[31] ibid, p.36.

who provided the nucleus of the Cape Town's first segregated township at Ndabeni.[32]

This history is not part of the Capetonian identity presented at the Waterfront. There is no mention of convict or migrant workers in the audio-visual show, and only a line on them in the historical walks brochure. The Breakwater Jail in which they lived now houses, with a singular irony, the UCT Graduate School of Business Studies and the luxurious 'Breakwater Lodge' Hotel. Cells and walkways, even old treadmills, are preserved in the incongruous setting of a smart training ground for business executives. On the walls near the restaurant carefully framed extracts from convict record books list the punishments given for malingering or laziness ('4 hours hard labour') in an atmosphere where such behaviour might still be considered criminal. A display of photographs and extracts from dated journal articles is available near the back door. On one of them we are told that the old Breakwater Prison 'ranked with Dartmoor and Devil's Island' while on another an anonymous writer informs us that despite the horrors of confinement and treadmills,

> a walk through this melancholy mass of stone grey buildings may leave one touched with a wonderful sense of progress; a wonderful faith on the ultimate triumph of Nature, and sweet reasonableness in the world

and continues by extolling the beauty of the Superintendent's garden as a 'place to learn to repent ...on

[32] V.Bickford-Smith, 'Black labour at the docks at the beginning of the twentieth century' and C.Saunders, 'Africans in Cape Town in the nineteenth century: an outline' in Studies in the History of Cape Town 2, 1984.

a mid-morning of our most brilliant South African sunshine'.

The horrors of a convict jail are thus romanticised[33]. But of the migrant workers for whom the Breakwater Jail was a hostel between 1926 and 1989 there is no mention[34]. In a localised explanation of the origins of segregation the keeper of the Breakwater Shop tells those visitors who enquire that 'apartheid began at the jail when prisoners were segregated'. But the Africans who lived and worked at the docks are officially ignored.

Indeed Africans as a whole are absent from the Capetonian identity of the Waterfront. Even the Penny Ferry oarsman, now one of the few African faces at the Waterfront, is shown in the audio-visual as a white harbourman. The landing stage at which Robben Island prisoners disembarked after their period of incarceration is unmarked. The only mention of the island is on a flyer for cruises departing from the Waterfront

> Cruise to Robben Island and experience the breathtaking views of Table Mountain. The Mother City and the Twelve Apostles. See for yourself an island of exile and banishment, rich in a history from Penguins to Prisoners.[35]

Despite the audio-visual's opening statement that 'Once upon

[33] The romanticisation of prisons in public history is not infrequent. Lowenthal comments that 'restored Port Arthur, Tasmania's notorious prison, almost persuades us that nineteenth-century convicts were lucky to live in so idyllic a setting', D.Lowenthal The past is another country (Cambridge 1985), p.341.

[34] 'New life for old prison' UCT News Magazine May 1992, p.18.

[35] Ocean Star Yacht Charter C.C. Cruise brochure. The round trip costs R70.

a time Cape Town was the gateway to Africa - the window to its soul', the Cape Town of the Waterfront has firmly set its back on the African hinterland and its inhabitants. The Waterfront thus perpetuates the myth of apartheid tradition that Africans form no part of the western Cape. It is scarcely surprising that many African students found the Waterfront an alienating experience. As one commented, 'I as a black person do not have a history according to the Waterfront'[36].

The Dutch, the convicts, the Khoi, the slaves and Africans are thus obliterated by the British splendours of maritime colonialism. They are also largely absent from the popular perceptions of the city held by many visitors to the Waterfront (for which see more below). Few 'coloured' faces appear in the audio-visual. The fishing activities of working class Capetonians at Roggebaai receive little attention at the Maritime Museum; a West Coast open fishing boat is displayed without comment and a single photograph of Roggebaai, unlabelled, is included in the Table Bay presentation. As a resident of Mitchell's Plain, visiting the Waterfront last summer commented 'The Cape vibe is lacking here'[37]. And the Vrye Weekblad put it as forcefully, 'Waar's die bokkoms'?[38] The only tangible presence of the 'Cape vibe' are artificial performance, watched, but not created, by visitors: 'Coon' bands and weekend performers

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[36] M.Gayoyo, June 1992

[37] Male Capetonian, late 30s, February 1992

[38] Vrye Weekblad 5-11 June 1992, p.25-6.

and most notably Taliep Pieterson and David Kramer's musical Fairyland which has been running to full capacity audiences at the Dockroad Theatre since it was opened two years ago. It is, as the Musical of the Year Vita National Award citation, displayed in the theatre entrance, puts it, 'a vibrant work pulsating with the rhythms of a joyously remembered past'.

But in general the Capetonian identity of the Waterfront is not one which evokes the glitter and razzmatazz of the kind found at Gold Reef City[39]. It is a staid and solid past, representative of the industry and serious-mindedness of nineteenth century British entrepreneurs and men of commerce. The 'real life' of Cape Town is to be found in Greenmarket Square, as one visitor pointed out, 'That's where the action is...it's all too neat and tidy round here[40]'. Jazz bands, weekend carnivals and Dockland theatre musicals certainly liven up the modern day atmosphere of the Waterfront. But these are not part of the Capetonian past which it represents.

NOSTALGIA AT THE WATERFRONT

The past presented at the Waterfront is thus a highly selective one. But it is has a strong appeal to middle class and predominently white Capetonians who accept its recreated

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[39] 'A lot of residents have expressed fears that [the Waterfront] will become a sort of glitzy Disneyland, not what Cape Town would want at all', stated a reporter interviewing David Jack, Chairman of the V & A Company, 'Bringing the sea back to the city' Argus 30 March 1989.

[40] Male Capetonian, late 20s, May 1992

past and infuse it with a sense of nostalgia for an era they believe they once knew. While many visitors fail to recognise that the Waterfront presents a past at all and others, particularly black Capetonians, feel rejected by what they do find, to some the Waterfront has an immediate appeal: 'It brings back memories. Cape Town like it used to be, before they took it away from the sea' as one visitor stated[41].

Of course the Waterfront is not in any sense 'Cape Town like it used to be'. But it evokes an image of the past which some Capetonians today would like to think once existed. 'What pleases the nostalgist', writes Lowenthal, 'is not just the relic but his own recognition of it, not so much the past itself as its supposed aspirations, less the memory of what actually was than of what was once thought possible'[42].

The ethos of the Waterfront shows a world far removed from that dominated by 'Pretoria'. It provides an image of a commercially successful city which stood in its own right as controller of the Cape shipping routes and was by implication the hub of South Africa, before the decline of the city's economic role set in after the Second World

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41 Female Capetonian, early 70s, February 1992

42 Lowenthal, Past is a foreign country, p.8.

War[43]. This was, symbolically, also the period in which 'they' took the sea away. 'They' represent the makers of the foreshore plan drawn up in 1947, with government overriding the municipality, and implemented in the early 1950s, just in time for the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary. The building on the Foreshore is seen as a product of the bad apartheid years of the 1950s when Pretoria conquered the city and planted anonymous buildings such as the Department of Internal Affairs, the Customs house and two segregated railway stations between the city centre and the bay[44]. The Waterfront epitomises a return to the city of the sea that marked its once proud past, even if Cape Town's actual economic preponderance was lost long before the lifetimes of even the oldest visitors. As in all evocations of nostalgia there is a certain timelessness about the Waterfront, where the 1860s blur easily into the 1930s[45].

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[43] There is a striking parallel here with the perceptions of older Liverpool visitors to the reconstructed Merseyside waterfront, who evoked a past in which the Mersey teemed with shipping, in contrast to its present day decline, A.Mellor, 'Enterprise and heritage in the dock' in J.Corner and S.Harvey (eds.) Enterprise and heritage: crosscurrents of national culture (London and New York 1991), p.112.

[44] In fact the destruction of the 'old shore' with its Pier, Roggebaai fishing harbour and Marine Parade took place with the building of the Duncan Dock between 1939 and 1945. Nonetheless Foreshore land was controlled by a special Board under central government which was only abolished in 1979. The construction of a four lane highway symbolised the cutting off of the city from the sea. An attempt to justify such action by the planner who implemented it is S.Morris, 'The Cape Town Foreshore scheme - origins and evolution' unpub. paper, Interbou 80 Building Conference, Johannesburg 1980.

[45] P. Wright, On living in an old country (London 1985), p.78.

To be effective in presenting a desirable past, nostalgia has to call on actual memories and suppress others. The memories evoked are those which middle-class English-speaking Capetonians feel comfortable with: tea orchestras and boyhood (no girls) swimming at the pier, the mail ships bringing news from 'home', the Union Castle line in its heyday. All of these images are represented in the audio-visual (with appropriate sepia tinted photographs and palm court orchestra music), at the Maritime Museum, and in the respectable regality of the pseudo-'Victorian' decor. The entrance to the Dockroad Theatre evokes similar types of memories: the large clock ('under which we used to meet at the station'), the Edward VI postbox and the Lipton's tea adverts sit uneasily beside old cinema posters and 1940s/50s American decor of the Dock Road restaurant. A notice of apprenticeship (of a white immigrant carpenter) sits rather incongruously on the wall but fails to elicit comment. It is as if the 'golden past' has come to life again, even if the buildings are painted in what one student described as over-bright colours, 'like the changing rooms at Muizenberg'[46].

But apart from the absence of a broader spectrum than middle class white English-speakers, what is also missing from the Waterfront is any sense of conflict or tension in the past. Nostalgia does not permit such memories to be evoked in the presentation of a public historical heritage; the recreation of an altered past plays down 'the ignoble, the ugly, the

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[46] G.Pillay, June 1992.

shameful'[47]. This applies to a distant as well as a more recent past. There is no mention, for instance, of the fierce opposition to the building of a breakwater put up by the Port Elizabeth representatives of the eastern Cape in the 1850s[48]. Strikes, convictism, slavery, migrant labour and racial tension are all missing from the Waterfront displays. The myth of Cape Town's racial harmony is thus confirmed. 'It is good to see coloureds here' said one weekend visitor '...we all got along so well together in the old days. I think it's the sea that brings us all here[49]'. The nostalgia for a multi-racial Capetonian past is of course highly selective. 'Coon carnival' choirs and bands are 'quaint' attractions to visitors rather than meaningful aspects of a working class culture and forced removals are romanticised into the icon of District Six[50]. At the Waterfront this 'entertainment' value is maintained by

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[47] Wright, On living in an old country, p.69; Lowentha', The past is a foriegn country, p.332.

[48] Peterson, 'Development of the Table Bay harbour', p.33.

[49] Elderly male Capetonian, February 1992.

[50] On the selectivity of middle class Capetonian memory which enshrines District Six but forgets the many other forced removals in Cape Town, K.Ward, 'The road to Mamre: migration, memory and the meaning of community, c.1900-1992' (unpub. MA, UCT 1992), pp.156-7. The 'Coon Carnival', which originated in the 1870s reached its height as a manifestation of working class culture in District Six in the 1940s. By the 1950s, 'white middle class tourists appreciated coons, choirs and carnival from a distance for their 'otherness', quaintness and an 'almost uncontrolled performance in an otherwise pedestrian Cape Town'.By the 1950s this was being controlled by municipal regulations and was finally driven off the streets of the city by the 1970s. The nostalgia is thus also one of a sanitized 'Cape culture'; S.Jeppie, 'Aspects of popular culture and class expression in inner Cape Town, 1939-1959' (unpub. MA, UCT 1990), pp.38-74.

'performers'; Fairyland celebrates a '*joyously* remembered past'.

Nostalgia also provides a means of avoiding the present, a 'refusal to face up to the dilemmas' of the world we inhabit today[61]. In early 1992 there were many such 'dilemmas' for middle-class Capetonians to avoid. One visitor put it very precisely, 'I like it here. There's none of that nonsense you get all the time...you know, crime and people making trouble'[62]. Indeed not. As the Vrye Weekblad put it

> Nêrens lê sigaretstompies en leë Stoney-blikkies rond nie, daar's geen bedelaars en straatkinders nie, en in die verskeie kroeë en eetplekke suip geen vissers nie. Geen jong angry's wat rondstaan,lus om 'n fight te pick nie. Die bergies, kenmerkend aan Kaapstad, is nie daar nie, die hippies van die Groentemarkplein ook nie. Die technikon-skollies, die UCT-lefties - almal is pynlik afwesig.[63]

Here there is nothing unpleasant to disturb the vision of a ordered present, and by association, an ordered past. As David Cannadine has commented, nostalgia for a golden past is most apparent at a time of economic depression[64]. In South Africa to economic malaise may be added the political disorientation of its middle classes, 'people making trouble'?.

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[61] Lowenthal, The past is a foreign country, p.13.

[62] Middle aged, male visitor from Port Elizabeth, February 1992

[63] Vrye Weekblad, 5-11 Junie 1992, p.25. With the possible exception of a number of 'UCT-lefties' who invaded the Waterfront during the History III project, this is a finely apt description.

[64] D.Cannadine, The pleasures of the past (London 1989), pp.257-9.

This nostalgic vision of the Waterfront is of course confined to a limited number of people who visit the harbour. To younger Capetonians who view the many pubs of the development as a 'good place for a jorl'[55], nostalgia plays little obvious part (I'm too young to remember Cape Town harbour' said one[56]).

But even the young at the Waterfront are the middle class young. And in this they are typical of visitors to the harbour. The nostalgia evoked, the Cape Town past constructed, is a middle class history. As elsewhere in the world's museums, theme parks and reconstructed docklands the Cape Town Waterfront is predominantly patronised by the middle classes[57]. The rest of society has little to recognise, little to appreciate in a representation of the past in which its own role is minimised. At the Waterfront the working class past is absent. There is nothing here for many Capetonians to be nostalgic about.

ENTERPRISE AND HERITAGE AT THE WATERFRONT

In many parts of the world the past decade has seen the growth of a 'heritage industry'. In some places, this is

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[55] Early 20s, female Capetonian, February 1992. Bertie's Landing and Quay 4 have come to replace the 'Pig and Whistle' as a UCT student locale, as many of those involved in the history project pointed out.

[56] Mid-20s, male Capetonian, February 1992.

[57] N.Heinich, 'The Pompidou centre and its public: the limits of a utopian site' in R.Lumley Museum time machine; Mellor, 'Enterprise and heritage in the docks',p.114; J.Parkington and A.Smith, 'Museums in a changing and divided society' South African Archaeological Bulletin, 144 (December 1986), p.44.

dominated by government policy (France) and in others by charitable trusts (Britain). However in many cases (including South Africa, notably at Gold Reef City), the philosophy of private enterprise has been applied to the 'leisure world of heritage culture with [the] projection of a common and shared inheritance, available to all for the price of a ticket on a Sunday outing'[58] While much of the focus of the heritage industry is on stately homes, living museums and theme parks the redevelopment of waterfronts has played an important part in the privatised restoration and public display of the past. The Cape Town Waterfront developers are well aware of this. The audio-visual links it with pride to similar developments in London, Liverpool, Boston, Baltimore, Vancouver and Sydney, and important encouragement to the project was given in 1985 by the South African creator of Sydney's Harbour Rocks area[59] Many of these dockland developments have done little to make the harbour areas 'open to all': Sydney and the London docklands are notorious examples of a process of residential 'yuppiefication' which has made property and rents beyond the means of their original inhabitants.[60] Elsewhere waterfront developments have focussed more on shopping, reconstructed buildings and visitors, all paying the price

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[58] J.Corner and S.Harvey 'Great Britain Ltd' in Enterprise and heritage, p.11. On the commercialisation of heritage in general, Lumley , Museum time machine, p.10-11.

[59] 'Waterfront expert visits City docks' Cape Times 24 January 1985.

[60] For example, B.Schwartz, 'Where horses shit a hundred sparrows feed: Docklands and East London during the Thatcher years' in Corner and Harvey Enterprise and heritage, p.88-9.

of highly commercialised concerns[61]

The Cape Town Waterfront presently follows the latter pattern although commercial and private property developments are planned for the next stages of the project to be completed by the turn of the century.[62] The 'cultural heritage' created and mythologised by some visitors at the Waterfront thus exists within a fiercely commercialised context. As the Victoria and Alfred Company staunchly maintains, the Waterfront is not a charity nor a free resource centre. It is a product of private enterprise, and its goals are those of profit. History serves the aim of enterprise and relics of the past are readily modified to commercial needs: the plaque marking the position of Prince Alfred's inauguration of the breakwater basin was moved to make way for a car park[63]. And as Brian Kantor put it at the time of the establishment of the V & A Company

> It is intended that the redevelopment thrust will concentrate initially on the historic Pier-head. These developments will bring the sea and harbour back to the city. A mix of restaurants, pubs, retailing - especially food and fish retailing - and recreational facilities will be provided there. Older buildings will be preserved and adapted. New buildings will be constructed to blend in. Some of the current eye-sores will be

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[61] For instance at the Merseyside dockland development scheme, Mellor, 'Enterprise and heritage in the dock'.

[62] Victoria and Alfred Waterfront Company, 1991 Review, p.31.

[63] It is to be moved again shortly to the newly constructed shopping mall in Quay 5; Cheryl Ozinsky pers. comm.

removed to create space for sight-seers and shoppers.[64] A visitor expressed his perceptions of these priorities clearly when asked what he thought of the way the harbour had been restored,

> Just a lot of people making a lot of money. They're pretending this is what old Cape Town was like...But it's got nothing to do with it[65].

It is a complaint of many visitors that the Waterfront is a 'rip-off'. Prices are significantly higher than in the rest of the city, and certainly beyond the reach of all but the affluent. The purpose of drawing people is to get them to spend, and the past is presented as a part of this enterprise. The audio-visual with its romanticised history is essentially an advertisement for the facilities of the area (helicopter flights and chartered boats included). The exception is the Maritime Museum, under the aegis of the state, which makes little profit from its R2 admission fee, but also provides little in the way of excitment or entertainment. Elsewhere private enterprise dominates. In contrast to the demure wall map of wrecks in the Maritime Museum, wrecks and the allure of salvage treasure are vividly displayed in the 'Ship of Treasure and Tragedy' anchored in the Alfred Basin. The ship, inevitably renamed the 'Victoria', was privately bought and is run by the South African Shipwreck Foundation.[66] Signs exhort the visitor to

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[64] Victoria and Alfred Waterfront Company, News release, 27 September 1988, p.3

[65] Middle aged male Capetonian, February 1992

[66] 'City divers showing it like it was' Argus 13 January 1992. An ex-UCT History honours student is one of the partners, which demonstrates that public history and enterprise are well appreciated by at least some tertiary students.

> Come aboard and see the largest display in Africa of genuine treasure - gold, silver, guns, artifacts - all salvaged from our southern seas. Now on view for the first time ever!'.

Inside a video recreates the wealth of early shipping around the Cape and the 'excitement' of wreck salvage, while displays in the bowels of the vessel lure visitors with their riches. History here is a profitable activity.

Elsewhere at the Waterfront profit is covered with a thin veneer of history. At the Arts and Crafts Market, held every weekend in a large shed near the Maritime Museum, a notice proclaims in the only reference at the Waterfront to the pre-British period that,

> For over a century the Dutch East India Company contributed to the development of the Cape of Good Hope. The arrival of their merchant ships, laden with spices and treasures from markets explored, caused great excitement in the community.
>
> Times have changed, yet the same spirit lives on at the Waterfront Trading Company, where craftsmanship and artistry of an ageless quality are captured in a market for the explorer at heart.

Elsewhere there is little connection between the content of the chic shops and the carefully restored buildings in which they are housed. The 'Waterfront Shoppe' sells heritage items such as old photographs and drawings, but seems to do a better trade in Coca Cola which it advertises in a large sign outside. Next door the 'Indaba Curio' store provides the only tangible sign of Africa at the Waterfront, neatly packaged for the visiting (primarily foreign) tourists. 'Admiral's Frozen Yoghurt' and the 'Alabama' floating restaurant capitalise on the maritime theme to do a roaring

trade[87]. And of course the 'joyously remembered past' of District Six at Fairyland is a commercial venture of considerable success.

The Waterfront is thus more akin to the privately owned commercialised 'heritage' centres of many parts of the world, epitomised in South Africa by Gold Reef City. How does private enterprise affect the presentation of the past?

Clearly the main way to persuade people to come and spend money is to offer entertainment[88]. At present the Waterfront does this through bars, restaurants, theatres (and soon cinemas), jazz bands and other 'live musicians', particularly at weekends and throughout the summer season. Entertainment and education, as Kros has pointed out in the case of Gold Reef City, do not sit easily together, and the depiction of social tensions and conflict are not perceived as crowd-drawing activities.[89] Those more historically related activities that are present at the Waterfront need to be profitable. Hence the emphasis on the nostalgic images

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[87] The 'Alabama' draws on the famous visit to Cape Town of the confederate steamboat in 1863, which attracted muc local interest and is immortalised in the renowned 'Cape Malay' song, 'Hier kom die Alabama', E. and F. Bradlow Here comes the Alabama (Cape Town 1958). Once inside this exclusive floating restaurant, historical links are swiftly abandoned.

[88] For the implications of this for Gold Reef City, G.Berning and G.Dominy, 'The presentation of the industrial past in South African museums', unpub. paper, South African Historical Society Conference, 1989, p.11.

[89] C.Kros, 'Visiting history on the weekend: from colonial Williamsburg to Gold Reef City: an exercise in scrutinising public history', unpub. paper, History Workshop, p.8.

of prosperous Capetonians. As Lowenthal comments, 'at most historic sites it is nostalgia that pays the bills'.[70] Dockyard museums world wide thus emphasize the 'heritage' of the powerful. Rarely does the history of dockland workers attract support, for both financial and political reasons.[71] The Cape Town Waterfront is at present no exception.

Of course few people go to the Waterfront to educate themselves about the past. As in Liverpool, the majority of visitors I spoke to were there to 'look around', 'enjoy a drink' or 'just to see what is happening'[72]. As one put it, 'This place is amiracle. Before there was nowhere to go in Cape Town...there's always someting to look at down here'[73] As yet, enterprise at the Waterfront has not harnessed the heritage industry to the full. But what it does present of the past is, as elsewhere in the world, a heritage conditioned by its entrepreneurial needs.

THE FUTURE OF THE PAST AT THE WATERFRONT

This paper has argued that the private development of the

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[70] Past is a foreign country, p.345.

[71] Portsmouth dockyards provide an interesting example of the conflict between public presentation of 'blatantly ideological...imperialist and navalist myths' supported by the local council and private investors, in contrast to the poorly funded dockyard worker museum where oral histories, tools and photographs collected by the workers themselves were displayed. K.Lunn and R.Thomas, 'Portsmouth's dockyards - the rerigging of a city's history' History Workshop Journal 21 (Spring 1986), 191-8.

[72] Middle aged male and female Capetonians, February and April 1992. For the Liverpool parallel, Mellor, 'Enterprise and heritage', p. 108.

[73] Middle aged female Capetonian, May 1992.

Cape Town Waterfront has used a notion of preservation and presentation of the 'heritage' of the city and its harbour as part of the justification for its development, but that this heritage is artificially constructed, overtly appealing to the nostalgia of a particular sector of Capetonians and moulded by the needs of profit and enterprise. At present the Victoria and Alfred Company seems unaware of any alternative perspectives on dockland and broader Cape Town history.

But current criticism of the Waterfront may well influence plans for its future. As yet the Waterfront is only at the initial stage of development. Not everything is going according to plan: chic jewellry counters in the Union Castle Building have left after defaulting on rents, and plans for a Victorian railway station and luxury steam train excursions have been halted[74]. But there are tentative signs of some changes in the public presentation of Waterfront history. New educational activities are aimed at a broader community (although at present not primarily historical in focus), plans for new signboards and the making of a new audio-visual show and historical brochure are all being made.[75] But can the kind of history presented be fundamentally different, given the commercial ethos of the project?

Restoration of the history of people, ordinary men and women

[74] 'Waterfront train plans run out of steam' Argus 8 June 1992.

[75] pers. comm. Cheryl Ozinsky.

as well as the few 'great figures' presently portrayed, would do much to increase the broad appeal of the Waterfront. Indeed at the moment, people are markedly absent from the Waterfront's past. Buildings and ships play a more prominent role. And if the Company does wish to counter the claims that it is a racially exclusive development, the presentation of a broader history will be required as one way of attracting different visitors and representing a past with which they can identify. Together with the harbour activity and the 'teeming life and energy', 'Cape Town's own Waterfront' will need to unwrap a different sort of history to that which it currently presents. Whether it can or will want to do so will reveal much about the future of privately-funded public history in the 'new' South Africa.