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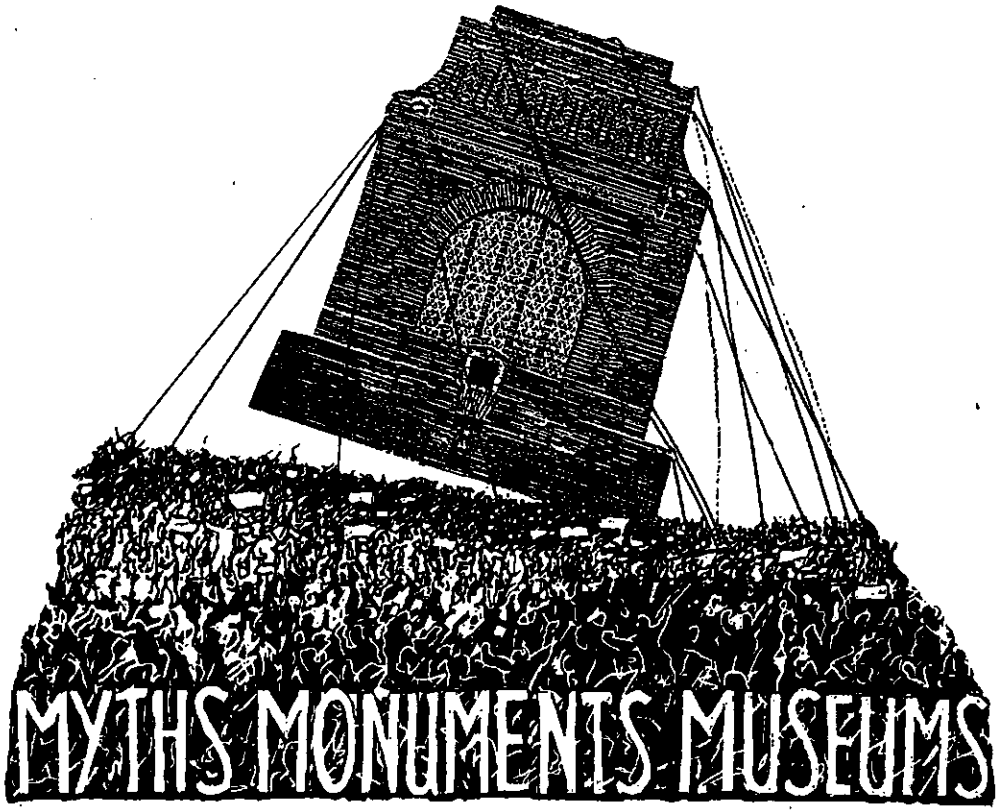

NEW PREMISES?

16 - 18 JULY 1992

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
HISTORY WORKSHOP

MONUMENTS AND THE MONUMENTALISATION OF MYTHS

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AFRICANA

MONUMENTS AND THE MONUMENTALISATION OF MYTHS

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PREAMBLE

The culture of a nation, a people or a region is usually a composite of many factors. This may include the personal attributes of the people themselves, or their skill in a particular area of activity, or perhaps the physical nature of their countryside. These often give rise to a variety of symbols which, appropriate or note, become associated with the people concerned. In understanding these symbols, it is also necessary to examine the nature of symbology and the manner in which it can be used, and abused, in the creation of a group identity.

Firstly symbols are seldom better than stereotypical images which represent the interests of a small minority of citizens. Where these stereotypes are of a positive nature, the larger group will usually find little difficulty in identifying with them. For that reason Italians will portray themselves as being artistic, the Swiss as being punctual, the Japanese as being industrious and the Zulu as being proud. The reverse picture, however, is that stereotypical thinking lies at the root of racism and xenophobia. Up to comparatively recent times English children were being taught nursery rhymes charging that :

> "Taffy was a Welshman
> Taffy was a thief ..."

whilst, at the same time, Enid Blyton was portraying black people as "Golliwogs" dressed in Coon Carnival clothes. Other countries share in similar experiences, but direct their stereotypes against other communities. Humour is another medium for popularising negative religions, ethnic, racial or sexist images.

Secondly the meaning of symbols will vary from culture to culture, from region to region. Thus, to find popular approval, they need to find positive significance across a wide spectrum of groups co-existent within a society.

Thirdly, because symbols are open to interpretation, they are liable to manipulation. They can, for example, be harnessed in the creation of national myths, or in the justification of fictitious political claims. Dutch claims to land in Zululand during the mid-nineteenth century, for example, were based upon a forged document purportedly discovered intact in Retief's satchel nine months after he and his followers had been executed by the Zulu (Naidoo 1989). On the other hand, symbols can also be used as a unifying force, harnessing divergent vested interests to one common cause. Many of the symbols of Union after the 1920s were designed to promote the idea of a political unity between the two "great white races", the Dutch and the English.

Perhaps one of the most important components of a people's identity is their built environment, for at once it encapsulates their social hierarchies, religious beliefs,

value systems and technological achievements. Many of their built forms, textures and decorations often find their way into popular composites of regional identity. This has been consistently abused by European architectural historians, both past and present, who persist in using the buildings of a society as a guideline as to its level of "cultural attainment". Such assessments are usually guided by overtly eurocentric value systems and are harnessed to prevailing political ideologies or prejudices. Contrary to overwhelming archaeological and anthropological evidence, the Rhodesian UDI regime, for example, consistently held that the Great Zimbabwe complex was the work of a mythical, long-vanished race. The idea that the Shona could have erected public works of such magnitude clearly gave credibility to Black Nationalist claims to the existence of an early and advanced Zimbabwean culture (Frederikse, 1982).

Although such viewpoints are finding increasing international rejection, they retain a fertile breeding ground in South Africa through the work of two groups. The first is the National Monuments Council (NMC), a body dedicated to the preservation of old buildings and artifacts through a process of selective "monumentalisation". The second is the South African Museum's Association (SAMA), whose work in the area of Open Air and so-called "cultural museums" has created a series of stereotypical displays aimed at reinforcing white prejudices and at romanticising rural Black poverty. Intentionally or otherwise, their end-product has provided white bigotry with a convenient "cultural" home.

This does not mean that the sins of past generations of architectural historians and museum curators should be laid in perpetuity at the doors of the NMC and SAMA. This is plainly wrong, but for as long as both organisations retain their present unrepresentative structuring and outdated policies, they will continue to act as a strong link with the abuses of the past.

In this paper I propose to examine three areas where the built environment has been used, and abused, by "cultural conservationists" in order to achieve sectarian political objectives. I do not intend to focus solely upon the work and policies of present structures, but I plan to include an analysis of some current architectural practices.

INTRODUCTION

The first tentative steps towards the preservation of South Africa's cultural heritage were taken in 1911 when the "Bushmen Relics Protection Act" was passed. This legislation was aimed specifically at the protection of San rock art as well as other archaeological artifacts. However an awareness that the historical built environment was a valuable and non-renewable resource which should also be protected, took somewhat longer to develop. In spite of the establishment of a Historical Monuments Commission (HMC) in 1923, existing legislation could do little to safeguard buildings and other

artifacts from indiscriminate destruction. It was only in 1934 that the promulgation of the "Natural and Historical Monuments, Relics and Antiques Act" empowered the HMC to extend its protection to a wide range of artifacts, buildings and natural environments. As a result the HMC was able to embark in 1936 upon a relatively modest programme of monument declaration. This was continued with increasing vigour after 1969 when the HMC was replaced by the National Monuments Council (NMC), a body whose powers have since been extended by successive Acts of legislation promulgated in 1979, 1981 and 1988 respectively (NMC c1986). Up to 1988, a period of 52 years, 3581 buildings, sites and objects had been brought under the umbrella protection of the NMC (NMC 1988), an average of 66 proclamations per annum.

The work of the NMC has undoubtedly played a leading role in preventing the demolition of many individual historical buildings as well as the education of the general public on issues of environmental conservation. In more recent years however, the policy of monumentalisation as a conservation strategy has been subjected to increasing scrutiny (Frescura 1989, and others). There is a rising awareness among many architects, for example, that the character and charm of a built environment owes much to the use of a particular set of building elements (Theron c1984, Herholdt and Frescura 1987). These are often ephemeral and thus virtually impossible to preserve through the declaration of monuments. Also a wholistic, multi-disciplinary approach to architectural conservation dictates that buildings be read in their wider context. This may make the process of monumentalisation irrelevant unless accompanied by parallel adjustments at a social, environmental or technological level.

MONUMENTALISATION : THE FAILURE OF ARCHITECTS

A comprehensive historiography of architectural histories over the past two hundred years has still to be written, although a number of interesting books on the subject have begun to appear in more recent times (Rykwert 1972). For our purposes however we can begin to identify three broad trends of thought.

* The first and older tradition follows a linear and compartmentalised pattern, favouring the creation of stylistic and historical stereotypes based upon aesthetic patterns. The failings of such thinking are self-evident and are best represented by the "monumental" work of Bannister Fletcher, in all its nineteen comparative editions. His writings focused upon the outward forms of what Rapoport described in 1969 as a "high design" tradition, embodying the monuments of man, the works of the rich, the powerful, the idiosyncratic (Rapoport 1969).

* The second propounds a view of history as a series of interacting synchronic flows responsive to socio-economic and technological forces and therefore

accepts aesthetics as being but one of the significant features of an architecture. This thinking has typified many of the architectural histories written since the early 1970s and was probably initiated by the publication of Charles Jencks' "Modern Movements in Architecture" in 1973.

* In more recent years a third school of thought has begun to emerge as the result of interaction with other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and philosophy. It argues that the built environment is governed by a series of cognitive codes, a language perhaps, which permits us to accept an object, picture or building as a document to be read and interpreted as a series of contexturalised texts. The aesthetics of built form, material texture and decorative motif are therefore given equal place alongside the social and economic structures which they reflect (Alexander 1977, and others).

The impact of such thinking upon the everyday practice of building is not easy to assess. Certainly the rise in recent years of a Post Modernist style of architectural expression seems to suggest that the writings of post-structuralist philosophers such as Derrida and Foucault (Sturrock 1979) have not gone unread. However the monumental and elitist quality of much of this work raises the question whether architects have truly understood the lessons that post-stucturalism has to offer, or whether the profession's rank and file have not merely adopted it as yet another aesthetic promulgated through the glossy journals. The implications of such attitudes in the field of culture conservation are understandably serious.

Architects, almost by definition and certainly by their very nature, build monuments. They build monuments to their clients, to their national heroes, to their kings, to their presidents, to their political systems, to corporate society and to their own egos. They build monuments because they are encouraged to do so from the very first moment they cross the threshold of an architectural school; because professional journals publish monumental work and sneer at anything smaller; because politicians and financiers reward them richly; because society lionises its monument builders and their power; and because, unlike other mortals, architects are given the opportunity of achieving immortality through their work. It is not for nothing that most architectural history books are littered with the monuments of "man" : the religious shrines, the corporate headquarters and the homes of the rich and powerful. They also reflect a strong patriarchal bent which views "architecture" as the product of "Man's Efforts", and relegates women to passive or neutral roles.

It does not come as a surprise therefore that the programme for the conservation of our historical architecture in South Africa has become involved primarily with the declaration of

national monuments. Not only have architects always been influential in this movement but our society, indoctrinated by generations of architectural historians, has come to equate "monuments" with "history" and, more dangerously, with "culture". This is plainly wrong. Not only does this marginalise the role of the larger community in the processes of history, but it also ignores their habitat, which at the best of times, constitutes the major part of the built environment.

There are, of course, other reasons why South African society should have become so concerned with the creation of architectural monuments. In cases where a small elite controls political power it also controls the writing, and the rewriting, of history. At a time when South Africa's white minority found its legitimacy being challenged from a variety of sources, it is natural that it should have sought to reinforce its precarious claim to tenure by elevating examples of its material culture to the status of "monuments". Revel Fox (1987) perceived this in 1986 when he stated that :

> "To achieve true cultural representation, our very history books will have to be rewritten. People, places and events with special significance for the different groups in our society will have to be identified ..."

Like other architects of his generation, Fox is also bound by the concept of celebrating history through monuments. He went on to claim that :

> "... there will be a need for new monuments to record the memories of past events". (Fox 1987)

This does not mean to say that, given a different set of circumstances, the concerns and reactions of the local Black community would differ radically from this standpoint. A good example of this was given in 1981 by Dr Edison Zvobgo when he was still Zimbabwe's Minister of Local Government and Housing. Giving evidence as an expert witness in a court case successfully instituted to save Jameson House, in Harare, from demolition, he stated that :

> "Nations who go about destroying their own buildings are in danger of destroying their own heritage." (Jackson 1989)

In this case Zvobgo was motivated by more than mere aesthetic considerations. In 1896 some twenty-two Zimbabwean patriots, who had taken part in the national uprising against the white settlers, were tried and sentenced in the High Court which then sat in Jameson House. Thus, although the Zimbabwean experience differs from the South African one on a number of significant points, the intent of their conservation policy remains orientated towards the preservation and declaration of individual buildings as monuments. As such then, its outcome is very similar to our own.

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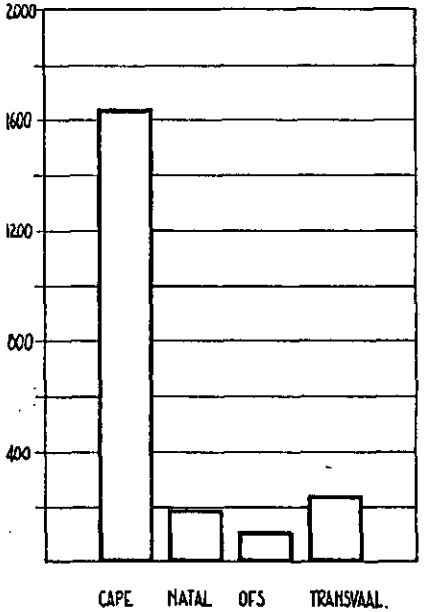
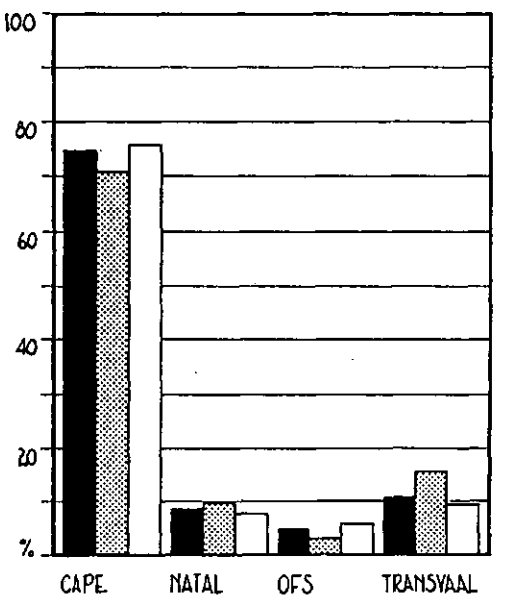


DISTRIBUTION OF MONUMENTS PER PROVINCE

2.



PERIOD 1936-1989

PERIOD 1936-1974.

PERIOD 1975-1989

DISTRIBUTION OF MONUMENTS

FIGURES GIVEN AS % OF TOTAL FOR GIVEN PERIOD.

What makes this question particularly crucial in the South African context is the fact that rural and indigenous architecture is usually of a transient and ephemeral nature. This makes its conservation through a process of monumentalisation virtually impossible to achieve. Paul Oliver (1992, MS in press) recognised this when he suggested that, as in the Japanese example, the preservation of the vernacular was only possible through the preservation of the social processes which gave rise to it. It is in this context that regional museums should play an important role.

Thus, what is in question here is not the concept of "conservation", but the manner in which this is enforced through a policy of declaring monuments.

THE FAILURE OF THE BUREAUCRACY

South Africa's record since 1936 in the declaration of national monuments does not appear to have ever been fully assessed. Thus the objectives and terms of reference of the HMC, formulated in the 1920s, and first applied in 1936, are still being implemented almost unchanged in the 1990s by the NMC.

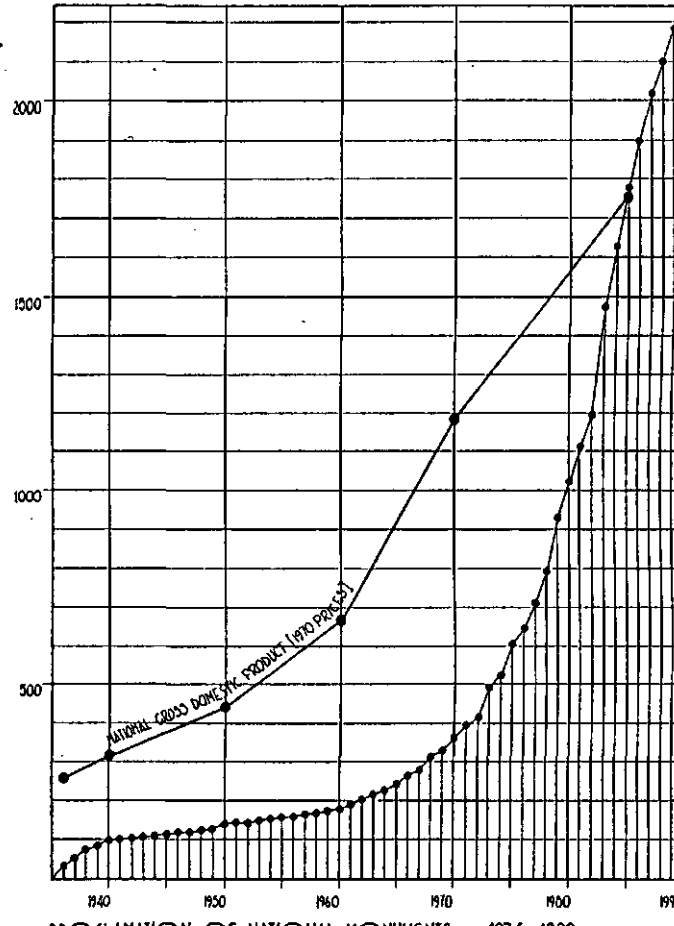
A survey of the HMC/NMC's records for the past 54 years makes for interesting reading (NMC 1969-1989). During this time some 2183-odd buildings, environments and objects have been declared. Using these as a data base it was possible to arrive at a number of conclusions.

1. The bias of HMC/NMC declarations has been almost overwhelmingly orientated towards the Cape, 75% of monuments being located in this province (figure 1). The remaining are distributed between the other three provinces, with the OFS containing less than 5%. It does not appear that a significant change of emphasis took place after 1974, when Brian Bassett joined the NMC as its Director (figure 2).

2. Since 1936 the number of national monuments has increased at an exponential rate which exceeds the rise gradient of this country's GNP (figure 3). It is interesting to note that, in the fifteen years between 1974 and 1989, three times as many national monuments were declared as in the previous 38 years. This is probably attributable to growing public interest in the local historical built environment, although other factors of a political and economic nature have also played a strong contributory role.

3. Since 1936 the declaration of national monuments appears to have taken place in a number of well-defined stages (figure 4). The establishment of the HMC in 1934 was followed by a brief flurry of activity which covered the years between 1936 and 1939. This abated substantially after 1940 when the second World War and the economic downturn which followed it gave national monuments

3.



PROCLAMATION OF NATIONAL MONUMENTS : 1936-1989

relatively low priority in the national budget. A small number of declarations were made annually from 1950 onwards, but their quantity remained modest, averaging only eleven per annum up to 1969. During this time the bronze plaques, which the HMC/NMC places outside proclaimed buildings, cost 13.10.0 (R27.00) apiece. This appears to have been a factor which affected the implementation of HMC policy to a great degree (Barrie Biermann, pers comm July 1989). From 1960, after South Africa left the Commonwealth, up to 1969, when the National Monuments Council was established, there was a gradual increase in the number of listings. In 1969 the number of annual declarations rose sharply almost every year until 1983 when the number of proclamations more than trebled. This year marks a high point in the activities of the HMC/NMC and since then the number of proclamations has undergone a gradual decrease until 1989 when the number of declarations returned to the same levels experienced in the early 1970s.

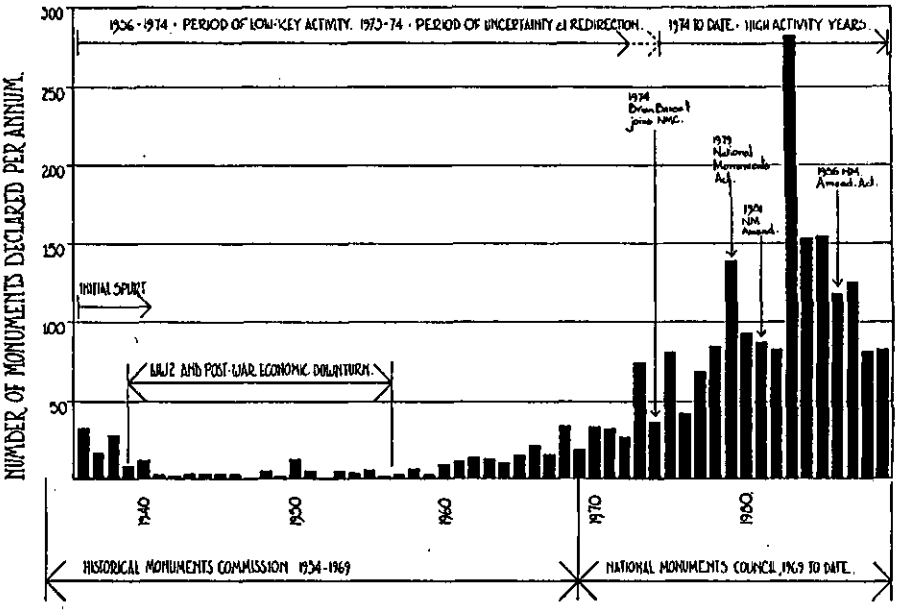
4. Omer-Cooper has postulated that apartheid went through three historical stages of development (1987) :

* Baasskap Apartheid, which emerged in the 1930s with Afrikaner nationalism and was moulded by white supremacist ideologies from Europe. However it was only put forward as a formal political platform in 1948 by the Nationalist Party under Malan. It probably reached its climax in 1961 with the transformation of South Africa into an Afrikaner-ruled republic, although vestigial elements survive to the present day.

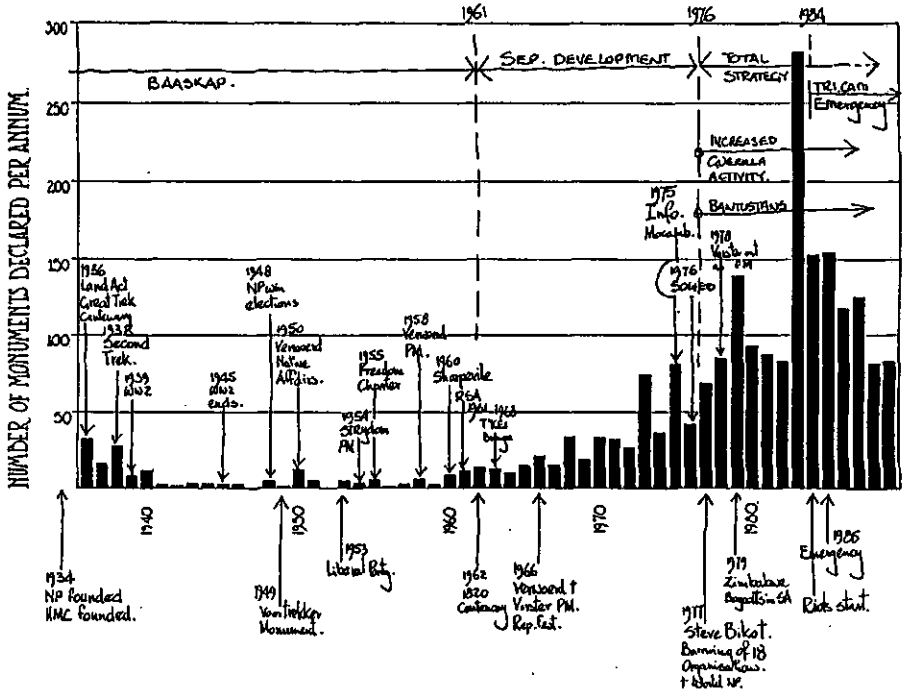
* Separate Development, which sought to give racism a veneer of political legitimacy by formalising colonial policies of land segregation and labour exploitation into an ideology of providing the various racial groups with separate-but-equal facilities. This began to break down after 1973 when changing social and political pressures inside the country began to bring about significant alterations in the South African economy.

* Multi-racial co-option, which coincides with rising ANC political and military activity inside the country, widespread social unrest, increasing militarisation of white political structures, military adventurism both without and within the country, and attempts to impose increasingly repressive legislation and censorship as part of a policy of "Total Strategy". This stage effectively came to an end in 1989.

During this time the work of the HMC and its successor, the NMC may be seen to act as a broad reflection of these social patterns (figure 5). Before 1960 the declaration of national monuments was relatively low


NUMBER OF MONUMENTS DECLARED PER ANNUM.
300
250
200
150
100
50
1936-1974 · PERIOD OF LOW-KEY ACTIVITY. 1973-74 · PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY & REDIRECTION.
1974 TO DATE · HIGH ACTIVITY YEARS.
INITIAL SPURT
WW2 AND POST-WAR ECONOMIC DOWNTURN.
1974 Brian Bacon & joins NMC.
1979 National Monuments Act.
1981 NM Amend.
1986 NM Amend. Act.
1940
1950
1960
1970
1980
HISTORICAL MONUMENTS COMMISSION 1934-1969
NATIONAL MONUMENTS COUNCIL 1969 TO DATE.

4.


NUMBER OF MONUMENTS DECLARED PER ANNUM.
300
250
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150
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50
1961
1976
1984
BAASKAP.
SEP. DEVELOPMENT
TOTAL STRATEGY
TRI.CAM Emergency
INCREASED GUERILLA ACTIVITY.
BANTUSTANS
1975 Info. Mocamb.
1976 SOWETO
1978 Vorster out PM
1936 Land Act Great Trek Centenary
1938 Second Trek.
1939 WW2
1945 WW2 ends.
1948 NP win elections
1950 Verwoerd Native Affairs.
1954 Strydom PM
1955 Freedom Charter
1958 Verwoerd PM.
1960 Sharpeville
RSA
1961
1968 TKEI Bridge
1940
1950
1960
1970
1980
1934 NP founded HMC founded.
1949 Voortrekker Monument.
1953 Liberal Pty.
1962 1820 Centenary
1966 Verwoerd & Vorster PM. Rep. Fest.
1977 Steve Biko t. Burning of 18 Organisations. & World NP.
1979 Zimbabwe Bogotts in SA
1986 Emergency
Riots start.

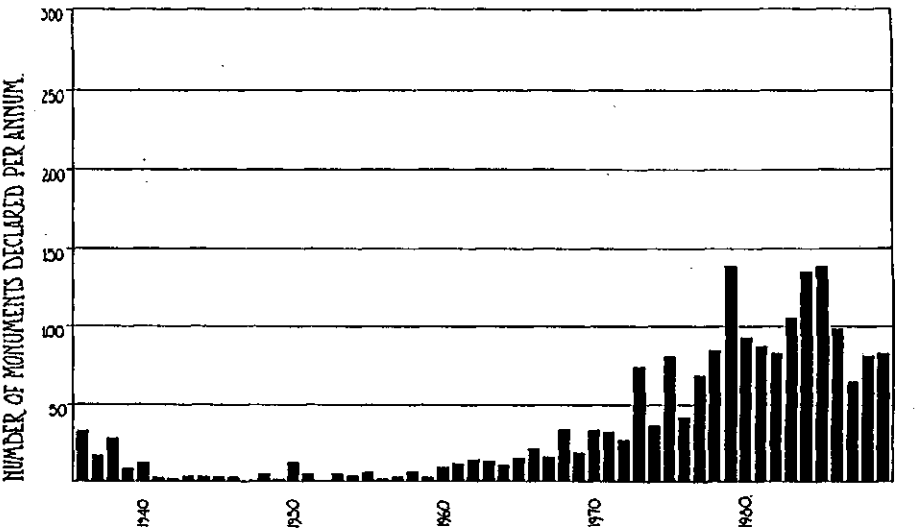
5.

key, marked only by an initial spurt between 1936 and 1938 and another in 1950. The tempo picked up perceptibly after 1960, the year of Sharpeville and the State of Emergency, and showed a slow but marked upward trend over the next 15 years. This reached a high point in 1975 following the independence of Angola and Mocambique and the breaking of the so-called "Info Scandal". In 1976, the year of the Soweto uprising, was relatively quiet for the NMC but the upward swing was picked up again the following year when Steve Biko was murdered and eighteen community organisations, including World newspaper, were banned. The period from 1976 onward was marked by the establishment of "bantustans" as "independent states", rising guerilla activity within the country and increased mass action. This also marks the high point in NMC activity, and between 1983 and 1987, the years of greatest governmental oppression yet in this country, the Council created 826 monuments, 38% of the total number ever declared. Significantly once the incidence of violence began to decrease in 1988, so then the number of declarations show a marked decrease, reaching levels comparable to those experienced in the late 1970s.

Although during the 1980s popular resistance to white minority government was countrywide, much of this struggle was focused upon the eastern Cape, a region generally acknowledged to be the heartland of ANC support. It is significant therefore that, when the number of monuments declared annually in this region between 1983 and 1987 is deducted from the national totals, the chart undergoes a dramatic transformation (figure 6). The all-time high of 1983 is reduced substantially while other totals, although still inflated, appear to be more in accord with the national average since 1978. Data indicates that in 1983 61% of monuments declared were located in the eastern Cape, whilst in 1987 this figure was 49%.

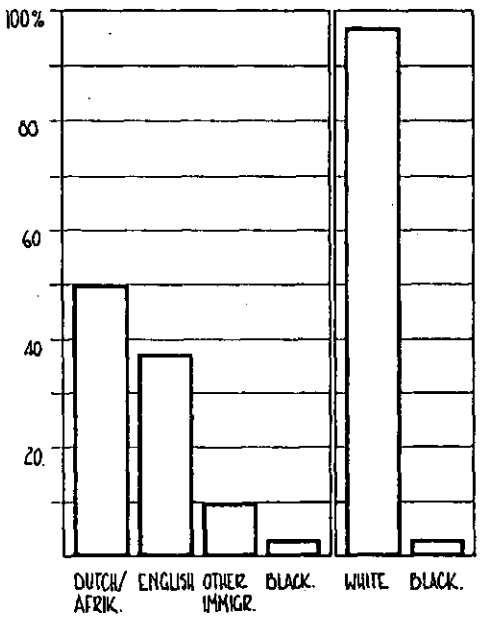
5. The distribution of monuments among various language and culture groups indicates that the work of the HMC/NMC has generally focused upon the material culture of white Dutch settlers to this country. 97% of all declared monuments reflect the values of the immigrant white community whilst the remaining 3% represent the art, architecture and artifacts of 84% of this country's population (figure 7). The majority of these were archaeological sites or the location of San wall art, thereby perpetuating white supremacist stereotypes of indigenous South Africans as a group of rural and poorly educated peasants possessing little material culture of any note. The full breakdown, in percentages, is as follows (figure 8) :

6

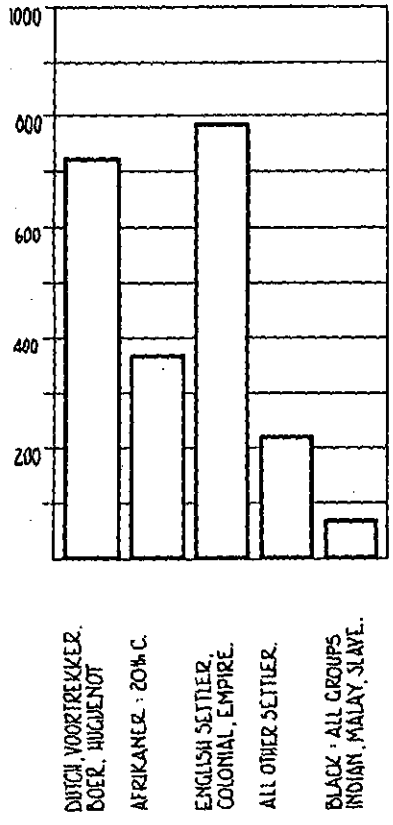


1983-87 FIGURES ADJUSTED TO REMOVE E.CAPE.

7.

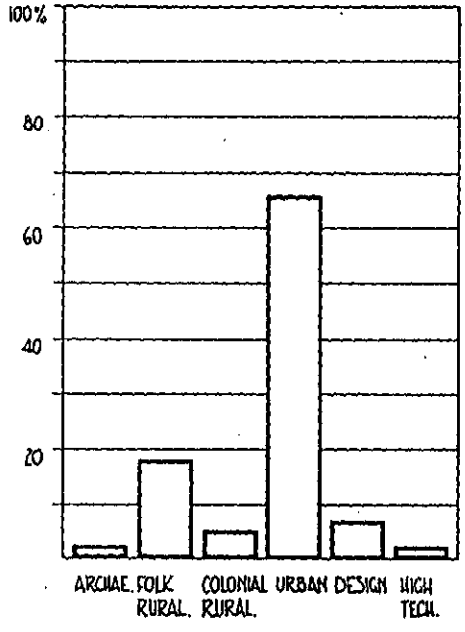


DISTRIBUTION OF MONUMENTS PER POPULATION GROUPING



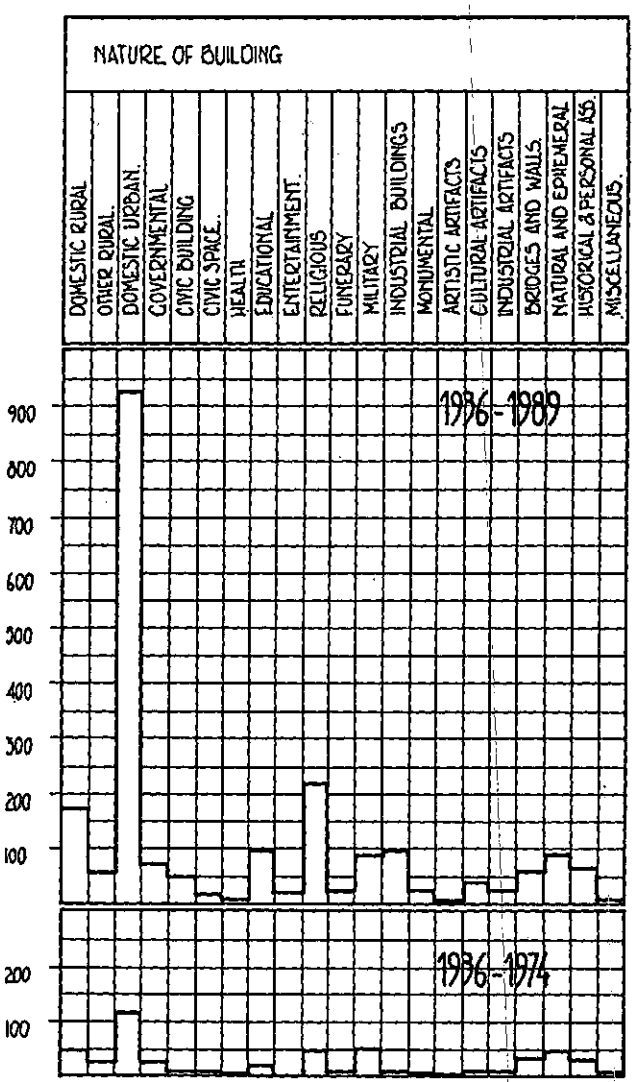
DISTRIBUTION OF MONUMENTS PER POPULATION GROUPING

8.



ARCHITECTURAL STATUS

9.



TYPES OF MONUMENTS DECLARED

Dutch, including Voortrekker, Boer and Huguenot	33%
Afrikaner, 20th century	17%
English, including 1820 settler, colonial and Empire	37%
All other white settler	10%
Black, including all indigenous, Indian, Malay, Slave and Griqua	3%

8. The work of the HMC/NMC has focused predominantly upon urban sites, which comprised 66% of all declarations, while only 17% were located in rural areas (figure 9). 9% of the total were also concerned with structures which could be considered to have a modern or high technology component, the majority being bridges or an assortment of mechanical artifacts. Examples where colonial architecture has attempted to find an accommodation with local values and traditions have largely been ignored. This is probably indicative of a mind set which has not progressed much beyond a frontier mentality, seeking to emphasise immigrant roots and to justify a white presence at the tip of an otherwise "dark" continent. The extension of the national monument ethic to cover more recent architectural aesthetics, such as Modernism and Art Deco, seems to strengthen this viewpoint. It also seems to indicate that the majority of officials employed by the NMC originate predominantly from urban, white, bourgeois backgrounds and have little in the way of inclination, knowledge or travel budgets to venture beyond the city confines.

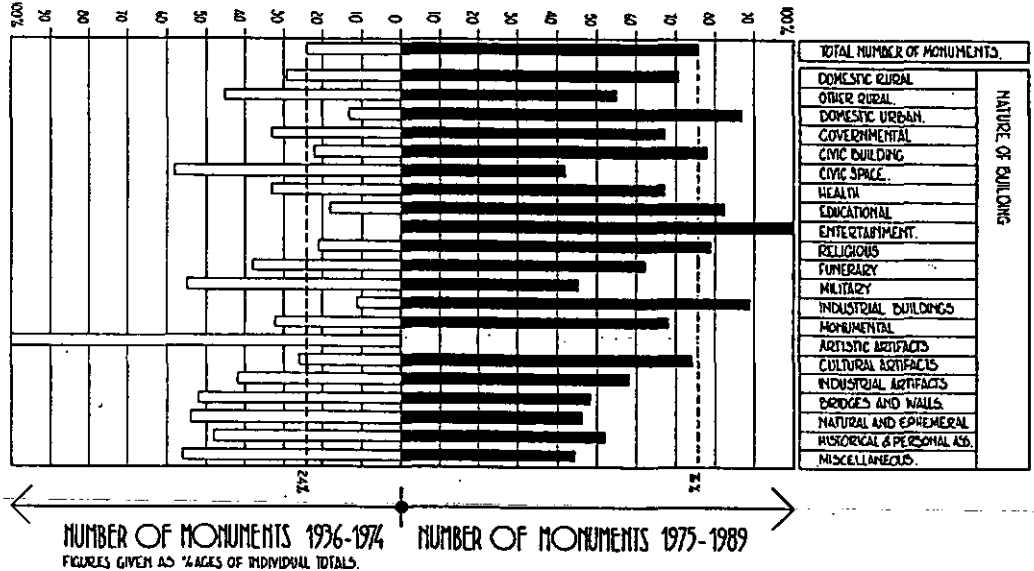
7. Analysis also indicates that 43% of declared national monuments, originally fulfilled a domestic function, while 11% were of a religious nature. The remainder served a wide variety of governmental, industrial and public uses (figure 10).

8. 76% of all national monuments were declared after 1974, when Brian Bassett joined the NMC. Understandably the concerns of the HMC/NMC have not remained consistent over the years and, in some cases, have shown extreme fluctuations. For example, all listed theaters and hotels were declared after 1974 although no artistic artifacts have been listed since that time. Similarly there has been a marked increase in the number of listed industrial buildings and urban domestic structures, while there has been a considerable drop in civic spaces, military installations, bridges, walls and natural features (figure 11).

As a result of their enlightened work the HMC/NMC have managed to identify and immortalise some prime examples of South Africa's cultural heritage. These include the following architectural gems :

* Hendrik Verwoerd's house at Betty's Bay, which was

11.


TOTAL NUMBER OF MONUMENTS.
DOMESTIC RURAL
OTHER RURAL.
DOMESTIC URBAN.
GOVERNMENTAL
CIVIC BUILDING
CIVIC SPACE.
HEALTH
EDUCATIONAL
ENTERTAINMENT.
RELIGIOUS
FUNERARY
MILITARY
INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS
MONUMENTAL
ARTISTIC ARTIFACTS
CULTURAL ARTIFACTS
INDUSTRIAL ARTIFACTS
BRIDGES AND WALLS.
NATURAL AND EPHEMERAL
HISTORICAL & PERSONAL ASS.
MISCELLANEOUS.
NATURE OF BUILDING
NUMBER OF MONUMENTS 1936-1974
NUMBER OF MONUMENTS 1975-1989
FIGURES GIVEN AS %AGES OF INDIVIDUAL TOTALS.

canonised in December 1973. Known as "Blaas 'n Bietjie", it is reputed to have been designed in 1961 by a man better known as the "Architect of Apartheid".

* The Victoria Tower in Uitenhage, which apart from being an outstanding colonial landmark, is also the local Security Police Headquarters.
* The birthplace of Gen Louis Botha, which is essentially a piece of barren ground, for the house, which was a simple mud-wall structure, has long since crumbled away.

Among the artifacts which the HMC/NMC has lovingly preserved for posterity we can find nine pieces of artillery whose potential for demolition remains somewhat suspect; a historic hyena trap, found on the farm Bluegum House, in Graaff-Reinet; eighteen water pumps which, it is claimed, sum up the cultural heritage of Jagersfontein; and the first aircraft engine manufactured in South Africa, which is in the tender care of the Bloemfontein Museum.

The Monuments Council has also paid particular attention to the historic, and rapidly vanishing craft of digging holes in the ground. The "Aandenk" borehole, at Allanridge, in the OFS, is reputed to be a prime example of its genre, whilst those wishing to fill in the railway tunnel at Waterval Boven will find their way barred by an angry crowd of NMC officials.

The demands of horticultural historians and arboreal architects have also been well catered for. Van Riebeeck's hedge, in the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, and remains of the same in Klaasen Road, Bishopscourt, are both listed monuments. Lovers of leafy lushness and luxuriant lumber can also visit an orange tree on the farm Groot Heksrivier, in Citrusdal, a figtree on a vacant lot in Church Street, Durban, a raffia palm grove at Mtunzini, and an acacia tree in Pietermaritzburg. They can also mourn over one syringa tree stump in Rustenburg, which marks the spot where the Reformed Church of South Africa came into existence. Significantly, this piece of ground was donated to the conservative "Dopper" community by an Indian businessman, a fact which is conveniently omitted from the NMC's public documentation (Oberholster, 1972).

An interesting item which also features in the NMC's listings is the engraved names of Ensign Oloff Bergh, Captain Jesse Slotsbo and Ensign IT Rhenius at Vanrhynsdorp, which only goes to show that today's vandalism could potentially be tomorrow's national monument.

In contrast to this trivia, many sites important to the study of Black South African history have never been recognised. These include :

* the home of Solomon Plaatje
* Freedom Square, in Kliptown
* the burial grounds of our early leaders, such as Nongqawuse, Bambata, Sekhukhuni, Hintsa, Nxele, Sandile,

Sarhili, Jonker Afrikaner, Maharero, Dingiswayo, Dinizulu, Faku and many, many others

* Bulhoek, where the Israelites were massacred in 1920
* Gandhi's home at Phoenix, outside Durban
* the historical settlement at Mapungubwe, near Messina, which dates back to 1050 AD and is the earliest capital of what was to become the Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe. Today this site is occupied by the SADF who use it as an artillery range.
* the fortified villages of Mukumbani and Mutele, in Venda.

Quite clearly therefore HMC/NMC policy since 1936 has been concerned predominantly with white, Dutch and Afrikaner domestic structures mostly located in the Cape Province. Significantly the number of declarations affecting the material culture of rural Afrikaners is particularly low. However a glimpse of Government policy since 1948, which used urbanisation as a means of reducing levels of rural white poverty, reveals that this lack is probably owed to a wish to submerge, or even falsify, the historical record of its own people.

It is also obvious that the policy of monumentalising our built environment has been used, consciously or unconsciously, to reinforce white political strategies and to create a myth of white legitimacy in the region at the time that this has been most challenged by indigenous groups wishing to cast off the burden of political and economic repression.

The relationship between the HMC/NMC and ruling political ideology also needs to be examined. Since 1969 about 71 people have been nominated to the NMC Council. Of these 54 have been Afrikaans speaking, only three have been women and two have originated from outside the white community. At least 12 are known members of the Broederbond, the secret society of Afrikaners which, since 1919, has sought to regulate South Africa's political, economic and cultural life. These include FD Conradie, Member of Parliament for Oranjezicht, membership number 4765; Prof JJ Oberholster, membership number 4444, who was a member of the Council from 1951 to 1976 and in 1977 became its first Executive Director; Dr WA Cruywagen, former Minister of Education; and H Sloet, Director of FAK (Wilkins and Strydom 1978). The latter two are still sitting members of the NMC Council and chair its two most important Committees.

OPEN AIR MUSEUMS

The idea of a "museum" as a building dedicated to the specialised storage, preservation and display of natural and man-made curiosities is peculiar to nineteenth century European and Western society. In more recent times this concept has been extended to the preservation of the historical built environments, most notably in Europe and North America, where the "open air museum" was initially

developed. However, when local museums have attempted implement similar measures in the context of indigenous folk and vernacular architecture, they have been presented with a number of practical and moral dilemmas unique to the South African condition.

Invariably such projects have fallen under the aegis of semi-governmental structures reflecting an ethnocentric philosophy. Almost without exception they have all been harnessed to the justify the ideological premises underlying the establishment of "ethnic" Bantustans. Detractors of such a policy have charged that open-air museums are little better than vehicles for Nationalist propaganda. At best they are misrepresentative of the people and the culture they purport to promote; at worst they are demeaning to visitors and visited alike. Museum officials, on the other hand, point with some justification to the ephemeral nature of the indigenous built environment, and its rapid rate of destruction under the onslaught of modernisation.

During the 1950s a number of South African artists and academics found themselves attracted by the rich textures and colours they perceived in the rural buildings of the Transvaal highveld about them. This was most particularly true of the sculptured architecture and decorative wall motifs of the South Ndebele living north of Pretoria and in the Bronkhorstspruit/Groblersdal districts, whose polychromatic wall art began to blossom from the 1930s onwards. Artists and architects, such as Barrie Biermann, Constance Stewart-Larrabee, Alexis Preller and Dick Findlay, all conducted regular forays into the Transvaal countryside and returned with sketch-books full of excitement and colour.

In the early 1950's Anton Meiring, professor of Architecture at Pretoria University, documented with his students the extended homestead of the Msiza family, a South Ndebele clan living on the farm Hartbeesfontein, some 10km north of Pretoria (Meiring, 1955). When this group was forced to resettle at the site of their present village near Klipgat, in the district of Odi, now renamed kwaMatabeleng locally, Meiring assisted them in their relocation, their choice of new land and the reconstruction of their new homes. He also obtained for them from the local Native Commissioner the promise of an annual grant of thatching grass, a practice which was maintained until the area fell under the newly-established Bophuthatswanan regional authority in 1977 (Frescura, 1981).

It is a matter of some doubt today whether Meiring's assistance to the Msiza was philanthropically motivated or whether it represented a conscious attempt on his part at establishing their village as a tourist drawcard, thus effectively turning it into southern Africa's first open air cultural museum. Regardless of his motives however, once the Pretoria Tourism Board placed this location on their tour map, the photogenic architecture of kwaMatabeleng became one of the best documented in the region, appearing in an

impressive array of architectural and geographical journals as far afield as France and the USA. It would be true to say therefore that this stream of publicity did much to popularise the South Ndebele's unique and highly graphic style of polychromatic wall decoration, giving it a measure of recognition as one of the world's more picturesque folk arts. It is also conceivable that the Ndebele artist was not unaware of this attention and responded to it with ever increasing flamboyance of colour and design. The implication therefore is also that current Ndebele wall art is, at least in part, the foster-child of a mass media based upon western values and culture.

Despite its subsequent tourist function, kwaMatabeleng began as and, to this very day remains, a viable and economically active community which retains the integrity of its cultural and architectural traditions.

Despite Meiring's efforts at kwaMatabeleng, it was to be nearly a quarter of a century before this experiment was repeated. This was initiated by the Transvaal Museum's Services who, in the mid-1970's, reconstructed a traditional Tsonga settlement at Eiland, near Tzaneen, in the northern Transvaal. The work was directed by anthropologists and archaeologists who were also responsible for the preliminary research and supporting documentation. Although the project suffers from a number of perceivable flaws in its make-up, Eiland must be considered technically to be one of the more successful experiments of its kind in this country to date (TPA Museum's Department, c1979). However, despite some obvious parallels with similar, and well accepted, museums overseas, the local example has been "read" by many foreign visitors in the context of an "apartheid" ideology, leading to accusations that its inhabitants were being made to act like "monkeys in cages".

However, any reservations which may be entertained about the Tsonga open air museum must pale into insignificance when it is compared with the project erected by the Middelburg Municipal Museum at Botshabelo, site of Alexander Merensky's second mission station. The buildings purport to illustrate a hypothetical evolutionary pattern in "traditional" South Ndebele dwelling forms which bear no relationship to either oral history or archaeological evidence, and are credible only to the uninitiated or to the most obtuse. The settlement follows no ordering of a recognisable historical nature and although each square centimeter of wall space has been dutifully decorated in careful emulation of South Ndebele art, the total result lies closer to a tourist-orientated pastiche than it does to the reality it claims to represent.

It could be wished that a lack of architectural integrity is all the criticism that needs be leveled at Botshabelo. Regrettably it is the least of several. It would appear that when the Middelburg Museum builds, it builds forever. Thus, when the organisers of the project first erected their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homestead walls, they dispensed with the traditional clay-and-cowdung mix, which requires permanent residence and regular maintenance, and opted for a cement plaster, which requires neither. However even their sensibilities must have been upset because within a couple of years all the surfaces had been replastered in a more acceptable material. The next problem they encountered lay in the fact that the South Ndebele "traditionally" inhabit their homesteads and that the ones at Botshabelo were singularly bereft of the signs and paraphernalia of human habitation. This dilemma was compounded by the fact that the museum is located within a "White's Only" holiday resort and lies in a region notorious for its political conservatism. This was rapidly resolved however and nowadays the Botshabelo South Ndebele Open Air Museum is inhabited on a daily eight-to-five basis by a group of women, only some of whom are South Ndebele, who bus in and out, and who wear traditional garb during the daytime but otherwise prefer designer jeans and mock-leather handbags.

Botshabelo is undoubtedly well-built, with many of the structures purporting to represent the modern era using absurdly well-measured 90½ angles and sharply plastered corners. It is also uncompromisingly clean, no doubt in an effort to facilitate research of serious scholars. As recently as June 1992 architectural students from the University of Port Elizabeth wishing to conduct field research on South Ndebele architecture, were advised by museum staff in Pretoria to avoid real farmsteads, where they would :

> "... have to talk to people, and step into cow (pats) ..."

but to rather visit Botshabelo, which was every bit as good as the "real" thing.

This advice was probably heeded by designer AH Barrett when, in 1985, he was commissioned by INTERSAPA to produce a definitive stamp issue for the abortive "bantustan" of KwaNdebele. Faced with the prospect of visiting real Ndebele farmers, meeting their families and depicting one of the richest architectural traditions in the world, Barratt opted instead to represent on his stamps the work of a young, white, Pretoria-trained anthropologist. The set, whose four top values all feature views of Botshabelo, was never issued as KwaNdebele's putative "independence" was delayed indefinitely by unprecedented public opposition to the Government.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE AND THE CREATION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

The boundaries of what was to become known as the "Ciskei" were established as early as 1913 when parts of this region were set aside by the Union Government for exclusive black settlement. During the 1960s and 1970s the area was used by South Africa as a dumping ground for the forcible resettlement of many black residents of the Cape. As a

result some villages became little better than rural slums where unemployment and starvation were endemic. The Visagie survey of 1978 found that kwashiokor affected 27% of all infants in the 6 to 23 month age group. As late as 1985 the Herman/Windham study established that between 1970 and 1983 approximately one infant in every five born in the region died before reaching the age of five. In 1980 the Quail Commission stated that 95% of Ciskeian workers in employment held jobs in white South Africa.

When the Ciskei opted for "independence" in 1981 under the South African Government's "Bantustan" policy, it did so with the consent of only a small minority of its population and against the specific recommendations of its appointed consultants. In the process it inherited a legacy of poverty unequalled in modern-day southern Africa.

The Ciskei is also unique among South Africa's rural "homelands" in that it has absolutely no basis upon which to claim a separate ethnic, cultural or linguistic homogeneity. There is no distinctive Ciskeian identity, no separate Ciskeian culture, nor is there a Ciskeian language. Instead its people are intrinsically bound within a larger Xhosa identity and, in terms of the South African Government's ethnophobia, should have achieved independence as part of a larger Transkeian unit.

If the want of a sound economic base to the region did little to deter the Ciskeian leadership from accepting independence, then the lack of a distinct ethnic identity would not have caused them too many sleepless nights either. Acting under the leadership of former President, the Honorable Chief Dr Lennox Sebe, a they set about inventing one. This involved the proclamation of an annual holy day, somewhat akin in spirit to the Swazi first-fruits celebration. An audience was provided by the Ciskeian Civil Service, whose attendance was made compulsory under threat of dismissal. The site chosen for this festivity was on top of a mountain called Ntaba kaNdoda, and was the brainchild of Sebe himself, who conceived it in 1977 following a visit to Mount Massada, in Israel. The National Shrine, looking like an oversized African mask, cost some R860 000, and was funded by compulsory deductions made from the salaries of Civil Servants. Alongside it is incorporated a "Hero's Acre", in obvious emulation of a similar plot in Pretoria, and the alleged bones of Chief Maqoma, a Xhosa leader who opposed white colonial rule, were materialised from an unmarked grave on Robben Island and reinterred there. Finally the Ciskei was provided with a capital city, named Bisho. At the heart of this complex, costing some R158 million, are a huge sport stadium, a new Legislative Assembly, office blocks housing the Ciskeian civil service, the headquarters for the Security Police, and a Presidential palace (Vail, 1989). The architectural style chosen to embody the new Ciskeian spirit and sense of identity was Post-Modernism, a self-conscious aesthetic based upon a neo-classical grammar of building which originated in North America. The development of Bisho,

the Ciskei's new capital, must then be viewed in the context of these factors. The town lies some six kilometers north of King William's Town on the main road linking the Cape to the Transkei and Natal. Its location was dictated by a wish on the part of the Ciskei to place an economic stranglehold upon the white community of King William's Town who, Democratic, Nationalist, Conservative and HNP party supporters alike, stood united against incorporation into the homeland. When questioned on the subject residents pointed, with some reason, to the Ciskei's long history of political and economic mismanagement : the location of a new hospital below the flood plain of the Keiskamma River by Israeli "experts"; the building of a multi-million Rand "international" airport outside Bisho which has yet to be used; the proposed erection of an equally expensive "international" hotel nearby; the purchase of a R36 million jet aircraft which could not obtain a permit to fly and was eventually sold as scrap for R10; and a string of internecine rifts, vigilante violence, attempted coups d'etat, military invasions and bribery scandals which have typified its administration.

The visitor approaching Bisho is immediately struck by the surrealistic image of a town rising abruptly out of the landscape. The odd juxtaposition of a stranded CBD, ready-made and unsupported by a residential component, against a backdrop of wide-open veld, is bizarre to say the least. As evening approaches, day-trippers disappear into the veld leaving the streets empty for the goats that amble along, "wending their weary way" from nowhere to nowhere.

The Master Plan for the town has clearly been disregarded by the architects, as buildings jostle with each other, each clamoring for attention. Neighbours are rudely ignored and spaces between buildings carelessly abandoned to dust and litter.

The buildings are treated in the Post-Modern idiom, a style of architecture which is prescribed by the town's building regulations, making Bisho the world's first, and probably only, wholly post-modernist settlement. Ironically, virtually no references are drawn from the region or Xhosa culture. Unimpeded by the constraints of an established urban setting and a sophisticated and critical audience, the architects have had a field day. Bisho is a town that is as unlovely as it is apparently unloved. Perhaps Italo Calvino was right when he said that "a town without old buildings is like a man without a memory"; but the problem with Bisho lies not only in its lack of old buildings but in the quality of the new.

In 1981 the Ciskei also commissioned the construction of a Ciskei Museum of National Culture. Its American funders and various local experts advised that such a complex should focus upon job generation, the provision of alternative educational facilities, and the promotion of rural cottage crafts. They also advocated that it should be sited within an existing urban fabric, such as could be found at

Keiskammahoek. Despite this Sebe decided that it should be located at Ntaba kaNdoda, as part of the National Shrine complex, and eighteen kilometers from the nearest population centres. Estimated to cost some R23 million, the project was abandoned in 1990, following the Ciskei's military coup, with little work having been completed. Its architect is now believed to be touting the project to the ANC in the Eastern Cape, albeit under a new title.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the problems which faces the practice of architecture in South Africa today is its perceived status in a divided society. On the one side architects claim for themselves the license of artists, the skills of crafters, and the leadership of management. Architectural work, they claim, is apolitical. It should be adjudged on its aesthetic and technical merits, and sold on the open market to the highest bidder. On the other side the wider community is fully cognisant of the contributory role played by the built environment in their economic and political oppression. South African indigenous architecture is steeped in social, religious and mystical values, and thus the symbols and meanings of white architecture are known and understood at a far wider level than is generally appreciated.

Few architects may claim with any honesty that the political import of the NMC's policies was not evident to them long before now. Similarly professional designers must have been aware that the post-modernist glories they were creating in Bisho were reinforcing the bitterness of a rural community long dispossessed of its land, its voice and its economic power. Yet, to the present day, the architectural profession persists in defending its involvement with both. The South Ndebele Museum at Botshabelo is not, strictly speaking, the work of professional designers, but the local community is unaware of this fine distinction and perceives that their own built environment has been plundered by architects for the benefit of white entrepreneurs. Architecture, therefore it is claimed, has become a tool for the oppression, the dispossession and the division of underprivileged communities.

This attitude stands in sharp contrast to conditions in the village of KwaMatabeleng, which has not only retained control of its own built environment, but its residents have called in architectural consultants in order to exploit its obvious aesthetic charms to their larger economic benefit.

In a greater sense, these three examples exploit the built environment and misuse its symbols in order to create new myths and reinforce existing misconceptions. Here architecture is no longer seen as a means of housing the activities of a community, but rather as a strategy for establishing pseudo-ethnic identities serving the interests of cultural separation and exclusivity. Seen in these terms the built environment is reduced to a series of political

symbols, to be used, abused, and manipulated by an elite able to afford the services of the specialist designer. Unfortunately the South African architectural profession has failed to learn the lessons of history : that the interests of architecture and those of political elitism are often synonymous.

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