

‘SEE PRETORIA THROUGH NEW EYES’: Modernism, memory, and the apartheid city

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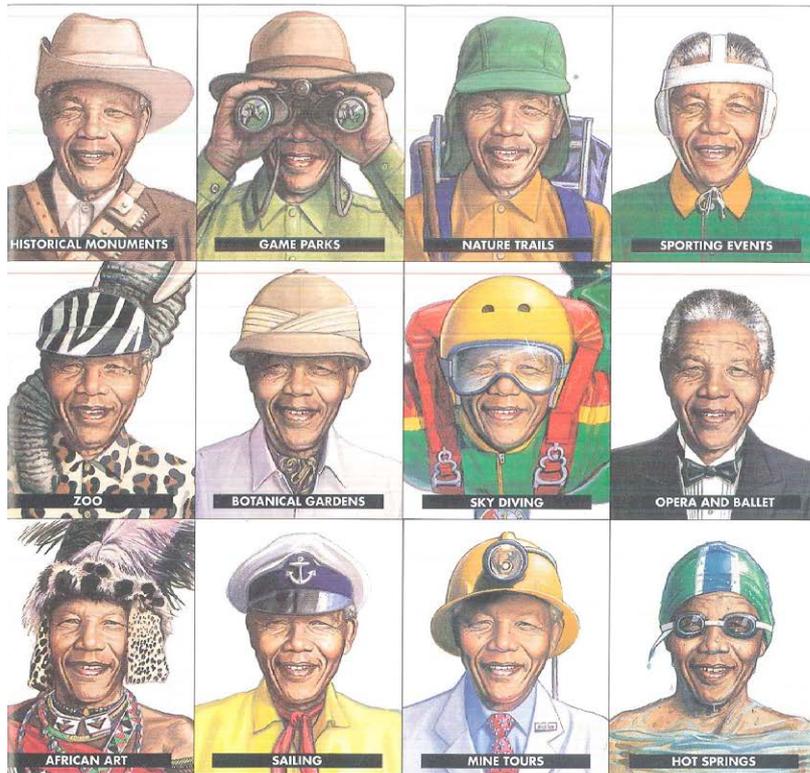
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ABSTRACT

This essay starts out with a reflection on a 1996 advertisement for Pretoria, featuring twelve images of Nelson Mandela in different costumes, each representing a tourist site or leisure activity in the city. It goes on to argue, however, that the pleasurable ‘seeing Pretoria with new eyes’ the advertisement touts is not all that is required for a new interdisciplinary scholarly account of the city’s history: we need to consider the complexities, or even confusions at stake in apartheid-era Pretoria, a city that was—like apartheid itself—both aggressively modern and retrograde. As an instigation for further scholarship, the essay offers some reflections on Pretoria’s built environment and, drawing on the work of memory, suggests what it was like for a young person to navigate the disconcerting—almost uncanny—nature of the city in the years right before the Soweto uprising

Keywords: Pretoria, Strijdom Square, Sterland, Poynton Building, uncanny, Nelson Mandela, Derek Hook, Ato Quayson, Jacob Dlamini.

I start this meditation with a document redolent of the golden years of the Mandela republic. I first saw it in 1996 in the hands of a fellow passenger on a British Airways flight to Cape Town. Fascinated, I wondered if I should knock her on the head and grab it, or if, by luck, it might be in the inflight magazine, *High Life*, which meant that I would have a copy in my seat pocket. Fortunately, that turned out to be the case. The image that entranced me was an advertisement for Pretoria, the city where I was born. It featured twelve pictures of Nelson Mandela wearing different outfits and headdresses, all representing different activities and attractions in the city (Figure 1).



**SEE PRETORIA THROUGH NEW EYES.
HE DID.**

It's quite understandable if, in the past, your perceptions of Pretoria were a little jaundiced. But, today, the Rainbow Nation reigns supreme in South Africa's administrative capital. And it's time you viewed its many attractions through new eyes. For Pretoria is a city of colourful contrasts, a veritable window on Africa. A city where jazz, hot from the townships, vies with the rums and clatter of the busy city centre, the peace and tranquillity of its numerous nature trails and game parks are pierced only by birdsong and the haunting calls of the wild. And it's a place that offers you everything from the most up-to-date sporting and convention facilities to five star hotels

and the humblest of inexpensive guest houses.

So whether your tastes run to Picasso and Pierneef or you're captivated by the earthy splendour of our indigenous African Art; whether you'd enjoy spelunking in the Sterkfontein Caves where the three million year-old skull of Mrs Ples was discovered or would like to try your luck at a neon-lit casino or two, make sure Pretoria and its surrounds feature strongly on your itinerary when you visit South Africa. You'll end up seeing Pretoria through new eyes too!

For further information, telephone the Director of Marketing and Communications at 27-(0)12-313-8018, fax us at 27-(0)12-324-2380 or write to PO Box 440, Pretoria 0001, South Africa.



'n Lekker place to be.

* This colloquial mixture of English and Afrikaans can only be inadequately translated as meaning something like, "A wonderful place to be".

THE AGENCY 2552

FIGURE **Nº 1**



'SEE PRETORIA THROUGH NEW EYES'.

Today it may well strike us as a piece of ‘new South Africa’ kitsch, reminiscent of those Mandela paper dolls one used to find for sale, complete with a set of costumes to don and doff: an elegant suit, a prison uniform, a Springbok rugby jersey, a colorful Madiba shirt, and so forth. Like the dolls, the advertisement alludes to the deft sartorial choices that characterised Mandela’s performances of political reconciliation. Here too, the gear changes, but the face remains identical; it is, in fact, the smiling portrait of the silver-haired Mandela that appeared on the ballot papers in 1994.

The advertisement’s amusing play of sameness and difference reveals the fundamental operations of ‘Madiba magic’: the reiterable, loveable icon symbolically holds together South Africa’s cultural incommensurabilities—what Jean and John Comaroff (2012:2) might call its ‘endemic polyculturalism.’ The advertisement co-opts Mandela’s symbolic multivalence for the city that, as apartheid’s capital, was once a synecdoche for one thing only: state-ordained racism. In so doing, it registers the transformed possibilities that have opened up for black South Africans, for whom the capital city was once rife with interdictory spaces.¹ And it aims, of course, to transform the audience. The slogan, ‘SEE PRETORIA WITH NEW EYES. HE DID,’ invites you and me to emulate Mandela’s gift for change: the magazine reader can mutate into the post-apartheid tourist, with the great man’s blessing.

But the curious thing to note, especially in the context of this gathering of essays on Pretoria, is that the addressee does not actually get to look at the city at all. To be sure, the small print does describe it as ‘a city of colorful contrasts, a veritable window on Africa, a city where jazz, hot from the townships, vies with the strains of opera and ballet, a place where, just minutes from the rumble and clatter of the busy city center, the peace and tranquility of its numerous nature trails and game parks are disturbed only by birdsong and the haunting calls of the wild.’ But, even though the copy claims that the city provides a ‘veritable window on Africa,’ the advertisement provides no window at all. We are instead locked into what Lize van Robbroeck (2014:250-253) has theorised as the specular state of national narcissism. Applying Lacan’s understanding of the mirror stage of psychological development, she suggests that Mandela is our Big Other in whose idealised image we may find compensation for our lost infantile omnipotence. To respond to the advertisement’s slogan is, in Van Robbroeck’s argument, to be interpellated by a national parental imago.

This is a compelling account and one that offers a necessary reconsideration of Mandela’s iconic meaning. I myself have interpreted the advertisement more simply and somewhat differently. The advertisement is to me pure myth, in the precise sense developed in Roland Barthes’s classic work from the 1950s: *Mythologies*. While the slogan, SEE PRETORIA WITH NEW EYES, acknowledges historical

1. It is poignant to remember that before his release from prison, Nelson Mandela only came to the Pretoria to stand trial in its courtrooms. See Karin van Marle’s contribution in this issue.

change, the illustration does the opposite: by equating such diverse institutions as the gold mine and the Voortrekker Monument, it erases their specific histories and socio-political significance. Both become pure spectacle. By celebrating the exciting contrast between, say, 'opera' and 'African jazz' (both now available to the tourist as commodified experiences), the advertisement does not encourage us to bring the histories of these forms to mind (Barnard 1998:138-140).

And some of these histories are quite remarkable. For Pretoria, soporific as it might seem on a dusty, sun-struck afternoon, has a dramatic urban history—of progress and stagnation, of comfort and repression, of pride and abjection, of official exclusiveness and *de facto* mixture, of monuments and oblivion, of brutality and dull bureaucracy. The city has seen wars, rebellions, protests, historic trials and funerals, massacres, bombings, and inaugurations—even though its daily life can feel rather boring: a matter of the suburban ordinariness in extraordinarily good weather. Given this drama, the scholar's visual archive of the place cannot include only sunny images of jacarandas and the Union Buildings from picture postcards and glossy propaganda magazines; it must extend, for instance, to such items as the pixelated photos of mutilated bodies, victims or wounded survivors of apartheid-era bombings (the memory of which seems to be kept alive these days only on right-wing websites).

But since 'opera' is evoked in the advertisement, let us rather consider for a moment the transformations of the few blocks around Pretoria's State Theatre and the nearby Strijdom Square, a space that has also been discussed by Van Eeden and Van Marle in their contributions to this special issue. This mini-urban history involves construction and destruction, grandiose planning and bizarre contingency. The square first was a dusty place where, in the mid-nineteenth century, subsistence farmers came in from the platteland with their wagons to sell produce. Next, in the late nineteenth century, it saw the construction of a grand covered market building: this was the site of a museum, of the celebratory opening of the newly constructed railway to Mozambique, and of the trial of the Jameson raiders. In the 1960s, this building (which eventually became known as the Indian market) was demolished and the Indian-owned shops nearby were removed to the segregated Laudium. And by the 1970s, the square, now paved in austere granite, had become a prime location for the display of apartheid's dominance. On it arose a gigantic white dome housing a most disconcerting sculpture: a disembodied twelve foot-high copper face of the former Prime Minister, JG Strijdom. In 1978, a thirty-three story-high Volkskas Bank building was erected alongside it (with explicitly nationalistic aesthetic aims).²

2. I am indebted here and throughout to Derek Hook's (2013:18-25) splendid chapter, 'The monumental uncanny,' in *(Post)apartheid conditions: Psychoanalysis and social formation* and Melinda Silverman's (1999:141) chapter "Ons bou vir die Bank': Nationalism, architecture, and Volkskas Bank' in *Blank _____: Architecture, apartheid, and after*.

It should already be evident that Strijdom Square is compelling in its contradictions and ironies. An aspiration to be ‘modern’ was evident (the Volkskas building, for instance, sported such novel design elements as external elevators); but so, too, was a harking back to a retrograde totalitarian cult of personality (at least in the aesthetic style—for the forgettable JG Strijdom, ironically enough, had little personality beyond party loyalty and stubbornness). But the history goes on. Even Ivan Vladislavić, the South African writer most fascinated by the strangeness of monuments³—no accident, perhaps, that he was born in Pretoria—could not have invented the story of how on 31 May 2001, the Strijdom head fell down and, by dint of its own colossal weight, burst through the granite paving of the square into the subterranean parking lot, thereby also bringing down the vaulting—but, it turned out, quite fragile—arch that seemed designed to give shelter to that hideous head for eternity. The fact that this collapse occurred exactly forty years to the day after the Republic of South Africa was declared is sinisterly serendipitous. Today the State Theatre is still in operation, but no longer as an assertion of South Africa’s European cultural heritage or apartheid’s triumph. As Derek Hook (2005:703) points out, the square has to some extent reverted to its old aspect: a public space, where vendors flog their wares, homeless people take shelter, and photographers offer to take a picture of you with Mandela, or even, strange to say, with Strijdom, who no longer holds much terror.

Two thoughts arise for me from this fascinating story. First, I am struck again by the significant symbolic and aesthetic change that the transition to democracy brought about (something we often forget in our disappointment with the present). The Strijdom Square was, as Hook describes it, a site of monumental political affirmation and, indeed, political intimidation, with the eyes of Strijdom’s vast visage (unattractively acne-pitted, as I recall, because of the texture of the metal sculpture) coldly meeting the gaze of passers-by. The strangely severed head, ‘disproportionately massive,’ was intended to suggest the essence of leadership; ‘unchallengeable, unchanging,’ it was a ‘positively foreboding icon’ (Hook 2013:25). This conception of leadership is, of course, quite antithetical to that expressed in the endearing, small, ever modulating, and no less iconic Mandela images in the advertisement we started out with. The replacement of the one by the other explains something about the joy and relief that accompanied South Africa’s ‘miracle’ regime change. Second, I would note that while the advertisement offers us a simple pleasure, that of feeling good about the capital city’s transformation and about ourselves, there is a far more complex pleasure in savoring the transformation and eventual fate of the Strijdom monument. To really see Pretoria with new eyes, it seems to me, would require not the tautological narcissism and ahistorical mythmaking of the multiple

3. See his short story ‘Propaganda by monuments’ in the volume *Propaganda by monuments and other stories* (Johannesburg: David Philip, 1996).

Mandelas, but a rather uncomfortable retrospect. Such a backward gaze should recognise the traumatic or uncanny aspects of the apartheid-era past and be aware that it afflicted both black and white subjects, however differently.

Two interpretations of the Freudian uncanny are particularly helpful to my thinking here. For Derek Hook (2013:30-46), Freud's essay offers a way of grasping what he sees as the peculiar subjectivity (or intersubjectivity) of certain places, including the Strijdom Square: a site that, in his view, effects unhealthy and even vicious forms of interpellation (about which more later). The 'uncanny monument' does this, in Hook's view, because it blurs the distinction between the animate and the inanimate and also the past and present, thereby generating a disconcerting experience of temporality: a kind of inverted *déjà vu* or doubling. It is precisely the quasi-ontological distress that accompanies such indistinctions—the discomfiting discovery that the *Heimlich* is present in the *Unheimlich* and that the past hemorrhages into the present—that produces the characteristic feelings of creepy anxiety Freud associates with the uncanny. For Ato Quayson (2003:78-82), who has also applied Freud's work to Southern Africa, this ontological distress is also crucial, especially in colonial and postcolonial situations. Drawing on the work of the psychoanalyst Yolanda Gumpel, Quayson suggests that uncanny structures of feelings are often prevalent in violent social contexts, or ones that transmit extremely paradoxical messages. The resulting sense of systemic disorder breaks down the ego and then reconstructs it in ambiguous manner (a process akin to what Hook sees as the uncanny monument's interpellation) in 'a space between anxiety and terror.' Quayson therefore declines to separate trauma and the uncanny too sharply: though the latter is productive of anxiety, one might perhaps say, and the former of terror, the feelings have similarly destructive effects and are accompanied by similarly complex temporalities.⁴

I extrapolate from these ideas the suggestion that, while black youngsters under apartheid were subject to the harsh forms of violence Gumpel discusses (not to mention the equally destructive 'slow violence' of geographical and economic abjection), white ones were often in the grip of imposed contradictions that also made for considerable anxiety.⁵ Everyday life in Pretoria under apartheid, it seems to me, was deeply confusing in both its intellectual and psychological aspects, in a way that bordered on the uneasy and destabilising effects of the uncanny. One aspect of this confusion arose from the way in which the world seemed simultaneously modern and retrograde: a tension that enfolded a tangle of pride and shame. Apartheid, as is often said, attempted to turn back the clock; it strove to keep blacks trapped in the status of rural racialised subjects and to keep whites, especially Afrikaners,

4. See also, for another application to South Africa, Lars Engle's (1989:101-127) seminal essay, 'The political uncanny: The novels of Nadine Gordimer', *Yale Journal of Criticism* 2(2), Spring 1989.

5. I owe the term to Rob Nixon. See his *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

trapped in fixed ethnic and gender roles, as citizens of a nationalist state, existing in defiance of the world out there. Yet the apartheid state and its leaders were deeply aware of the world's gaze and wished to see itself—and be seen—as that world's future: the saviour of so-called Western values.⁶ This contradiction has often been noted. But what did it mean for a young person—and my example is, for better or worse, myself—growing up in Pretoria in the heyday of apartheid (let's say from 1968 to 1975, the years I was in high school and university)?

A bit more historical and visual background before I attempt an answer. The years in question (the Soweto uprising in 1976, of course, changed everything) were precisely the time in which downtown Pretoria was permanently reshaped. The apartheid government's 'second trek' for economic power was beginning to bear fruit and aspects of its ideology—more peculiar and self-divided than one might think—was beginning to express itself in the built environment. Today one can look away and critically at this environment, as one views the Pretoria CBD not in ruins, exactly, but in stagnation. The dated look of the brutalist buildings of the period emphasise how short-lived, perhaps even delusional, the nationalistic and modernist ambitions of the era in fact were. As Pretoria has expanded across the hills in suburban sprawl, its centre has come to seem rundown, but somehow more casual, more inhabited than in the old days, as Hook also notes with regard to the Strijdom Square. The high-rises from the apartheid-era look inelegant and no longer impressively large. Yet the spirit in which they were built during the late 1960s and early 1970s was hubristic. These years marked the construction of several modern buildings, including the aforementioned Volkskas Building, the Poynton Building, the Nedbank Centre, Munitoria (the municipal offices), the Humanities Building and the Administration block at the University of Pretoria, and the ghastly monumental office buildings of UNISA (Figure 24 in Van Eeden's article). The political, educational, and business leaders behind this spate of construction set out to be of the moment (as Melinda Silverman (1999:129) puts it, 'the international style of these buildings might not have been of the *here*, but they certainly were of the *now*') and to rival, in its Afrikaner nationalist assertions (quite explicit in the case of Volkskas), the commercial vitality of Johannesburg. Each and every one of these buildings, moreover, was simultaneously an affirmation of apartheid's muscle and a statement of exclusion and intimidation directed to black South Africans.⁷ The building materials and styles had a certain grim heaviness; eschewing glass and steel, they were of concrete (new-fangled aerated concrete in the case of the high-rise Humanities Building astraddle Roper Street at the University of Pretoria). In what now seems like a grievous and blinkered emulation of Niemeyer's *Brazilia*, the buildings showed a concern to avoid Pretoria's glorious sunlight. They were shaded by cantilevered

6. On South African temporalities, see for example James Ferguson, 'Theory from the Comaroffs: Or, how to know the world, up, down, backwards and forwards' (http://jwtc.org.za/salon_volume_5/james_ferguson.htm).

7. UNISA, to be sure, had many black students, but it sent a message of exclusion with its racially segregated toilets.

sills, recessed windows, and other *brise-soleil* effects—and even windowless façades, as in the strange prow of the administration block of the University of Pretoria: a white-washed ship, adrift, somehow, in the part of campus near the Loftus Versfeld rugby stadium once known as ‘die gat’ (the hole) (Fischer 1999:231).

These architectural statements might seem quite without nuance (the Wikipedia entry on the Poynton building simply asserts that it ‘indicates the optimism present in the 1960s’. But as Tony Morphet (1999:148) writes, there was a peculiar double signification to apartheid’s structures. They expressed, if you will, a rather contradictory affective-temporal structure:

The public face of the state expressed the driving energy of a confident modernism, yet not far beneath it lurked a profoundly anxious, premodern, theocratic spirit which asserted that the locus of authority lay beyond reach in God himself. In the vast social parlance, the instrumental rationality of modernity was put to work to shape and enfold an Old Testament order of being.’

The forbidding concrete and granite of Pretoria’s modernism thus masked, in Morphet’s view, a certain sense of vulnerability—which, as the anti-apartheid struggle intensified, could express itself in paranoia and violence. The extreme example of this violent potentiality was the 1988 massacre, when one Barend Strydom, a.k.a. ‘die “Wit Wolf”’ dressed in military camouflage, fired on black workers and pedestrians around the square. The act, he declared later, was intended to express his conviction that they had no place in ‘ons hoofstad’—our capital city. The moment of his attack, then, is significant: for, by the late 1980s, the forces of transformation were starting to seem irresistible and some of the other modern structures in Pretoria (two of which I will discuss anon) had already been bombed.⁸

Some of the urban history I have recounted here is also inscribed in my memory. I remember how, as a young girl, I would travel to the Municipal library in Pretoria’s London-style double-decker buses and look in fascination at the covered market with its Victorian roof. Even more intriguing was the bustling, fun street nearby (Prinsloo Street, if memory serves), where, until the Strijdom Square construction began, there were still a few Indian electronic and fabric shops, with bright scarves and *mbaqanga* music spilling on to the streets. Down at the heels, it was an intriguing part the city. Here a dark and handsome young man once touched my breasts while I was trying on pair of jeans and invited me on a trip to Swaziland. Of course, this sort of experience was the antithesis to what I was officially supposed to learn. At my school, we were constantly reminded of nationalist history and destiny as

8. Strydom’s killing spree—the doubling of the name (Stijdom/Strydom) suggests for Hook the interpellative power of the site—was a vain attempt at sustaining the illusion that the capital was white.

‘volksmoeders.’ To be thought of as a future mother even though any form of sexual expression—contact with boys, dancing, with-it style, flaunting of good looks—was prohibited, posed an illogical conundrum. And the archaism of the volksmoeder ideology made for embarrassment and confusion in equal parts. For this was, after all, the age of Woodstock: a time in which, as Jon Hyslop (2009:119-143) has recounted our English-speaking counterparts were certainly being drawn into global counterculture. And so, to some extent were we. We absorbed a watered-down hippy aesthetic from our favourite (and short-lived) magazine, *Close-up*.⁹ To our parents’ dismay, we listened avidly to Led Zeppelin and Jethro Tull and the riskier girls among us bought small, colourful Sobrani cigarettes at one of the few with-it shops in the city, tucked away in the shadiness of the Burlington Arcade. (Yes, Pretoria had its glass and steel arcade, even if it was a universe and a century away from Benjamin’s Paris). It was here, at the cool Poster Cave, that I bought a blue-grey Arlo Guthrie hat and the poster of Jimi Hendrix that troubled my mother no end. (And what could Jimi with his Afro, his lips, and crazy-patterned silky finery, signify to a conventional Afrikaner mother?)

But living in this kind of modernity—a very different version from that projected by the brutalist buildings of the time—was made extremely difficult by the curriculum and visual culture we had to absorb at school and home. Our time was perhaps, in Ato Quayson’s productively loose sense of the term, uncanny: a systemic or epistemological disorder made it hard to grasp what kind of world one was inhabiting. In a dark classroom, filled with stoves and sewing machines, we studied Huishoudkunde (Home Economics) and, yes, ‘Moederkunde’—in which the biology of sex was taboo, but the ideology of motherhood *de rigueur*. We learned how to wash a baby and how to knit sweet small booties. We read a textbook so ancient that parts of it became the matter of uneasy joking. There was a section (not prescribed, thank goodness) about how to build an outhouse and others on proper dress codes, in which we were advised (this detail sticks in my mind as bizarre) that it was fine to wear ‘uitskoponderrokkies’ (wide petticoats) to formal events like ‘prysuitdelings’ (prize events).

This curriculum interpellated us into a world that was bygone, yet lingering: a spectral time and place troubling our bodily identity formation. And so we faced petty, but vexed questions. Could one get away wearing a mini-length dress (I had a short red-and-white one in a shimmery patchwork design) to our very modern-looking, even slightly Afrocentric church, when at school we were encouraged to identify with Anton van Wouw’s iconic statuette, ‘Die Nooientjie van die Onderveld,’ of a girl dressed in a long dress and sunbonnet, her head bowed, innocently letting her tummy bulge a bit? Were we in the old Transvaal Republic or in the modern—even postmodern world—of 1960s consumer culture?

9. This magazine, edited briefly by Jane Raphaely was, surprisingly, published by Nasionale Pers in the early 1970s, in an attempt to reach a youth market. It now seems fairly radical visually and to some extent politically (with articles on Cambodia, Vietnam and African-American musicians, but nothing at all about black South Africans).

I remember the feeling of newness that attended the first shopping malls. There was a posh-feeling of the one in Arcadia and a simple one—today it would barely qualify as a mall—in Sunnyside, where there was a steak house with a reproduction of a banquet scene from the Bayeux tapestry celebrating the Norman Conquest on the wall.¹⁰ It pleased me to be able to translate the Latin inscriptions: perhaps a sign that, in a way, I felt more comfortable with the archaic than with Pretoria's ambivalent modernity. I still remember seeing a black worker in one of those ubiquitous overalls, stepping carefully towards the automatic doors of the mall, again and again, puzzled and fascinated by their mysterious mechanism of opening. My thought at the time was that I was actually no closer to him in understanding how it actually worked: all that gave me an edge was the knowledge that I would like to be 'modern' and that being modern meant to take new things in one's stride with nonchalance, not visible puzzlement.

Another new thing was the Sterland complex in Arcadia on the corner of Beatrix—now Steve Biko—Street. Its history would be well worth researching—not least because a reconstruction of the building has recently been initiated. The suspicion in which several apartheid leaders held American-influenced media is, of course, well recorded.¹¹ But when the Sterland complex was first opened in 1969, the attractions of the new were felt by all. I remember people discussing it at school and over afternoon tea. There was one small theatre that had, for lighting, a strange, gradually brightening and dimming pool of light, filtered through gauzelike fabric: 'soos duisende sakdoekies,' one tannie said. Another theater was done in what I would now describe as seventies kitsch: plush orange fuzz on the walls, with contrasting dashes of purple. There were escalators—themselves something of a novelty. It was all very up-to-date, and it contrasted rather starkly with the old-fashioned visual styles I lived with at home (the collected set of Langenhoven's works, the etching on the wall of a returned Boer prisoner of war mourning over the grave of a loved one) and that the more posh kids encountered at school and elsewhere: the oxwagon on the 'skild' that a class might receive for good attendance, the Voortrekker monument, etc., etc.

But the problem for the children of Verwoerd (as my generation is often dubbed) was not just one of contrasts: those are the fabric of life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and—as we saw in the tourist advertisement—comfortably consumable as one of the pleasures of a tourist destination. These different sets of signals—call it 'with-it sixties kitsch' and 'nationalist kitsch'—were disorienting to the point of being a little scary, especially since the latter increasingly accrued a violent and militaristic edge. (And we were being scared quite deliberately: in *Jeugweerbaarheid* a lugubrious teacher told us all about Christians being burned in the Soviet Union,

10. The author seems to be referring to Sir Loin steakhouse in Barclay Square in Sunnyside (ed.)

11. See, for instance, Rob Nixon (1994:43-76), 'The devil in the black box: The idea of America and the outlawing of TV,' *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African culture and the world beyond* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

terrorists cutting off our lips, and so forth.) So much so, that when all the prefects of my high school were invited to come and see a film at the new Sterland complex—it turned out to be *Born Free*—some of us didn't quite know how to sit back and enjoy: we suspected that there would be some covert message of nationalist indoctrination. (Otherwise, why would we have been allowed to go?) When that did not seem to be emerging from the innocuous film about a kind couple in Kenya raising a lion cub and releasing her into the wild, we began, with considerable teenage cynicism, to be sure, to seek for some other explanation. Was this, we joked, a communist plot to seduce or, even, to massacre a few leaders of the Afrikaner youth by trapping us in some sort of risky public space? Sterland somehow seemed to be territory where volksmoedertjies, as we unfortunately were in our blue uniforms, did not belong. And perhaps our vague suspicion of threat was not entirely out of place: years later and in a different political context, on 15 April 1988, a bomb exploded prematurely outside the Sterland cinema, killing the bomber, OM Maponya of Umkhonto weSizwe and injuring a bystander. The intended target was ostensibly a government building—but there are few nearby, so the event remains a somewhat mysterious incident of violence.

If Sterland is a Pretoria site that deserves to have its history written, so too is the Poynton building. The building was a kind of monument to Afrikaner bureaucracy. It rose thirty-three storeys high in concrete, mosaic tiles, and granite. There was some fairly grim retail space at the bottom floors and concrete cantilevered sills kept out the sun. The further one rose up in the elevator, or so it seemed to me during my single visit there, the more sinister the place became. For this was, after all, the building that housed the headquarters of the navy and air force, the military and the secret service. When the lift doors opened (I think I missed my proper floor several times) I saw, to my naïve surprise, security gates and armed personnel. I gave the guard the name of the man I had been told to interview with about a possible job in Paris and was taken to a large, dark office. He turned out to be a high-ranking officer. After some warm-up questions, he asked me if I would be willing to work for the intelligence service—to be in uniform, as it were, while I was in the City of Lights. I was completely taken aback, and, to the credit of my youthful self, firmly declined this proposal; indeed, I was truly disturbed by the milieu I had entered, which felt strange, hypermasculine, inhospitable and yet also like the revelation of something already known: as if I had seen something of the barely hidden heart of the system that made me feel so unhappy and helpless.¹²

12. My experience is echoed by that of others: one of my friends, a fellow academic, was sought out in a similar manner (which says a lot about the complicity of universities and the 'total onslaught' effort). When he told the official that his plan was to study drama abroad one day, he was met with an unexpected offer—payment for his proposed studies in exchange for being an informant.

For some reason I had not expected any of this. Indeed, I felt betrayed. For the person who set up this meeting was a lecturer in French, who after class one day asked me: 'Mademoiselle, would you like to go and work in France?' So my visit to

the grim Poynton Building actually started out in the elegant, colonial style Ou Lettere Gebou on the University of Pretoria's campus, in a way that not just created contrast, but uncomfortably undermined my expectations and structures of understanding. For French was what I loved, what I thought would set me free; it was what I believed lay outside the minor oppressions of a white apartheid girlhood. French was Baudelaire, as opposed to the conservative selection of Afrikaans literature we were compelled to read at school. It was what I thought would make me more cosmopolitan (a desire that the arranged interview in a sense exploited). I never fully figured out what lay behind this experience: how exactly the connections worked. But I have since heard of others, economically vulnerable, socially ambitious, and intellectually driven like me, some with an inclination to support the system, some with none at all, who were solicited by the system in this way. It seems clear to me now the interview was as much mode of intimidation as of invitation, as if the aim was to say: 'We've noticed you and your unpatriotic inclinations, and we can incorporate you, whether by seduction or force.' I could never speak to the lecturer again and now register this puzzling and troubling incident as an example of how Pretoria's social space for a teenager under apartheid felt treacherous to navigate.

Not even the most graceful space of learning on campus of a university that General Jan Smuts, who spoke at its inauguration, hoped might become a South African Oxford was safe, or entirely what it seemed. The Ou Lettere, designed by a student of the celebrated Sir Herbert Baker, was linked by some network I never managed to trace out, to the harsh administrative modernism—or was it the retrograde militarism—of the apartheid state apparatus.¹³ And the Poynton building, of course, like Sterland and the Strijdom Square, was to become the site of violence. In 1983 a destructive bomb exploded at rush hour, killing 19 and injured 200, many by the vicious debris of a modernist structure, limbs severed by panes of glass and falling metal. One cannot derive satisfaction from such terrible violence; but the choice of target made some symbolic and emotional sense to me at the time.

Some insights into how the lived experience of apartheid—Pretoria style—might be understood, are suggested in Jacob Dlamini's *Askari: A story of collaboration and betrayal in the anti-apartheid struggle*. Of particular interest to me are Dlamini's comparative insights between the workings of apartheid and the Latin American dirty wars of the same era. His claim that apartheid's bureaucracy and its more militaristic and thuggish aspects always went hand in hand is particularly legible in Pretoria—which physically headquartered both apparatuses. The paranoia of the military—the fantasy of a 'total onslaught' to which they responded by what was called 'total strategy'—has often been noted. But, as Dlamini points out, this dramatic discourse (and we might recall here Magnus Malan's description of the Poynton

13. Perhaps I should not have been too surprised: for the same old building housed, in those days, the offices of Aksie Morele Standarde Tuks, which leapt into action after 1973 after it was discovered that students at the University of Pretoria were become 'permissive,' which is to say, open to the 'communist influences' that proponents of the 'total onslaught' idea seemed to notice everywhere.

Building bombing as ‘a cowardly, criminal deed in the Communist war being raged against South Africa’) hides a kind of vacuum. The notion that cause of the ‘onslaught’ was the Soviet Union’s expansionist ideas prevented any clear and humane understanding that ‘South Africa’s fundamental problem was the denial of citizenship and basic human rights to the majority of its inhabitants. ‘Apartheid failed, ultimately,’ Dlamini (2015:107) declares, ‘because it rested on a fundamental denial of reality: South African was a multiracial country that could only work if all who lived in it enjoyed the same freedoms rather than relegating the black population to serve as a source of cheap labor. Total strategy denied that reality.’ One might express this in spatial terms too: apartheid-era Pretoria’s ideological structures and built environment helped to sustain this delusion, one that found such an extreme expression in Barend Strydom’s assertion that blacks have no place in ‘our capital,’ but was somehow pervasive in the years before the Soweto uprising.

A visual and experiential history of Pretoria, to which this is only a minute and improvised contribution, will require further collective investigations and reminiscences: of Dutch Reformed churches in modernist idiom; of abstract expressionism in galleries and experimental theatre in racially segregated social spaces; of schools where we somehow managed to read Totius and PJ Schoeman, but also Verlaine, Rimbaud and Eluard; of a university where flagship buildings were strangely modernist, but where the student council still had a ritual of dragging an ossewa down the street in their blazers. (I once chanced on such an astonishing procession.) To look at Pretoria properly, we need to think not only of the new, as the title of my paper may have suggested, but of both the old and new and their uncanny imbrication.

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